In speaking of the vision of language underlying ordinary language procedures in philosophy, I had in mind something I have suggested in discussing Wittgenstein's relation of grammar and criteria to "forms of life", and in emphasizing the sense in which human convention is not arbitrary but constitutive of significant speech and activity; in which mutual understanding, and hence language, depends upon nothing more and nothing less than shared forms of life, call it our mutual attunement or agreement in our criteria. I have said both that criteria are apparently necessary to our knowledge of existence or reality, and that they can be, apparently out of necessity, repudiated. I expressed this by saying that normally the presence of criteria (the fact that we say, truly, "that is what we call 'suppressing anger' ") will insure the existence of its object (he is there feeling angry), but not inevitably (deductively?), and suggested that this meant not that normally (usually) a statement made on the basis of a criterion is true, but that it is true of the normal inhabitants of our world, of anything we recognize as part of our world.

Now I want to say something more specific about what it is Wittgenstein has discovered, or detailed, about language (i.e., about the entire body and spirit of human conduct and feeling which goes into the capacity for speech) which raises the sorts of problems I have so crudely and vaguely characterized in terms of "normality" and "our world".

What I wish to say at this point can be taken as glossing Wittgenstein's remark that "we learn words in certain contexts" (e.g., Blue Book, p. 9). This means, I take it, both that we do not learn words in all the contexts...
in which they could be used (what, indeed, would that mean?) and that not every context in which a word is used is one in which the word can be learned (e.g., contexts in which the word is used metaphorically). And after a while we are expected to know when the words are appropriately used in further contexts. This is obvious enough, and philosophers have always asked for an explanation of it: "How do words acquire that generality upon which thought depends?" As Locke put it:

All things that exist being particulars, it may perhaps be thought reasonable that words, which ought to be conformed to things, should be so too, I mean in their signification: but yet we find quite the contrary. The far greatest part of words that make all languages are general terms; which has not been the effect of neglect or chance, but of reason and necessity. . . . The next thing to be considered is, how general words come to be made. For since all things that exist are only particulars, how come we by general terms, or where find we those general natures they are supposed to stand for? [An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III; Chapter III; Sections I and VI]

This is one of the questions to which philosophers have given the answer, "Because there are universals"; and the "problem of universals" has been one of assigning, or denying, an ontological status to such things and of explaining, or denying, our knowledge of them. What Wittgenstein wishes us to see, if I understand, is that no such answers could provide an explanation of the questions which lead to them.

"We learn words in certain contexts and after a while we are expected to know when they are appropriately used in (= can appropriately be projected into) further contexts" (and, of course, our ability to project appropriately is a criterion for our having learned a word). Now I want to ask: (1) What is (do we call) "learning a word", and in particular (to keep to the simplest case) "learning the general name of something"?; and (2) what makes a projection an appropriate or correct one? (Again, traditionally, the answer to (1) is: "Grasping a universal", and to (2): "The recognition of another instance of the same universal", or "the fact that the new object is similar to the old").

Learning a Word

Suppose we ask: "When a child learns the name of something (e.g., 'cat', 'star', 'pumpkin'), obviously he doesn't learn merely that this (particular) sound goes with that (particular) object; so what does he learn?" We might answer: "He learns that sounds like this name objects like that." We can quickly become very dissatisfied with that answer. Suppose we
reflected that that answer seems to describe more exactly a situation in which learning that "cat" is the name of that means learning that "rat" (a sound like "cat") is the name of that (an object like a cat). That obviously is not what we meant to say (because that obviously is not what happens?). How is what we meant to say different? We might try: "He learns that sounds exactly similar to this name objects exactly similar to that." But that is either false or obviously empty. For what does it mean to say that one cat is exactly similar to another cat? We do not want to mean that you can not tell them apart (for that obviously would not explain what we are trying to explain). What we want to say is that the child learns that a sound that is (counts as) this word names objects which are cats. But isn't that just what we thought we needed, and were trying to give, an explanation for?

Suppose we change the point of view of the question and ask: What do we teach or tell a child when we point to a pumpkin and say, "Pumpkin"? Do we tell him what a pumpkin is or what the word "pumpkin" means? I was surprised to find that my first response to this question was, "You can say either". (Cf. "Must We Mean What We Say?", p. 21.) And that led me to appreciate, and to want to investigate, how much a matter knowing what something is is a matter of knowing what something is called; and to recognize how limited or special a truth is expressed in the motto, "We may change the names of things, but their nature and their operation on the understanding never change" (Hume, Treatise, Book II, Part III, Section I).

At the moment I will say just this: That response ("You can say either") is true, at best, only for those who have already mastered a language. In the case of a child still coming to a mastery of its language it may be (fully) true neither that what we teach them is (the meaning of) a word nor that we tell them what a thing is. It looks very like one or the other, so of course it is very natural to say that it is one or the other; but so does malicious gossip often look like honesty, and so we very often call it honesty.

How might saying "Pumpkin" and pointing to a pumpkin not be "telling the child what a word means"? There are many sorts of answers to that. One might be: it takes two to tell someone something; you can't give someone a piece of information unless he knows how to ask for that (or comparable) information. (Cf. Investigations, §31.) And this is no more true of learning language than it is true of learning any of the forms of life which grow language. You can't tell a child what a word means when the child has yet to learn what "asking for a meaning" is (i.e., how
to ask for a meaning), in the way you can't lend a rattle to a child who has yet to learn what "being lent (or borrowing) something" means. Grownups like to think of children (especially their own) as small grown-ups, midgets. So they say to their child, "Let Sister use your shovel", and then nudge the child over towards Sister, wrest the shovel from the child's hand, and are later impatient and disappointed when the child beats Sister with a pail and Sister rages not to "return" the shovel. We learn from suffering.

