

Chapter 8

The visual room*

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Exactly two hundred years ago in 1789, the Austrian philosopher K.L. Reinhold said:

The idea [*Vorstellung*] is all there is about which all philosophers agree that it is real. At least if there is anything at all about which there is agreement in the philosophical world, it is the idea; no idealist, no egoist, no dogmatic skeptic can deny the existence of the idea.¹

About one hundred years ago, Frege had begun to question the philosophical relevance of the concept 'idea'. Frege never denied the reality or existence of ideas which Reinhold had claimed to be immune from philosophical doubt. But he flatly denied that the concept of idea is of vital importance for a philosophical theory of human knowledge. For, first, ideas are not what human knowledge is about. (This holds, of course, only with the exception of the few things we know about ideas.) And, secondly, ideas are not the kind of things in which human knowledge consists. What knowledge consists in must be something that intrinsically fixes a truth value, and it must be something that remains the same when different people have it. (This holds at least in those cases in which we want to say that different people know - or might know - exactly the same things.) But ideas do not intrinsically fix a truth value, nor can two people ever have the same idea. Frege's conclusion is that the concept of idea plays no important role in a philosophical theory of knowledge; its proper place is in a psychological account on what goes on in human beings when they acquire or apply knowledge.

Traditional conceptions of ideas - such as the Cartesian one - are not very well characterized. The word 'idea' is often used to

cover a variety of things which we nowadays consider as distinct. Perhaps the most telling characterization of what is meant by this word can be found in the 'Third Meditation': they are *tamquam rerum imagines*, as it were pictures of things. That is what the word 'idea' appropriately applies to, according to Descartes. The qualification ('as it were') is fairly indeterminate but necessary, for at least some ideas are said to be not like pictures at all (e.g. our innate idea of God).

When Frege attacks the tendency to attach central importance to the concept of idea, he assumes that ideas have at least the following interconnected characteristics:

- (i) Ideas are entities of a psychological kind. They are not brain-states or some other kind of physical thing.
- (ii) Ideas are essentially subjective; they are contents of a particular mind or consciousness. If *x* is an idea of mine, it cannot be an idea of yours. (To say that *x* is a content of my mind is not to say that *x* is in me. Strictly speaking, ideas are nowhere. When we say that a certain idea is in a certain person, this is, for Frege, just a metaphorical way of expressing the essential subjectivity of ideas.²)
- (iii) Ideas are *had*. They cannot be sensed or thought; they can neither be 'perceived' nor 'comprehended'. It is external objects which one might see, smell, taste, etc. Thoughts one might grasp (or 'comprehend'). But ideas one has. 'Having' is the word which Frege selects for the purpose of referring to the special relationship which obtains between a person and any of her or his ideas.
- (iv) There are no ideas which are not had.

According to the above features of ideas, as characterized by Frege, it is fair to say: ideas are *relata*, i.e. entities that stand in relations (to persons who have them.) And if a person has an idea, this is - in at least one sense - an essentially subjective state of affairs: no one else could have the very same idea. Taking a linguistic turn, it is fair to say that Frege held that '*. . . has (the idea) —*' expresses a relation of eminent intimacy: whatever name of an idea is inserted in the second slot of this dyadic predicate, the resulting monadic predicate will be true of at most one person. Name an idea, and you've picked out its 'haver' or owner.³

Before we turn to the difficulties that Wittgenstein finds in this conception of ideas, we should note two advantages it has over

many traditional accounts. First, the relation that obtains between a person and an idea is not a perceptual relation of some kind. Secondly, the spatial idioms ('in the mind', etc.) involved in our common discourse about ideas are just a manner of speaking; we should think of them as awkward metaphors for the essential subjectivity involved in having ideas.

For the sake of simplicity, let us concentrate on visual ideas, that is ideas of the kind we have when we see or imagine ordinary objects. Let i be such an idea, e.g. the idea that Harvey had yesterday at the stroke of eight. According to Frege's account, it holds that no one else but Harvey ever can have i . A question arises. Given that a sentence of the kind 'x has (the idea) y' entails that no one else (but x) has y, then how should this entailment be rendered in a logically perspicuous notation? There seem to be two possibilities. One way is to characterize the idea in such a manner that the only possible owner of the idea is determined by this characterization. (Accordingly, if D is an appropriate definite description of the idea i just mentioned above, then it follows on purely logical grounds that the predicate 'has' \wedge D applies to Harvey uniquely.) The other way is to characterize the relation of *having* in such a manner that its first relatum is determined by this characterization. (Accordingly, ideas could be specified 'anonymously', i.e. leaving it open who has them; we could, given the second way, allow for a description like 'the most exciting idea anyone ever had'. Such a description is ruled out by the other analysis.)

