Jerry H. Gill

WORDS
DEEDS
BODIES

L. Wittgenstein

J.L. Austin

M. Merleau-Ponty

M. Polanyi

Words, Deeds, Bodies

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Words, Deeds, Bodies

L. Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, M. Merleau-Ponty, and M. Polanyi

By

Jerry H. Gill

For

Mari

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Contents

Preface

My theme in these reflections is the intersections between language, action, and human embodiment in the thought of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Michael Polanyi. Each of these thinkers stresses the idea that linguistic activity is primarily a *behavioral* phenomenon, something that human beings *do* in relation to each other with and by means of their *bodies*. Although a great deal of attention has been given to such notions as Wittgenstein's "language-games," Austin's "speech acts," Merleau-Ponty's "embodiment," and Polanyi's "tacit knowing," very little attention has been paid to social and behavioral aspects of these notions. Moreover, little if any attention has been paid to the interconnections among these thinkers' key notions.

It is my purpose in these explorations to focus on the social, behavioral, and physical dimensions of these key ideas and to show how they interconnect with one another. Although they arose and worked in quite different philosophical contexts, each of these thinkers sought to overcome the traditional bias of philosophy toward the content and logical format of linguistic activity. Each in his own way tried to call attention to the behavioral and social dynamics involved in all human communication. Wittgenstein's emphasis on "getting jobs done" with language, Austin's stress on the "performative" dimension of speech, Merleau-Ponty's focus on the role of the body in human communication and Polanyi's stress on tacit knowing all converge on the relationship between and among "words, deeds, and embodiment."

Acknowledgements

Wittgenstein's "Language-Games"

In my view the key idea of the later Wittgenstein's revolutionary approach to the philosophy of language is that of *language-games*. His idea was that linguistic meaning is a function of the ways human beings communicate and interact by means their embodied participation in highly flexible, open-ended social activities which he labelled *language-games*. It has been said that he initially conceived of this metaphor for human linguistic activity while passing by a soccer match in Cambridge. Be that as it may, Wittgenstein did develop an understanding of human language which focuses on the give and take of linguistic activity within standard moves and patterns, on the one hand, and creative innovations, on the other.

It is with the unique character of this notion that we must begin our exploration of Wittgenstein's understanding of language. In his earlier work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* Wittgenstein understood the nature of linguistic meaning as parallel to the tracking of logical equations and the picturing of material facts. These facts were viewed as constructed out of and described by "atomic and molecular" parts which go together, much like Lego-blocks, to form the facts of the world. In turn, these facts can be described by corresponding atomic and molecular propositions that parallel them in a one-to-one manner.

This static, exhaustive "picture theory" of both reality and language was referred to by Bertrand Russell, who along with Wittgenstein, subscribed to it, as "logical atomism." Once one has understood the world and language in this way, there is nothing left to say or do. Meaningful language has been reduced to mirroring the facts of the material world, with no room left for creative or speculative linguistic efforts. After he summed things up in this manner, the young Wittgenstein retired from philosophy because he believed he had explained it all. Here are his parting words: "I believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems." (Preface, p. 5)

Fortunately, some fifteen years later Wittgenstein came to believe that he had, in fact, not "answered all the questions" and returned to Cambridge and to philosophy completely revising his theories about linguistic activity and meaning. In addition to opening up our understanding of language as far more flexible and complex than he had at first thought, the later Wittgenstein offered us a highly creative and multi-dimensional theory of linguistic meaning. He now focused on "use in context" as the key to understanding language and its vast and open-ended variations. More specifically, he centered in on

the metaphor of *language-games* as providing the key perspective for grasping what meaning is and how it works.

Before getting started I should mention that there are varying theories about just what it was that led to Wittgenstein's "turn-about" between his first work, the *Tractatus,* and his more mature *Investigations,* published over twenty years later. One very influential perspective is by Stephen Toulmin in his article *Ludwig Wittgenstein* in the "Men and Ideas" series in the journal *Encounter* (July, 1975). I shall share Toulmin's view briefly here and contrast it to my own, which was published in *Philosophy Today* (Summer, 2008).

Toulmin offers a very insightful account of the rich cultural context of Wittgenstein's upbringing, especially that of the highly political and aesthetic texture of those days in Vienna. He uses this background to suggest that Wittgenstein never really embraced the so-called "positivism" of his day. In short, in Toulmin's words, "Wittgenstein was never a positivist, nor were there ever 'two Wittgensteins,' the earlier one authoring the *Tractatus* and the later on the author of the *Investigations."* (p. 60) Toulmin claims that in the former work Wittgenstein argued *not* that one cannot speak about what lies beyond "pictures of states of affairs" because such things are "nonsensical," but rather because such things are what really matter in human life.

In other words, Toulmin maintains that after having set forth his version of "logical atomism," Wittgenstein realized that whatever can be expressed by such a theory is not really important. What *is* important but cannot be spoken, according to Toulmin's account, are the existential realities of everyday life, such things as morality, God, and other human values. Thus Wittgenstein remarked that once one sees what he has accomplished in his *Tractatus* one will see how unimportant it all is. His own words were that the value of this work lay in seeing "how little is achieved when these problems are solved." (p. 5) Thus he left philosophy behind and returned to Vienna and a more regular life.

Therefore, according to Toulmin the later Wittgenstein, the author of the *Investigations* returned to philosophy and Cambridge in 1929 because he had found a way to talk about the things that really matter in life beyond logical and empirical matters. So, on this view, Wittgenstein never really changed his mind about "logical atomism," he only discovered a way to do what he knew all along it would not do. As I mentioned above, Toulmin claims that Wittgenstein never had a change of mind about his earlier work and therefore there never were "two Wittgensteins."

My view, on the other hand, is that Wittgenstein did alter his view of the nature and value of "logical atomism" after having spent fifteen years working in the "real world" and teaching middle school children. I think he realized

that he had been living in an artificial world of logicians, mathematicians, and engineers without real contact with the language of everyday people. It was this experiential immersion in the "ordinary" world that enabled Wittgenstein to understand that it is ordinary language that provides the key to understanding linguistic reality. This realization provided the "turn-about" in both his life and his thought.

In my view, then, contrary to Toulmin's, there were two Wittgensteins. He did at first espouse the notion that the purpose of language is to "picture" reality, but came to see that language is far more complex and rich than this theory would allow. Moreover, in my view Wittgenstein himself contrasts his later view to his earlier view in the early pages of the latter. He specifically states that "the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus"* had it wrong (last line of #23). In other words, the later Wittgenstein directly contrasts his explorations in his *Investigations* to those in the *Tractatus.* Thus, I think Toulmin's account is off the mark. With this said, let us proceed with an examination of the *Investigations.*

It is in paragraph #7 that Wittgenstein first employs the term *language-game.* He keys off of the way children learn their native language as providing insight into this notion. I have helped raise three children and have paid particular attention to the process by means of which they acquired their mother tongue. Each time as I watched and listened, keeping careful notebooks, the entire process seemed like a great, impossible mystery. I frequently said to their mother "This child will never really talk." But slowly, imperceptibly it became clear that they were catching on to the game-structure of what was going on around them.

One of my children, at about age two, often sat on the living room floor with her plastic telephone, having "conversations" with whomever might be on the other end of the line. She did all this, without any vocabulary, simply by imitating the intonations and inflexions she had heard in our voices when listening to us talk on the phone. Her tone made it clear when she was asking a question, giving an order, or even laughing at a joke. Thus she was playing *language games* without even knowing it. In this way she backed her way into her mother tongue by trying to participate in everyday household "games."

On another occasion this same child sat listening to our family banter during dinner. We spoke, laughed, and even gestured forcefully by thumping on the table. My child watched and listened, waiting for an opportunity to "get into the game." Then, quite suddenly, she burst out with loud noises and laughter while banging on her highchair tray. We were all startled by her outburst and joined in with her enthusiasm with laughter of our own. At this she simply

beamed, looking around the table, as if to get confirmation that she had made a significant contribution to the table conversation. She was now "in," one of the players.

Of course, this whole process was predicated on the child's intense desire to be one of the gang, to be included in the "game." This desire expresses itself in the phenomenon of imitation. Young children inherently want to be included, and the *language-games* of everyday speech provide a key way of fulfilling this desire. To copy, and even alter and expand on, certain aspects of adult's behavior is the child's key to acquiring entrance into the mysterious "games" adults play and so become card-carrying members of the human race.

The other dimension of our linguistic behavior that often goes overlooked is the fact that it is not only a social phenomenon, but it is an active one as well. That is to say, speaking a language is something that persons *do,* something involving their embodied behavior. This seems obvious enough, but as a matter of actual fact this point has been systematically ignored in the literature which has focused on Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Most of the time the focus has been on *what* has been said and not on *how* and *why* it has been said. Not only do we move our mouths when we speak, but we involve our whole bodies, gesturing and posturing in ways that contribute to the meaning of what we are saying.

This aspect of what Wittgenstein is getting at is brought out in his use of active metaphors when describing how language and meaning take place. In paragraph #11 he likens language to a tool-box in which there are a variety of tools, each designed for a specific purpose. "The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. Of course what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their *application* is not presented to us so clearly. Especially not when we are doing philosophy!" (paragraph #11).

The mention of tools here is not incidental. Wittgenstein systematically treats language as something we *use* to get things done. In focusing on the content of various propositions and assertions many if not most modern, along with more traditional thinkers have overlooked the active dimension of linguistic activity. Wittgenstein seeks to recall our attention to the activity dimension of human speech. As we shall see, this is an insight employed by J.L. Austin in his provocative little book *How to Do Things with Words.* The fact is that people speak in order to accomplish certain tasks. This is the revolutionary idea shared by Wittgenstein and Austin.

Using a different metaphor (paragraph #12), Wittgenstein offers the cabin of a locomotive. Clearly the handles which the engineer must operate are designed to accomplish specific tasks, to get certain things *done.* Wittgenstein

likens these handles and their respective functions to different linguistic tasks. Although they all look alike ("Naturally since they are all supposed to be handled") each handle fulfills a different, specific function and thus must be employed differently. This metaphor displays a uniquely graphic picture of linguistic activity by specifying the many different sorts of things the locomotive's handles can do.

One other metaphor that Wittgenstein employs in order to stress the embodied activity dimension of linguistic activity is that of playing chess. Several times he suggests that speaking a language is similar to playing a game of chess. What the function of any given piece is cannot be discerned by examining the piece itself. Rather, one must observe how the piece functions in the game in relation to the other pieces. Moreover, the occasion of a "Check Mate" can only be determined by an examination of the positions of the pieces in relation to one another on the board. It is the movement of the game, like that of a conversation that brings one to "Check Mate," not any specific move in and of itself.

All of this is to show how Wittgenstein values the embodied activity aspect of the use of language. Language is not just a matter of "talking heads" or propositional analysis. Rather, it is a social give-and-take by means of which we humans participate together in shaping our world, often by the "laying on of our hands" on the specific tasks that lie before us. We talk in order to get things done together. This is the major theme of the *Investigations.* Meaning is a function of use in context in relation to the appropriate surrounding circumstances. It does not and cannot stand alone.

In the same passage where he introduces the notion of *language-games*, Wittgenstein defines its open-ended and active character: "Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that *speaking* a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (paragraph #23). He goes on to offer a wide list of the sorts of things we do with language, our *language-games*, on an everyday basis. I shall quote this passage in full because I am convinced that it contains the key to understanding Wittgenstein's mature view of linguistic activity.

> But how many kinds of sentences are there? Say assertion, question, and command? – There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols', 'words', 'sentences'. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten... Here the term 'language-*game*' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an

activity, or of a form of life. Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples, and in others: Giving orders, and obeying them – Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements – Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) – Reporting an event – Speculating about an event – Forming and testing a hypothesis – Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams – Making up a story; and reading it – Play-acting – Singing catches – Guessing riddles – Making a joke; telling it – Solving a problem in practical arithmetic – Translating from one language to another – Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

Philosophical Investigations, paragraph #23

I take this paragraph to constitute the turning point in Wittgenstein's line of thought. I have come to think that it was his contact with everyday people and especially his teaching of middle school children during his years away from philosophy that opened up his understanding of the main dynamics of linguistic activity. When he got away from a mathematical and logical way of thinking of symbolism he realized the multifarious quality of human speech and turned to a rethinking of his earlier approach. Several of the examples in the above paragraph clearly come from his classroom activities with young people. This experience opens up a whole new way of thinking about how and why people actually use language.

We should pause a bit here on paragraph #23 before going forward because Wittgenstein's radical understanding of how language works is encapsulated therein. In spite of the fact that very many philosophical thinkers acknowledge Wittgenstein's "turn around" as crucial to an understanding of contemporary thinking about linguistic activity, the fact remains that very few of them have caught the truly revolutionary character of his approach. First off, the notion of "games" carries with it implications for the obvious fact that it is *people* who play these games *with each other.* Language is a *social* phenomenon practiced by people in order to accomplish many diverse tasks.

For far too long philosophers have approached linguistic activity ignoring the fact that sentences never stand on their own, but are always actually uttered by human speakers trying to achieve certain ends. No one utters "The cat is on the mat" in a vacuum. Statements are analyzed as if they were without contexts and purpose. So Wittgenstein's idea that speech acts have "vectors" and consequences is truly a radical, yet obvious one. If we are going to understand how and why language works we have to pay attention to motivations, accomplishments, and possible changes in the environment, as well as in the persons.

In addition, it is important to pay attention to the way Wittgenstein actually expresses his point in this paragraph. It is important to note that he spells the term 'language-games' by putting 'game' in italics: "Sprach*spiel."* This is a point that has often been overlooked. His emphasis is clearly on *activity,* on language games that get *played* by people for specific purposes and with specific results. In some cases, in fact, it may be more important to pay attention to the activity of speaking itself, as well as the surrounding circumstances, than to the content of an utterance. The "spin" put on a word or sentence by tone or even facial expression can completely alter its assumed meaning.

Right in the middle of paragraph #23, Wittgenstein offers an example of a picture depicting a boxer in a certain stance. He says "Now this picture can be used to tell someone how he should stand, how he should hold himself; or how he should not hold himself; or how a particular man did stand in such-and-such place; and so on." With respect to the meaning of the picture, everything depends on the *use* to which the picture is put. It is the same with linguistic utterances. Everything depends on context and purpose. Another interesting aspect of Wittgenstein's list of language-games in this paragraph is that they almost all use a participle construction, thus emphasizing on-going action of the linguistic activity.

Wittgenstein sums up his point here further along in paragraph #43: "For a *large* class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language." The same might also be said of the meaning of a sentence or paragraph – its meaning is in fact the *use* to which it is put in the give-and-take of language. Once again I must emphasize that this activity-oriented approach to understanding meaning is *still* a radical idea, even among those who claim to have "read their Wittgenstein." Discussions in the various journals and at conferences on "reference and meaning" focus almost entirely on the content of the utterances in question.

His discussion of the notion of language-game eventually leads Wittgenstein to address the question of whether or not all such phenomena that bear the term 'game' have a common essence. In other words, must all games have something in common that allows them to be classified as games? Wittgenstein stands four-square against this idea, stressing the fact that the concept of "game" involves a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing and suggesting thereby the notion of "family resemblances" with which to cover all these various uses of a given term or concept.

Like the characteristics that some family members may exhibit while others exhibit still others but not these favored ones. Similarities and differences of nose, eyes, and hair, for instance, may vary within the same family,

yet be recognizable among other members. No single characteristic need be present in each person for the notion of "family resemblance" to be viable. It is the same with notions like "games"; no one thing is necessary for us to be able to call an activity a game. This same flexibility pertains to "language-game" and to the general idea of other activities as well. It is not having a definite common line of demarcation that renders a concept usable and thus meaningful.

Wittgenstein illustrates this reality by referencing the fact that it was not the definition of one pace as equaling 75cm that made the concept of "one pace" usable. For centuries people have measured out land plots by pacing them off without the benefit of such a definition. He adds: "When I give the description 'The ground was quite covered with plants' do you want to say I don't know what I'm talking about until I can give a definition of a plant?" The point is, when talking we begin with a practical level of vagueness and only move to greater precision when necessary. Significant precision, not absolute, is what makes communication work.

This all applies to the notion of "language-game" in the following manner. We do not need to, or even be able to, specify or demarcate between all of the various speech-acts we may be engaged in at any given time or place, or in any given context. Some such games may well overlap and crisscross with each other so that we might be playing in more than one game at a time. If I say to my wife as she drives off to work "I love you," I am at one in the same time participating in at least two different language-games. The first is the game of assurance, a kind of promise, the second is the game of description, this is how I feel toward you. We enter into and play these games without first specifying their parameters and/or boundaries.

Wittgenstein addresses these issues in the following way: "One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way. I do not, however, mean by this that one is supposed to see in those examples that common thing which I – for some reason – was unable to express; but that he is now able to *employ* those examples in a particular way. Here giving examples is not an *indirect* means of explaining – in default of a better. For any general definition can be misunderstood too. The point is that *this* is how we play the game (I mean the language-game with the word 'game')" (paragraph #71).

The crucial point here is that there is no absolutely *preferred* or required way to explain how any given game or expression is to be played. One teaches and learns by examples, one after another until the learner says: "I've got it!" In active linguistic interchange things are not defined in advance, as if we couldn't get started until all the moves were prescribed. We just invite and enter into a game *as we go* and the learner "picks it up" as and by entering into the play. This

is what Wittgenstein means by the term "employ" in the above quotation. The learner puts his or her understanding into practice, gets feedback, and goes on from there.

Here is an example of how my two year old granddaughter *misemployed* an expression. There is this sports program on TV where they show a dumb thing a player did and then all the announcers say "Aw, come on, man." They use a tone that implies this was a really stupid thing to have done. My granddaughter heard us employing this expression in our conversations, but took it to be something one would say to get someone to come along. So she went around saying to anyone who was lagging behind: "Come on man." Her intonation was that of one language-game when it should have been that of another. She does not as yet understand sarcasm.

Wittgenstein's point is that the actual employment, or use, of linguistic expressions *shows, displays, or embodies* our understanding of them. As he says: "What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean to know it and not be able to say it? ... Isn't my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in the explanation that I could give? That is, my describing examples of various kinds of a game; showing how all sorts of others games can be constructed on the analogy of these, saying that I should scarcely include this or this among games; and so on" (paragraph #75).

The proof of the pudding, then, lies in the tasting, not in some previous, abstract definition. We simply *do* learn to play linguistic games, crisscrossing and overlapping with one another *in situ,* as the sociologists might put it. One *shows* one's understanding of the meaning of a term, or of a whole language-game, by how he or she should respond to and participates in the games going around them. Sometimes we mess up, cross from one language game to another, and are corrected by the other players. We adjust, we invent, we play along with whatever responses we think are appropriate, and the way we indwell the patterns in the game(s) shows how well we have learned the meaning of the terms in question.

Wittgenstein applies these distinctions directly to the field of philosophical discussions. "And this is the position you are in if you look for definitions corresponding to our concepts in aesthetics or ethics. In such a difficulty always ask yourself: How did we *learn* the meaning of this word ("good" for instance)? From what sort of examples? In what language-games? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings" (paragraph #77). He goes on to say that our penchant for pure, abstract definitions of words and concepts leads us away from "looking and seeing" how we got started in and with language in the first place, namely by concrete yet incomplete examples (paragraph # 81).

The groundwork has now been laid for Wittgenstein's final distinction between philosophy as it has traditionally been conceived and practiced and the approach he is now advocating. The basic contrast is between, on the one hand, conceiving of the need for absolute standards and criteria of meaning and, on the other hand, allowing for language to take its own course and finding its meaning and truth in the concrete contexts and utterances. Moreover, these meanings and truths will vary from situation to situation, from naming ships and making apologies, on the one hand, to private confessions and "sweet nothings," on the other. It is in the latter type contexts that we initially learn language, and thus it is to these that we should look when trying to track the logic of meaning and truth.

As Wittgenstein puts it: "The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a *result of investigation:* it was a requirement). The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty. – We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction.* Back to the rough ground!" (paragraph #107).

In the very next paragraph Wittgenstein alters the image slightly when speaking of the purpose of individual language-games. "The *preconceived idea* of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination around. (One might say: the axis of our reference of our examination must be rotated, but about the fixed point of our real need." (paragraph #108) The point here is that our participation in language-games grows out of our day-to-day existence, the push-and shove of everyday life, not out of some preconceived notion of how language *must* work. As he says: "Philosophical problems are not empirical problems; they are *resolved* not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have already known" (paragraph #109). Note that *gelost* in German does not mean to "solve," as with empirical problems, but to "resolve," as with conceptual conflicts.

It is from this sort of observations that Wittgenstein obtains his fresh view of the nature of philosophical inquiry. He contrasts it with the traditional search for ideal abstractions, stressing the practical, everyday uses of words as the key to their meanings. "Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand" (paragraph #118).

A bit later on he says: "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question ... Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. There is not *a* single method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies" (paragraph # 133).

I think it is important to fuss a bit here with respect to the translation of *abzubrechen* (stopping) and, once again, *gelost* (solved). In the first case, in this context this German word is better translated "interrupting." "Stopping" makes it sound like one is all done with, having completed, philosophy (as in the *Tractatus*), whereas clearly this is not the case for Wittgenstein or his investigations. Secondly, *gelost* is better translated as "resolved" so as to avoid the impression that there is a specific answer to a given philosophical question, as in empirical science. Conceptual puzzles, or "cramps" as he calls them elsewhere, are resolved not "solved."

This is, to be sure, a rather unorthodox understanding of the nature of philosophy, and that is precisely what Wittgenstein intends to do, to redefine philosophy from a sort of "super science" that seeks to solve the "big" questions about reality to a way of showing that philosophical problems are actually pseudo problems that arise because we seek to solve them as if they are regular empirical problems. On the contrary, he now sees philosophical "problems" as linguistic puzzles that arise because we lose our way by mistaking them to be about "reality" when in fact they simply reflect our confusions about how language does and does not work. Thus, he says, we get "bumps on our heads by running up against the limits of language" (paragraph #118).

The thing is, as with any game, we must always enter the language-games comprising linguistic activity "mid-stream," as it were, since they are already underway. We can never start from scratch, even as a child must simply dive into the linguistic activity going on all around him or her, pretending to know what's going on. The child "fakes it until making it." There is no way to "begin at the beginning." When speaking of following the rules of any game, Wittgenstein puts it this way: "'How am I able to follow a rule?' – If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say 'This is simply what I do'" (paragraph #217).

This is not a "bedrock" in the sense of finally having arrived at the "truth" about the philosophical problem, but a bedrock in the sense that there may well be no "final answer," but rather an admission that ultimately this is "simply what I do." In other words, ultimately meaning and truth are functions of the

broader language-game known as "linguistic activity" and their significance is grounded, or better, "embedded" therein.

Wittgenstein explains this paradoxical point in this way: "'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?' – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. This is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so. – It is one thing to describe methods of measurements and another to obtain and state the results of measurement. But what we call 'measuring' is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement" (paragraphs #241–242).

In other words, in the final analysis two things we usually think of as separate, namely definitions and empirical facts, ultimately merge in the interactive give and take between language and behavior. Without a constancy between our speech and our measuring activity we would not be able to measure things. The two define each other symbiotically in what Wittgenstein calls our *form of life*, our "way of being in the world." This is the *axis*, a far better notion than "foundation," around which our linguistic activity revolves and from which even notions of "truth" get their meaning. This is our primal language-game. "What people accept as justification- is shown by how they think and live" (paragraph #325).