Nor, in saying "Pumpkin" to the child, are we telling the child what a pumpkin is, i.e., the child does not then know what a pumpkin is. For to "know what a pumpkin is" is to know, e.g., that it is a kind of fruit; that it is used to make pies; that it has many forms and sizes and colors; that this one is misshapen and old; that inside every tame pumpkin there is a wild man named Jack, screaming to get out.

So what are we telling the child if we are telling him neither what a word means nor what a thing is? We might feel: "If you can't tell a child a simple thing like what a pumpkin is or what the word 'pumpkin' means, then how does learning ever begin?" But why assume we are telling him anything at all? Why assume that we are teaching him anything? Well, because obviously he has learned something. But perhaps we are too quick to suppose we know what it is in such situations that makes us say the child is learning something. In particular, too quick to suppose we know what the child is learning. To say we are teaching them language obscures both how different what they learn may be from anything we think we are teaching, or mean to be teaching; and how vastly more they learn than the thing we should say we had "taught". Different and more, not because we are bad or good teachers, but because "learning" is not as academic a matter as academics are apt to suppose.

First, reconsider the obvious fact that there is not the clear difference between learning and maturation that we sometimes suppose there is. Take this example: Suppose my daughter now knows two dozen words. (Books on child development must say things like: At age 15 months the average child will have a vocabulary of so many words.) One of the words she knows, as her Baby Book will testify, is "kitty". What does it mean to say she "knows the word"? What does it mean to say she "learned it"? Take the day on which, after I said "Kitty" and pointed to a kitty, she repeated the word and pointed to the kitty. What does "repeating the word" mean here? and what did she point to? All I know is (and does she know more?) that she made the sound I made and pointed to what I pointed at. Or rather, I know less (or more) than that. For what is "her
making the sound I made”? She produced a sound (imitated me?) which I accepted, responded to (with smiles, hugs, words of encouragement, etc.) as what I had said. The next time a cat came by, on the prowl or in a picture book, she did it again. A new entry for the Baby Book under “Vocabulary”.

Now take the day, some weeks later, when she smiled at a fur piece, stroked it, and said “kitty”. My first reaction was surprise, and, I suppose, disappointment: she doesn’t really know what “kitty” means. But my second reaction was happier: she means by “kitty” what I mean by “fur”. Or was it what I mean by “soft”, or perhaps “nice to stroke”? Or perhaps she didn’t mean at all what in my syntax would be recorded as “That is an X”. After all, when she sees real kittens she not only utters her allophonic version of “kitty”, she usually squeals the word over and over, squats down near it, stretches out her arm towards it and opens and closes her fingers (an allomorphic version of “petting the kitten”?); purses her lips, and squints with pleasure. All she did with the fur piece was, smiling, to say “kitty” once and stroke it. Perhaps the syntax of that performance should be transcribed as “This is like a kitty”, or “Look at the funny kitty”, or “Aren’t soft things nice?”, or “See, I remember how pleased you are when I say ‘kitty’”, or “I like to be petted”. Can we decide this? Is it a choice between these definite alternatives? In each case her word was produced about a soft, warm, furry object of a certain size, shape, and weight. What did she learn in order to do that? What did she learn from having done it? If she had never made such leaps she would never have walked into speech. Having made it, meadows of communication can grow for us. Where you can leap to depends on where you stand. When, later, she picks up a gas bill and says “Here’s a letter”, or when, hearing a piece of music we’ve listened to together many times, she asks “Who’s Beethoven?”, or when she points to the television coverage of the Democratic National Convention and asks “What are you watching?”, I may realize we are not ready to walk certain places together.

But although I didn’t tell her, and she didn’t learn, either what the word “kitty” means or what a kitty is, if she keeps leaping and I keep looking and smiling, she will learn both. I have wanted to say: Kittens—that we call “kittens”—do not exist in her world yet, she has not acquired the forms of life which contain them. They do not exist in something like the way cities and mayors will not exist in her world until long after pumpkins and kittens do; or like the way God or love or responsibility or beauty do not exist in our world; we have not mastered, or we have forgotten, or we have distorted, or learned through fragmented models,
the forms of life which could make utterances like "God exists" or "God is dead" or "I love you" or "I cannot do otherwise" or "Beauty is but the beginning of terror" bear all the weight they could carry, express all they could take from us. We do not know the meaning of the words. We look away and leap around.

"Why be so difficult? Why perversely deny that the child has learned a word, and insist, with what must be calculated provocativeness, that your objects are 'not in her world'? Anyone will grant that she can't do everything we do with the word, nor know everything we do about kittens — I mean kittens; but when she says 'Kitty's nice' and evinces the appropriate behavior, then she's learned the name of an object, learned to name an object, and the same object we name. The differences are between what she does and what you do obvious, and any sensible person will take them for granted."

What I am afraid of is that we take too much for granted about what the learning and the sharing of language implies. What's wrong with thinking of learning language as being taught or told the names of things? Why did Wittgenstein call sharp attention to Augustine's having said or implied that it is, and speak of a particular "picture" of language underlying it, as though Augustine was writing from a particular, arbitrary perspective, and that the judgment was snap?

There is more than one "picture" Wittgenstein wishes to develop: one of them concerns the idea that all words are names, a second concerns the idea that learning a name (or any word) is being told what it means, a third is the idea that learning a language is a matter of learning (new) words. The first of these ideas, and Wittgenstein's criticism of it, has, I believe, received wider attention than the other two, which are the ones which concern us here. (The ideas are obviously related to one another, and I may say that I find the second two to give the best sense of what Wittgenstein finds "wrong" with the first. It isn't as I think it is usually taken, merely that "language has many functions" besides naming things; it is also that the ways philosophers account for naming makes it incomprehensible how language can so much as perform that function.)