The problem is this. According to Frege's account, a sentence of the kind

(v) x has y

expresses that a certain relation obtains between a certain person and a certain idea. Such a sentence entails that no other person stands in the same relation to the same idea. We have noted at least two candidates for a logically appropriate representation of the truth condition expressed by such a sentence:

(vi) Has(x, y_x)

(vii) Has_x(x, y).

If we choose (vi) as our analysis of (v), we should add a convention to the effect that the subscript of the second relatum-expression must, on pain of analytical falsity (or lack of well-

formedness), agree with the first relatum-expression. If we choose (vii), our convention should guarantee an agreement of the relation-expression's subscript with the first relatum-expression. But which should we choose? Either choice seems completely arbitrary. Perhaps, then, what we really need is another, and better, way of analysing sentences like (v).

THE FIRST PARAGRAPH

Frege did not deal with questions like these. But Wittgenstein did, or so I shall assume in trying to understand §398 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In this section, Wittgenstein attacks some conception of visual ideas which is so much like the Fregean one that it seems reasonable (or at least acceptable for the purpose of identifying a determinate target of his remarks) to suppose that it actually is the Fregean conception. This is of course not to say that Wittgenstein means to criticize Frege. He criticizes a certain conception of ideas. This conception is metaphysically neutral in the sense that it does not entail any of the grand *isms* - Frege held it, and he was a realist; when Wittgenstein used to hold it (as we may suspect), he was a solipsist; and this conception is consistent with idealistic doctrines as well. This is important to note because Wittgenstein's earlier discussions of this conception of ideas are sometimes in the context of a discussion of solipsism.⁴ So it may seem that what Wittgenstein really means to attack is solipsism. But this is not so. The topic in §398 is clearly whether it makes sense to assume that having ideas is something essentially subjective. A negative answer will have repercussions for any doctrine that relies on a Fregean conception of ideas, not just for Wittgensteinian solipsism.

Let us turn to §398. And let us imagine that Wittgenstein is sitting in a room with somebody who holds a theory of visual perception and imagination that is based on the Fregean conception of ideas. The Fregean, as we might call him for convenience, has just put forward the outlines of his theory. He holds that whenever a person sees or visually imagines something, he or she has ideas. The idea that one has when one, for example, looks around in this room, the Fregean claims, cannot be had by anybody else; at most, another person might have a similar idea (but this is a dubious claim anyway because there is no

possibility of comparing different people's ideas).⁵ But how can one characterize the idea one has? It seems very natural to describe the visual idea of a room by mentioning visible features of the room. But if the Fregean tries out a description like 'It is the visual image of a room in which there are two windows and a heater beneath them', then Wittgenstein might object that exactly the same description is true of something that he presently has as well and that the Fregean therefore has failed to describe his idea in such a way that his claim ('it cannot be had by anybody else') is justified. So far, the description of the idea has not yielded anything so special that nobody else might have the thing described.

It is at this point that §398 starts. The Fregean, less confident, repeats his claim, now laying stress on ideas of imagination (but obviously he has not completely abandoned hope of pushing it through for visual perception also):

But when I imagine something, or even if I actually *saw* objects, I shall after all *have* something which my neighbour has not.⁶

To this Wittgenstein replies, in his inimitable manner:

I understand you. You want to look about you and say: 'At any rate, only I have THIS.'

Indeed, the Fregean certainly would like to say this, if he only had a way of pointing to his visual idea - this would save him the trouble of searching for an appropriate way of describing that which only he has. But he knows very well that pointing is out of the question. According to his view, his ideas cannot be seen (or otherwise sensed) by anybody, not even by himself. What the demonstrative 'THIS' is meant to refer to is nothing that can be demonstrated.

Wittgenstein makes a short remark on the uselessness of the Fregean's reply⁷ and raises a fairly radical question:

Is it not equally well possible to say: 'There is here no question of a 'seeing' - and therefore none of a 'having' - nor of a subject, nor therefore of the I either'? Might I not ask: In what sense do you *have* that of which you are talking and of which you say that only you have it? Do you possess it? You do not even *see* it.