This way of putting the point gives rise to the claim that Wittgenstein is at bottom a "behaviorist," because he collapses thinking or "thought processes," into outward activity. "How does the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about behaviorism arise? – The first step is the one that altogether escapes notice. We talk of processes and states and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we shall know more about them – we think. But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite concept of what it means to learn to know a process better. (The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one we thought quite innocent.) – And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. ... And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we do not want to deny them" (paragraph #308).

As he says in the next brief paragraph, we need to be shown the way out of this particular "fly-bottle." As the magician will tell you, the first move is always the one that gets us looking at the wrong hand and so distracts us from the simple fact that we do not really talk about our feelings and mental activities as if they are parallel to physical ones. This move tricks us into the "fly-bottle"

of trying to liken "inner" processes to "outer" processes. What we need to do here is trace our "mental" talk back to the context within which we learn and use it in order to see that it is not about "inner" processes but about behavioral activity.

"What we deny is that the picture of the inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of the word 'to remember'. We say that this picture with its ramifications stands in the way of our seeing the use of the word as it is" (paragraph #305). When I say "I remember such and such" I am not concerned with my own mental images, etc. but with affirming the fact that such and such thing took place amidst human circumstances. Nor do I propose to prove my claim by producing such images. Rather, I appeal to such things as other people's acknowledgements, calendar dates, etc.

In the same way, "When I think in language, there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought" (paragraph #329). It's the mistake of presuming that so-called "inner processes" must accompany outer expressions that gets us off the track. The fact is we talk with words that get their meaning within their various appropriate social and physical language-games. As Wittgenstein several times points out, the moves in chess, such as "checkmate," get their meaning from their consequence in the game, not from how they make us feel or from some secret inner magic.

In addition, he often likens language-games to financial exchanges. Think of words as money and their "meanings" as their transaction value. It matters not to the vending machine that you have just deposited your favorite or very last coin into its slot. If you put in the right amount, the machine produces the item of your choice and if not it does not. The "meaning" of the exchange lies in the outcome, not in what you or I were thinking or feeling at the time. So it is with language. We talk to get certain jobs done and the meaning of the talk is to be found in transactions surrounding it. "Look at a sentence as an instrument, and at its sense as its employment" (paragraph #421).

Wittgenstein's well-known dismissal of the possibility of a "private language" (paragraphs #246 following) fits right into this discussion. A language by definition involves exchanges between at least two persons for the simple reason that without at least one other person there can be no criterion as to whether the "speaker" has chosen the proper words when he or she says something. He or she could say whatever they wish and with no feedback from a person other than themselves they could not be sure they were using the right words.

A classic example of this difficulty arose in the story of Robinson Crusoe. When he passed out from a fever he had no idea how long he had been

unconscious, and thus how many days he needed to notch on his log calendar. He chose a number arbitrarily and so marked it. When he was rescued he remarked to the Captain of the ship how ironic it was that he was rescued on a Friday, the same day as the name of his companion. Whereupon the captain corrected him that it was in fact a Tuesday and not a Friday. Had this human interaction never occurred Robinson would have gone using his private calendar "correctly," though erroneously.

Thus the meaning of our language-games lies in their connection to our common behavior, not to whatever emotional or mental connotations we happen to assign them. As with money, chess, or baseball, the meaning of the key terms accompanying the involved exchanges lies in the circumstances and results of the social interchanges among those participating, not in their individual feelings about them. Thus it is to these external and public factors that we must look to ascertain such meanings. After all, language-games are just that, games participated in by people with one another reciprocally for mutual purposes.

A more philosophically sophisticated application of this reality is offered by Wittgenstein in response to the famous question of the justification of induction. In his critique of our inability to supply a non-circular rationale for believing that the future will be like the past, other than the argument that in the past the future has always been like the past, David Hume argued that this amounts to nothing but assuming what one has set out to prove. Thus he concluded that all scientific reasoning is at bottom circular in nature and incapable of providing sound knowledge. We have no rational basis for predicting the future.

Wittgenstein's answer to Hume, though not expressly called that, is simply to say: "If anyone said that information about the past could not convince him that something would happen in the future, I should not understand him. One might ask him: What do you expect to be told then? What sort of information do you call a ground for such a belief? ... If *these* are not grounds, then what are grounds? If you say that these are not grounds then you must surely be able to state what must be the case for us to have the right to say that there are grounds for our assumption" (paragraph #481).

Here the point is, as with all similar cases, "Justification comes to an end. If it did not it would not be justification" (paragraph #485). The search for a final justification, an ultimate foundation for all knowledge claims is indeed futile. It comes to an end amidst the push-and shove, the give-and-take of everyday human experience encapsulated in our language-games when understood as the social and behavioral activities of human life. "Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon.'

That is, where we ought to have said: *this language-game is played"* (paragraph #654).

Wittgenstein offers a similar angle of approach to the traditional problem of skepticism in his *On Certainty.* Much like Descartes in his critique of our claim to know the qualities of everyday experience, the skeptic attacks the distinction between what we think in our minds and what reality is actually like by *doubting* the possibility of our being able to tell the difference between them. Whatever criterion we appeal to in order to do so, the skeptic rejects as susceptible to doubt. Put differently, what we think is real is always questionable because our minds are always subject to deception and mistake.

Wittgenstein's reply to this attack, following in the same line of thought as G.E. Moore did in his famous defense of common sense, is straight forward. He argues that the very distinction between what is real and what is unreal depends on the assumption that there is something "real" which one can contrast to the unreal. To call something a deception requires some sort of knowledge of that which is not a deception, otherwise the distinction between the two notions make no sense. The doubt that any given experience is real entails an assumption that at least something is real by means of which to make the contrast. In short, one cannot *begin* with doubt. One can only begin where one is, which is by "assuming" that something is real.

Once again we see the conjurer's trick of forcing one to be on the defensive. The burden of proof is placed on the one who believes in commonsense reality when in fact it should be placed on the one who does not so believe. The belief in the reality of the commonsense world is *square one* of our shared language-game, of our shared "form of life." The burden of proof lies with anyone who questions it because even such a one must begin by acting as if it were the case. It provides the leverage point, the point of purchase from which all other thought and communication take root. As he put it in the *Investigations:* "The question is not one of explaining a language-game by means of our experiences, but of noting a language-game" (paragraph # 655).

When we actually turn to *On Certainty* we find passages similar to those of the *Investigations.* Here for instance is a remark about having grounds, a la Hume, for any given belief: "Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting,* which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (*On Certainty,* paragraph #204). Once again we see how Wittgenstein drives every effort to find a foundational beginning point for our reasoning processes to its axis of linguistic embodied *activity.* How we come to "know" things is all bound up with how we "do" things together.

To put it slightly differently, when we enter into social reality we do so "all at once," as it were. Or to put it in another way, we "back our way" into linguistic activity as we might a newly introduced party game or dance step. We do not start with instructions, rules, etc. but rather, we "go through the motions" as it were, for a few turns until we catch on. As I have mentioned about small children finding their way into speech, they just dive in, imitating and playing along as best they can. Gradually we, like children coming into language, also come into the myriad of language-games constituting our linguistic world. We "fake it until we make it."

Here is a passage from *On Certainty* that addresses this "axial" reality: "All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life" (paragraph #105). The best analogy I can think of at this point is the relationship between fish, oxygen, and water. A fish breaths or "imbibes" its oxygen in and through the water without being able to differentiate the one from the other. It simply *lives* in both at once. They are its "elements."

It is easy to understand how and why this way of looking at the epistemological enterprise seems confusing and wrong-headed. The reason for this, according to Wittgenstein, is that we have been taught to examine *everything* including the thought processes themselves by means of which we carry on such examinations. But that is where we go wrong. These processes themselves provide us with the framework *within* which we think and reason, and they cannot be applied to themselves. They must simply be accepted as part of the language-game that comprises our social reality.

To put it another way, it is not possible to evaluate the evaluative system embedded within our "way of being in the world," our "form of life." Hume sought to drive this evaluative process all the way to its foundation, to its "beginning" so as to evaluate evaluation itself. He failed, not by running up against a wall, but by finding himself running in circles. He insisted on getting "behind" the reasoning processes by means of the reasoning process itself. Wittgenstein had sympathy for this "heroic" effort, but in the end found it misguided. As he put it: "It is so difficult to find the *beginning.* Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back" (paragraph #471).

In short, we wake up to find ourselves participating in linguistic activity, in the language-game of our "form of life." This *is* the "beginning." It simply makes no sense to try to go "further back" to find the foundation upon which these processes rest. They do not rest. Rather they are part of the human way of life.

They are the axis around which all that we do and say rotates and from which it acquires its meaning. They provide the ultimate language-game.

Wittgenstein continues this line of thought in the second part of the *Investigations* which is titled *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* (with a fresh sequence of paragraph numbering). Even though this was written years later and seems to explore a number of themes different from but related to those of the first part, the idea of language-games continues to play an important if more subtle role. In *Philosophy of Psychology* he addresses the phenomenon of the mediational relationship between behavior and states of mind: "'I noticed he was out of humor.' Is this a report about his behavior or his state of mind? ('The sky looks threatening': is this about the present or the future?) Both; not side-by-side, however, but about the one *via* the other" (paragraph #29).

The mental state is "mediated" in and through the talk about behavior, but there is no "middle term" or premise through which this relationship can or need be drawn. The one is somehow "in" the other. But then someone might suggest that those involved make a "tacit presupposition." Wittgenstein replies: "Then what we do in our language-game always rests on a tacit presupposition," which is to say no presupposition at all is involved in such cases. The one comes in and through the other, period. And in paragraph #33: "Doesn't a presupposition imply a doubt? And doubt may be entirely lacking. Doubting has an end."

The point of this interchange is to once again drive home the reality of the finality, the bedrock character, of the language-game comprising the human way of being in the world, the human form of life. All of our reasoning and questioning comes to end in "simply what we do." I myself prefer the image of the axis to that of bedrock because it avoids the "foundationalist" implications of the latter. Our lives and our linguistic activities revolve around the primal language-game consisting of our social and behavioral realities at the center of what it means to be human. There is no possibility of, nor need to, look any further.

Wittgenstein goes on to offer the parallel of our talk about physical objects and our sense impressions of them. "Here we have two different language-games and a complicated relation between them. – If you try to reduce their relations to a *simple* formula you go wrong" (paragraph #34). It's like the story about the world resting on the back of an elephant, which in turn is standing on the back of a turtle. While the traditional problem lies in the realization that it is "turtles all the way down," Wittgenstein is arguing that the real answer lies in realizing that it is "turtles all the way around." In other words, the support for what we do lies in our mutual life together, not in some final, rational court of appeal.

Wittgenstein continues with this mediational theme by introducing the notion of "seeing as" or "seeing an aspect." He presents a diagram of a three dimensional box and suggests that we can see the box in either of two ways, one as protruding towards us and the other as receding away from us. "We can also *see* the illustration now as one thing now as another. – So we interpret it, and *see* it as we *interpret* it" (paragraph #116). It is important to understand that his notion of interpretation here does not involve reasoning from several factors to a conclusion. Rather, the seeing and the interpreting are simultaneous, the one in and through the other. In a word, the one is *mediated* via the other.

Here Wittgenstein refers to the well-known drawing of the "duck/rabbit." How do we explain the fact that the same drawing can be seen as two different objects just by "saying so." Now I see it *as* a duck, now *as* a rabbit. He says: "Here we are in enormous danger of wanting to make fine distinctions. – It is the same when one tries to define the concept of a material object in terms of 'what is really seen.' – What we have rather to do is to *accept* the everyday language-game, and to note false accounts of the matter *as* false. The primitive language which children are taught needs no justification; attempts at justification need to be rejected" (paragraph #161).

Wittgenstein alters the illustration by turning to discussion of aesthetic qualities: "Here it occurs to me that in conversation on aesthetic matters we use the words: 'You have to see it like *this,* this is how it is meant'; 'When you see it like *this,* you see where it goes wrong'; 'You have to hear this bar as an introduction'; 'You must listen for this key'; 'You must phrase it like *this*' (which can refer to hearing as well as to playing)" (paragraph #178). He then asks: "Do I really see something different each time, or do I only interpret what I see in a different way? I am inclined to say the former. But why? – To interpret is to think, to do something; seeing is a state" (paragraph #248).

This seems to me to be an important distinction that needs to be incorporated into our understanding of Wittgenstein's notion of *seeing as.* At first he seems to use it as synonymous with interpreting, as in the case of the duck/rabbit figure. But here he clearly wants to speak of it as a dimension of the broader language-game of seeing itself. Interpreting characteristically involves rational steps, whereas *seeing as* is more a matter of direct experience. "Seeing an aspect and imagining are subject to the will. There is such an order as 'Imagine *this*,' and also: 'Now see the figure like *this*'; but not: 'Now see this leaf green'" (paragraph #256).

He goes on to discuss the crucial question of what is to serve as the criterion for judging between such differences. How does one learn the subtle distinctions embedded in our everyday language-games? Wittgenstein addresses this

issue beginning with paragraph #355. This is how he introduces the topic: "Is there such a thing as 'expert judgment' about the genuineness of expression s of feelings? – Even here, there are those whose judgment is 'better' and those whose judgment is 'worse.'" He continues by exploring how such judgment can be developed. "Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through '*experience*.' – Can someone else be a man's teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip*. – This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. – What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments" (paragraph #355).

Next Wittgenstein introduces the notion of "imponderable" evidence. "The question is: what does imponderable evidence *accomplish*?" (paragraph #359). "Imponderable evidence includes subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone. I may recognize a genuine loving look, distinguish it from a pretended one ... But I may be quite incapable of describing the difference .... If I were a very talented painter I might conceivably represent the genuine and the simulated glance in pictures" (paragraph #360). "Ask yourself: How does a man learn to get a 'nose' for something? And how can this nose be used?" (paragraph #361).

So Wittgenstein has introduced here, by way of exploring how we learn and use the subtleties of language-games, a notion which is perhaps best termed that of "tacit knowing." This term was introduced by Michael Polanyi in his major work *Personal Knowledge.* At the basis of Polanyi's overall position stand the distinctions between focal and subsidiary awareness, one the one hand, and conceptual and bodily activity, on the other hand. In all cognitive contexts we attend *from* certain subsidiary factors *to* other focal factors. Thus there always are factors which must be taken for granted – as certain – if there is to be any awareness at all. At the same time our involvement in the world is always characterized by both conceptual and bodily activity, each of which carries a cognitive dimension.

Now, the interaction between focal awareness and conceptual activity gives rise to *explicit* knowledge – knowledge yielding analytic clarity, deductive and/or inductive logic, and "say-ability." Correspondingly, the interaction between subsidiary awareness and bodily activity gives rise to *tacit* knowledge – knowledge yielding the employment of skills, patterns of behavior, and "show-ability." Finally, and most importantly, tacit knowledge is logically prior to explicit knowledge. Thus there must always be some "truths" whose certainty is beyond, or "beneath," being made explicit if there is to be any explicit knowledge at all.

It should be clear that these distinctions resonate nicely with those Wittgenstein developed, both in his *Investigations* and in *On Certainty*. His notions of "imponderable evidence," "expert judgment," and "getting a nose" for

something all correspond very well with Polanyi's understanding of the character of tacit knowing. We acquire our abilities to discern "the ins and outs" of various language-games indirectly, tacitly, rather than by direct teaching and instruction. Indeed, the dynamic of the entire acquisition of language itself lies beyond explicit rules and instructions. We "back our way," as it were, into our linguistic form of life.

Polanyi puts the matter thusly: "Things of which we are focally aware can be explicitly identified, but no knowledge can be *wholly explicit.* For one thing, the meaning of language, when in use, lies in its tacit component; for another, to use language involves actions of our body of which we have only a subsidiary awareness. Hence, tacit knowing is more fundamental than explicit knowing: [*W*]*e can know more than we can tell and we can tell nothing without relying on our awareness of things we may not be able to tell*" (*Personal Knowledge,* p. x). For a visual presentation of these relationships, see the diagram in the concluding chapter.

Another main theme of Polanyi's thought which dovetails nicely with that of Wittgenstein is the importance of bodily activity as the primary manifestation and basis of tacit knowledge. Polanyi employs the notion of "indwelling" in order to suggest how our most fundamental and pervasive knowledge is obtained and displayed. Tacit knowledge is acquired, not through analysis and argument, but by means of imitation, empathy, and practice. Thus it can only be experienced and evaluated in the skills and behavior patterns, the decisions and deeds, which make up our daily existence or "form of life."

Polanyi explains it in this way: "We know another person's mind by the same integrative process by which we know life. A novice trying to understand the skill of a master, will seek *mentally* to combine his movements to the pattern s by which the master combines them *practically.* By such exploratory indwelling the novice gets the feel of the master's skill. Chess players must enter into a master's thought by repeating the games he played. *We experience a man's mind as the joint meaning of his actions* from the outside" ("The Logic of Tacit Inference," *Philosophy,* January 1966, p. 14).

This concept of indwelling is helpful in focusing Wittgenstein's understanding of actions and decisions as the axis of the type of certainty he was exploring. He stresses participation in the active and speaking human community as the child's means of acquiring language and the axial "belief system" inherent in it. This stress is essentially similar to Polanyi's emphasis on behavioral indwelling, since it calls attention to the skill character of the most primal dimension of cognitivity. Conceptual understanding is, for both Wittgenstein and Polanyi, essentially a matter of "knowing how to go on," "how to find one's way about." Polanyi's point is well summed up in Wittgenstein's comment in

On Certainty: "Knowledge (*Wissen*) is in the end based on acknowledgement (*Anerkennung*)" (paragraph #378).

Another and most important aspect of Polanyi's thought pertains to the worry over the relation of tacit knowing to relativism, skepticism, and/or fideism. It is often argued that if knowledge is ultimately grounded in unjustified "certainties," then truth is merely a function of bias, no real knowledge is possible, and one is free to believe whatever one wants. In a word it is alleged that the concept of tacit knowledge undermines the distinction between responsible and irresponsible belief. However, Polanyi argues that the drive for what he calls "universal intent," namely the common commitment to the desire for knowledge and truth, presupposes that all beliefs and assertions seek to be accepted by open-minded person's function, not as a guarantee of truth, but as an adequate means of distinguishing between responsible and irresponsible belief.

Wittgenstein would make the same point by referring to our common participation in the human form of life and linguistic activity as the guideline for distinguishing between responsible and irresponsible belief. People talk, after all, as well as have families, build houses and bridges, etc. in order to be understood and accomplish specific tasks, and they do so under a common commitment to be understood and believed. Such behavior entails what Polanyi calls our "universal intent" to participate meaningfully with one another in our common form of life, our overarching "language-game." I shall return to a fuller examination of Polanyi's insights and their applicability to our general themes in the Conclusion of these explorations.

J.L. Austin's "Performative Utterances"

My focus in this section will be on J.L. Austin's notion that linguistic activity is primarily a *behavioral* phenomenon, something that human beings *do* in relation to each other in their *bodies.* In my view amidst all the talk about Austin's fresh emphasis on the activity aspects of our "speech acts," contemporary philosophers of language have overlooked the more basic *social* and *physical* dimensions of his analysis.

In short, in my view most commentators have transposed Austin's critique of traditional philosophies of language dichotomy between the "constative" and "performative" functions of speech by reducing his more radical perspective to yet another traditional analysis of linguistic activity. The *embodied* and *interactive* aspects of his perspective have largely been overlooked. The focus has been almost exclusively on the utterances of the speaker to the exclusion of his or her physical and social behavior.

I shall take as my point of departure Austin's well-known introduction of the "performative" function of language in his book *How to Do Things with Words.* From there I shall move on to tracing the key insights involved in this deep and fresh perspective in some of his other writings, with an eye to highlighting the social and embodied character of his analyses. My focus will be on the "interactive or doing" dimensions of Austin's philosophy of language as they work themselves out in his essays in *Philosophical Papers,* as well as in his short book *Sense and Sensibilia.*

This focus will lead us to an exploration of the several parallel fields of analysis, most of which have been systematically ignored by commentators on Austin's thought. I see direct lines of connection between Austin's "embodied activity" and the insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his phenomenological studies of embodiment in *The Phenomenology of Perception.* There are even interesting connections with Charles Saunders Peirce's notions in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear." The pragmatist connections of Austin's insights, such as those encountered in Nelson Goodman's *Ways of World Making,* should not be overlooked.

It is often said that although Austin is generally classified in one sense or another as an "ordinary language" thinker, following in the train of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, there seems to be little if any direct connection between Austin's work and that of Wittgenstein. He never seems to have studied with him, attended his lectures, or quoted his works. Indeed, Austin studied at

Oxford while Wittgenstein taught at Cambridge, and even though they both served England in one form or another during World War Two, Austin was quite a bit younger and died in 1960, while Wittgenstein had died in 1951.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that there are numerous common themes running throughout the works of these two highly influential thinkers. Indeed, in addition to their common concern with the "ins and outs" of ordinary language as they bear on standard philosophical topics, both the later Wittgenstein and Austin thought that in some way or other the way ordinary people talk carries with it the resolution of many if not most philosophical dilemmas.

More specifically, there are passages in Austin's papers that reverberate directly from insights offered by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations.* Consider this passage: "For some years we have been realizing more and more clearly that the occasion of an utterance matters seriously, and that the words used are to some extent to be 'explained' by the 'context' in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in a linguistic interchange" (*How to do Things with Words,* p. 100).

More pointed yet are these lines from "A Plea for Excuses": "Our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon- the most favored alternative method .... When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or 'meanings', whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use words to talk about. We are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena" (*Philosophical Papers,* p. 130).

Lastly, consider these words from the final pages of Austin's *How to do Things with Words: "*The notion of the purity of performatives...was essentially based upon a belief in the dichotomy of performatives and constatives, which we see has to be abandoned in favor of more general *families* of related and overlapping speech acts" (p. 149).

The obvious parallels here with the following passage from Wittgenstein's *Investigations* are striking. He says: "I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between the members of a family; build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and crisscross in the same way. – And I shall say: 'games' form a family" (paragraph #67).

So, in this way I think it both possible and advisable to maintain a vital connection, however indirect, between the thought of the later Wittgenstein and that of J.L. Austin. Given the similarities between their academic contexts and philosophical commitments to ordinary language, it is both easy and natural to think of their respective patterns of thought side by side. In fact, I think it is misleading and erroneous to proceed otherwise.

It seems relatively clear that Austin "discovered" the performative aspect of linguistic activity somewhere between 1939 and the early 1950s when he was delivering lectures at Oxford under the title "Words and Deeds." His essay "Performative Utterances" first appeared in 1956, but the basic ideas involved were more fully developed in the William James Lectures at Harvard in 1955 under the title *How to do Things with Words.* In these lectures Austin traced out the main nuances involved in trying to follow up on his initial distinction between "constative" and "performative" uses of speech. The latter have been almost entirely overlooked in the history of the philosophy of language.

While philosophers have been almost exclusively concerned with the uses of language that "describe facts" or "assert propositions," they have not noticed that in addition to, or along with, these functions of speech, speakers can be said to "perform" linguistic acts that accomplish specific deeds other than these other, more favored tasks. "They do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true' or 'false'; and the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something" (*How to Do Things with Words*, p. 5).