Against the dominant idea of the dominant Empiricism, that what is basic to language (basic to the way it joins the world, basic to its supply of meaning, basic to the way it is taught and learned) are basic words, words which can (only) be learned and taught through "ostensive definitions", Wittgenstein says, among other things, that to be told what a word means (e.g., to know that when someone forms a sound and moves his arm he is pointing to something and saying its name, and to know what he is point-
ing to) we have to be able to ask what it means (what it refers to); and he says further: "One has already to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of asking a thing's name. But what does one have to know?" (Investigations, §30). I want to bring out two facts about this question of Wittgenstein's: that it is not because naming and asking are peculiarly mental or linguistic phenomena that a problem is created; and that the question is not an experimental but a conceptual one, or as one might put it, that the question "What do we call 'learning or asking for a name'?" had better be clear before we start experimenting to find out "how" "it" is done.

It will help to ask: Can a child attach a label to a thing? (Wittgenstein says that giving a thing a name is like attaching a label to something (§15). Other philosophers have said that too, and taken that as imagining the essential function of language. But what I take Wittgenstein to be suggesting is: Take the label analogy seriously; and then you'll see how little of language is like that. Let us see.) We might reply: "One already has to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of attaching a label to a thing. But what does one have to know?" Well, for example, one has to know what the thing in question is; what a label is; what the point of attaching a label to a thing is. Would we say that the child is attaching a label to a thing if he was pasting (the way a child pastes) bits of paper on various objects? Suppose, even, that he can say: "These are my labels" (i.e., that he says <zyzir may leybils>). (Here one begins to sense the force of a question like: What makes "These are labels" say that these are labels?) And that he says: "I am putting labels on my jars." Is he?

Mightn't we wish to say either Yes or No? Is it a matter of deciding which to say? What is it a decision about? Should we say, "Yes and No"? But what makes us want to say this? Or suppose we ask: In what sense does a child pay for something (cp. say something) (e.g., for groceries, or tickets to a puppet show)? Suppose he says "Let me pay" (and takes the money, handing it to the clerk (putting it on the counter?)). What did he do?

Perhaps we can say this: If you say "No, he is not putting labels on things, paying money (repeating names)", you are thinking: He doesn't know the significance of his behaviors; or, he doesn't know what labels or money or names are; or, he isn't intending to do these things, and you can't do them without intending to (but is that true?); anyway, he doesn't know what doing those things really would be (and what would be "doing them really"? Is he only pretending to?). If you say "Yes, he is pasting
labels on”, etc., then won’t you want to follow this with: “only not the way we do that”? But how is it different?

Maybe you feel: “What else would you say he’s doing? It’s not wrong to say ‘He’s pasting labels, paying money, learning names’, even though everyone knows that he isn’t quite or fully doing those things. You see the sense in which that is meant.” But what has begun to emerge is how far from clear that “sense” is, how little any of the ways we express that sense really satisfy us when we articulate them.

That the justifications and explanations we give of our language and conduct, that our ways of trying to intellectualize our lives, do not really satisfy us, is what, as I read him, Wittgenstein wishes us above all to grasp. This is what his “methods” are designed to get us to see. What directly falls under his criticism are not the results of philosophical argument but those unnoticed turns of mind, casts of phrase, which comprise what intellectual historians call “climates of opinion”, or “cultural style”, and which, unnoticed and therefore unassessed, defend conclusions from direct access — fragments, as it were, of our critical super-egos which one generation passes to the next along with, perhaps as the price of, its positive and permanent achievements: such fragments as “To be clear about our meaning we must define our terms”, “The meaning of a word is the experience or behavior it causes”, “We may change the names of things but their operation on the understanding never changes”, “Language is merely conventional”, “Belief is a (particular) feeling”, “Belief is a disposition caused by words (or signs)”, “If what I say proves false then I didn’t (don’t?) know it”, “We know our own minds directly”, “Moral judgments express approval or disapproval”, “Moral judgments are meant to get others to do something, or to change their attitudes”, “All rationally settleable questions are questions of language or questions of fact”, “Knowledge is increased only by reasoning or by collecting evidence”, “Taste is relative, and people might like, or get pleasure from anything” . . . If philosophy is the criticism a culture produces of itself, and proceeds essentially by criticizing past efforts at this criticism, then Wittgenstein’s originality lies in having developed modes of criticism that are not moralistic, that is, that do not leave the critic imagining himself free of the faults he sees around him, and which proceed not by trying to argue a given statement false or wrong, but by showing that the person making an assertion does not really know what he means, has not really said what he wished. But since self-scrutiny, the full examination and defense of one’s own position, has always been part of the impulse to philosophy, Wittgenstein’s originality lies not in the creation of the impulse,
but in finding ways to prevent it from defeating itself so easily, ways to make it methodical. That is Freud's advance over the insights of his predecessors at self-knowledge, e.g., Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and the poets and novelists he said anticipated him.

Now let me respond, in two ways, to the statement: “It's not wrong to say the child is pasting labels, repeating names; everyone sees the sense in which that is meant.”

First of all, it is not true that everybody knew that he wasn't quite “learning a thing's name” when Augustine said that in learning language he learned the names of things, and that we all “knew the sense” in which he meant what he said. (We do picture the mind as having inexplicable powers, without really knowing what these powers are, what we expect of them, nor in what sense they are inexplicable.)