Of course, the Fregean is prepared to concede that Wittgenstein is right about the first and the last point: he does not see the idea he has. But Wittgenstein seems to want to discard the words that the Fregean badly needs in order to convey what he is driving at: the word 'I' and the word 'have'. If these words – just like the useless demonstrative 'THIS' – should turn out to be unsuitable for the Fregean's current purpose, then he would be at a complete loss. How could he ever hope to make himself intelligible?

Wittgenstein now concentrates on the strange use the Fregean makes of the word 'have'. The first observation is that this word is in need of elucidation if it is meant to express a relation between persons and things that are not visible even in principle. But we can pass over this point – Wittgenstein himself does – for his next point seems to be much more forceful.

Would you not have to say of it [i.e. THIS something] that no one has it? For it is clear: if you logically exclude another person's having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it.

How can Wittgenstein say that an utterance of 'I have THIS' is senseless if it is made by the Fregean? To see more clearly what is at issue, we should get rid of the demonstrative. For the Fregean should concede that this was just a useful linguistic makeshift to which he resorted overhastily. A genuine demonstrative is used properly only if its referent can, at least in principle, be sensed. No such restriction applies to names, the Fregean might argue. So let us assume that in the meantime he has introduced a name for the visual idea he wants to talk about, for example by saying 'I hereby introduce *Hoc* as a rigid designator for the visual idea I had when I uttered the word "THIS"'. Certainly, Wittgenstein has plenty of objections against this move on tap, but these are not our immediate concern here. To straighten things out, it seems useful to keep the point about the demonstrative separate from the one that Wittgenstein tries to make about the Fregean's use of the word 'having'.

So let us ask again: How can Wittgenstein say that 'I have *Hoc*', as used by the Fregean, is senseless? What exactly is his argument in the passage just quoted? A first answer is this: in any case, the word 'have', as used by the Fregean, has lost its ordinary sense. Ordinarily, when we say that a person has something, *y*, we say this only if (at least in principle) somebody else

might have γ . Our common concept of *having* includes the possibility of change of ownership. And though the word 'have', as the Fregean prefers to use it, has lost its ordinary sense, it has not yet acquired a new sense; hence what he says is, strictly speaking, senseless.

If this is Wittgenstein's argument, then it seems similar in philosophical design to his first observation (about the visibility of what is possessed). And the Fregean might easily deny all this. He might insist that he is just applying the common concept of having to things about which we ordinarily (outside philosophical contexts) do not talk. Having, he might say, does not essentially involve the possibility of a change of ownership, even if it does so usually (and with regard to things of ordinary interest). Let us escape from the impending quarrel about words and turn to something less dull.

There is a second way of construing Wittgenstein's argument. The Fregean holds the following:

(viii) It is logically excluded that anybody else but I has Hoc.

(viii) entails

(ix) It is senseless to say of anybody else but me that he has Hoc.

Given the truth of (viii) and (ix), we are left with only two possibilities, namely (x) and (xi):

(x) I have Hoc.

(xi) I do not have Hoc.

But assuming that the introduction of the name 'Hoc' was successful, (xi) is a self-defeating statement. Therefore the Fregean is left with (x) as the only statement about who has Hoc that is not ruled out on linguistic grounds. Therefore (x) is what Wittgenstein calls a 'grammatical sentence' [*grammatischer Satz*]. Such sentences have no sense (or shall we say: what is said in using such sentences makes no sense?). To use a grammatical sentence is pointless when it comes to making statements: no information is given, no possible state of the world is excluded.⁸

A third interpretation of Wittgenstein's statement is as follows. Consider the extensions of the two predicates:

(xii) The Fregean has —.

(xiii) Wittgenstein has —.

According to the Fregean's conception, these extensions are necessarily disjunct sets of ideas. If an idea belongs to the extension of (xii), it cannot belong to the extension of (xiii), and *vice versa*. But, this being so, how can we assume - as the Fregean does - that there is a common dyadic predicate,

(xiv) . . . has —.

from which (xii) and (xiii) stem? Should we not rather say that 'has', if it is a genuine relational expression, takes on a different sense each time it is applied to a different person? Put more assertively, the point here is that the word 'has' lacks a uniform meaning when applied to different persons. And if this is so, then it makes no sense to contrast the Fregean's having Hoc with Wittgenstein's not having it, because two different concepts of having are involved. Hence it is senseless, in a way, for the Fregean to assert that he has something which nobody else has. He means to emphasize a contrast which, by his own lights, does not exist.