Austin offers several examples of this "performative" function of language. (1) "I do," as said in a wedding ceremony, (2) "I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth," at a ship naming ceremony, (3) "I give and bequeath my watch to my brother," and (4) "I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow." In each of these and other such cases, the statements accomplish a specific task other than describing or affirming. In short, they "perform" a function that makes them best described as an entire region or function of linguistic activity hitherto unnoticed.

Austin himself states that: "In these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it. None of the utterances cited is either true or false: I assert this as obvious and do not argue it" (*How to Do Things with Words,* p. 6). He goes on to dub this use of language the "performative" because it neither describes nor affirms, yet it performs important linguistic functions in human life.

It seems safe to say that Austin actually "discovered" the performative use of language, even though it was right there in plain sight all along. Such

discoveries are at best extremely rare. This accomplishment has earned Austin a permanent place in the history of philosophy.

He asserts as "obvious" that performatives do not describe one's doing but rather constitute the "doing" of it, and they are neither true nor false. In each case, of course, these utterances must be made in appropriate circumstances. I think it especially significant to note that Austin stresses the "doing" of the utterance. Here we see his concern with the active and pragmatic character of this type of linguistic activity. I make special note of this aspect of Austin's account of this special type of utterance because it ties his remarks to those of Wittgenstein pertaining to the active quality of language-games. Neither Austin nor Wittgenstein construe language as a simply "mirroring" or "naming" enterprise, and this is what marks them off as blazing a fresh trail amidst the quagmire of more common philosophers of language.

For both of these thinkers it is both natural and revolutionary to focus attention on the active, embodied, and social qualities of human speech. This emphasis should seem noteworthy since language is obviously a human *activity,* but the emphasis of nearly all language philosophy, especially since Bertrand Russell and the young Wittgenstein, has been on precisely the "picturing" or "naming" function of speech. The fact when we speak we are *engaging* in an action has generally been ignored. The reason for this lopsided approach may well have been the traditional philosophical concern with truth and knowledge.

Be that as it may, with the mature Wittgenstein and Austin all this has changed. Thus Austin's choice of words with which to describe this obvious but long neglected dimension of linguistic activity, namely *performative* utterances. Whenever we speak, in fact, we are "performing" an act, but in these special cases which Austin is focusing on the emphasis is on "getting something done" in addition to uttering words. Thus the title he chose for the 1955 Harvard lectures "How to *do* things with words," over and above simply talking.

Austin stresses, to be sure, that the performative dimension of such utterances is only fulfilled if the appropriate circumstances have been provided. "It is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*" (p. 8). Marriages, ship naming, betting, and the like can only transpire if and when the other customary surrounding features of such events are present. The person making the utterance may not, for example, be authorized to perform the act in question, or he or she may be pretending to perform it as a kind of joke, or even as a lie. Nonetheless, when such circumstances are in place, when the umpire says "You're out!" for instance, the act has, in fact, been performed.

There are, to be sure, cases wherein the circumstances have not all been in row, and the act in question has not been performed, or will later be nullified

as if it had never taken place. Austin calls such occasions "unhappy" or "infe-licitous," or later on "misfires" or "abuses." In addition, many of the sort of acts involved can be performed without any utterances at all. Papers can be signed and stamped, summonses can be sent, and time limits can have run out, with-out anyone uttering a relevant word. Moreover, it is normally necessary for the performative utterance to have been heard and understood for them to have been "performed." Often times, as well, such things as warnings and orderings may simply be "out of place" or "misunderstood."

One of the more interesting kinds of cases Austin takes up are those he calls *verdictives,* wherein a judge or umpire passes judgment or offers an official rul-ing, such as "Guilty" or "Out!" as a kind of verdict. These may well go beyond simply performing an act, for they carry with them additional circumstances. If the circumstances are in proper order, the "verdict" stands as uttered. If not, then a review of the entire proceeding is often required in order to determine the appropriateness of the ruling. Such cases thus may involve considerations as to whether certain facts were the case, whether there are additional *truths* that must be taken into consideration. Here, clearly, performatives are con-nected to issues of truth.

Austin then moves on to a more thorough consideration of the possible con-nections between facts and performatives. Here he admits to the importance of an exception to his initial distinction between doing and saying, between constatives and performatives. This leads him to an analysis of such notions as "presupposes," "entails," and "implies." Certain performatives often carry with them these sorts of judgments as well. Austin admits that at his point things begin to get a bit murky.

At the close of Lecture IV Austin concludes that in the end, if we are to come to a sound understanding of how language functions in all its variations, "We must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued – the total speech-act" (p. 52). It is here that he first introduces this notion of "speech-act" as an alternative way of referring to the entire performative function of lan-guage. Thus by suggesting that we discuss all linguistic activity as various types of "speech-acts," Austin shifts the whole conversation about linguistic meaning onto a still broader canvass. In Lecture VI Austin reconnoiters his approach by rethinking the idea that there must be a *single* criterion for distinguishing between constatives and performatives.

Most importantly, he notes that it is always an "I," the first person present indicative that is at the center of any speech-act. "We said that that the idea of a performative utterance was that it was to be ... the performance of an action. Actions are only performed by persons, and obviously in our cases the utterer must be the performer" (p. 57). For Austin, *doing* continues to lie at the heart of

speaking. The presence of the first person singular present indicative form renders the implicit feature of the speech situation *explicit.* It is significant to note that along the way Austin has introduced the terms 'dimension' and 'force' into his discussion of *speech – acts* (pp. 72–73). I shall return to this point shortly.

Having added these features to his analysis, Austin moves, in Lecture VIII, to devise a fresh classification scheme through which to view performative utterances. Having introduced the notions of "phonetic act," "phatic act," and "rhetic act," he soon transforms these into his well-known distinctions between (1) "locutionary," (2) "illocutionary," and (3) "perlocutionary" acts. He acknowledges that he has introduced the notion of locutionary act "[p]rincipally to make it quite plain what it is, in order to distinguish it from other acts with which we are going to be primarily concerned" (p. 94).

In performing a locutionary act the speaker utters a set of words, such as "I promise." that forms a grammatical sentence. However, in performing an illocutionary act the speaker actually accomplishes a specific linguistic task, such as making a promise. In the performance of a perlocutionary act, the speaker triggers or accomplishes certain consequential effects or outcomes of the act, such as placing a bet on a given number at the roulette wheel, thus actually "betting." In brief, the locutionary act involves saying the words involved in the utterance, the illocutionary act involves the reason for making the utterance, and the perlocutionary act involves the results of having made the utterance.

It is at this juncture that Austin begins speaking of the "force" of a given utterance, a step that will move him away from the division of performatives into separate "acts" and toward a focus on the illocutionary "dimension" of a given speech-act. In many ways the central concern with performatives is their ability to accomplish certain tasks as opposed to simply state or describe facts. It is by virtue of their *force* that they participate in the dimension of linguistic interaction. In short, it is by means of their force that "things get done by words." Austin explicitly moves away from what he calls the "descriptive" fallacy that has for so long dominated philosophers' concerns. "I want to distinguish *force* and meaning in the sense in which meaning is equivalent to sense and reference, just as it has become essential to distinguish sense and reference within meaning" (p. 100).

More specifically, Austin goes on to say that "We may entirely clear up the "use" of a sentence, on a particular occasion, in the sense of the locutionary act, without yet touching upon its use in the sense of an *illocutionary* act" (p. 100). After mentioning the role of the *perlocutionary act* (or "uptake") of an utterance, Austin specifically states that his "interest in these lectures is essentially to fasten on the second, illocutionary act and contrast it with the other two" (p. 103). He clarifies these points of emphasis in Lecture IX when he restates the

roles of the three aspects: *locutionary act, illocutionary act,* and *perlocutionary act.* Here, once again, he shifts from talking about these three aspects as individual acts to speaking of them as *dimensions* that have *force* within the same utterance (p. 108).

I want to stress this subtle yet very important shift in Austin's vocabulary when referring to what he early on designated as the "total speech act" (p. 52). Among those who seek to follow up with Austin's insights, notably John Searle, there has been a decided tendency to collapse his subtle shift of vocabulary from speaking of distinguishable "acts" to "dimensions" and "forces" to speaking almost entirely of the former. This failure to pick up on Austin's subtle shift has led many back to once again focusing on "locutionary acts" rather than on "illocutionary forces." In short, back to "propositional acts" as the main thrust of "locutionary acts." In my view, Austin was struggling to get himself free from these traditional sorts of analyses. I'll return to this theme a bit later on.

Austin finishes up Lecture IX by distinguishing between those illocutions that seek to perform an act and those that actually perform them. Indeed, as he mentioned earlier on, often the same effect can be achieved without anyone speaking at all. This fact then blurs the distinction between performatives and mere behavior. This is especially true where conventions are involved. Waving a stick or making a threatening face may "warn" another without a corresponding utterance. In addition, the performance of an illocutionary utterance must in one way or another secure what Austin terms "uptake."

In Lecture X Austin once again summarizes his progress thus far: "Thus we distinguished the locutionary act ... which has *meaning;* the illocutionary act which has a certain *force* in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is *the achieving of* certain *effects* by saying something" (p. 120). He acknowledges that eventually these distinctions will lead off into the psychological aspects of linguistics, but urges us not to proceed too quickly, lest we overlook something important. Thus he wants to consider, for instance, the difference between the expression "*In* saying such and such I was performing a certain act" and "*By* saying such and such I was so doing." The former focuses on accomplishing the deed while the latter focuses on the means by which it was accomplished.

In Lecture XI Austin readdresses the issue of the relationship between performatives and descriptions, between performatives as "happy" or "unhappy" and statements as true or false. Although initially these two forms of utterance seem to be quite distinct in their intentions and functions, it turns out that they are much more similar than Austin projected at the outset of his examination. As he points out: "'Stating' seems to meet all the criteria we had for distinguishing the illocutionary act" (p. 133). He then launches a full-scale

review of this original distinction between the locutionary and illocutionary dimensions of speech-acts, on the one hand, and the truth and falsity dimensions of constative "statements," on the other.

His key idea is that both of these forms of speech, as well as perhaps many others, have ways of succeeding and failing, and as such can be both "right" and "wrong." Stating is every bit the performing of an act, a speech-act, as is apologizing or promising. Likewise, because performative utterances can themselves go wrong or fail, they too can and must be seen as in some sense "wrong." In both cases a speaker is *saying* something as well as *doing* something. So it seems that Austin must jettison his initial stark contrast between the two modes.

Here is how he expresses this dilemma: "Once we realize that what we have to study is *not* the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act" (p. 138). And on the next page: "Performatives are, of course, incidentally saying something as well as doing something … *the* question arises, was what I stated true or false? And this we feel, speaking in popular terms, is now the question of whether the statement 'corresponds with the facts'" (p. 141). Thus Austin concludes that the initial, seemingly obvious, distinction between the illocutionary and locutionary dimensions of speech acts is now blurred.

He then dives in even deeper by asking whether the question of the truth or falsity of a locutionary act is "so very objective … Is the constative, then, always true or false?" (p. 141). At this point Austin introduces what has become the classic example of the problem: "How can one answer this question, whether it is true or false that France is hexagonal? It is just rough, and that is the right and final answer to the question of the relation of 'France is hexagonal' to France itself. It is a rough description; it is not a true or a false one" (p. 142). Likewise, the statement "'Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma' is exaggerated and suitable to some contexts and not to others; it would be pointless to insist on its truth or falsity" (p. 143).

In moving on to Lecture XII, Austin reiterates the point he made back at the close of Lecture IV, namely that it is "The total speech act in the total speech situation that is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating" (p. 147). Once again he employs the terms 'dimensions' and 'forces' when speaking of the different aspects of speech acts. He insists that stating and describing, the traditionally preferred terms for dealing with questions of truth and falsity, "have no unique position" in relation to illocutionary acts … "truth and falsity are" … "not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a dimension of assessment" (p. 148).

In this his final lecture, Lecture XII, Austin sums up the results of his exploration of the whole theme of *How to Do Things with Words* by zeroing in on several traditional dichotomies or "fetishes" that have become standard assumptions throughout the history of philosophy. The first is that between the "normative or evaluative" as opposed to the factual (p. 148). The next is that between the true and the false and the third that between values and facts (p. 150). "Both truth and falsity are (except by an artificial abstraction which is always possible and legitimate for certain purposes) not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a dimension of assessment – how the words stand in respect of satisfactoriness to the facts, events, situations, etc., to which they refer" (p. 148).

Instead of now needing a list of verbs that are explicitly "performative," what we need is a list of the *illocutionary forces* of an utterance. The initial distinction between constatives and performatives will no longer hold up. This dichotomy "has to be abandoned in favor of a more general *families* of related and overlapping speech-acts" (p. 149). In the end Austin claims that his analysis has allowed him to play "Old Harry" with two "fetishes" that have plagued Western philosophy down through the ages: (1) the "true/false fetish" and (2) the "value/fact" fetish. To play "Old Harry" with someone or something usually means to play "the devil" with or play tricks on them. In the end, then, Austin proposes that we do away with these time-honored but misleading dichotomies. Indeed, these dichotomies have plagued modern philosophical thought at least ever since Descartes.

In Austin's judgment, then, each of the following types of speech-acts exhibits qualities that synthesize the locutionary and illocutionary forces of their respective utterance types. He lists: Verdictives, Excercitives, Commissives, Behabitives, and Expositives as examples of speech acts that span the gap between the fetishes he has listed. It should not go unnoticed that this type of synthesizing into families is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's notion of the family resemblances among ways of speaking about various qualities and characteristics. As Austin put it: "It is the total speech-act in the total speech-situation that is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, that we are engaged in elucidating" (p. 147).

Austin concludes with a summary of just what each of these odd sounding speech acts might be thought to accomplish: "We may say that the verdictive is an exercise of judgment, the exercitive is an assertion of influence or exercising of power, the commissive is an assuming of an obligation or declaring of an intention, the behabitive is the adopting of an attitude, and the expositive is the clarifying of reasons, arguments, and communications" (p. 162).

I should like now to make one general observation about these final remarks of Austin's regarding his analysis of getting things done by speaking. It is important to mark his shift from talking about "acts" to talking about "forces" near the end of his remarks. In speaking about the former, one tends to get the idea of separate things done of individual acts performed, whereas in speaking about "forces" one gets the idea of active dimensions *within* a single utterance. Thus I think Austin's shift in vocabulary at this juncture is highly significant. As he puts it, it is the "total speech act" that we must deal with when unpacking the significance of any given utterance, not simply what might be termed its content.

I think it was John Searle's failure to grasp the distinction between illocution and locution that misled him in his book *Speech Acts,* into talking about "propositional acts" instead of "illocutionary forces." This oversight directed him back toward "propositional" analysis and away from Austin's unique insight into the truly multidimensional nature of all human speech-acts. A speech-act has at least three dimensions of meaning and these cannot be separated from one another if one is to truly grapple with its full meaning. In focusing on the "propositional acts" as he does, Searle distorts the deep and unique quality of Austin's analysis.

Before moving on I should like to underscore what I take to be of primary importance in Austin's exploration of performative utterances, together with their significant adjustments and extrapolations. The focal point of significance of Austin's work is his emphasis on the "doing" or "deed" character of linguistic activity. As the title of my own examination suggests, where Wittgenstein focuses on the "language-games" involved in human speech activity, I see Austin focusing on the accomplishing of specific tasks therein. Both, then, are especially concerned with the fact that in addition to referring to things, places, and persons, language involves *the use of* such references to accomplish these tasks. People actually use speech to "get things done." This feature of linguistic activity has been a long neglected feature of language study.

Austin, for his part, calls attention to the simple, obvious fact that people talk for specific purposes, that they do in fact *perform* linguistic actions by way of accomplishing things in the world. Thus it is not just the *content* of our utterances that should be of interest philosophically, but the actual *making* of the statements that constitute speech as well. By entitling his book *How to Do Things with Words* Austin opens the way for a much more extensive and rich analysis of what it means for us to be speaking persons. It is this dimension of linguistic activity that is the focus of my investigations in these

pages. *Words, Deeds, and Bodies* are inextricably intermingled in what we call language.

In addition, language is also something that human *persons* participate in, it is essentially a social phenomenon. This is another dimension of linguistic activity that has gone neglected in the Western interest in language. Philosophers often talk and write as if language exists exclusively for the purposes of describing the world, quite apart from the dynamic of social interaction. It would seem highly likely that how this dynamic is conducted would be relevant to our understanding of its nature, purpose, and success. In my view, both Wittgenstein and Austin, as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, have special interest in exploring the interactive, participatory nature of human speech, quite apart from, but not over against, its descriptive nature.

So, my concern in these pages is to draw out some of the salient features of human speech as regards its active, social, and behavioral characteristics. Seeing words as deeds, and even deeds as "words," along with their inherent connection to the role and functions of the human body, strike me as a long overdue enterprise. As Wittgenstein puts it: "We do not see meaning as surprising enough because we do not see language itself as surprising." So the focus of my explorations is on the obvious but neglected aspects of speech, namely words, deeds, and bodies.

Now I will move on to a consideration of Austin's *Philosophical Papers* in an effort to see how his emphasis on the performative dimension of speech acts plays out with respect to additional topics. I shall focus on five of the essays in this volume: "Performative Utterances," "A Plea for Excuses," "Truth," "How to Talk – Some Simple Ways," and "Other Minds." The main concern here of course will be how Austin adumbrated his central insight concerning the performative dimension of linguistic activity in these essays.

"Performative Utterances" was given as a talk on the BBC in 1956 and had been incorporated into his William James Lectures at Harvard University in 1955 published as *How to Do Things with Words* in 1962. This essay covers essentially the same ground as this latter volume but does make an additional point or two as well. After having distinguished those linguistic acts which aim primarily at *saying* something from those that aim at *doing* something as well, he offers the usual examples of the latter, such as those that begin with "I do," "I apologize," and "I name this ship …". He then stresses the fact that the presence of certain appropriate circumstances serve as the criteria for whether or not these utterances are successful.

Right near the outset Austin calls attention to the fact that he only arrives at near the end of *How to Do Things with Words,* namely that while performatives

do not themselves report facts and such, they do "imply" that certain facts are in place in order to be successful. There is a direct logical connection between them and the "conventional procedures" that actually pertain to them. Some of the factors that contribute to this distinction, not being as clear cut as might at first seem, pertain to precisely these "procedures." There are, after all, limits and boundaries within which performatives must operate in order to be effective.

The rulings of umpires in athletic contests are clearly open to review and their judgements may be set aside, or even ruled as outrageous. They do, in fact, sometimes change their minds after conferring with other umpires. "Besides the little question: "is it true or false?" there is surely the question "*is* it in order?" (p. 236). When people offer advice or warnings, it is always appropriate to ask if they are warranted or justified, and this leads to questions about facts and truths. "If then we loosen up our ideas of truth and falsity we shall see that statements, when assessed in relation to the facts, are not so different after all from pieces of advice, verdicts, and so on" (p. 238).

Austin concludes this essay by introducing the notion of the *force* of an utterance, an introduction that strikes me as extremely important in understanding the depth of Austin's analysis of linguistic activity. This same notion came out toward the close of *How to Do Things with Words* and it seems to me that it counts against the tendency to reduce Austin's insights about the "illocutionary" dimension of speech acts in the direction of mere "Propositional acts" having to do with statements of fact, etc., ala John Searle. Austin was, after all, following Wittgenstein, primarily interested the active, social, and behavioral dimension of language beyond its job of reporting facts.

"We may be quite clear what 'Shut the door' means, but not yet at all clear on the further point as to whether as uttered at a certain time it was an order. An entreaty, or whatnot. What we need besides the old doctrine about meanings is a new doctrine about all the possible forces of utterances, toward the discovery of which our proposed list of explicit performative verbs would be a very great help; and then, going on from there an investigation of the various terms of appraisal that we use in discussing speech-acts of this, that, and the other precise kind – orders, warnings, and the like" (p. 238).

Indeed, I well remember the initial difficulty that arose between my young son and myself over my repeatedly reminding him to close the door behind himself by announcing "The door is open." He would look at the door and agree with me that it was indeed open, having missed altogether the illocutionary force of my utterance, namely "Please shut the door." If the door had not been open my subtle directive would have been, to use Austin's term, "infelicitous."

Clearly the facts of the case with respect to the position of the door were relevant, but the speech-act involved was only tangentially related to it. My son repeatedly missed its *force.*

Toward the close of *How to Do Things with Words* Austin makes a subtle shift away from speaking of "locutionary acts," illocutionary acts," and "perlocutionary acts," and toward "locutionary," illocutionary," and "perlocutionary" *forces* and *dimensions.* In short, he came to see that every speech-act has all three of these forces and dimensions and they are essentially inseparable. Moreover, it is primarily by means of these forces and dimensions that we accomplish things in the world beyond merely describing and reporting them. In this essay Austin directly reiterates this emphasis on "forces" as the key to understanding the nature of linguistic activity.

In his essay "A Plea for Excuses" Austin boldly states the basic rationale for what is called "linguistic philosophy" or "ordinary language philosophy." "First, words are our tools, and at a minimum we should use clean tools: we should know what we mean and what we do not, and we must forearm ourselves against the traps language sets us" (p. 129). ..."Our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations" (p. 130).

And then a bit later on: "When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in certain situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or 'meanings,' whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using our sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena. For this reason I think it might be better to use, for this way of doing philosophy, some less misleading name than those given above – for instance, 'linguistic phenomenology,' only that is rather a mouthful" (p. 130).

I take these remarks to be extremely crucial when trying to get to what was of paramount interest to Austin. With these remarks in mind we can better understand his amazing patience with sorting out the many complex and at times devious twists and turns he discovers in the seemingly normal ways we speak about the different aspects of experience and reality. Moreover, his introduction of the term 'phenomenology' indicates an awareness of the other main current of contemporary philosophy developed on the "continent" by such thinkers as Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl Jean Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

It is Austin's awareness of, even interest in, the field of phenomenology that I wish to explore in the third part of this study by introducing Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodiment as a crucial dimension for understanding linguistic activity. I shall trace several lines of parallel connection between the thought

of these two thinkers, and try to point up their common emphasis on the role of our bodily activity as the axis around which our understanding of language revolves. The exploration of these lines of connection should cast light on the thinking of both Austin and Merleau-Ponty.

Austin concludes his stress on the crucial importance of the variations of ordinary language for our understanding of the reality around us by acknowledging that ordinary language often carries within it "superstition, error, and fantasy of all kinds" as well as the valuable distinctions adumbrated above. Nevertheless, although "ordinary language is *not* the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it is the *first* word" (p. 133).

When he goes on to spell out the best sources for our research into "ordinary language," especially with respect to those most relevant to an examination of the logic of "excuses," Austin mentions three crucial sources. The first is the dictionary, focusing on the words that seem most relevant to the issue at hand. The second is the law, especially tort cases, for it is here that we shall find how different judges have dealt with the role of excuses with respect to specific cases and verdicts. Third, there is psychology, including anthropology and animal behavior. "With these sources, and with the aid of the imagination, it will go hard if we cannot arrive at the meanings of large numbers of expressions and at the understanding and classification of large numbers of 'actions'" (p. 137).