Again, neither Wittgenstein nor I said it was wrong to say the child was “learning the names of things”, or “paying for the tickets”, or “pasting labels on her jars”. One thing we have heard Wittgenstein say about “learning names” was: “... Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one” (§32). And, in the same spirit, we could say: To describe the child as “pasting labels on his jars” or “paying for the tickets” is to describe the child as if he were an adult (or anyway, master of the adult activity). That is, we say about a child “She is pasting labels on jars” or “He paid for the tickets”, when we should also say “She's a mommy” or “He was Uncle Croesus today”. No one will say it's wrong (because untrue?) to say those things. And here we do begin more clearly to see the “sense” in which they are meant. You and the child know that you are really playing—which does not mean that what you are doing isn't serious. Nothing is more serious business for a child than knowing it will be an adult — and wanting to be, i.e., wanting to do the things we do — and knowing that it can't really do them yet. What is wrong is to say what a child is doing as though the child were an adult, and not recognize that he is still a child playing, above all growing. About “putting on labels”, “playing school”, “cooking supper”, “sending out invitations”, etc., that is, perhaps, easy to see. But elsewhere perhaps not.

Consider an older child, one ignorant of, but ripe for a pumpkin (knows how to ask for a name, what a fruit is, etc.). When you say “That is a pumpkin” we can comfortably say that this child learns what the word “pumpkin” means and what a pumpkin is. There may still be
something different about the pumpkins in his world; they may, for ex-
ample, have some unknown relation to pumps (the contrivance or the
kind of shoe) and some intimate association with Mr. Popkin (who lives
next door), since he obviously has the same name they do. But that prob-
ably won’t lead to trouble, and one day the person that was this child
may, for some reason, remember that he believed these things, had these
associations, when he was a child. (And does he, then, stop believing or
having them?)

And we can also say: When you say “I love my love” the child learns the
meaning of the word “love” and what love is. That (what you do) will be
love in the child’s world; and if it is mixed with resentment and intimida-
tion, then love is a mixture of resentment and intimidation, and when
love is sought that will be sought. When you say “I’ll take you tomorrow,
I promise”, the child begins to learn what temporal durations are, and
what trust is, and what you do will show what trust is worth. When you
say “Put on your sweater”, the child learns what commands are and what
authority is, and if giving orders is something that creates anxiety for you,
then authorities are anxious, authority itself uncertain.

Of course the person, growing, will learn other things about these con-
cepts and “objects” also. They will grow gradually as the child’s world
grows. But all he or she knows about them is what he or she has learned,
and all they have learned will be part of what they are. And what will
the day be like when the person “realizes” what he “believed” about
what love and trust and authority are? And how will he stop believing
it? What we learn is not just what we have studied; and what we have
been taught is not just what we were intended to learn. What we have in
our memories is not just what we have memorized.

What is important in failing to recognize “the spirit” in which we say
“The child, in learning language, is learning the names of things” is that
we imagine that we have explained the nature of language when we have
only avoided a recognition of its nature; and we fail to recognize how
(what it really means to say that) children learn language from us.

To summarize what has been said about this: In “learning language”
you learn not merely what the names of things are, but what a name is;
not merely what the form of expression is for expressing a wish, but what
expressing a wish is; not merely what the word for “father” is, but what a
father is; not merely what the word for “love” is, but what love is. In
learning language, you do not merely learn the pronunciation of sounds,
and their grammatical orders, but the “forms of life” which make those
sounds the words they are, do what they do — e.g., name, call, point, express a wish or affection, indicate a choice or an aversion, etc. And Wittgenstein sees the relations among these forms as 'grammatical' also.

Instead, then, of saying either that we tell beginners what words mean, or that we teach them what objects are, I will say: We initiate them, into the relevant forms of life held in language and gathered around the objects and persons of our world. For that to be possible, we must make ourselves exemplary and take responsibility for that assumption of authority; and the initiate must be able to follow us, in however rudimentary a way, naturally (look where our finger points, laugh at what we laugh at, comfort what we comfort, notice what we notice, find alike or remarkable or ordinary what we find alike or remarkable or ordinary, feel pain at what we feel pain at, enjoy the weather or the notion we enjoy, make the sounds we make); and he must want to follow us (care about our approval, like a smile better than a frown, a croon better than a croak, a pat better than a slap). “Teaching” here would mean something like “showing them what we say and do”, and “accepting what they say and do as what we say and do”, etc.; and this will be more than we know, or can say.

In what sense is the child's ability to “follow” us, his caring what we do, and his knowing when we have and have not accepted the identity of his words and deeds, learned? If I say that all of this is natural, I mean it is nothing more than natural. Most people do descend from apes into authorities, but it is not inevitable. There is no reason why they don't continue crawling, or walk on all fours, or slide their feet instead of lifting them; no reason why they don't laugh where they (most) now cry; no reason why they make (or “try” to make) the sounds and gestures we make; no reason why they see, if they do, a curving lake as like a carousel; no reason why, having learned to use the phrase “turn down the light” they will accept the phrase “turn down the phonograph” to mean what it means, recognizing that the factor “turn down” is the same, or almost the same, in both; and then accept the phrases “turn down the bed” and “turn down the awning” and “turn down the offer” to mean what they mean, while recognizing that the common factor has less, if any, relation to its former occurrences. If they couldn't do these things they would not grow into our world; but is the avoidance of that consequence the reason they do them?

We begin to feel, or ought to, terrified that maybe language (and understanding, and knowledge) rests upon very shaky foundations — a thin net over an abyss. (No doubt that is part of the reason philosophers offer
absolute "explanations" for it.) Suppose the child doesn't grasp what we mean? Suppose he doesn't respond differently to a shout and a song, so that what we "call" disapproval encourages him? Is it an accident that this doesn't normally happen? Perhaps we feel the foundations of language to be shaky when we look for, and miss, foundations of a particular sort, and look upon our shared commitments and responses — as moral philosophers in our liberal tradition have come to do — as more like particular agreements than they are. Such an idea can give us a sense that whether our words will go on meaning what they do depends upon whether other people find it worth their while to continue to understand us — that, seeing a better bargain elsewhere they might decide that we are no longer of their world; as though our sanity depended upon their approval of us, finding us to their liking.

This vision of our relation to the child prompts me — in addition to my suggestions in the early essays of *Must We Mean What We Say?*, along with the suggestions listed in the present Chapter VI (at the end of the section "The Appeal to Projective Imagination") — to a further characterization of the kind of claims made by philosophers who proceed from an examination of ordinary language, about the kind of validity appealed to when a philosopher says things like "When we say . . . we are implying . . ." or "We wouldn't call that (say) 'recounting' ". In such appeals such a philosopher is voicing (reminding us of) *statements of initiation*; telling himself or herself, and us, how in fact we (must) go about things, not predicting this or that performance. He is not claiming something as true of the world, for which he is prepared to offer a basis — such statements are not synthetic; he is claiming something as true of himself (of his "world", I keep wanting to say) for which he is offering himself, the details of his feeling and conduct, as authority. In making such claims, which cannot be countered by evidence or formal logic, he is not being dogmatic; any more than someone who says "I didn't promise to . . .", or "I intend to . . .", "I wish . . .", or "I have to . . ." is being dogmatic, though what he says cannot be countered, in the usual way, by evidence. The authority one has, or assumes, in expressing statements of initiation, in saying "We", is related to the authority one has in expressing or declaring one's promises or intentions. Such declarations cannot be countered by evidence because they are not supported by evidence. We may, of course, be wrong about what we say and do or will say and do. But that failure is not one which can be corrected with a more favorable position of observation or a fuller mastery in the recognition of objects; it requires a new look at oneself and a fuller realization of what one is doing or feeling. An expression of in-
tention is not a specific claim about the world, but an utterance (outer-
ance) of oneself; it is countered not by saying that a fact about the world
is otherwise than you supposed, but by showing that your world is other-
wise than you see. When you are wrong here, you are not in fact mistaken
but in soul muddled.

Projecting a Word

I said that in trying to sketch the vision of language underlying the ap-
peals to ordinary language I would have to discuss both what it meant to
say that “a word is learned in certain contexts” and what I had in mind
in speaking of “appropriate projections into further contexts”. It is the
second of these topics which is most directly relevant to what more I shall
have to say about the limitations of the appeal to ordinary language as a
direct criticism of traditional philosophy; but a discussion of the first was
necessary to give a concrete sense of the nature of this problem.

If what can be said in a language is not everywhere determined by
rules, nor its understanding anywhere secured through universals, and if
there are always new contexts to be met, new needs, new relationships,
new objects, new perceptions to be recorded and shared, then perhaps it
is as true of a master of a language as of his apprentice that though “in a
sense” we learn the meaning of words and what objects are, the learning
is never over, and we keep finding new potencies in words and new ways
in which objects are disclosed. The “routes of initiation” are never
closed. But who is the authority when all are masters? Who initiates us
into new projections? Why haven’t we arranged to limit words to certain
contexts, and then coin new ones for new eventualities? The fact that we
do not behave this way must be at the root of the fierce ambiguity of or-
dinary language, and that we won’t behave this way means that for real
precision we are going to have to get words pinned to a meaning through
explicit definition and limitation of context. Anyway, for some sorts of
precision, for some purposes, we will need definitions. But maybe the
very ambiguity of ordinary language, though sometimes, some places, a
liability, is just what gives it the power, of illumination, of enriching
perception, its partisans are partial to. Besides, to say that a word “is”
ambiguous may only be to say that it “can” mean various things, can,
like a knife, be used in various ways; it doesn’t mean that on any given
occasion it is being used various ways, nor that on the whole we have
trouble in knowing which way it is being used. And in that case, the more
uses words “can” have, then the more precise, or exact, that very possibility might allow us to be, as occasion arises. But let’s move closer.

We learn the use of “feed the kitty”, “feed the lion”, “feed the swans”, and one day one of us says “feed the meter”, or “feed in the film”, or “feed the machine”, or “feed his pride”, or “feed wire”, and we understand, we are not troubled. Of course we could, in most of these cases, use a different word, not attempt to project or transfer “feed” from contexts like “feed the monkey” into contexts like “feed the machine”. But what should be gained if we did? And what would be lost?

What are our choices? We could use a more general verb, like “put”, and say merely “Put the money in the meter”, “Put new material into the machine”, “Put film into the camera”, etc. But first, that merely deprives us of a way of speaking which can discriminate differences which, in some instances, will be of importance; e.g., it does not discriminate between putting a flow of material into a machine and putting a part made of some new material into the construction of the machine. And it would begin to deprive us of the concept we have of the emotions. Is the idea of feeding pride or hope or anxiety any more metaphorical, any less essential to the concept of an emotion, than the idea that pride and hope, etc., grow and, moreover, grow on certain circumstances? Knowing what sorts of circumstances these are and what the consequences and marks of over-feeding are, is part of knowing what pride is. And what other way is there of knowing? Experiments? But those are the very concepts an experiment would itself be constructed from.

Second, to use a more general verb does not reduce the range of transfer or projection, but increases it. For in order that “put” be a relevant candidate for this function, it must be the same word we use in contexts like “Put the cup on the saucer”, “Put your hands over your head”, “Put out the cat”, “Put on your best armor”, “Put on your best manner”, “Put out the light and then put out the light”.