The remainder of this essay traces out in considerable detail many of the ins-and-outs involved in our efforts to explain our behavior by way of various "excuses." His overall point is that by examining how people go about explaining their "excusable" behavior we can gain valuable insight into the nature of key issues in moral philosophy, as well as of such broader issues pertaining to such notions as "freedom." Austin addresses the intricacies of this notion more directly in his essay "Ifs and Cans" in relation to the question of "determinism" versus "freewill," but this essay is not directly germane to our current interest in his focus on performative utterances.

The essay entitled "Truth," however, bears directly on our main focus of interest. After a lengthy discussion of the relation between some performative utterances and statement of facts, Austin zeros in on the question of whether or not to say that a given statement is "true" involves anything more, an additional claim, than simply asserting the statement itself. He poses the issue by rehearsing the following hypothetical case:

> If Mr. Q writes on a notice board 'Mr. W is a burglar,' then a trial is held to decide whether Mr. Q's published statement that Mr. W. is a burglar is a

libel: finding 'Mr. Q's statement was true (in substance and in fact).' There
upon a second trial is held to decide whether Mr. W is a burglar, in which
Mr. Q's statement is no longer under consideration: verdict 'Mr. W is a
burglar.' It is an arduous business to hold a second trial: why is it done if
the verdict is the same as the previous finding? (p. 95)

In Austin's view, to say that a given statement is "true" is to make an additional
claim over and above simply stating the first claim. "P is the case" is, according
to Austin, a statement of a possible fact, while to say that this initial statement
itself is "true" is, to borrow a phrase from a different one of Austin's essays, to
take a "new plunge," to say something about the person who first said "P is the
case." In short, to engage in an additional speech-act affirming the correctness
of the first assertion. He thinks that his story about the libel case makes this
clear.

This way of viewing the matter puts Austin at odds with Peter Strawson over
whether or not the second utterance performs an additional speech act to that
of the first. They seem to disagree over whether to say "I agree" with your ini-
tial statement constitutes yet an additional performative utterance. Although
Austin agrees with Strawson that the affirmation of the speaker's original state-
ment is itself not necessarily an additional performative utterance, he seems
to disagree that this does not constitute an additional assertion. Clearly, from
the example of Mr. Q and Mr. W, something additional has transpired in the
exchange, "a new plunge has been taken." Austin sees here two assertions, one
about libel and one about being a burglar.

I must add that this example confuses me a bit. It would seem that before
the case of libel (or slander) could be taken up it would have to be decided
whether or not the claim that Mr. Q made was in fact true. Then the question
of whether his claim was actually one of libel could be taken up. If Mr. Q's
claim was false, then he would be guilty of libel, but not if it was true. It seems
to me that Austin has the cart before the horse, but I defer to him since he
clearly knows a lot about such things.

Anyone who has read much Austin is well aware that he was particularly
partial to the language of the courts as a guide to how our basic distinctions
concerning responsibility get adjudicated. His footnote story about whether
his donkey was shot by "mistake" or by "accident" is a particular favorite of
mine. At one place he says that in his opinion courtroom judges regularly make
better distinctions than the average person with respect to many such issues.
I myself have made a number of visits to courtrooms with my students for ob-
servation purposes and I am inclined to agree with Austin about the judges'
ability to get things sorted out.

One of the more interesting of Austin's writings dealing with such distinctions is his "Three Ways of Spilling Ink," which first appeared in *The Philosophical Review,* (October, 1966) and was reprinted in *Philosophy Today, No 1* (Macmillan Publishers in 1968.) Here he struggles with the differences between doing something "on purpose," "intentionally," and "deliberately" in a most illuminating way. It quickly becomes clear that these terms are in no way synonymous and that Austin offers many insights into why this is the case. Along the way, as is usually the case, he offers a number of humorous remarks as well as a number of insights into moral decision making.

It seems clear that for Austin, several performative utterances can be stacked on top of one another by virtue of the remarks made following previous utterances. All of this comes to a head when discussed in these examples. In my view, the main point here for our explorations is that each and every speech-act, each and every performative utterance involves real *behavior* that engages the speaker with the circumstances and relevant persons comprising the context, and thus the meaning, of its force. Real people make real actualities by means of their reciprocal linguistic engagements. These not only constitute the real world in which we live, but shape and structure it as well.

In his essay "How to Talk – Some Simple Ways" Austin seeks to classify a number of diverse sorts of speech-acts according to various classifications. Along the way he maintains that "Names for speech-acts are more numerous, more specialized, more ambiguous and more significant than is ordinarily allowed for" and that "To some extent we probably do, even in ordinary language, make use of models of the speech situation in using the terms that we do for speech-acts" (p. 197). He concludes that "We seem bound to use a whole series of different models, because *difference between one named speech-act and another often resides principally in a difference between the speech-situations envisioned for their respective performances*" (p. 198).

What I find significant in this last remark is Austin's italicized final sentence in which he specifies that the differences involved between and among various speech-acts resides in the differences in their "speech-situations." I take this to mean that often what matters most in discerning the meaning of a given speech-act will be found in the specifics of the actual physical circumstances and personnel involved. This is not the first or only time Austin has called attention to the "context" of various speech-acts as crucial in determining their effectiveness and meaning. Such references point us in the direction of the "embodied activity" of those involved in any given speech-situation.

This emphasis points to the role physical and behavioral aspects of linguistic activity that are crucial to the whole question of "meaning." So often those who treat this question do so in such a way as to imply that all that is involved

in a speech-act is a collection and series of words, statements, and sentences. One might call this approach a simplistic matter of "talking heads." Speech-acts are full-fledged events in the world and the lives of actual persons, not simply exchanges of information. "Doing things with words" entails concrete connections with physical and social reality and these must be taken up in any account of the speech-acts involved. I shall return to this issue at the close of this chapter.

Perhaps the most interesting and well known of the essays in Austin's *Philosophical Papers* is that dealing with the question of "Other Minds." In it he addresses many more issues than the role of performative utterances, focusing on the questions of knowledge and especially our knowledge of the thoughts and intentions of other people. His point of departure is a well-known paper on this subject by Professor John Wisdom. Wisdom puzzled over how we can ever know what another person is thinking since we cannot "see into," or "read" their minds. Indeed, in early modern philosophical discussions this question often took the form of our knowing that minds or persons outside of our own consciousness even exist.

Austin's conclusion concerning this broader question comes at the end of his essay where he says "Of course I *don't* introspect Tom's feelings (we should be in a pretty predicament if I did) … to suppose that the question 'How do I know that Tom is angry?' is meant to mean 'How do I introspect Tom's feelings?' … is simply barking up the wrong gum tree" (*Philosophical Papers,* pp. 83–84). His overall point is that the question about knowing another person's mind is better treated as a question about my "reasons" or "credentials" for claiming that I know another person's thoughts. At the outset of his essay Austin interprets this question as a response to what might be called yet another type of "performative utterance."

He begins by making a distinction between two forms the above challenge might take. One takes the form: *"How* do you know?" and the other "*Why* do you believe?" In the first case we may challenge a person's alleged knowledge while in the second case we may challenge the basis for their belief. In this latter case one is being asked for the evidence or rationale upon which the belief is based, while in the former one is being asked how they are in "a position" to know such and such. In reply to this query one might cite their own special experience or that of an expert source. Either of these replies may, of course, be challenged and then we are may well seek to press them further.

What is of paramount interest to our inquiry in these pages is Austin's use of the logic of the speech acts by means of which we engage in this sort of discussion. At one point in his discussion he says: "It is fundamental in talking (as in other matters) that we are entitled to trust others, except in so far as there is

some concrete reason to distrust them. Believing persons, accepting testimony, is the, or one main, point of talking. We don't play (competitive) games except in the faith that our opponent is trying to win: if he isn't, it isn't a game, but something different" (p. 50). I take this sort of remark as absolutely crucial to our understanding of Austin's approach to linguistic activity in general, and to his notion of "doing things with words," in particular.

The reason for seeing this remark as absolutely crucial has to do with the insight it provides into the nature of the "performative character" of human speech in general. The point is that all peoples use language, and nearly every person uses language of some form or another. Moreover, they do so in order to accomplish certain common tasks in the world around them. Even tiny children are drawn into speech in order to learn and express themselves. We speak with one another in order to "do things with words." In this process we generally, almost always, take people "at their word" unless there is a specific reason not to. Understanding is square one in linguistic activity, with questions and disputes taking a more or less "parasitic" role.

Austin couches this "understanding of understanding" within the standard philosophical debate about whether one can know that a given object is in fact "real." He says: "The wile of the metaphysician consists in asking 'Is it a real table?' ... and not specifying or limiting what may be wrong with it, so that I feel at a loss 'how to prove' it *is* a real one. It is the use of the word 'real' in this manner that leads us on to the supposition that 'real' has a single meaning ('the real world,' 'material objects'), and that a highly profound and puzzling one. Instead, we should insist always on specifying with what 'real' is being contrasted. – 'not what' I shall have to show it is, in order to show it is 'real'" (pp. 55–56).

In other words, Austin's point is that the burden of proof in this discussion lies with the person who *denies* that something or other is "really real" rather than with the one who takes it as real. One cannot, in the give and take of ordinary conversation, *begin* with doubt. Rather, we must always begin behaving and speaking as if things *are* real unless there is a specific reason for not so doing. To use Austin's own image, in a slightly different context, it is the presumption that whatever is under discussion is "real" that "wears the trousers," not the other way around. A whole bundle of "freshman" philosophy discussions could be dispensed with if this simple principle were to be invoked.

Midway through his essay, Austin shifts his main concern to the question of whether one can ever be wrong when claiming that they "know." He says: "Expressions such as 'We don't know another man's anger in the way he knows it' or 'He knows his pain in a way we can't' seem barbarous. The man doesn't 'know his pain': he feels not 'knows' what he recognizes as, or what he knows to

be, anger (not his anger), and he knows that he is feeling angry" (p. 65). Austin goes on to say "Surely, if what has so far been said is correct, then we are often right to say we *know* even in cases where we turn out subsequently to have been mistaken – and indeed we seem always, or practically always, liable to be mistaken" (p. 66).

Here he butts up against the long standing claim of what are generally called "foundationalists," such as David Hume and Bertrand Russell, who would claim that all claims to knowledge, in order to be knowledge, must have an absolute basis that precludes the possibility of being wrong. There has always been a debate as to whether any such "error proof" foundation exists for any given knowledge claim. "The human intellect and senses are, indeed, *inherently* fallible and delusive, but not by any means *inverately* so ... It is futile to embark on a 'theory of knowledge' which denies this liability: such theories constantly end up by admitting the liability after all, and denying the existence of 'knowledge'" (p. 66). This would seem to apply directly to David Hume's skepticism.

To put it differently, Austin says: "Being aware that you may be mistaken doesn't mean merely being aware that you are a fallible human being: it means that you have some concrete reason to suppose that you may be mistaken in this case" (p. 66). Both "foundationalism" and "skepticism" thrive on trading between these two senses of "I may be wrong." The former insists that for true knowledge to obtain, there must be some "truth" that is incorrigible, while the latter maintains that there is no such thing as an incorrigible truth claim. Austin finds them both wanting on the basis of everyday linguistic activity. We admit our fallibility one claim at a time, neither wholesale nor begrudgingly, but concretely and sparingly.

Amidst all this talk about "performative utterances" of various sorts it would be easy to overlook the obvious fact that what makes these forms of speech active and effective is the presence of two factors, namely a social and a material context. Austin often refers to these as the "circumstances" surrounding the speech acts in question. The simple fact is, of course, that any and all speech acts take place against the background of human social interaction and various material objects. Speech acts do not simply pop up *sui generis* in a vacuum. Rather, they are always connected to other people and concrete physical surroundings. "Words" are used to speak of things and to people, thereby creating "deeds." Moreover, both of these realities derive from human "bodies."

In other words, speech acts do not occur by themselves, but are part and parcel of what is going on in the physical and social worlds surrounding them. They do not emerge from disembodied "talking heads" in empty space. Nor are they "vectorless." That is to say, they emerge in concrete contexts aimed

at someone and something in the real world, both social and physical. It is important to keep the "acts" as "deeds" at the center of the conversation about "speech acts." Austin incorporates these factors in his development of the notion of "illocutionary force." Getting things done is what linguistic activity is all about.

We come now to the most interesting of Austin's ideas, namely that there exists a parallel between our speech acts involving the expressions "I know" and "I promise." Here is how he introduces this parallel: "But now, when I say 'I promise,' a new plunge is taken: I have not merely announced my intention, but, by using thus formula (by performing this ritual), I have bound myself to others, and staked my reputation, in a new way. Similarly, saying 'I know' is taking a new plunge. But it is *not* saying 'I have performed a specially striking feat of cognition, superior, in the same scale as believing and being sure, even to being merely quite sure': for there *is* nothing in that scale to being quite sure ... When I say 'I know,' I *give others my word: I give others my authority for saying* that 'S is P'" (p. 67).

So, as with promise making, to say "I know" is basically to assure others that they can take my word for the issue at hand, that they can take my word "to the bank," bank on what I have said to be the case as actually being the case. If I say "I was born in Lynden Washington" you can trust that this is so because I am in a position to know since my birth certificate says so. Likewise, if I say that I know that Kentucky University won the NCAA Men's Basketball Championship Game in Seattle in 1949 by beating Oklahoma A and M University, you can count on that being true because I actually saw the game. I "promise you" that these claims are both true, I know them to be so.

It turns out that saying "I know" and saying "I promise" are not entirely parallel in that if what you claim to know turns out not to be the case, you must retract your claim, while with promising one still did promise, but simply failed to make good on the promise. The point of the parallel is only that in uttering such speech acts the speaker puts him or herself on the line in a way that simply describing an event or object does not. To "describe" has no reflexive force, while to claim to "know" and to "promise" do have such force.

"In these 'ritual' cases, the approved case is one where *in the appropriate circumstances,* I say a certain formula: e.g. "I do" when standing, unmarried or a widower, beside a woman, unmarried or a widow and not within the prohibited degrees of relationship, before a clergyman, registrar, &c., or "I give" when it is mine to give, &c., or "I order" when I have the authority to, &c. But now, if the situation transpires to have been in some way not orthodox ... then we tend to be rather hesitant about how to put it, as heaven was when the saint blessed the penguins" (p. 70).

Austin is particularly concerned to sort out the "descriptive fallacy" problem with respect to performative utterances. He argues that to say "I know" is not to describe my inner cognitive state but rather to indicate my willingness to provide my personal backing to whatever it is that is under discussion. "To suppose that 'I know' is a descriptive phrase, is only one example of the *descriptive fallacy,* so common in philosophy. Even if some language is now purely descriptive, language was not in origin so, and much of it is still not so. Utterance of obvious ritual phrases, in the appropriate circumstances, is not *describing* the action we are doing, but *doing* it ('I do'): in other cases it functions, like tone and expression, or again like punctuation and mood, as an intimation that we are employing language in some special way ('I warn', 'I ask', 'I define')" (p. 71).

The whole point of Austin's efforts to introduce and explore performatives was to distinguish them from the run-of-the-mill descriptions which often dominate our conversations, especially in philosophy and science. Indeed, even casual observation will make it clear that the majority of our everyday conversations are full of "nondescriptive" utterances such as performatives, questions, jokes, and the like. The multitude of jobs we accomplish by means of the help of speech require a vast array of techniques and interactions in addition to descriptions of "facts." One is reminded of paragraph #23 in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* which I quoted near the beginning of the first chapter where he lists a great many tasks we accomplish with language which go far beyond mere descriptions.

When it comes to getting it right as to knowing what another person is thinking or feeling, we have standard ways of getting such clarity, and they do not involve introspection or clairvoyance on our part. Rather, they involve observation and discussion by and among the parties involved. Mistakes and deception may often occur, but we have more or less standard ways of smoking these out through further discussion. Often we simply must take the other person's word for what it is they are claiming, in fact, most of the time we take another's word for whatever it is they are experiencing and/or thinking.

At this point in his discussion, near the end of the "Other Minds" essay, Austin once again raises the issue of why and how language itself works at all. "The question, pushed further, becomes a challenge to the very possibility of 'believing another man', in its ordinarily accepted sense, at all. What 'justification' is there for supposing that there is another mind communicating with you at all? How can you know what it would be like for another mind to feel anything, and so how can you understand it? It is then that we are tempted to say that we only mean by 'believing him' that we take certain vocal noises as signs of certain impending behavior, and that 'other minds' are no more really real than unconscious desires" (p. 83).

Austin has brought us back to the question raised by Wittgenstein when he asked what is the justification for talking, thinking, and behaving in the ways we do with respect to our beliefs and actions? As he put it: "This is simply what I do. I have reached bedrock. My spade is turned." The only justification that in the end can be given is not something "outside" of our linguistic and social systems, but rather the systems themselves. Our human "form of life," including our linguistic activity, is all we have as a "justification" for thinking and behaving the ways we do at the deepest level. As Wittgenstein put it in *On Certainty*: "Be willing to begin at the beginning and not try to go further back" (paragraph #471).

Austin concludes by arguing that the above "dilemma" concerning choosing whether or not to believe that there is another mind within and behind another person's talk and behavior is a "distortion." "It seems, rather, that believing in other persons, in authority and testimony, is an essential part of the act of communicating, an act which we all constantly perform. It is as much an irreducible part of our experience as, say, giving promises, or playing competitive games, or even sensing colored patches. We can state certain advantages of such performances, and we can elaborate rules of a kind for their 'rational' conduct (as the Law Courts and historians and psychologists work out the rules for accepting testimony). But there is no 'justification' for our doing them as such" (p. 83).

This last remark constitutes Austin's final answer to the question of how we are to justify going about our common social life as we do. Simply put, there *is* no "ultimate justification" for how we proceed other than the proceeding itself. We begin our common life together "in the middle," as it were, with no way to get back to the some ultimate beginning point that explains why we do things the way we do them. This does not mean that we do not have procedures for making epistemological and moral judgments along the way, it only means that the system within which we do this has no justification for itself, nor does it need one.

Earlier on Austin was quoted as saying that language was not "descriptive" in its origin. It does seem clear that speech began, and for tiny children still begins, with verbal activity more "proto" than mere description. Such things as names, approvals and disapprovals, songs, simple humor, and behavioral instructions clearly come first. Indeed, even "performatives" of some sort must have come into being before describing things did. We "back our way" into language by way of our common and shared social activities. My dissertation advisor's three year old son, when asked if he had any brothers, after reflecting replied: "No, but I have three sisters, and they have a brother – and that's me."

I would like to conclude this chapter by offering some observations of my own concerning the notion of performative utterances. It has occurred to me that all of Austin's examples are of what might be termed a "public" or "official" nature. That is to say, saying "I do," "You're Out," "I name this ship," and "I promise" in the proper setting or circumstances in and of itself constitutes performing an action rather than describing one. I find myself wondering if there are not also "personal" or "unofficial" performatives within the warp and weft of our everyday conversations. For instance, when I say "I'm sorry" to my wife when I have interrupted her, is this not also a performative utterance? Or, in a personal conversation when I say "I must confess that I failed to consider that possibility," is this not an example of an "informal" performative?

Clearly here too the circumstances must be appropriate in order for the utterance to be *happy,* but nonetheless in such cases my utterances perform acts on their own, linguistic acts that do not describe but rather accomplish deeds. I have in "deed" apologized and confessed. Of course, if the surrounding circumstances are not in order my speech acts may be said to *misfire.* As Austin makes clear, it is the propriety of these circumstances that renders a performative effective. This fact reminds us that our speech acts do not occur in a vacuum, but rather are part of the totality of our everyday lives. Words and deeds are mere abstractions unless there are concrete entities comprising their context.

On a brief lighter note, in the movie "A Thousand Clowns" many years ago, Murry, the Jason Robards' character, tells of standing on a street corner all day apologizing to everyone who came by. "I'm sorry" he would say to each person. Surely this speech act misfired every time. However, he said, one woman stopped and actually said "I forgive you!!" Does such a reply change this fact? Both the apology and the response seem senseless without the appropriate circumstances. I think Austin would say that no real speech act was performed here, even though these words were exchanged, because there was no connection to the surroundings. Of course one might write this episode off as a "joke," something quite different.

Or, if I say to my wife "I love you," is there not a sense in which this, too, constitutes a performative utterance? To be sure, it can be taken as a description of how I feel about my wife, but is there not also a sense in which in and by saying this I am, in Austin's words, "taking a new plunge," committing myself to behave in certain appropriate ways in the future? Indeed, a specific deed may have been performed by means of my speech, quite apart from, or in addition to, any inner feelings I may have had at that particular moment. Indeed, I may well have "done things with words."

Allow me one final note. In the April 1965 issue of *The Philosophical Review* Stanley Cavell wrote an article entitled "Austin at Criticism" in which he surveyed and evaluated Austin's contribution to the philosophy of language. It is a very thorough treatment of Austin's then published papers, which were collected in the book *Philosophical Papers* and published in 1961. Unfortunately, Cavell's essay appeared prior to Austin's William James Lectures at Harvard University in 1955 were published as *How to Do Things with Words* in 1962, just two years after Austin's death. In my view, as should be amply evident from the foregoing discussion, this latter volume adds a good deal to Austin's stature as a first-rate thinker.

Cavell's treatment of Austin's work carries an overall tone of disappointment with its narrowness of perspective, a criticism Cavell seemingly levels at all attempts to base philosophical analysis on the "the Oxford/Cambridge tutorial methodology," while expressing great admiration for Austin's clever, even deep, insights about the nature of language and its many labyrinthine twists and turns. All in all, however, Cavell seems to conclude that there is something "wrong-headed" about placing so much store and emphasis on the intricacies of everyday speech. As one colleague shared with me, Cavell seems to conclude that Austin was not "deep."

As should be evident enough from my foregoing analysis of Austin's efforts to uncover the dynamic relationship between speech and embodied action, I myself find these efforts and insights immensely insightful and deep. They go right to the heart of one of the weaknesses of traditional Western philosophy, namely the detachment of speech from everyday life, the presumption that philosophical analysis can be carried on quite apart from the goings and doings of day-to-day life. In addition, Austin's insights and perspective dovetail nicely with those of Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and Polanyi, to form a fresh approach to the role of speech in our efforts to get clear about reality and knowledge.

Merleau-Ponty's "Intentional Threads"

The title of this enterprise indicates that I seek to connect up "words, deeds, and bodies" in an effort to forge a fresh understanding of the relation among human language, action, and embodiment. In my first two chapters I have discussed Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of "language-games" and J.L. Austin's notion of "performative utterances" by way of setting the table for an introduction of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's analysis of human embodiment in the present chapter. It is my contention that the synthesis of the insights of these three thinkers provides for a fresh model of the relationship between speech and behavior that can serve as the axis for our understanding of human thought, language, and action.

Although he was not directly involved in the discussions surrounding the question of the "meaning of meaning" among English speaking philosophers, Merleau-Ponty was aware of the "picture theory of meaning," as well as of its inherent limitations. Some thinkers had interpreted this theory to be about the relation between language and the world around us, while others saw it as an account of the relationship between language and human thought. That is to say, some philosophers of language took speech to provide a picture of the states of affairs in the external world, while others took it to be a mirror of the mind or beliefs of the speaker. Merleau-Ponty was opposed to both of these understandings of the nature of language.

The fundamental difficulty with both of these perspectives, according to Merleau-Ponty, is that they see language as optional and/or arbitrary in relation to both the world and the mind. The former assumes that the world of facts will be exactly what it is with or without any sort of language whatsoever, while the latter assumes that people can and will be able to think their thoughts whether or not ever expressing them in language. In either case, according to Merleau-Ponty, language is seen as essentially incidental to the constitution of both the world and human life. His point here is that language cannot be understood as a mere mosaic of building blocks placed in various and frequently complex patterns, with each block having a single, consistent meaning. He is at one with Wittgenstein in insisting on the poly-significance and open-ended character of language.

Language is, in short, not a mere means of various cognitive and/or social ends, but it plays an integral role in the actual weaving and shaping of both the world around us and of our own social being. Another way to put this is to say

that for Merleau-Ponty language often has a kind of "orphic" or creative function in the warp and weft of reality, actually calling things, facts, and persons into being. A good word for with which to describe this is 'symbiosis,' for he saw the two realities defining and sustaining each other. In brief, then, there is nothing arbitrary about the connection between speakers, their thoughts, and others, and it is language that weaves them together into the fabric we call reality. Here is how he puts it:

> Language is not meaning's servant, and yet it does not govern meaning. There is no subordination between them. Here no one commands and no one obeys. What we *mean* is not before us, outside all speech, as sheer signification, it is only the excess of what we live over what has already been said. With our apparatus of expression we set ourselves up in a situation the apparatus is sensitive to, we confront it with the situation, and our statements are only the final balance of these exchanges.
>
> *Signs,* p. 83

As would be expected, human embodiment lies at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of linguistic activity. As he says in his monumental *Phenomenology of Perception,* "The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them" (p. 82). Moreover, it is through our embodiment that we communicate our attitudes, feelings, and even thoughts somatically. To invert J.L. Austin's title, for Merleau-Ponty it is possible to "say things without words."

Thus, even our gestures often express our feelings, thoughts, and beliefs as clearly as do our statements. "One can see what there is in common between the gesture and its meaning, for example, in the case of emotional expression and the emotions themselves: the smile, the relaxed face, gaiety of gesture really have in the rhythm of action, the mode of being in the world which are joy itself" (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 186). At the most primordial level language itself is, after all, a mode of physical behavior, whether in relation to the sounds-producing mechanisms of the upper body or to the movements of facial muscles, shoulders, arms and hands. Even posture and gait, as well as ways of sitting and standing, (or refusing to do so) speak eloquently within various contexts.

The crucial role played by the human body, then, should be obvious. Speech is not just so many sounds being emitted from the speaker's mouth that have by convention been associated with certain physical objects or emotional states. "It is through the body that I understand other people, just as it is through the

body that I perceive things. The meaning of a gesture thus "understood" is not behind it, it is intermingled with the structure of the world outlined by the gesture, arrayed all over the gesture itself" (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 186).

A crucial dimension of linguistic meaning is, of course, the whole issue of initial language acquisition. How is it that children come into language in the first place? Since they start out on "square zero," how can and do they ever move to "square one"? The crucial avenue of language acquisition for a child is, of course, imitation. Without the innate capacity, indeed the need, to imitate, a child would never acquire the ability to speak and understand the speech of others. The imitation mode functions at both the linguistic level and the somatic level, since embodiment lies at the center of both. Children seek to copy both the verbal and the physical behavior of adult persons and other children in order to become members of the linguistic and social community.

In relation to his concern to highlight the "orphic" character of speech, Merleau-Ponty stresses the role of metaphor at the primordial level of both thought and language. In many cases, he argues, speech does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it. As with understanding a joke or a local idiom, the meaning of the metaphoric mode is more a function of the interactive field formed by common custom, nonverbal behavior, and intentionality than it is a matter of simple signification. Reality as we know it neither exists independently of us, nor is it simply a logical construction of our thought and speech. Rather, it is the consequence of our mutual interaction in, with, and around the world with which we have to do and which by our linguistic activity we help to weave by means of our symbiotic "dance."

The most revealing image that Merleau-Ponty introduces in order to capture this symbiotic dynamic is that found in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* where he speaks of "slackening the intentional threads" that connect us to the world around us. We cannot simply cut these threads to see the world "as it is" apart from our interaction with it, nor are we doomed to an epistemological solipsism consisting only of our own ideas and mental sensations. While we cannot sever these threads, we can, by "slackening" them, acquire a *feel* for how they connect up with the world around us. We can come to know reality by our "dancing" with it through symbiotic interaction.

This image of "slackened threads" strikes me as quite parallel to Wittgenstein's image of "language-games" and Austin's "performatives utterances." In each case the emphasis is on linguistic "activity," on doing something in the world in addition to simply speaking words. Language and the world are thought of as connected in a symbiotic "dance," if you will, along with other persons as well. Thus in each case we get "words, deeds, and bodies" woven together in a pattern that enables people to interact with their world and each

other creatively. Also, in each case speakers are intertwined with one another by means of their common tasks and language, by means of their shared "form of life."

For Merleau-Ponty there is an interactive, symbiotic relationship in our human experience between where we stand at the center of our perception *in* the world and the horizon of our sensory experience *of* the world that surrounds us. In *Phenomenology of Perception* he develops an account of the crucial role played by the body in all human experience and knowledge in relation to visual and spatial perspective. "Is not to see always to see from somewhere? In other words: to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it" (p. 67). Thus my body not only locates me in the space that I "inhabit," but it provides me with a place from which to see the surrounding world. Thus vision is an act with two facets, since it exists and operates between the location of my body in the world, yet as I alter my location what was "there" is now "here" and vice versa.

So it is that "there" itself is an interactive, symbiotic relationship between where we stand at the center of perception *in* the world and the horizon of our sensory experience *of* the world that surrounds us. Our perceptual experience thus always has a dual foci, our bodily location and the horizon that encompasses it. Merleau-Ponty employs this notion of horizon in relation to our experience of time as well. "With my immediate past I have also the horizon of futurity which surrounded it, and thus I have my actual present seen as the future of that past. With the imminent future, I have the horizon of the past which will surround it, and therefore my actual present as the past future" (p. 69).

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, the body is the nodal point, the ground or anchor by means of which and at which we take up our place in the world, both with respect to time and space, on the one hand, and with respect to physical objects on the other. The body is our entry point into the world, or it provides us with our point of view upon the world. Not only so, but it is by means of our embodied existence that we encounter the world through movement, or what Merleau-Ponty calls *motility*. We know ourselves, not as mere objects among other objects, but as physical and mental agents who engage both the physical and social worlds through bodily movement and interaction. Not only are we aware of our environment through our body, but we interact with it through it as well.

The notions of "project" and "commitment" interject a fresh aspect into our understanding of the nature of embodiment, an aspect that might best be termed a *vectorial* thrust or current. Here again we see the importance of

motility in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, for embodied experience is never simply passive in character. "The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is for a living creature to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them … The body is not some kind of inert thing; it too has something of the momentum of existence" (pp. 82–84).

Obviously, one of the major thrusts of Merleau-Ponty's approach to understanding the role of the body in human experience and knowledge is directed against the mind-body dualism that has dominated Western philosophy at least since Plato's day and with Descartes became, in Gilbert Ryle's terms, the official view of the "ghost in the machine." Merleau-Ponty sets his more unified and integral view of the relationship between these two dimensions of our existence. "Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts" (p. 88).

The reality of our mind/body existence is the tether point or anchor of all human experience and knowing, according to Merleau-Ponty. We are always "here" where our body is and can never be "there" without moving ourselves somewhere else, which then becomes our "here" in relation to what was once "there." Here and there are always relative to where we are in our embodied existence. To put it differently, our bodies are the only physical objects away from which we cannot move. Likewise, as we move about in our world, our horizon always moves with us as well. As the saying goes, "Whichever way you turn, your backside is always behind you."

It is both interesting and instructive to note that Merleau-Ponty's approach is also quite opposed to that of Immanuel Kant when the latter sought to explain our experience of space and time as built in structural "categories" of the mind. It often goes unnoticed that Kant developed his perspective without any reference whatsoever to the role of the body in his account of perception. In this sense he too followed the Western tradition of separating the mind from the body altogether. For Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, a person acquires both self-awareness and an awareness of physical and social reality through interaction with the surrounding world. Consciousness projects itself into the physical world by means of the body and projects itself into the cultural world by taking on its "habits."

An illuminating way to get a grip on Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the cruciality of the body to the peculiarly human way of being in the world is to contemplate the difference between the experiences of scratching an itch for one's self and having someone else scratch it for you. For you, your body is both the object and the subject in this undertaking. For another person, however,

your bodily itch is "external" to their body as they try to relieve it with their own. Only you can give the "first person" directions as to where your itch is, while another person must try to follow your directions.

Or, alternatively, consider the difference between trying to remove a sliver from one's own finger and having someone else do it for you. In the former case you are both the subject and the object, your relation to your own body is entirely different from having someone else be the active agent while you yourself are the object. Likewise, when you lift your one arm with the your other hand, the arm is an "object" for you in an entirely different way from when you pick up a book, for example. Our relation to our own body is entirely unique, and provides us with a privileged position in relation to itself, as well as to the world around us.

There are two further aspects of our uniqueness to our own bodies as we analyze its centrality with respect to our place in the world. The first has to do with the "motility" aspect of our interaction with and resulting knowledge of the world. We are not, like other bodies merely *in* the world as an object. Rather, we move around in the world, confronting it, interacting with it, changing it, and so on. In a word, we *live* in the world. It is by means of our movement in the world, toward and away from other objects, around, over, and under them, that we not only become more acutely aware of them as other entities in the world, but in this way we become more aware of ourselves as well. A static, stationary existence would result in an understanding of human experience as passive, formed by perceptual "inputs."

This point of view pretty much resulted from the approach to human experience taken by John Locke and other empiricists who saw it as the result of "impressions writing on a blank tablet." Even Kant, as I mentioned above, in his revolutionary insight that the mind plays an active role in the formation of experience failed to acknowledge any role for the active body in this formation. Bertrand Russell as well, in his well-known distinction between knowledge "by acquaintance" and knowledge "by description," neglected to leave any room for the role of active bodily interaction. Merleau-Ponty's approach includes, indeed focuses on the role of bodily movement and interaction in the formation of experience and knowledge.

The second aspect of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body that bears special mention is the notion of "intentionality." When we move about in the world, interacting with the objects and persons that populate it, we generally do so with a sense of purpose, toward some specific end. We *intend* to accomplish certain things, we *attend* to one thing and then to another, and so on. We seek to fulfill our *intensions* by means of our various activities. We so take this aspect of our lives for granted that we fail to realize that we are in fact drawn

toward objects, tasks, and purposes in activities that literally define our very being, both as individuals and as human communities. We regularly overlook this *vectorial* character of our experience of the world.

To put it another way, our bodily existence is such that we are always moving *from* and *by means of* our bodies toward reality; our bodies are at the center of our being and form the vortex or axis that provides the fulcrum or leverage point that enables us to achieve our intentions in the world. We do not push, as it were, our intentions on reality from the "inside" outward toward the world. Rather, we are engaged by and engage the world interactively by means of our intentionality, by means of our endeavors to accomplish things in the world. Just as new born babies do not wait for the world to come to them, but, rather, seek to find and interact with it by wiggling, grasping, and sucking as soon as they arrive on the scene, so we as adults also seek the world actively, intentionally.

Merleau-Ponty expresses this point in the following manner:

> The various parts of my body, its visual, tactile, and motor aspects are not simply coordinated. If I am sitting at the table and want to reach the telephone, the movement of my hand towards it, the straightening of the upper part of the body, the tautening of the leg muscles are superimposed on each other. I desire a certain result and the relevant tasks are spontaneously distributed amongst the appropriate segments, the possible combinations being presented in advance: I can continue leaning back in my chair provided that I stretch my arm further, or lean forward, or even partly stand up. All of these movements are available to us by virtue of their common meaning. That is why, in their first attempts at grasping, children look, not at their hand, but at the object: the various parts of the body are known to us through their functional value only, and their coordination is not learnt.
>
> *Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 149

Merleau-Ponty often speaks of linguistic activity in terms of the notion of "gesture." He contends that in all linguistic interaction the meaning of an utterance is inextricably intertwined within the utterance itself, its vocabulary, grammar, and intent. The meaning is neither reducible to the sum of these elements nor independent of them. Rather, the meaning is *mediated* in and through these linguistic elements. We do not normally "infer" the meaning of an utterance from the sounds we hear, any more than we do when it comes to the meaning of a gesture. We grasp the meaning of a sentence as a whole, even as we do a simple gesture.

Consider examples of common gestures: the nodding or shaking of one's head to indicate agreement or disagreement, waving, shaking hands, pointing to an object, signing "OK" and "Yes" by means of specific finger positionings, the umpire's signaling a third "Strike" in a baseball game, saluting a superior or a friend, shaking a fist in anger, offering the "peace sign," and so on. I once saw Joseph Pap, the Director of the "Shakespeare in Central Park" theater, indicate ten different meanings from the different positionings of his forefinger and thumb when forming a circle, each depending on the angle of the arm and hand. He signaled such meanings as "A-OK," "Whose dirty sock is this?," "What a fine cup of tea," "Look at this tiny splinter," and "I see you through this knothole."

Here is how Merleau-Ponty puts this insight:

> Faced with an angry or threatening gesture, I have no need, in order to understand it, to recall the feelings which I myself experienced when I used these gestures on my own account...I do not see anger or a threatening attitude as a psychic fact "behind" the gesture, I read it in it. The gesture *does not make me think of anger,* it is anger itself ... The communication or comprehension of gestures come about through the reciprocity of my intentions and gestures and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernable in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intentions inhabited my body and mine his.
>
> *Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 184

This quotation puts one in mind of the remarks Wittgenstein offered about how we do in fact often know what another person is thinking or feeling, not by analogy nor by direct introspection, but simply by being a human being one self. Nor do we "infer' that another person is angry or happy or sad on the basis reflecting on our own previous experience. The other person's anger, happiness, or sadness is "worn on their sleeve," as it were, for their behavior both *is* and *conveys* their emotional state, it is experienced by us *directly in and through* their behavior. In the same way as the umpire's raised arm and call "Strike Three" *constitutes* being called out, it does not "stand for" being called out.

The overall point here is that the language of our bodies plays a key role in all linguistic communication, as well as in our finding our way around in physical and social reality. Humans recognize other humans in the same way small children immediately discern each other among a gathering of adults. Moreover, our experience and understanding of the physical and social worlds is a function of our natural bodily interaction with one another by virtue of

our common embodiment. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "The body is our general medium for having a world" (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 146).

These comments once again bring us to the overall issue of how, following Merleau-Ponty, as well as being able to "do things with words" according to Austin, we can also "say things without words" by means of our bodily actions. That is to say, by our various postures and gestures we easily and regularly convey or communicate our attitudes, intentions, and even beliefs. In point of fact, even our linguistic activity is obviously predicated on our bodily behavior. The body is, after all, at the center of every aspect of our human experience and activity. It is our entry point into the world, the fulcrum or axis of both our understanding of reality and of our own consciousness. This is the central theme of nearly all his writings, but especially of his major work *The Phenomenology of Perception.*

There are a number of passages where Merleau-Ponty explores the nature of this body that lies at the center of our existence. One of the metaphors he introduces in the Preface to his major work is that of a tightly woven fabric and later on he speaks of the 'I' as a fabric into which "all objects are woven" (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 235). Again, elsewhere he speaks of language as "a dialogue into which our own thoughts and those of another are interwoven into a single fabric" (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 354). Moreover, in addition he frequently employs other similar images, such as "organic networks" and "tissues."

It is important for us to follow these biological images for they lead us straight to the heart of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the human body itself. They pivot around the image of the "pregnant" quality of the world to produce its various aspects and dimensions (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 21ff). It is in the Preface that he introduces what may be the most incisive metaphor, and which I have taken as the focal point of our present study of his thought, that of the "intentional threads that attach us to the world" (Preface, p. xiii). In his efforts to find a way to slip between the horns of the traditional dilemma posed by so-called "objective" and "subjective" knowledge, Merleau-Ponty proposes the image of vibrant, biological threads or tissues which bind us loosely to the world around us.

Although we can neither disengage our understandings from our own minds nor from the world around us, we can, he suggests, "slacken the intentional threads" by means of which we have come to understand the world. In this way we can get a "feel" for what lies at their farther ends without standing free of the world or of the threads themselves. This does not provide us with an objective understanding of the world, nor does it leave us subjectively bound

up in our own minds unable to discern the shape and texture of reality. Rather, it provides us with an interactive, ongoing understanding of both the world and our own minds by focusing on the *relational* character of knowing.

Here we can see a strong parallel between Merleau-Ponty's understanding of reality in relation to human language and that of both Wittgenstein and Austin. For all three of our thinkers reality is comprised of the ongoing interactions between things and persons, between our bodies and the world, between reality, speech, and human activity. These are the concrete aspects and dimensions of human experience, the relational realities comprising the warp and the weft of the fabric we call the "real world." We weave and are woven into this fabric by the things we do and say, by our "language-games," our "performative utterances," and by our "embodied intentionalities."

The overlapping or crisscrossing character that lies at the axis of the symbiotic nature of reality, as well as that of the relation between the knower and the known, Merleau-Ponty calls an "intertwining," or "chiasm." It is in this connection that he introduces the image of the "flesh." Although he employs this image on a few occasions elsewhere, it comes to the fore in the final chapter of his very last book, *The Visible and the Invisible* (p. 131ff.). This image, when used in such terms as the "flesh of the world," the "flesh of history," and the "flesh of my flesh," marks the focus of his thought when speaking of our individual place in the world and our exploring or grasping our connection with both physical and social reality.

As has already been mentioned more than once, in his Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty speaks of the possibility, indeed the need for, a "slackening of the intentional threads" by means of which we interact with the physical and social worlds so as to be able to understand both worlds and the threads themselves more fully. Thus an interactive knowledge, achieved by "loosening" our hold on the world, while still being able to let it be itself, allows us to find a foothold between objectivist dogmatism on the one hand and relativist skepticism on the other. Our knowledge of reality will never be complete or absolutely objective, but it may still be useful and sufficient for our needs.

As I understand it, what Merleau-Ponty means by this "slackening" of our cognitive methods and/or techniques for interacting with the world is a sort of self-reflective process of turning our awareness of thought and analysis back on itself, so to speak, so as to gain a vantage point from which to better understand how these capacities operate. Perhaps it's a bit like using words to analyze language, or a kind of "double vision" where by squinting we look both at the details in the foreground of a painting and the whole at the same

time. Better yet, perhaps it is precisely what Wittgenstein and Austin did when they examined how speech, as "games" and "performatives" work in everyday language.

In short, as we have followed Austin and Wittgenstein's analyses of how language actually works by means of their words we have come to a better understanding of how words in general work. As we grasp the meaning of their efforts we come to a better knowledge of what and how meaning itself is and how it is achieved and understood. While we cannot "float free" of our normal understandings of the words they use, we do "see through" or past them to obtain a better grip on linguistic activity in general, while at the same time not losing sight of the meaning of the individual words involved in their analyses. In a sense, we "bracket" the meaning of their words while continuing to use them as well.

More specifically, when Wittgenstein offers examples and images of how various language-games work, we see through these and by them into the actual workings of language. The term 'game' is itself an excellent case in point. His use of this word-image, as well as those of 'toolbox' and the labyrinthine character of an 'ancient city,' call attention to the orphic quality of speech. These word-images themselves evoke a deeper understanding of words and utterances themselves, while at the same time conveying their conventional meanings. In Merleau-Ponty's terminology, we "slacken the threads" of these terms as we use them in order to enrich our understanding of both them and that of which they speak. They are seen to carry their own, regular meaning and to point beyond themselves to the meaning of language in general.

Or, on the other hand, consider Austin's use of the term 'performatives.' Here he is using this term itself to call attention to a special use if speech, even as he himself is "performing" various speech-acts, such as explaining and analyzing. In Merleau-Ponty's terminology, Austin is "turning language back on itself" in order to flesh out, as it were, its inner workings. When he "invents" such terms as 'verdictives,' 'behavitives,' and 'commisives,' by means of which to focus certain forces within linguistic activity, he is "slackening," or bracketing the normal connections between such words and that of which they speak in order to call attention to their yet further meanings.

To put it differently, both Wittgenstein and Austin, when they examine the tasks that get done in public life using certain established locutions, are "slackening" the intentional threads that normally connect our intentionality with the world around us, including each other, so that we can better grasp how these connections work. In both cases, as well, we often come to a better understanding of how certain locutions do *not* function, such as with the

expressions involved in speaking about the thoughts and intentions of other persons. These are best understood as utterances aimed directly at behavior rather than as descriptions of "inner" activities.

"I know what he is thinking" is an excellent example of this insight because it faces in two directions at once. Such statements are neither about my "inner cognitive achievements" nor about the other person's. They are, rather, about how we go about making transactions with each other in conversations and concrete activities. That is, I can cooperate with and anticipate my companion's thinking about our shared tasks. It is not a descriptive expression at all, but is a "signal" that I understand how he wants to proceed with our common task, rather like "Gotcha" functions in today's everyday conversations.

Another way we can "slacken the intentional threads" is by exploring the reciprocal and reduplicating dimensions of our understanding of the place of our embodiment in the world. For instance, when we lift one of our arms with the opposite hand, it is fundamentally different from lifting some other object. In this case, we are one and the same time the subject and the object of this activity. I am not so much aware of being *in* a body as actually *being* a body. We do not say "My body weighs 180 pounds," but rather, "I weigh 180 pounds." Such grammatical realities reveal important characteristics of the way we are in the world, of our "form of life."

It is important to see that for Merleau-Ponty the image of "flesh" extends not only to our encounters with and in the physical world, but to our interactions with and knowledge of the social and cultural worlds also. Other persons, too, whether taken individually or collectively, are "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh." Indeed, as particular persons we ourselves are all created, nurtured, and enculturated by other embodied persons into our own respective individualities. It is our common human interactive *enfleshment* that renders this process both possible and effective. Merleau-Ponty even extends this notion of enfleshment to the physical world, which in its own way participates in the same reality as we.

The nature and significance is not, therefore, understood only, or even primarily, on the basis of our understanding of the world. It is, rather, by virtue of our commonality with the world that we are enabled to understand ourselves, as well as the world, and also to be understood by the world of others. All of these aspects, or folds of our mutual enfleshment with the world are drawn together by Merleau-Ponty in the imagery of "intertwining." This metaphor unifies both those images connected with "woven fabrics" and "threads," on the one hand, and those pertaining to the "tissues" and "leaves" of the body, on the other hand. Thus the image of a living biological process stands at the center of his thought.

In his early studies Merleau-Ponty focused on the notion of "intentionality," which he borrowed from Edmund Husserl, as the "vector" that shapes both consciousness and activity. This way of thinking brought him to the image of the "threads" that tie us to one another and to the world. Parting from Husserl at this point, Merleau-Ponty gave up on the possibility of obtaining an "objective" understanding of the world because we can never fully sever our connections to the threads by means of which we interact with it. By "slackening these intentional threads" we can come to an "interactive" understanding, both of ourselves and of the various facets of the rest of the world.

Undoubtedly the key way Merleau-Ponty seeks to achieve this "slackening" is by means of the use of metaphor. One need not read more than a few pages in any of his writings before realizing that metaphor is the main linguistic vehicle with which he both develops and expresses his thought. He uses literally dozens of different metaphors throughout his books. In fact, at times he tends to pile them up on one another in a rich if sometimes confusing manner.