We could, alternatively, use a more specific verb than “feed”. There would be two ways of doing this, either (a) to use a word already in use elsewhere, or (b) to use a new word. In (a) we have the same case as before. In (b) we might “feed eels”, “fod lions”, “fawd swans”, “fide pride”, “fad machines”. . . . Suppose we find a culture which in fact does “change the verb” in this way. Won’t we want to ask: Why are these forms different in the different cases? What differences are these people seeing and attaching importance to, in the way these things are (as we say, but they cannot say) “fed”? (I leave open the question whether the
“f – d” form is morphemic; I assume merely that we have gathered from the contexts in which it is used that it can always be translated by our word “feed”.) We could try to answer that by seeing what else the natives would and would not accept as “feeding”, “fodding”, “fawding”, etc. What other animals or things or abstractions they would say they were “fiding” or “fadding” . . . . (I am also assuming that we can tell there is no reason in superficial grammar why the forms are as they are, e.g., no agreement in number, gender, etc.) Could we imagine that there were no other contexts in which these forms were used; that for every case in which we have to translate their verb as “feed” they use a different form of (the “morpheme”) “f – d”? This would be a language in which forms were perfectly intolerant of projection, one in which the natives would simply look puzzled if we asked whether you could feed a lion or fod an eel. What would we have to assume about them, their forms of life, in order to “imagine” that? Presumably, that they saw no connection between giving food to eels, to lions, and to swans, that these were just different actions, as different as feeding an eel, hunting it, killing it, eating it. If we had to assume that, that might indeed be enough to make us call them “primitive”. And wouldn’t we, in addition, have to assume, not only that they saw them as different, but that these activities were markedly different; and not different in the way it is different for us to feed swans and lions (we don’t hold bread crumbs to a lion’s mouth, we don’t spear whole loaves with a pitchfork and shovel them at swans) but different in some regularized way, e.g., in the preparations gone through in gathering the “food”, in the clothes worn for the occasion, in the time of day at which it was done, in the songs sung on each occasion. . . ? And then don’t we have to imagine that these preparations, clothes, times, songs are never used for other purposes, or if they are, that no connection between these activities and those of “feeding” are noticed or noted in the language? And hence further imagine that the way these clothes, times, songs are used are simply different again, different the way wearing clothes is from washing them or rending or mending them? Can everything be just different?

But though language — what we call language — is tolerant, allows projection, not just any projection will be acceptable, i.e., will communicate. Language is equally, definitively, intolerant — as love is tolerant and intolerant of differences, as materials or organisms are of stress, as communities are of deviation, as arts or sciences are of variation.

While it is true that we must use the same word in, project a word into, various contexts (must be willing to call some contexts the same), it is
equally true that what will count as a legitimate projection is deeply controlled. You can "feed peanuts to a monkey" and "feed pennies to a meter", but you cannot feed a monkey by stuffing pennies in its mouth, and if you mash peanuts into a coin slot you won't be feeding the meter. Would you be feeding a lion if you put a bushel of carrots in his cage? That he in fact does not eat them would not be enough to show that you weren't; he may not eat his meat. But in the latter case "may not eat" means "isn't hungry then" or "refuses to eat it". And not every case of "not eating" is "refusing food". The swan who glides past the easter egg on the shore, or over a school of minnows, or under the pitchfork of meat the keeper is carrying for the lion cage, is not refusing to eat the egg, the fish, or the meat. What will be, or count as, "being fed" is related to what will count as "refusing to eat", and thence related to "refusing to mate", "refusing to obey", etc. What can a lion or a swan refuse? Well, what can they be offered? (If we say "The battery refuses to respond" are we thinking of the battery as stubborn?)

I might say: An object or activity or event onto or into which a concept is projected, must invite or allow that projection; in the way in which, for an object to be (called) an art object, it must allow or invite the experience and behavior which are appropriate or necessary to our concepts of the appreciation or contemplation or absorption . . . of an art object. What kind of object will allow or invite or be fit for that contemplation, etc., is no more accidental or arbitrary than what kind of object will be fit to serve as (what we call) a "shoe". Of course there are variations possible; because there are various ways, and purposes, for being shod. On a given occasion one may fail to recognize a given object as a shoe — perhaps all we see is a twist of leather thong, or several blocks of wood. But what kind of failure is this? It may help to say: What we fail to see here is not that the object in question is a shoe (that would be the case where, say, we failed to notice what it was the hostess shoved under the sofa, or where we had been distracted from our inventory of the objects in a painting and later seem to remember a cat's being where you say a shoe lies on its side), but rather we fail to see how the object in question is a shoe (how it would be donned, and worn, and for what kind of activities or occasions).

The question "How do we use the word 'shoe' (or 'see' or 'voluntary' or 'anger' or 'feed' or 'imagine' or 'language')?" is like the question a child once asked me, looking up from the paper on which she was drawing and handing me her crayon, "How do you make trees?"; and perhaps she also asked, "How do you make a house or people or people smiling or
walking or dancing or the sun or a ship or the waves. . . ?". Each of these questions can be answered in two or three strokes, as the former questions can each be answered in two or three examples. Answered, that is, for the moment, for that question then. We haven't said or shown everything about making trees or using the expression "But now imagine. . .". But then there is no "everything" to be said. For we haven't been asked, or asked ourselves, everything either; nor could we, however often we wish that were possible.

That there are no explanations which are, as it were, complete in themselves, is part of what Wittgenstein means when he says, "In giving explanations I already have to use language full-blown . . . ; this by itself shows that I can adduce only exterior facts about language" (Investigations, § 120). And what goes for explaining my words goes for giving directions and for citing rules in a game and for justifying my behavior or excusing my child's or for making requests . . . or for the thousands of things I do in talking. You cannot use words to do what we do with them until you are initiate of the forms of life which give those words the point and shape they have in our lives. When I give you directions, I can adduce only exterior facts about directions, e.g., I can say, "Not that road, the other, the one passing the clapboard houses; and be sure to bear left at the railroad crossing". But I cannot say what directions are in order to get you to go the way I am pointing, nor say what my direction is, if that means saying something which is not a further specification of my direction, but as it were, cuts below the actual pointing to something which makes my pointing finger point. When I cite or teach you a rule, I can adduce only exterior facts about rules, e.g., say that it applies only when such-and-such is the case, or that it is inoperative when another rule applies, etc. But I cannot say what following rules is überhaupt, nor say how to obey a rule in a way which doesn't presuppose that you already know what it is to follow them.