We have already encountered what I take to be the crucial metaphor introduced in his Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, that which guides both his entire approach to philosophy in general and his understanding of language in particular, namely that of the "slackening of intentional threads." All of what might be called his "textile" metaphors, centering on the images as "fabrics," "weavings," and "tissues" are best understood in terms of this initial metaphor. It arises in relation to the issue of the traditional epistemological debate between those who argue, on the one hand, that our so-called knowledge of reality is really only a projection of our own minds, sometimes called "idealism," and those, on the other hand, who argue that we actually can know the external world outside of our own minds, sometimes called "realism."

Merleau-Ponty strives to maintain a middle ground between these two dominant perspectives by insisting that while we are never in a position to claim that we are directly connected to external reality in some pure sense, we are nonetheless able to know it through our interaction with it by means of our embodiment. In short, while we cannot deal "directly" with the world around us, and know it in Kant's words, "in and of itself," we can and do deal with it "indirectly" in and through our bodily interactions with it. Neither the world around us nor our own awareness of it exist in a vacuum by themselves, but, on the contrary, neither can either be said to exist outside of our symbiotic embodiment. They are integrally connected, we must and do "start in the middle."

"Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice" (Preface, xiii).

Here the term 'transcendence' designates the reality of a world *beyond* us, which we are able to cognize in and through the "sparks" that arise as a result of our loosening our hold on it so as to be able to discern it indirectly rather than straight on. We are not trapped within the so-called "ego-centric predicament," even though we can only know reality "mediationally" in and through our dealings with it. Nor can we claim to know reality directly "in and of itself." We dance, as it were, with reality by means of our "slackened intentional threads," always connected but at the same time always as a mediated reality.

The adjective "intentional" qualifies the notion of "threads" and serves once again to emphasize the interactive character of our existence and cognition. It is by seeking to carry out our intentions in the world that we constitute ourselves as well as our knowledge of the world. We are tied to the world in such a way as not to be able to disentangle ourselves from it, but also in such a way as not to be able to fully control or track it. Moreover, philosophical reflection cannot transcend this threadlike connection in order to know the world as it is "in and of itself."

Only by "slackening the threads," that is by reflecting on them and the world *while and as* we function in the world by means of them, can we gain an understanding of both the world and our own place in it. Here is how Merleau-Ponty expresses this point: "The body, by withdrawing from the objective world, will carry with it the intentional threads linking it to its surroundings and finally reveal to us, the perceiving subject, as the perceived world" (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 72).

Thus it is that the use of metaphorical thinking enables us to "slacken," not *suspend*, our awareness of ourselves in connection with the world so to cognize it and ourselves while actually interacting functionally with it. Metaphoric thought and speech enable us to loosen our grip on the steering wheel, as it were, in order to feel the tension between the wheels and the road even as we drive by means of them. So with the metaphoric mode we think and speak about ourselves and the world "indirectly," or "around about-ly," while still accomplishing our intentions. In Aristotle's words: "Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species or from species to genus ... on the grounds of analogy ... The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor" (*Poetics,* 1457b–1459a).

Aristotle's use of the notion of "transference" calls to mind something I saw while living in Greece many years ago. In all the cities one sees little three-wheeled vehicles or trucks moving about in the traffic carrying merchandise from one place to another. On the front of their cabs is written in Greek *Metaphora* which literally means "transference." These little trucks transfer items from one spot to another, in the same way as metaphors "transfer" a meaning

from one word to another. These little trucks are literally metaphors, and thus their name. In the same way, as Aristotle put it, a metaphor "transfers" the meaning of one word to another in order to cast fresh light on the latter.

To change the image slightly, consider the way a wagon driver handles the reins with which he guides the horses pulling his wagon. At times he holds them tightly so that they are taut and at other times he holds them loosely, "slackened." When they are in this latter mode the driver is still driving the wagon or steering the horses, but doing so in a way that allows him to get a good idea of the horses' gait, the weight and direction of the wagon, etc. without actually "steering" them. His attention is focused more on the *relationship* between the reins and the horses than on the actual steering process. The same relationship can be seen in a rider's use of the reins while riding horseback. It is a dynamic, interactive relationship.

As he puts it in this crucial passage from his Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception,* (xiii): "Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis," (which would result in pure subjectivism). Nor, however, does or can our conscious reflection know the world directly, as it is in and of itself outside of our consciousness (which would be affirm pure objectivism). Rather, "it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice."

The transcendence spoken of here is not some sort of "other worldly" reality, but simply the real world which epistemologically cannot be collapsed into our consciousness but nor can it be identified with it. It is by "slackening of the intentional threads" we gain our knowledge of the world that opens up, or allows us to apprehend, the relational character of our interaction with the world. Though "slackened" these threads still function, but in a more relaxed or "mediational" manner. In this mode we know the world "through a glass darkly" as it were, or indirectly as and while we are yet interacting with it.

Merleau-Ponty spends the first four chapters of his *magnum opus* critiquing both empiricism and intellectualism as extremist and thus misleading accounts of human cognition. Throughout he insists that knowledge is a relational reality by means of which we interact and connect with through our bodily and linguistic activity. This theme is carried on throughout the remaining chapters of this book and throughout Merleau-Ponty strives to elucidate what linguistic activity is and what it is not. He sets aside the "picture theory" of language in both its erroneous forms, arguing that the main function of speech is neither to mirror the facts of the world nor those of our mental thoughts and feelings.

Merleau-Ponty seeks to elucidate and illustrate the *metaphoric* function of language as the key to understanding how it serves our diverse purposes.

As I mentioned earlier on, the metaphoric mode of speech serves well as the prime example of a way for us to "slacken the threads" connecting us to the world. When we speak in the metaphoric mode we are still interacting with the world, but in a more indirect, mediational manner. The use of metaphor in Merleau-Ponty's thought is parallel to that of "language-games" in Wittgenstein's thought and to Austin's discussion of "performatives utterances." In all three cases the focus has shifted to the meta-exploration of the medium itself.

That is to say, all three thinkers turned their sights on the "tools" by means of which we think and speak rather than on the content of what is being expressed. This might best be understood as a second order examination rather than as a first order one. By means of their focus on the "uses" of speech in language games, performatives, and metaphors these three seminal thinkers are able to develop and explore what Austin labels "linguistic phenomenology." That is to say, by virtue of their analyses of these three ways of "slackening the intentional threads" Wittgenstein, Austin, and Merleau-Ponty cast a great deal of light both on what linguistic communication is not and what it, in fact, is.

Since we have already examined Wittgenstein's and Austin's contributions in some depth in previous chapters, let us now explore Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the metaphoric mode more thoroughly. The best place to begin is with his idea that linguistic meaning is always a matter of *gesture*. With linguistic meaning the significance of the words does not lie *behind* the words, but rather it lies *within* them. "One can see what there is in common between the gesture and its meaning, for example in the case of emotional expression and the emotions themselves: the smile, the relaxed face, gaiety of gesture really have in them the rhythm of action, the mode of being in the world which are joy itself" (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 186).

Thus at the most primordial level language is a mode of physical behavior which can speak powerfully in diverse contexts. In the final analysis, the discernment of meaning, whether at the infantile or adult level, is dependent on our ability to comprehend the significance of physical sounds and movements in relation to broader behavior patterns and environmental settings. Each of these elements factor into the way meaning is expressed and read.

Two obvious examples of the crucial role played by gesture in the expression and grasping of linguistic meaning are the child's acquisition of native language and the adult's acquisition of a foreign language. In the former case, the infant begins to "read" the parent's facial expressions, tone, and inflection of voice, as well as body movements (touching, cuddling, etc.) from the moment of birth (or before!) without any knowledge or previous experience of vocabulary or rules of grammar whatsoever. An infant recognizes his or her mother's face and voice, and even responds to and imitates these phenomena within a

matter of days. Soon various patterns of behavior, even facial and tonal "games" are established (songs, "patty-cake," etc.) that provide the warp across the weft of language *per se* (i.e. vocabulary, syntax, etc.) is woven. The resulting fabric of speech thus comprises the interlocking of these patterns and developments, with gesture providing the anchor or fulcrum for the entire process.

In like manner, when we as adults take on the learning of a language other than our native tongue, especially in a context where this language is the only or primary means of communication, gestural meaning comes to the fore. Often we come to "understand," or even successfully use an expression, of whose literal or dictionary definition we are completely ignorant. We do this by keying off of the context, and by reading tones. Facial expressions, and bodily movements. All linguistic communication presupposes a more fundamental mode of understanding that, as Merleau-Ponty has repeatedly stressed, is provided by our common human embodiment. Even though they are to a significant degree culturally determined, gestures provide the pivot-point around which this primordial mode of understanding, and even the recognition and correction of misunderstandings, revolve.

Merleau-Ponty falls back on the reality of our common embodiment to explain how mutual understanding takes place. Because we live in the same world in the same somatic fashion, we are granted a kind of *pre*-understanding or *proto*-understanding, that enables us, indeed compels us, to move from "square zero" to "square one" linguistically speaking. This movement is not the result of intellectual interpretation, but rather a sort of "blind recognition" that renders subsequent intellectual interpretation possible in the first place. The former is "logically prior" to the latter. We begin already standing on the playing board, so to speak.

Such primordial understanding is possible because we, even as newborn infants, tacitly recognize ourselves in others, and vice versa, by means of our common embodiment. We do not "learn" that we have such a shared somatic axis; rather, we are able to learn everything else (and at all!) because we have it. We do not move from sensory observation and inductive inference to the idea that there are other persons in the world. Instead, by virtue of our recognition of other persons embedded in our common embodiment, we are enabled to perceive the world as such and to construct inferences and concepts about it. As Merleau-Ponty expresses it: "It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things.' The meaning of a gesture thus 'understood,' is nor behind it, it is intermingled with the structure of the world outlined by the gesture, and which I take up on my own account. It is arrayed all over the gesture itself … The linguistic gesture, like all the rest, delineates its own meaning" (*Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 186).

Thus Merleau-Ponty builds his understanding of linguistic meaning, of speech proper on the basis of this understanding of gestural meaning. For he sees speech as a highly articulated and conventionalized form of somatic behavior. He frequently explores the various ways speech can go wrong, or to use Austin's term, can "misfire," as with for instance aphasia, in order to clarify what it means to "go right." The aphasic person has not simply lost the ability to remember or form associations between words and things. Rather, what is lost is a "sense of place" in the world, an ability to use language in the give-and-take of everyday life.

In several works other than *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty explores additional dimensions of linguistic activity and meaning. In addition to his final volume, *The Visible and the Invisible,* there exists his early lecture notes *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language* in which he not only explores how language is initially acquired, but addresses the ways in which, through our embodiment we actually can reverse Austin's title and ask how it is that we are able to "Say Things Without Words." A brief account of his analysis in this manuscript concerning language acquisition will clarify just how this is the case.

Merleau-Ponty provides a survey of a child's psychological development as it pertains to speech. The rationalist tradition fails to give a helpful account of language acquisition because its inherent dualism prohibits it from connecting mind and body. The empiricist tradition can never get beyond the mere collection of linguistic data to the meaning thereof. Merleau-Ponty maintains that only an account that begins by acknowledging the logical and existential priority of meaning in all human life will be able to make sense of the phenomenon of speech. Humans *begin* as linguistic beings, they do not arrive at that point later in life.

During their first year, undoubtedly the most crucial period as well as the most difficult to study, the child proceeds from (1) facial mimicry through (2) the babbling stage to that of (3) vocal imitation. Mimicry has been established as far more specific and extensive than generally believed. Recognition of specific others and basic embodiment are clearly involved. Babbling is universally the same no matter the native culture or language, but soon focuses on indigenous sounds. Verbal imitation is initiated audibly rather than visually since at this stage the child's attention is on the speaker's eyes, not on the mouth. Meaning is clearly sought by the child from the outset. Moreover, since virtually all children are spoken to *as if* they will understand, it is clear that meaning comes to be expected as well.

Imitation is, of course absolutely crucial to the acquisition process. Of special significance is the fact that what is initially imitated are tones and inflections,

not words. Thus the child is aware of the use of speech, what Austin termed its "illocutionary force," prior to its use in the lexical sense. Children will "talk" into play telephones, employing a wide variety of "speech acts" (giving orders, asking questions, laughing at jokes, etc.) well before they can use any specific words. Once again, meaningful speech activity in the sense of "significance," is what the child initially picks up and seeks to participate in. From the outset the child is "bathed" in language, and by means of vocal imitation, begins to swim in this all-pervasive medium by "pretending" to do so already.

Another way in which children seek to participate in language through imitation during this proto-linguistic stage is by directly inserting themselves into adult conversation, even though they may not as yet know any actual words. At the dinner table, for instance, when everyone is talking and laughing, a child may well yell out a whole string of sounds and then burst out laughing when the adults do so as well. Such behavior clearly indicates an innate desire to be included in shared activity, to be acknowledged as a participant in the linguistic community. It should be noted, of course, that mere imitation is not sufficient to explain language acquisition, since adults often imitate the child as much as the other way around. Only an underlying predilection for "significance" enables a child to override such potentially confusing phenomena in an effort to become a full-fledged member of the human society.

Around one year of age the child utters their first "word." Merleau-Ponty de-emphasizes the seemingly pivotal character of this event, preferring to stress its continuity with what has gone before and what will follow after. Unlike Helen Keller, for instance, most children do not progress dramatically in word acquisition after such an event. In spite of the fact that there remains a "magical" quality to the child's apprehension and use of language, between that initial "word" and what is signified thereby, the child's first and early words may often be more their own creation than a repetition of adult words.

This initial utterance of the "first word" is followed, over the next six months or so, by the addition of a large number of "one word utterances." It is important to note that these, in fact, are actual one-word sentences rather than simply names or labels. When a child says "Fire" or "Dog," for instance, she or he may not simply be designating an object. On the contrary, the child may be saying "That is a dog," or "There is a fire." In addition, often such utterances come with a tone that is asking for approval, an acknowledgment on the part of the adults present that the child has, in fact, properly identified the item and used the symbol correctly. This drive for validation and inclusion in the linguistic community plays a crucial role in the acquisition process.

Roughly between 18 months and three years of age, the child progresses to multi-word utterances, according to a rather wide range of patterns, depending

on a varying circumstances. The same can be said for the various stages up to roughly five years of age, at which point the vast majority of children are reliable users of their native tongue, although there is a wide variation with respect to the degree to which speech is actually used for social discourse. Experts differ as to the degree to which children prior to five actually use language conversationally.

Following the outline of K. Buhler, Merleau-Ponty suggests that language has three main functions: (1) to represent, (2) to express, and (3) to appeal to others. This way of putting things corresponds roughly to Austin's distinction between the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary forces of speech-acts. Any meaningful utterance will involve all three forces. "The child's movement toward speech is a constant appeal to others. The child recognizes in the other another one of himself. Language is the means of effecting reciprocity with the other. This is a question of a vital operation and not only an intellectual act. The representative function is an aspect of the total act by which we enter into communication with others" (*Consciousness and Acquisition of Language,* p. 310).

This way of putting the matter suggests that the business of communication is a two-way street from the outset. Both the adult and the child seek meaning, and each brings to their dialogue as much as he or she gets in return. Merleau-Ponty offers the analogy of the highly creative writer, such a James Joyce, who extends himself, as well as his reader, beyond what is expected and comfortably known already as he and the reader strive to reach a common understanding. Such a writer is not unlike the adult and child striving to understand each other.

"Joyce, at first, was not understood, but little by little became understandable by teaching people to understand him. His gestures seem to point in nonexistent directions; then little by little some notions begin to find themselves a potential home in these gestures. In the same way, language ends up by coming alive for a child. At a certain moment a whole set of indications, which draw toward an undetermined goal, call up in the child a concentration and assimilation of meaning ... The totality of meaning is never fully rendered: there is an immense mass of implications, even in the most explicit of languages; or rather, nothing is ever completely expressed, nothing exempts the subject who is listening from taking the initiative of giving an interpretation" (*Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language,* p. 29).

The process of imitation is far more complex, for it involves the whole problem of selfhood and our knowledge of other selves. It would seem that in order to imitate an adult's speech, a child must first be able to identify the other person and to identify him or herself as a distinct person as well. This would seem

to erect an unbridgeable gap. Nevertheless, it is overcome over and over again by nearly every child when finding their way into adult-like conversations on a regular basis. The key for Merleau-Ponty lies in the notion of *inter-subjectivity* whereby communication and meaning are understood as beginning in the "middle," as it were, rather than at either end with the assumption of existential commonality.

With the notion of the logical and existential priority of inter-subjectivity firmly in place, Merleau-Ponty is in a position to readdress the possibility of meaningful imitation. He sees it based, not in the imaging of another's behavior in one's own, but of acting in order to effect or achieve the same result as the other person. It is through sharing goals and tasks, a la Wittgenstein, that we come to know each other and thus acquire language. "Imitation can be explained to the extent that other people utilize the same means as we do in order to obtain the same goal ... Imitation is founded on a community of goals... It is from this imitation of results that subsequently the imitation of others becomes possible" (*Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language,* p. 35).

Thus speech becomes embodied in a speaker on the basis of his or her general imitation of other members of the speaking community. Although the somatic dimension of speech and personhood is thereby revealed as crucial, it is not to be thought of as opposed or contrasted to consciousness. Rather, embodiment and consciousness are to be understood as two complementary dimensions of a unified reality, the former mediating the latter and the latter inhabiting the former. Signification and meaning arise within the dynamic matrix provided by the interaction of these two dimensions, in relational activity with other embodied consciousnesses. Gesture remains as the pivot-point or intersection wherein meaning, and thus language is born.

It is the "opaqueness" or perpetual incompleteness of language that provides both the possibility for misunderstanding and for creating fresh meaning in speech. Not only does speech achieve its significance against the backdrop if non-speech in general, but it remains alive by trading, as it were, on its own indirectness, through which it always leaves a great deal *unsaid.* What is meant is as much a function of what is not said as it is of what is said. Not only is the context of an utterance crucial to this indirect quality of language, and thus to its meaningfulness, but our nonverbal behavior also serves as a form of indirect communication. Once again we encounter the fundamental role of embodiment in linguistic communication.

In the end Merleau-Ponty claims that this indirect or "silent" character of language, like that of painting or creative writing, is grounded in or pivots around gesture and embodiment around what he terms "tacit language." He concludes that beneath spoken language "there is an operator or speaking

language whose lateral or indirect signification makes demands" (*Signs,* p. 75). This tacit language is a function of our gestural and behavioral interaction with each other and with our shared physical environment and common tasks. Speech is a form of embodiment.

Just as in our actions we express and embody our intentions in our non-verbal behavior, so in speech we express and embody them in our verbal behavior. Speech is both embodied language and embodied intentions, even as embodiment is both a form of speech and an expression of intentions. As has been noted previously, it is in this final work, *The Visible and the Invisible* that Merleau-Ponty pursues the metaphor of the flesh in relation to our place within and in interaction with the world of things and persons. Unsurprisingly, he employs this image in relation to the nature and use of linguistic activity as well. We are placed within the world, others, and ourselves by means of our embodiment and speech.

Understood in this way, language is for Merleau-Ponty a pivotal, perhaps *the* pivotal dimension within the embodied existence known as "the human way of being in the world." Just as our bodies are our entry point into the world of things and persons, so speech is the hinge upon which this entry point swings, both to open reality to us and to allow us to insert ourselves into reality. Speech itself is not added to our intentions or behavior as a kind of optional or arbitrary afterthought. Rather, it is the very stuff or "flesh" out if which we, *qua* human beings are made and through which we live. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of psychic reality spread over the sound; it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain; it is given with the words, for those who have ears to hear" (*The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 155).

I would like to conclude this analysis of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language by offering a presentation of the insights of James Edie concerning Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the relationship between the structure of language and that of the human body. Edie introduces his analysis in this way: "It is the task of the philosopher of language, ultimately, to show how linguistic structures mirror and analogize the structures of perception and thus enable us to understand the structures of action which give us our primordial motives for distinguishing one object or any aspect of an object, from any other, and how they thus produce, emanating from the active subject (as an embodied consciousness), the actual lived world of our perceptual experience" ("The Significance of Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Language", *History of Philosophy,* July 1955, p. 396).

Edie seeks to sketch out the main lines of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the relation between language and reality as one of what one might call "the

grammar of experience." He claims that the components of sensory experience, for example, correspond directly to those of speech. The color *red,* for example, never stands alone as a sense datum, but is always a part of a broader aspect of reality, an object generally, just as the word 'red' is always part of an utterance. Such things as colors, or other aspects of our perceptual experience, come to us already connected to other aspects in a coordinated way, just as words come to us in a grammatical relationship with other sounds of speech.

Edie finds this grammatical and experiential "matching" to be a significant part of Merleau-Ponty's view of the relation between language and thought developed in *The Visible and the Invisible.* Edie argues that in this work Merleau-Ponty departs from his initial dependence on the views of Edmund Husserl and moves to those of de Saussure's "structuralism." Edie finds that this parallelism between the structure of language and that of perceptual experience is, in fact, Merleau-Ponty's most profound and useful insight into the nature of human existence.

This correlation between linguistic expression and bodily structure builds upon Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the connection between speech and human embodiment. These two dimensions of human experience are symbolically and symbiotically seen as united in the "gesture." Edie argues that Merleau-Ponty sees and exploits the "gestural" function of language as the lynch-pin between speech and action. "Words have a gestural function and are, indeed, *like* gestures in that they express a meaning that is not objectifiable or expressible without their 'incarnation' in bodily acts" (*History of Philosophy,* p. 394).

Here we see the crucial connection between *words, deeds, and bodies* that serves as the nexus around which the project developed in these pages revolves. The human body is the vehicle of meaning, whether in language or behavior, that places and connects people to the world. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of this pivotal role played by our embodiment in both perception and language thus becomes crucial to our understanding of human experience and expression.

It is time now to bring this discussion full-circle by returning to the question of the acquisition of language as it relates to the thought of all three of our thinkers discussed so far in this exploration. Each in his own way incorporated a number of common insights and themes pertaining to language acquisition and it will stand us in good stead if we review and elaborate on them. I shall focus four such common and shared themes or emphases found to guide and adumbrate each of the three thinkers' perspectives both on language acquisition and the nature of linguistic exchange in general. The four themes are: embodiment, reciprocity, pragmatics, and community.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with the thoroughly *embodied* character of both human experience and speech. Traditional philosophy has systematically ignored the role of the physical dimension in human cognitive activity, including its linguistic aspect. Knowing and thinking are traditionally held to be exclusively matters of the mind, with language being simply the external symbolization thereof. If any single truth has emerged from the investigations discussed in this book it is that this traditional perspective is entirely wrongheaded, or better yet, entirely out of touch with the facts concerning human cognition and speech.

It is clear that those who come to know their way around in their mother tongue, both in understanding and in expression, do so by means of bodily action and interaction. In addition to the obvious physical aspects of hearing and speaking, the actual grasping of the dynamics of thought is mediated in and through the axis provided by the embodied character of human existence. Beginning at birth, and most likely well before, an infant's physical movements are patterned so as to actually seek meaningful interaction and significance in the world around it. Not only does an infant arrive on the scene sucking, grasping, and wiggling, but these activities are not random, as one might suppose.