For our strokes or examples to be the explanations we proffer, to serve the need we see expressed, the child must, we may say, see how those few strokes are a tree or a house ("There is the door, there is the window, there's the chimney with smoke coming out. . ."); the person must see how the object is a shoe ("There is the sole, that's for the toe. . ."); how the action was — why you call it one, say it was — done in anger ("He was angry at. . .", "He knew that would hurt", "That gesture was no accident", "He doesn't usually speak sharply to his cat". . .). Those strokes are not the only way to make a house (that is not the only instance of what we call a shoe; that is not the only kind of action we call an affront,
or one performed voluntarily) but if you didn’t see that and how they made a house, you probably wouldn’t find or recognize any other ways. “How much do we have to imagine?” is like the question, “How many strokes do we have to use?”; and mustn’t the answer be, “It depends”? “How do we know these ten strokes make a house?” is like the question, “How do we know that those ten words make that question?” It is at this level that the answer “Because we know the grammar of visual or verbal representation” is meant to operate.

Things, and things imagined, are not on a par. Six imagined rabbits plus one real rabbit in your hat do not total either seven imagined or seven real rabbits. But the very ability to draw a rabbit, like the ability to imagine one, or to imagine what we would feel or do or say in certain circumstances, depends upon the mastery of a form of representation (e.g., knowing what “That is a pumpkin” says) and on the general knowledge of the thing represented (e.g., knowing what a pumpkin is). That language can be represented in language is a discovery about language, one which shows the kind of stability language has (viz., the kind of stability an art has, the kind of stability a continuing culture has) and the kind of general knowledge we have about the expressions we use (viz., the kind we have about houses, faces, battles, visitations, colors, examples . . .) in order to represent or plan or use or explain them. To know how to use the word “anger” is to know what anger is. (“The world is my representation.”)

I am trying to bring out, and keep in balance, two fundamental facts about human forms of life, and about the concepts formed in those forms: that any form of life and every concept integral to it has an indefinite number of instances and directions of projection; and that this variation is not arbitrary. Both the “outer” variance and the “inner” constancy are necessary if a concept is to accomplish its tasks — of meaning, understanding, communicating, etc., and in general, guiding us through the world, and relating thought and action and feeling to the world. However many instances or kinds of instances of a concept there are — however many kinds of objects we call shoes — the word “shoe” can be (verbally) defined, and in that sense has a meaning (cf. Berkeley, Principles, Introduction, section 18). The aspect of meaning I am trying to get at, that condition of stability and tolerance I have described as essential to the function of a concept (the use of a word), can perhaps be brought out again this way: to say that a word or concept has a (stable) meaning is to say that new and the most various instances can be recognized as falling under or failing to fall under that concept; to say that a concept must be
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tolerant is to say that were we to assign a new word to "every" new instance, no word would have the kind of meaning or power a word like "shoe" has. Or: there would be no instances, and hence no concepts either.

It is one thing to say that words have both connotation and denotation and that these are not the same; it is something else to try to say how these are related to one another — beyond remarks at the level of "on the whole (with obvious exceptions) they vary inversely". The level at which I could wish an answer to this question would be the level at which we could answer the questions: How do we know that an instance "falls under" a concept?; or: How, having a word "defined" ostensively, do we know what point or points of the displayed object the ostension is to strike? (Is that even a fair formulation of the problem? For upon what specific point or definite set of points does the "ostensive definition" of, e.g., a monkey or an organ grinder turn? There would be definite points only where there are definite alternatives — e.g., the difference between an Old World and a New World monkey.) Or: What is the difference between regarding an object now as an individual, now as an example? One way of putting the problem about examples (and hence one problem of universals) is: How is the question "Of what is this object (say what we call a shoe) an example?" to be answered? One wants to answer it by holding up the shoe and crying out, "Why, an example of this!". Would it help to hold up a different shoe? If you did, and someone then replies, "Now I see what it (the first shoe) is an example of", what would he have seen? (This seems to be what Berkeley's idea of a particular idea (or object) representing others of "the same sort" amounts to.)

I might summarize the vision I have been trying to convey of the tempering of speech — the simultaneous tolerance and intolerance of words — by remarking that when Wittgenstein says "Essence is expressed by grammar" (§371), he is not denying the importance, or significance, of the concept of essence, but retrieving it. The need for essence is satisfied by grammar, if we see our real need. Yet at an early critical juncture of the Investigations, the point at which Wittgenstein raises the "great question that lies behind all these considerations" (§65), he imagines someone complaining that he has "nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language."; and he replies: "... this is true. — Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all." He then goes on to discuss the notion of "what is common" to all things called by the same name, ob-
viously alluding to one familiar candidate philosophers have made to bear the name "universal" or "essence"; and he enjoins us, instead of saying "there must be something in common" — which would betray our possession by a philosophical "picture" — to "look and see" whether there is. He says that what we will actually find will be "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. . . . I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'" (§66, §67); and it looks as if he is here offering the notion of "family resemblances" as an alternative to the idea of "essence". But if this is so, his idea is empty, it explains nothing. For a philosopher who feels the need of universals to explain meaning or naming will certainly still feel their need to explain the notion of "family resemblance". That idea would counter the idea of universals only if it had been shown that family resemblance is all we need to explain the fact of naming and that objects may bear a family resemblance to one another and may have nothing in common; which is either false or trivial. It is false if it is supposed to mean that, asked if these brothers have anything in common and we cannot say what, we will say "Nothing at all". (We may not be able to say very well what it is, but we needn't, as Wittgenstein imagines to be our alternative, merely "play with words" and say "There is something common to all. . . . namely the disjunction of all their common properties" (§67). For that would not even seem to say, if we see something in common among them, what we see. We might come up with, "They all have that unmistakeable Karamazov quality". That may not tell you what they have in common, but only because you don't know the Karamazovs; haven't grasped their essence, as it were.) Or else it is trivial, carries no obvious philosophical implication; for "They have nothing in common" has as specific and ordinary a use as "They have something in common" and just as Wittgenstein goes on to show ordinary uses of "what is common" which do not lead us to the idea of universals (cf. §72), so we can show ordinary uses of "there is nothing common to all" (which we may say about a set of triplets) which will equally not lead us away from the idea of universals.