In addition to the fact that when spoken to an infant focuses its eyes on the speaker's eyes rather than their mouth, it has also been established that infants learn after only a few days to distinguish their mother's face from that of others and human faces from artificial ones. Even more significantly, the movements of a two-month old's hands and feet have been shown to co-ordinate with the rhythm of the speech and bodily movements of the adult humans caring for them. This reciprocal, interactive embodiment forms the warp and weft out of which human relationships are woven, and this fabric, in turn, provides the matrix from which communication emerges.

Tickling with fingers and breath, along with singing and playing primitive versions of "patty-cake" soon become the chief media of communication between infants and their nurturers. Such activities quickly evolve into simple games, with distinctive rhythms and patterns of their own. In addition, it is important to take note of the degree to which adults alter their own speech when speaking to infants, commonly called "baby talk," and the percentage of this speech that takes an interrogative form. Infants are spoken to as if they already understand language and can answer questions. Moreover, it is perfectly clear that if they are not spoken to as if they understand, they will never come to understand. In short, adults do not wait around until children understand speech before we engage them in conversation.

It is this cruciality of embodied speech that Merleau-Ponty stresses so heavily in his work. As we have seen, in his view it is the body that serves as the axis

point from which we extend the intentional threads that tie us to the physical and social worlds comprising our reality. The commonality of this embodiment, shared in by all human beings, he terms the "flesh" of the world. Wittgenstein, too, stresses the basic behavioral vector that carries and interprets human linguistic activity and meaning. "Speech acts," to use J.L. Austin's key term, are embodied deeds that actually perform and accomplish specific tasks in the physical as well as the social world. The examinations we have made in all three of the previous chapters clearly demonstrate the significance of role of human embodiment.

A second major theme emerging from our earlier explorations is that of *reciprocity*. As was indicated directly above, the potential member of a speaking community is from the outset surrounded by those belonging to this community, who talk to and at it incessantly. Moreover, these speakers speak to the infant as if he or she is already a member of the speaking community. In this way they invite, indeed they envelop, the potential speaker into language. From songs and face-making to hand games and questions, an infant is literally incorporated into, or swallowed up by, the speaking community. Crossing the threshold into language constitutes the rite of passage into full humanity. Like all rites of passage, this "ritual" is grounded in reciprocal human interaction based on established and supervised patterns of speech and behavior.

From the work of those who have studied the sign language of chimpanzees through the success of Annie Sullivan with Helen Keller to the interpretations and translations of Native American speech, the cruciality of human of reciprocity is fully evident. When and only when a potential member of the speaking community is placed in a social context where others talk to and expect him or her to talk as well, will this person cross the threshold of language. Put the other way around, those who have been isolated from or otherwise deprived of linguistic interaction, such as feral children or severely autistic children, will fail to acquire or develop both linguistically and humanly. At best they will lead a sort of "shadow" existence on the fringe of human community, while at worst they will function as little more than domesticated animals.

It is worth noting that many of the latter can be and have been brought to the edge of human language through specialized training and/or close companionship with members of the human community. All the way from domestic pets to highly trained dolphins and hunting dogs we can easily experience those who, while remaining just beyond the threshold of language, can and do share a certain degree of reciprocity with the human community. The everyday "miracle," if you will, of tiny children growing beyond this threshold in leaps and bounds and developing way beyond anything similar to "training," while an everyday occurrence, is truly remarkable nonetheless.

The genius of Wittgenstein's "language-games," Austin's "performatives," and Merleau-Ponty's "intentional threads" is that they each focus this notion of social reciprocity very clearly and forcefully. In each case these focal metaphors, as it were, pinpoint the interactive character of human existence and speech. Each calls for a human social context within which it can function, and the give-and-take of social discourse lies at the heart of each. In a very real sense it can be said to conjure up the worlds in which we live, our experienced reality, by means of our linguistic interaction with each other and the natural environment. In a word, both human selfhood and the worlds within which we mutually live are "linguistically constituted." Let us now turn to the third theme, the pragmatic aspect involved.

It is this pragmatic quality of language that Wittgenstein underscores with his emphasis on linguistic meaning being a function of "use in context." Thus he stresses thinking of language as a toolbox containing a wide variety of "language-games" for the accomplishment of a wide variety of tasks. In like manner, J.L. Austin focuses on "doing things with words" in developing his insights into the performative force of speech-acts. In addition to offering greetings, giving orders, making requests, asking questions, and such, we also perform ceremonies, offer apologies, make promises, and hand out compliments. Even when we may seem to be merely describing something, we make the implicit claim that this is a true description, that this is how it is with respect to the object or situation in question. Such "speech-acts" actually constitute deeds accomplished in the world; they alter our environment and behavior.

It is by means of participating in this pragmatic dimension of linguistic activity that potential speakers are carried across the language threshold into speech. It is in this way that language serves as the human-way-of-being-in-the-world, as the "human form of life." The simple learning and accomplishment of tasks can be nothing but operant conditioning, but when it is intertwined with speech, it is somehow transformed into the means of endowing potential human speakers with both speech and humanity. Unlike books, however, human language and embodiment cannot be set aside when a given task is completed. Once we have indwelt our bodies and speech, they come to indwell us so as to be co-extensive and synonymous with our very selfhood. This indwelling is accomplished by means of our participation in the pragmatic dimension of life and language.

Of course, what makes the above task-oriented processes effective is their integral relationship in the broader *social* contexts within which we are embodied. This brings us to the fourth theme arising from the discussions of the previous chapters. Clearly the specific tasks and their accompanying language

patterns do not occur in a social vacuum. Rather, they are woven into the very fabric of various complex, at times overlapping and crisscrossing patterns of social interaction. By chimps, and human infants experienced as somewhat random and isolated acts, a pre-linguistic being is drawn into a wider horizon of meaningful human activity. Verbally identifying and placing dishes and silverware in their respective receptacles, for instance, is a part of the larger game of "doing the dishes," which in turn finds its significance within the broader pattern known as "housekeeping." Housekeeping itself can be seen as part of the general notions of stewardship and social responsibility.

Being drawn into these increasingly rich and comprehensive concentric circles of meaning, a potential speaker is slowly and imperceptibly transported across the threshold of language. Dogs, chimps, and infants, for example, can all be taught to participate in certain ball games that involve minimal linguistic patterns. As the games grow in complexity, however, at some point dogs and chimps become unable to participate at differing higher levels. The behavioral dimension of such performance is inextricably intertwined with the linguistic dimension so as to form, together, the cognitive reality known as "learning." If the increased complexity and broadened context are progressively assimilated by the learner, at some point he or she can be said to have become a full member of the human social community. Chimpanzees and feral children both flirt with this threshold, though from opposite angles. The former seem capable of at least partial participation by means of sign language, while the latter seem to fall beneath the threshold almost entirely.

Perhaps it should go without saying that the type of cognitive dynamic involved in all of the foregoing considerations is primarily one that might best be termed "tacit knowing." I mentioned this notion once or twice earlier on and will return to it in a more thoroughgoing manner in the Conclusion of these explorations. Even though a certain amount of the language instruction operative in some of the situations described in these chapters was explicit in nature, in the vast majority of cases the primary learning contexts were provided by informal, indirect, and implicit interactions.

Moreover, the explicit teaching settings were employed only with those learners who had attained chronological or physiological age beyond that of childhood. From a logical point of view, all explicit learning requires the use of previously learned elements, since unfamiliar items must be explained in terms of familiar ones. Clearly, this explanatory chain must begin with knowledge that was not acquired explicitly; otherwise knowing would never get started in the first place.

The normal human child acquires language primarily through the "side door," or by "cognitive osmosis," rather than by explicit instruction. It is not

possible to give a very young child a vocabulary list and the rules of grammar as a prerequisite to learning language. Even simple ostensive definitions presuppose a tacit grounding in a myriad of previously shared activities from which to grasp the significance of pointing itself, as well as such relative pronouns as *this, that*, *here* and *there*. The grasping of explicit designations and instructions draws heavily and parasitically on a whole host of non-explicit interactions of both a linguistic and nonlinguistic nature. Songs, whispers, patty-cake like games, overheard conversations, and imperative utterances all form the subsidiary background that provides the tacit foothold for subsequent explicit verbal instructions and learning.

The mystery of the tacit character of the ground of speech, as well as that of learning in general, runs counter to the fundamental atomism and reductionism of the Western heritage. In assuming that all phenomena will yield to an analytic breakdown of its basic elements we also presuppose that knowledge is composed of a quantitative accumulation of these essentially independent and isolatable conceptual units. This is one instance of what Alfred North Whitehead called the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." The plain fact of both experience and logic, however, is that no one has or can isolate any such "atomic" building blocks. The fundamental given is far more holistic and organic than such a view will allow. Even contemporary physicists now prefer to speak of nature as organized patterns of energy in motion, finding little use for the notion of "matter" as such.

Beginning with Plato's theory of "Forms" right down to Bertrand Russell's "logical atomism" it has been presupposed that unequivocal meaning and absolute precision must be both the basis of all language and the goal of all comprehension. The mature work of Ludwig Wittgenstein has served as the useful fulcrum for dismantling this "luggage tag" or "picture" theory of meaning. Use and context are now seen as the primary bearers of meaning, and "significant precision" has become the standard of successful communication. Such communication is now understood as far more diverse, organic, and flexible than any univocal atomism would allow. Indeed, J.L. Austin's analysis of how we "do things with words" and Merleau-Ponty's focus on the basic metaphorical character of language have also contributed to this richer, more open-ended quality of linguistic activity.

In the traditional view of communication, literal significance is taken to be the basis out of which figurative or metaphoric significance arises. Although this view seems to explain a good deal at surface level of language, it will not hold up as an account of how language works at the primary level. First, it is logically and experientially impossible to begin speaking with literal or precise meanings because such meanings presuppose previous ones by means of

which such literal meanings are identified and crafted. Even the terms 'literal,' 'precise,' and 'metaphor' are, along with the vast majority of so-called literal speech, themselves "dead" metaphors.

Owen Barfield in his *Poetic Diction* (Wesleyan University Press, 1973, pp. 77–92) has made this same point in a more interesting manner. He calls attention to the strange contradiction between the received view of the historical development of language and our traditional view of the logical nature of language. According to the former, ancient peoples spoke and lived within the "metaphoric mode" by means of their mythologies and archaic symbols, while modern peoples have replaced this mode with the precision of science and logic. According to the latter, however, literal language is logically prior to the metaphoric mode, so it clearly must antedate it. Obviously, both views cannot be true.

Barfield argues cogently that both historically and conceptually the symbiotic relation between language and reality must precede the separation between them that has characterized the traditional Western view. This symbiosis is at the very heart of the metaphoric mode of communication. As Aristotle puts it: "The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor, since it is the true sign of genius."

In the process of reviewing and reflecting on the particulars, as well as the thematic dynamics, of the foregoing investigations, the focal image that suggests itself most forcefully to me is that of the dance. In every case and at all levels pre-linguistic beings are, in a very real sense, invited by the members of the speaking community to participate in a social activity that is already in process and ongoing. This invitation is largely not a "formal" one; it is more a matter of being caught up in a swirling, open ended group activity without ever really being asked to do so. As existentialist thinkers characterize our existence as that of having been "thrown" into life, so our linguisticality is that of having been "swept away" into the dance of language.

Without knowing the steps, indeed, without even being aware that there are steps, the pre-linguistic being is taken by the hands and drawn into the speaking community as it whirls around in the worlds of space and time amidst the "furniture" provided by the natural environment. Although the steps are often complex, one's immediate dancing partners frequently separate themselves from the larger circle in order to provide "slowed down" and simplified instruction. Slowly one gets the hang of some of the steps, finds one's feet, as it were, and is simply dragged along by the larger group for the rest. It is an immensely frustrating yet exhilarating experience; the expectations of the other, adult dancers are demanding, yet the rewards of participating in this dance are enriching.

Perhaps the most interesting yet perplexing aspect of the dance of language is the fact that there are so many "dances within dances," so many spin-off groups engaged in various specialized routines even while continuing to participate in the larger, overall dance. The most amazing thing is that not only do these various dance groups weave in and out of one another, frequently metamorphosing and merging with other formations and patterns, but both the steps and the individual dancers are continuously altered and exchanged. Although there are occasional confusions and falterings, sometimes resulting both in breakdowns and innovations, for the most part are somehow absorbed into the dominant ebb and flow of the larger dance.

In my view this image of the dance forcefully focuses the many diverse dimensions of the language phenomenon. The axial role of the body, the reciprocity among speaking agents, the specific task orientation, the social and contextual variations, the primacy of tacit knowing, and the freedom of metaphorical extension are all exhibited in the complexity and progressions of dancing. Perhaps this image can be put to fruitful use in further investigation and reflections on the mysterious yet all-pervasive character of linguistic activity since those of us seeking to understand this many-splendored phenomenon are still only at its threshold.

Michael Polanyi's "Tacit Knowing"

More than once in the various stages of these explorations I have mentioned the notion of "tacit knowing" as developed by Michael Polanyi in his outstanding work *Personal Knowledge* (University of Chicago Press, 1975). It is time now to introduce his insights more thoroughly as a means of drawing the foregoing investigations to a conclusion. It is my conviction that Polanyi's approach to the entire notion of cognitivity casts a great deal of light on the whole enterprise of epistemology in general and on linguistic activity in particular. In this way his insights concerning the notion of "tacit knowing" will help bring these explorations into broader perspective.

As I suggested earlier, Polanyi's overall approach to cognitivity issues initially revolves around two sets of distinctions, which in turn give rise to yet a third set of distinctions. The first distinction pertains to the *awareness* dimension of human experience, while the second involves its *activity* dimension. Each of these dimensions of human experience may be seen as functioning along a continuum between two polar termini. These two dimensions together yield the matrix out of which the cognitivity continuum of our experience arises.

For Polanyi, the awareness dimension of experience operates between its "focal" and "subsidiary" poles. That is to say, in any perceptual or conceptual context we are focally aware of some factors and subsidiarily, or subliminally, aware of others. For instance, the reader is currently focally aware of the meaning of these very words and sentences, while only being subsidiarily aware of their spelling and grammatical arrangements. To take another example, consider our general awareness of what time of day it is or even what day of the week it is. We are usually only subsidiarily aware of such factors until we are asked to focus on them.

Polanyi calls these two poles the "proximal" and the "distal" termini of awareness. Of course what is focal in one context may well be subsidiary in another, and vice versa, but no factor can be focal and subsidiary at the same time. Thus, there is a vectorial relationship between these two poles, running from the subsidiary to the focal. Polanyi says that we "attend to" the focal while "attending from" the subsidiary. For instance, the reader is now attending from his or her knowledge of English to the meaning of these very sentences.

The second of Polanyi's dimensions pertains to the *activity* dimension of experience in relation to our environment. This dimension operates on a

continuum between the poles of conceptual and bodily interactions. In all our interaction with the various features of our environment we do so by means of both our bodies and minds, albeit, in any given context we may rely more on one than the other. For instance, because new born babies clearly rely more on their bodily functions and capacities than on their as yet largely undeveloped minds, it can be said that there is a vectorial relation running from bodily activity to that of the mind. As we grow toward adulthood we increasingly engage more of our mental capacity.

At the same time, however, when a person is deeply involved in solving a technical conceptual problem he or she may almost entirely forget that they are embodied at all. It has been frequently pointed out that Albert Einstein often forgot to perform various bodily functions, such as eating and sleeping, when he was working on different aspects of his relativity theories. On the other hand, when one is running the 100 meter dash or lifting a very heavy weight one's mind may well be totally blank. Even when engaging in ordinary everyday activities we generally move *from* or through our bodies *toward* the task or concern we have in mind.

When these two dimensions or continua of awareness and/or activity are thought of as intersecting each other, their respective polarities can be seen as interacting with one another to produce two different modes of human knowing. The focal and conceptual poles converge together to yield what Polanyi called "explicit knowing," while the subsidiary and bodily poles what he called "tacit knowing." Finally, these two modes of knowing, can, in turn, be viewed as giving rise to a third continuum or dimension, that of *cognitivity*:
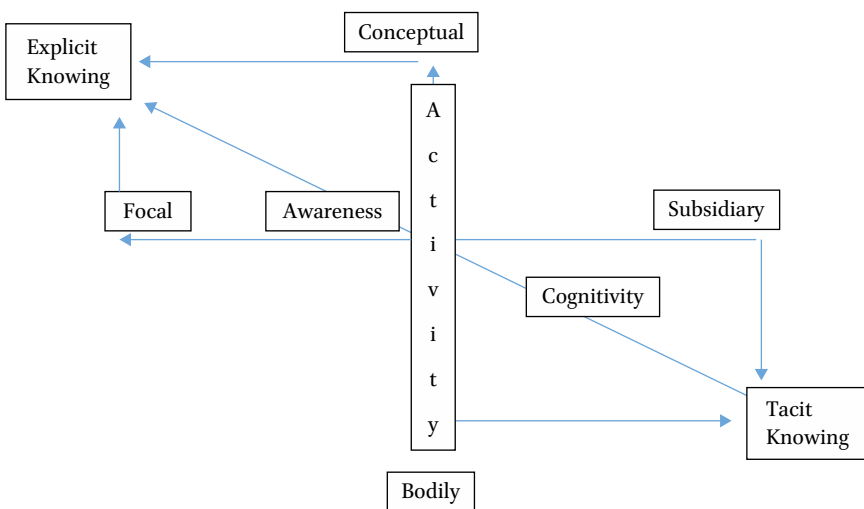
As the above diagram makes clear, the continuum between explicit and tacit knowing, like those of the awareness and activity continua, also has a vectorial structure attending from the tacit pole to the explicit. Having laid out the basic dynamics of the interaction between the awareness and activity dimensions of human experience, and having indicated how they work together to form the cognitivity dimension, Polanyi delineates the special features of the latter dimension. It is of course the dynamics of tacit knowing that are of special interest for our purposes here.

In the West we are very familiar with the kind of knowing that Polanyi designates as "explicit." From Plato onward nearly all Western philosophers have agreed that in order for a person to be said to know a given thing he or she must not only be able to say what it is that they know, but be able to say why it is that they know it. In short, one must be able to explicate, or articulate, the meaning of and the rationale behind what it is that one is claiming to be true. Without such clarification of the evidence and/or logic on the basis of which the claim is said to be true, no knowledge claim can be accepted.

Explicit knowledge, then, stresses precision of concepts, deductive or inductive demonstration, and objectivity as the basis for any claim to explicit knowing. Moreover, the stress in claims to explicit knowledge is on the *inferential* process, whether deductive or inductive, in moving from mere belief to genuine knowledge. Each claim must be carefully articulated and shown to be in line with the facts in order to be accepted as cognitively significant and true. As Plato put it, only the person who has actually travelled the road to Larisa can be said to *know* which the right road is. All others at best can be said only to have "right opinion."

In this inferential process the emphasis is on moving step-by-step, a la Descartes, from one articulated and established truth to the next, making sure that no logical or evidential mistakes are made along the way. Each step must be, in Descartes' terms, 'clear' and 'distinct.' In addition, as Polanyi points out, this inferential process is essentially reversible. That is to say, one can retrace its steps in order to make sure a mistake has not been made. Indeed, one can actually pretend that the process has yet to be completed so as to double check it.

When it comes to "tacit knowing," on the other hand, no full articulation can be given, nor rightfully expected. As Polanyi puts it: "We always know more than we can say" (*Personal Knowledge,* Preface x). Since this aspect of our cognitive experience arises out of our bodily interaction with our subsidiary input, it can never be fully explicated and/or demonstrated by means of the usual procedures involved in explicit knowing. Throughout the centuries of Western thought there have been those, such as Kierkegaard, Bergson, Pascal, and John Henry Newman, who have insisted that there is more to human cognitivity

than can be explained by logic and scientific investigation. For the most part, however, these thinkers have remained marginalized.

In my view what kept these thinkers from being able to make inroads into the Western intellectual tradition was their lack of the very insights and vocabulary developed by Polanyi. They were unable to express their frustration with the hegemony of the classical rationalistic and empiricist approaches to the question of knowledge in a way that could actually show its shortcomings. It took Polanyi's analysis of the dynamics of tacit knowing to provide the proper angle of approach to the questions surrounding human cognition. Once his insights are brought into play, many of the difficulties are cleared up.

Polanyi begins his exploration of the tacit dimension by examining familiar bodily skills wherein we know, and are able to do things that neither we nor others can fully articulate nor demonstrate the rationale behind them. With everything from learning to walk, swim, and ride a bicycle to recognizing familiar faces in a crowd, playing musical instruments, and acquiring our mother tongue, we can provide very little if any real explanation of how we are able to accomplish such tasks. We know *that* we can and do learn to do these things, but we ourselves, as well as the "experts," remain largely unable to articulate the actual processes and steps involved in so doing. Thus, Polanyi insists, the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the tacit dimension of cognitivity is necessary.

Indeed, as a practicing scientist, Polanyi contends that most scientific investigation and discoveries actually begin with inarticulate intuitions, hunches, and random experimentation, with the rationale and demonstration only being provided after the fact in order to share the findings with the scientific community. He supports this claim with examples from his own work in the field of chemistry and conversations with other scientists, such as Albert Einstein. In spite of the fact, for instance, that the usual explanation of his relativity theory attributes his insight to the results of the well-known Michaelson-Morely experiments, Einstein himself always insisted that he had intuitions about the nature of his speculations as a very young man, long before those experiments.

Thus, Polanyi concludes that rather than arising as the result of explicit objective logical and/or scientific investigation and articulation based on inferential processes, the initial axis of knowledge is really the result of what he terms "integrative acts." The interaction between our bodily activity and our subsidiary input as indirect and mediated give rise to holistic, gestalt-type grasping of meanings and rationales that we are unable to fully articulate. Such integrative acts, unlike inferential processes, do not move in a reversible, step-by-step manner, but incorporate and integrate the particulars involved in a

given context into meaningful wholes at the outset. These cannot be analyzed and/or specified until afterward, if ever.

Here is how he expresses this crucial point: "Things of which we are focally aware can be explicitly identified; but no knowledge can be *wholly explicit.* For one thing, the meaning of language, when in use, lies in its tacit component; for another, to use language involves actions of our body of which we have only a subsidiary awareness. Hence, tacit knowing is more fundamental than explicit knowing; *we can know more than we can tell and we can tell nothing without relying on our awareness of things we may not be able to tell at all*" (*Personal Knowledge,* Preface x).

The dynamics whereby we acquire tacit knowledge are, according to Polanyi, inextricably bound up in the activity he terms "indwelling." It is by interactively participating in, or indwelling, the various aspects of our environment, which for the most part we are only subsidiarily aware, be they physical, psychological, or social, that we come to experience and thus to know them tacitly. We join in singing songs, playing games, imitating linguistic sounds and pronunciations, or in giving focal attention to diverse aspects of a complex problem or activity. Thus we learn to bring these into our own bodies and minds as part of our knowledge base. As we repeatedly indwell the particulars of any specific reality, or any of its aspects, we "incorporate" them, quite literally, and integrate them into our bodies and our understanding.

Throughout his writings Polanyi offers numerous concrete examples, taken both from everyday life and scientific investigations, of how this dynamic works. Many of these involve the use of tools, a la Wittgenstein, as extensions of our bodies, while others pertain to common social activities such as speaking and grasping conventional meanings, a la Austin. However, the following example is especially insightful and useful: "We know another person's mind by the same integrative process by which we know life. A novice trying to understand the skill of a master will seek *mentally* to combine his movements to the pattern to which the master combines them *practically.* By such exploratory indwelling the novice gets the feel of the master's skill. Chess players enter into a master's thought by repeating the games he played. *We experience a man's mind as the joint meeting of his actions* by dwelling in his actions from outside" (*Knowing and Being,* p. 152).

So, over all, we can conclude that Polanyi stresses two major points throughout his works on the nature and functioning of human knowing. The first is that there is a cognitivity continuum extending and operating between the poles of explicit and tacit knowing. Moreover, this dimension of cognitive experience has been systematically ignored, or even flatly denied, by the vast majority of philosophical thinkers in the Western tradition, both ancient and

modern. Nevertheless, it is clear that without accrediting this aspect of cognitive experience we are unable to understand, let alone explain, how knowledge is acquired and authenticated.

The subtitle of Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* is "Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy." The addition of this subtitle makes it clear that Polanyi thinks of his own work as an instance of "postmodern" thought, moving beyond the excessively critical work of such modern thinkers as Descartes, Hume, and Kant. However, it should be clear by now that his approach to the epistemological issues involved in the modernist treatment seeks as well to go beyond the so-called postmodernism of the contemporary thinkers who are generally designated by that term. Polanyi not only deconstructs modernist philosophy, but he also seeks to "reconstruct" our understanding of the whole of human knowledge so as to render it again viable and helpful. In a word, he seeks to establish a truly "deep postmodernism."

Furthermore, as Polanyi's statement quoted above clearly indicates, he not only maintains that tacit knowing is a legitimate and important aspect of human cognitive experience, but he also insists that tacit knowing is logically prior to, more fundamental than, explicit knowing. In short, he contends that we cannot ever begin an analytic or demonstrative process of explicit knowing without tacitly relying on other processes and meanings that we cannot articulate before we begin. All of our bodily activities, including the use of techniques and instruments of scientific investigation, to say nothing of our use of language itself, rely on tacit knowing residing in our bodies. All of our conceptual activity relies ultimately on previously accepted and unarticulated concepts and reasonings which can never be fully articulated.

For instance, any word we choose to use must be defined in terms of yet other words that we have not yet defined, and the definitions of these words depend on still other words, ad infinitum. In short, no matter what explicit processes we begin with, it will always be based on either logical or experimental elements that must remain unarticulated if we are ever to get stated at all. Thus it is safe to say that in every undertaking we must begin "mid-stream" without being able, either practically or theoretically, to spell out all the items and factors that our efforts presuppose. Thus tacit knowing is clearly logically prior to explicit knowing in the same ways that premises are logically prior to conclusions even though they are not articulated.

This is, to be sure, the most radical aspect of Polanyi's enterprise. To return to the diagram offered earlier, just as there is a vector running from subsidiary awareness toward focal awareness, and from bodily activity toward conceptual activity, so there is a vector running from tacit knowing toward explicit knowing. Therefore, without tacit knowing there can be no explicit knowing and

this logical priority makes the explorations of the dynamics of tacit knowing all that much more significant. The things that "cannot be said," that we know but cannot "tell," reveal themselves in how we conduct our human activities, not without some slippage, to be sure, but sufficiently for the most part for us to be able to distinguish between truth and error. The reliability and veracity of our claims to tacit knowing *show* themselves in the warp and weft of the fabric of our common social interactions.

In addition, Polanyi counters the argument of the skeptic and/or absolute relativist head on by introducing the notion of "universal intent." The fact is, all human beings together seek to understand and share the truth. We all intend to be understood, and to express what is the case, in a manner that will achieve general or universal acceptance, as being true. The fact that not all meanings, assumptions, and reasonings cannot be made explicit does not lead to skepticism because we share a common world, a common sociality, and a common embodiment. Even the skeptic wants and expects to be understood and agreed with. The claim that knowledge is impossible carries "universal intent." Even the absolute relativists claim that their view is "true" absolutely and intend it to be accepted universally. Otherwise their claim and participation in language, is empty and meaningless.

One thinker who has sought to explore the implications of these types of issues is Harold McCurdy in his essay "Personal Knowing and Making" in the book of essays on Polanyi's thought entitled *Intellect and Hope*. McCurdy is a psychologist who is interested in what might be called the application of Warner Heisenberg's "principal of indeterminacy" to psychological knowledge. His work has a wider application to all human efforts to garner knowledge about other human beings knowledge, including their own.

McCurdy, in short, focuses on situations in which a social scientist seeks to acquire knowledge about what is going on in another person's mental and/or emotional experience. Namely, just how "objective" can such efforts hope to be, since the very inquiry itself inevitably has "input" into what is discovered? Put simply, how much and in what ways does the fact that the "observer" is observing have on the results of his or her observations? Heisenberg made it clear that even in the observation of sub-atomic reality, the act of observing always alters the results of the observation. So, it would seem, this should be even truer in cases where one human is observing the behavior of another.

This focus clearly relates directly to Polanyi's claims concerning the necessity of grounding all efforts to know reality in the "personal" dimension of experience, where all knowledge is inevitably "personal." Indeed, in such cases one wonders how it would ever be possible to obtain "objective" knowledge of the object of study without the projection of the knower him or herself becoming

a vital part of the outcome. In Polanyi's view such so-called "objectivity is neither possible nor desirable."

Clearly this aspect of the "subject-object" epistemological situation is a highly significant one, and Polanyi's approach casts a good deal of light upon it. McCurdy relates the experience of one of his students conducting a psychological study of whether or not young women on their campus were friendly. The student, a woman, tabulated the response she got from other women students as she met them without a smile as she walked across the campus. Very few of them smiled at her. Then the student tried meeting the oncoming women with a smile herself, and the results were far better.

In the first case the young woman had sought to be "objective," not influencing the results of her study. But she soon realized that her blank look was itself not devoid of input into her results. However, when she smiled at her "subjects" they often smiled at her as well. McCurdy remarks: "How many hypotheses or theories have been supported by data generated, in a sense, by the hypotheses or theories themselves? ... One would simply observe carefully, perhaps skeptically and suspiciously as a good cautious scientist should, while withholding one's own smile" (p. 319).

In all such cases, no matter how carefully designed, the structure of the experiment itself inevitably incorporates the intent and/or values of the experimenter. No matter how carefully the study is designed, the intent of the scientist necessarily incorporates the values and intentions of the scientist. McCurdy mentions Freud's efforts to "screen" himself from his patient's answers to his questions, which inevitably led to different results from those he got when he did not do so – but even these results were "framed" by other conditions and patterns that played their part in the results he got.

In short, the very fact that an observer is observing seems inevitably to have an effect on the results of any effort to obtain knowledge. McCurdy goes on to argue that the only solution to this result is to find ways to incorporate the fact that a study is being conducted. He offers the example of the statement "She is growing beautiful" not being dissociated from the statement "*I see* that she is growing beautiful." "To report the fact accurately we must include ourselves in the description and admit that if our manner of looking has changed her, her manner of change affects in turn our manner of looking. We must describe, that is, a whole relational universe" (p. 321).

McCurdy goes on to describe additional, albeit more complex scientific endeavors, in which it is more difficult, but just as necessary, to incorporate Polanyi's insights into the importance and ultimate inevitability of the "personal" coefficient in all our efforts to get it right about diverse dimensions of reality. In every case, what is claimed to be "the case" is affirmed by someone, namely a

person. Thus the force of Polanyi's book title: "Personal Knowledge." Within the dynamic of tacit knowing, all knowledge is ultimately *someone's* knowledge.

In addition, McCurdy's analysis highlights the interaction between the verbal and somatic aspects of those conducting the key experiments. In all his cases the verbal inputs were crucial to the gathering of the cognitive information. There is always a reciprocal dynamic between behavior, meaning, and knowledge. As McCurdy puts it: "We acquire knowledge by participating in a holistic relational environment. Words serve as deeds as they are embedded in bodily behavior and interactions. And reciprocally, deeds themselves actually often serve as words" (p. 320).

It is time now to bring these explorations of Polanyi's to bear on those of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Merleau-Ponty. It seems clear that Wittgenstein's understanding of the dynamics of linguistic activity run parallel to Polanyi's insights, especially that of tacit knowing. The whole concept of language-games is dependent on human participation in shared linguistic activities, or "linguistic games" if you will, by means of which we carry on our daily behavior, both social and personal. The verbal and physical give-and-take of everyday life is packaged in the ongoing flow of our speech.

In initially finding their way into linguistic activity, the very young children often proceed as if language is, in fact, a game. They ask and answer questions, expecting other children or adults to respond in appropriate fashion, and act on what they hear or see as steps or "turns" in an on-going game. Just yesterday I witnessed a young child in a park talking with his mother about the weather; was it too hot or just about right? She took his questions seriously, and he took her answers seriously as well. The young boy decided that he did not want to wear his hat "because it makes me too hot."

Last week I observed a small child conversing with his father as they walked through the supermarket. He said: "After we get our ice cream we will drive to Grandma's for lunch." The father replied that they would have to go by the gas station on the way since their car was almost out of gas. This, like the other, was a real, meaningful conversation between two people about their circumstances and plans; they were participating in regular, commonplace "language-games" which were directly connected to their current and subsequent behavior. The children clearly understood what was being said and what was going on without grasping much of anything about the complex world of gas stations and ice cream beyond that immediate context.

Moreover, certain utterances and "turns" in the games in question were assumed and patterned so that everyone's behavior was connected to what would happen next, etc. There was a flow, a vector to these conversations even though they were genuine, open-ended exchanges and connected to concrete

activities. Although they had not been "scripted" ahead of time, these exchanges were a vital part of the on-going relationship between child and parent. Things were being decided and getting done. If the parent had suddenly interjected a question about the upcoming election, say, the children would no longer be able to participate. It would be like shifting from chess to baseball or some other game.

What is obvious in all such situations is that the knowledge required to "play" in these games had been acquired *tacitly* through previous encounters which may not have all gone well. This knowledge is obtained by the newcomers through full participation in the specific moves surrounding the activities, trying to imitate the adults involved as they went along. We adults have become so habituated to the various scenarios that we generally fail to see them at work. Sometimes, of course, the child makes a mistake and the whole process may get sidetracked. Generally the flow picks up again rather quickly and other "games" are embarked upon. Various "language-games" overlap with and crisscross over one another.

A young newcomer must read the situation and connect it up with what he or she has already ingested. Anyone who has paid attention to child-talk understands how youngsters find their way into language by means of imitation and enacting what they are learning. One minute you are sure they do not understand a particular move in the game, and the next they introduce their own version or parallel pattern which keeps the game going. Put into Polanyi's framework, the beginner indwells the subsidiary input from previous and the current exchange, interacts with it in terms of his or her own integration of it, and all without conceptualizing about it at all.

A similar process characterizes the way an adult speaker picks up on the latest joke, snide remark, or inferred inference. Learning the "lingo" surrounding the game of baseball or football, for instance, or that involved in the world of computer technology and video games, always takes a learning period, especially for those of us who start out completely unfamiliar with them. Also, acquiring facility in a foreign language follows the same tacit awareness dynamic, one "fakes it until one makes it." In such situations we often find ourselves way over our heads, saying things that work but not being able to say why they do. Subsidiary awareness allows things in through the backdoor upon which we act, and eventually these are integrated into our explicit, conceptual understandings.

It will be recalled that near the end of his *Investigations* Wittgenstein makes reference to what he termed "imponderable evidence." At bottom this notion ties in well with his remarks about the "bedrock" character of our human "form of life," as well as with his notion of how we often "get a nose" for something

without being able to explain how it turns out to be true. As he put it in one place, when I reach this level, "My spade is turned, I cannot go further down." To change the image, elsewhere (in *On Certainty*) he says that it is important to "begin at the beginning and not try to go further back." In a sense, then, with respect to our knowing, we are all like little children learning language, we must begin, as it were, "in the middle," assuming we know what we are doing before actually doing so.

Clearly these notions and claims fit in very nicely with Polanyi's concept of *tacit knowing*. We always "know more than we can say" because we, like beginning swimmers, have to dive into speaking before we actually know fully what we are doing. As Wittgenstein puts it with respect to imponderable evidence, even though we cannot always explain how and why we know, "one can get a nose for it." This, of course, does mean that everything we think we know we do in fact know. Nevertheless, in order to get started we often have to act as if we do in fact already know. If we do not begin in this way, like with swimming, we shall never know at all.

This was illustrated by Wittgenstein's veiled reply to Hume's demand for "grounds" for relying on the past to predict the future. He said "If you say that the past does not provide "grounds," I do not know what you would think "grounds" are. If the past is not grounds, what else do you have in mind?" In short, there is no absolute basis for human knowledge. There is only our human "form of life," our human way of conducting business and speaking together about it. Here again, we must simply dive in and justify our actions, both linguistic and behavioral, as we go. This does not lead to skepticism because we jointly accredit our common beliefs by mean s of what Polanyi calls "universal intent." This does not guarantee knowledge and truth, but it enables us to guard against subjectivism and fanaticism.

To change the image, although there is no "foundational" truth at the bottom of the stack of turtles ("It's turtles all the way down"), we are all engaged in our conversations and searches for truth together, and this means that "its turtles all the way around." Our *universal intent* allows us to continue our dialogues about the truth and knowledge, so that we are already embarked and our common life and quest is, in Plato's words, its own reward. The search for truth, even the denial of its possibility, backhandedly underwrites its viability, even as the skeptic's claim presupposes it by claiming to know that there is no such thing as knowledge.

The application of Polanyi's insights to those of J.L. Austin can be seen to follow a similar pattern as those of Wittgenstein. The major concern is to acknowledge social and active character of human linguistic behavior. In short, speaking words is a kind of action, a way of getting things done in the world.

Only some of these actions involve describing or "picturing" the world around us. More commonly they are part of a broader behavioral pattern which is shared with other people and aimed at effecting specific goals and accomplishing concrete tasks. In short, language is "proactive" rather than passive in relation to the surrounding world.

This fact can be seen as fitting into Polanyi's distinction between conceptual and bodily activity. Language is as much bodily as it is conceptual, for not only does it involve sound making motor activity, but it literally inserts itself into realm of human social and political interactions. This is the point of Austin's insight that by speaking we are actually changing the world, we are "doing things with words." To change the image, this is what Wittgenstein meant by learning to think of language as a *tool* by means of which we get things done in our common reality. Both Austin and Wittgenstein saw language as an activity, not simply as a mirror of the world.

Obviously, linguistic activity must often follow certain conventions if it is to accomplish its goals. The sorts of cases and examples provided by Austin's analysis put this fact front and center. One cannot simply speak in a random fashion and expect to accomplish specific goals. What is crucially important to note in this regard is that in the vast majority of cases our participation in such conventional behavior relies on our knowing when, where, and how to use them. Moreover, by and large such knowledge is never taught or learned by specific lessons, but is rather "picked up" through observation and/or practice.

In other words, the sort of knowledge we generally display in such ways and cases is clearly tacit in character. I remember, when washing the dishes with my two year old son, that if I handed them to him in the wrong way I would say "I'm sorry." Soon he picked this pattern up and would say "Sorry" every time I handed him a dish, even when I did it correctly. Clearly a "misfire" according to Austin's terminology. However, in this way he eventually learned the proper circumstances in which it is appropriate to say "I'm sorry." He learned to *indwell*, as Polanyi would put it, this utterance through practice in relation to the way the dishes were handed to him. Eventually he accomplished an *integrative act* when he began to use the utterance appropriately.

In parallel fashion, my two year old granddaughter must have heard someway complain that they were "Too old for this" with respect to some particular activity and she appropriated the expression when she got tired of using her walking-bike. She said: "I'm too old for this," which of course made everyone laugh. Another misfire, to be sure, but she will eventually come to use this conventional humorous expression in the right contexts either by being corrected or by seeing the humor in using it in the wrong circumstances. Then it will become a tacit usage rather than an explicit one.

All of this may seem unduly obvious, but the actual acquiring of informal conventional expressions is as subtle as it is important. Of course, the more formal conventions, such as "I promise" or "I apologize," are generally acquired more by explicit teaching, either in personal or public circumstances. The former cases often arise in family give-and-take around the home, while the latter may be learned at school or in athletic contests. In any case, the slide, as it were, from the tacit to the explicit, or vice versa, is generally unconscious. Generally speaking, we have little memory of ever having acquired such conventional performatives. They usually slide from our subsidiary awareness into our focal awareness, or vice versa, depending on the circumstances and the linguistic purposes.

Perhaps the most interesting and important connection between Polanyi's insights and those of J.L. Austin pertain to the area of epistemology. Both have sought to break down the traditional dichotomy between what Austin called the "constative" and the "performative" character of language and knowing. Austin, for his part, asks: "Can we be sure that stating truly is a different *class* of assessment from arguing soundly, advising well, judging fairly, and blaming justifiably? Do these not have something to do with facts?" and a bit further on: "But consider also for a moment whether the question of truth or falsity is so very objective. We ask: 'Is it a *fair* statement?' and are the good reasons and good evidence for stating and saying so very different from the good reasons and evidence for performative acts like arguing, warning, and judging?" (*How to Do Things with Words,* p. 141).

Polanyi, too, wants to establish a cognitivity continuum between explicit and tacit knowing based on the interactive dynamics between the awareness and activity dimensions of our human experience. As he says: "We always know more than we can say, and we can know nothing at all apart from tacit integrations." The title to his magnum opus, *Personal Knowledge* says it all. In all knowing there is a personal component operative that grounds cognitivity in the judgments of each person as he or she participates in the common search for truth. As mentioned earlier, truth, like knowledge, is always *somebody's* truth.

Finally, Austin is well-known for exploring the parallels between saying "I know" and saying "I promise." "But when I say 'I promise,' a new plunge is taken; I have not merely announced my intention, but, by using this formula (performing this ritual), I have bound myself to others, and staked my reputation in a new way. Similarly, saying 'I know' is taking a new plunge. But it is *not* saying 'I have performed a special feat of cognition,' superior, in the same scale as believing and being sure, even to being merely quite sure ... When I say

'I know', I *give others my word:* I *give others my authority for saying* that 'S is P'" (*Philosophical Papers,* p. 67).

This point, and this way of expressing it, is very much in line with Polanyi's emphasis on the personal quality of all knowing. In his Preface to *Personal Knowledge* he acknowledges this commitment: "I have shown that into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known, and that this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his knowledge" (*Personal Knowledge,* Preface, xiv). This is extremely similar to the point that Austin makes in the above quoted passage.

Finally, it is time to turn to the thought of Merleau-Ponty by way of focusing his participation in the overall theme of this investigation, namely the direct connection between words, deeds, and bodies as it bears on the relationship between human linguistic, social, and physical behavior. Chapter 3 traced the main lines of Merleau-Ponty's approach to these issues by focusing on his view of the centrality of embodiment in human experience and knowing. So, here I shall expand on this emphasis as it relates to those of Michael Polanyi's thought.

The obvious place to begin is with the fact that both Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi place a great deal of emphasis on the central role played by the body in human existence, especially in relation to questions of linguistic meaning and knowing. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty's main theme in his *Phenomenology of Perception* is that of the axial role of our embodiment in the development of our interaction with both the physical and social worlds in which we find ourselves. For him, in a very deep sense we *are* our bodies, we do not *have* bodies. Even our self-knowledge is largely a by-product of these interactions.

Polanyi, too, sees bodily activity as the ground-zero for all human knowing. Indeed, his schema for understanding the development of all human cognitivity begins with our embodied activity as we interact with the input from our subsidiary awareness of our various environments, both physical and social. The things that we *do* in and with our bodies engender the patterns and development of very existence, especially as it pertains to the formation of the tacit structure of our knowledge, of what we *know*. Bodily skills lie at the heart of all knowing, both in everyday life and in the acquisition of scientific knowledge.

There is an obvious parallel between Polanyi's dynamic of the "from-to" nature of our awareness and Merleau-Ponty's notions of intentionality and the "project centered" character of its embodiment in everyday life. Both of these thinkers speak out against the mind/body dualism of traditional Western approaches to cognitivity as it has been developed by empiricists and rationalists alike. For both, human beings are seen as holistic agents who function as

unitary entities in relation to physical and social reality. Our intentional behavior arises out of our inherent desire to interact with our surroundings, including each other.

In particular, we live and move in and from our physical bodies toward both concrete and abstract projects, both personal and social, from the very beginning of our human existence. From, or even before, birth tiny infants seek connection with their surroundings, grasping, sucking, searching out faces, and even imitating sounds. In their accounts there is no place for any "Lockeian-like" view of the human mind as a passive "blank tablet" on which experience writes. Humans "hit the ground running," as it were, seemingly already engaged in their surroundings.

In this regard, the notion of "imitation" plays a crucial role in the approaches of both Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi. It will be recalled that at the close of the chapter dealing with Merleau-Ponty's thought we discussed his approach to language acquisition. There he stressed the role of imitation in all linguistic learning. Children seek to participate in the adult world, trying to copy what they hear and see. They are continually invited to participate in the "dance" of language, indeed often forced to participate, and for the vast majority of cases, play along enthusiastically.

In that chapter we examined as well a wide variety of situations and moves that comprise the linguistic "dance." One example from my own experience that I neglected to mention was that of my ten month old daughter's invention of a word which she inserted into our family's regular vocabulary. Whenever we sought to feed her the morning cereal we would warn her that it might be hot by saying "Blow on it Jodie." She would try to copy this word, but it always came out as some sound like "Bleh." Soon this sound became the family word for cereal and whenever we were going to the store someone would say "Be sure to remember to get some Bleh." After a while we no longer thought of this new word as odd; it had become a real part of our family vocabulary.

So in some ways and at some levels the learning of language can become a two-way street. Grownups often learn to copy their child's speech patterns as well as the other way around. By and large, however, the dynamic functions in the reverse direction. Children learn to enter into the dance whenever and however they can, even if they fail to get everything absolutely correct. The point is that everything depends on the process of imitation, and eventually nearly everyone learns to get most of it right. Of course, sometimes a child will come off sounding like "Mrs. Malaprop" in Sheridan's "The Rivals," substituting the wrong word or making one up as they go along.

All this lines up rather well with Polanyi's account of how we acquire all our knowledge, including linguistic knowledge. By indwelling the input of

subsidiary awareness through imitation and practice we ingest such experience and it becomes part of us. Then we attend from it to other, as yet undigested experiential input. When these aspects of our experience are thus incorporated into our cognitive storehouse, Polanyi says this is accomplished by means of what he calls an *integrative act*. Once an item has been thus incorporated it has become a feature of our cognitive landscape. As with Merleau-Ponty, the key here is repetitive imitation through bodily interaction.

The important thing to bear in mind here, for both Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi, is that this process is essentially a tacit one. That is to say, the vast majority of what a child learns is acquired indirectly, through ongoing interaction with other, adult speakers of the language. For instance, by far most adult speakers cannot remember ever learning any particular word or expression in their mother tongue. These all come in through the back door, as it were, of our daily experience. Thus we generally work forward on the basis of such language to yet other, newer, language. The dynamic is "from" what is now tacitly known "to" that which is currently being known.

Once again we see Polanyi's insights into cognitive experience casting a strong light on our understanding of the concept of knowledge, especially that pertaining to language. In addition, his approach to such matters by means of the notion of tacit knowing provides an excellent basis for our grasp of the philosophical works of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Merleau-Ponty as they wrestle with the implications of the relationship amongst "words, deeds, and bodies."

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Index