But I think that all that the idea of "family resemblances" is meant to do, or need do, is to make us dissatisfied with the idea of universals as explanations of language, of how a word can refer to this and that and that other thing, to suggest that it fails to meet "our real need". Once we see that the expression "what is common" has ordinary uses, and that these are different from what universals are meant to cover; and, more
importantly, see that concepts do not usually have, and do not need "rigid limits", so that universals are neither necessary nor even useful in explaining how words and concepts apply to different things (cf. §68); and again, see that the grasping of a universal cannot perform the function it is imagined to have, for a new application of a word or concept will still have to be made out, explained, in the particular case, and then the explanations themselves will be sufficient to explain the projection; and see, finally, that I know no more about the application of a word or concept than the explanations I can give, so that no universal or definition would, as it were, represent my knowledge (cf. §73) — once we see all this, the idea of a universal no longer has its obvious appeal, it no longer carries a sense of explaining something profound. (Obviously the drive to universals has more behind it than the sense that the generality of words must be explained. Another source of its power is the familiar fact that subjects and predicates function differently. Another is the idea that all we can know of an object is its intersection of essences.)

I think that what Wittgenstein ultimately wishes to show is that it makes no sense at all to give a general explanation for the generality of language, because it makes no sense at all to suppose words in general might not recur, that we might possess a name for a thing (say "chair" or "feeding") and yet be willing to call nothing (else) "the same thing". And even if you say, with Berkeley, that "an idea [or word] which considered in itself is particular, becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort" (Principles, Introduction, section 12) you still haven't explained how this word gets used for these various "particulars", nor what the significance is if they don't. This suggests that the effort to explain the generality of words is initiated by a prior step which produces the idea of a word as a "particular", a step of "considering it in itself". And what is that like? We learn words in certain contexts. . . . What are we to take as the "particular" present here? Being willing to call other ideas (or objects) "the same sort" and being willing to use "the same word" for them is one and the same thing. The former does not explain the latter.

There is a Karamazov essence, but you will not find it if you look for a quality (look, that is, with the wrong "picture" of a quality in mind); you will find it by learning the grammar of "Karamazov": it is part of its grammar that that is what "an intellectual Karamazov" is, and that is what "a spiritual Karamazov" is, and that is what "Karamazov authority" is, . . . Each is too much, and irresistible.
To ask for a general explanation for the generality of language would be like asking for an explanation of why children acquiring language take what is said to them as consequential, as expressing intention, as projecting expectations which may or may not be satisfied by the world. But do we imagine that we know why we (non-children) take what is said and what is written as inconsequential, as without implication, as not mattering? It seems to me that growing up (in modern culture? in capitalist culture?) is learning that most of what is said is only more or less meant—as if words were stuffs of fabric and we saw no difference between shirts and sails and ribbons and rags. This could be because we have too little of something or too much, or because we are either slobs or saints. Driven by philosophy outside language-games, and in this way repudiating our criteria, is a different way to live, but it depends on the same fact of language as do the other lives within it—that it is an endless field of possibility and that it cannot dictate what is said now, can no more assure the sense of what is said, its depth, its helpfulness, its accuracy, its wit, than it can insure its truth to the world. Which is to say that language is not only an acquirement but a bequest; and it is to say that we are stingy in what we attempt to inherit. One might think of poetry as the second inheritance of language. Or, if learning a first language is thought of as the child’s acquiring of it, then poetry can be thought of as the adult’s acquiring of it, as coming into possession of his or her own language, full citizenship. (Thoreau distinguishes along these lines between what he calls the mother tongue and the father tongue.) Poetry thereby celebrates its language by making it a return on its birth, by reciprocating.

It is of immediate relevance to what I have been asking about Wittgenstein’s view of language, and indicates one general and important limitation in my account, to notice that in moving, in Part II of the Investigations, to “figurative” or “secondary” senses of a word (which Wittgenstein explicitly says are not “metaphorical senses”, cf. Investigations, p. 216), Wittgenstein is moving more concentratedly to regions of a word’s use which cannot be assured or explained by an appeal to its ordinary language games (in this, these uses are like metaphorical ones). Such uses have consequences in the kind of understanding and communication they make possible. I want to say: It is such shades of sense, intimations of meaning, which allow certain kinds of subtlety or delicacy of communication; the connection is intimate, but fragile. Persons who cannot use words, or gestures, in these ways with you may yet be in your world, but perhaps not of your flesh. The phenomenon I am calling “projecting a
word" is the fact of language which, I take it, is sometimes responded to by saying that "All language is metaphorical". Perhaps one could say: the possibility of metaphor is the same as the possibility of language generally, but what is essential to the projection of a word is that it proceeds, or can be made to proceed, *naturally*; what is essential to a functioning metaphor is that its "transfer" is *unnatural* — it breaks up the established, normal directions of projection.