Whatever might be the argument Wittgenstein has in mind, the exegetical problem at this stage consists rather in a surplus of *prima facie* feasible interpretations than in there being no plausible reading in sight. This will change as we move on. But before we continue, let us give a rough summary of the first paragraph of §398. The Fregean has not found a way of specifying, exactly and intelligibly, what he is talking about when he claims that he has it and is the only one who can have it. His attempt at demonstratively referring to 'it' was doomed to failure, and he has not yet offered anything more promising. Moreover, the very intelligibility of his use of the word 'have' has been challenged.

THE SECOND PARAGRAPH

At the beginning of the second paragraph, Wittgenstein gives the Fregean a second chance, or so it seems. Surprisingly, he turns very accommodating, assuring the Fregean of his understanding.

But what, after all, is it that you are speaking of? I said already that I know inside what you mean.⁹

But Wittgenstein hastens to add that it is not an object or some kind of entity he knows (when he knows, 'inside', *what* the Fregean means). What he knows is rather this: how one feels and tends to behave and speak if one is under the spell of the Fregean's doctrine and tries to explain it.

But what that meant is this: that I know how one thinks to conceive this object, to see it, to - as it were - refer to it by means of looking and gesturing. I know how one stares ahead and looks about one in this case - and other things as well.

Wittgenstein knows - or so he seems to want to say - what might be called the psychology of holding the Fregean's views, such as what it is like to feel the urge to say such things as the Fregean does say. Yet he does not accept the Fregean's claim that what he means (and what he means to refer to) is a certain entity of a special kind: namely his very own visual idea of the room. Nothing hinges here on 'the real existence' of a material room over and above his idea; his idea might, for the present purposes, be just as well merely an idea of imagination. (We are not concerned at present with any epistemological questions about how reliable ideas-of-a-room are with regard to there really being a room.) Wittgenstein now grants the Fregean a certain way of referring to what he has in mind:

I think one can say: you are talking . . . of the 'visual room'.

This looks like a terminological concession, a concession which gives the Fregean new leeway for saying what (which object) he means. What does this leeway consist in? Of course, ideas - and among them visual images - on the Fregean conception are not rooms, and they are nothing that is like a room. The Fregean is well aware of this. Yet he is now given credit for describing his visual idea as if it were like a room; in order to mark the difference (between the idea and the real thing, if there is any), the entity previously meant to be referred to as THIS is now being called the *visual* room. This new terminological device seems to enable the Fregean, at last, to talk about his very own visual idea in just the way in which we commonly talk about a room we see or imagine; in describing it, we mention windows, heaters, and so on. The Fregean seems to be led back from his semantical impasse to the richness of the usual ways of making one's meaning intelligible. His use of the word 'THIS' was quite

unforthcoming, even if accompanied by some looking around and other equally unhelpful behaviour. Wittgenstein now seems to grant him a terminological gimmick to make his point about the subjectivity of having ideas. He may talk about the *visual* room, making it thereby clear that he is not talking about rooms (namely '*material*' ones).

The Fregean may now, it seems, happily go along and describe what it is that he has. He might say: 'The visual room has two windows and a heater' and more of this kind. But wait a minute. Would it not be better to say: 'The visual room has two visual windows and a visual heater'? Heaters - real *material* heaters - seem to be the categorically wrong kind of equipment for *visual* rooms. Maybe he would be better off to take the pains of saying: 'The visual room has visually-two visual windows and visually-one visual heater.' Should the word 'has', in his description, be 'visualled' also, or has the visual room really got all of its visual furniture? - The Fregean may have a hard time figuring out exactly what is best to say. He has been offered a new way of expressing what he has in mind. But he must now make up his mind about how to put the new terminological devices to determinate use when it comes to describing his particular idea.

The problem the Fregean has to face resembles the problem of the early Cubists. Imagine Picasso and Braque, in late 1912, when they had just invented this new way of pictorial expression, having tried it out, so far, only on paintings representing fruits and musical instruments. Now imagine one of them popping one night into the other's studio and saying: 'How about a portrait of me in this new way?'. The other one would have faced a problem similar to the one that our Fregean has with respect to Wittgenstein's terminological offer. In a new idiom, various solutions to a seemingly straightforward problem of description (or depiction) may suggest themselves. A few sections later on, Wittgenstein characterizes the Fregean's predicament:

As if you had invented a new way of painting.

(§401)

The Cubists, eventually, came up with portraits of persons. May not the Fregean, eventually, come up with a description of the visual room? That seems to be the question at issue.

For the Fregean, there may be no determinate off-hand answer to the question of how to describe the visual room. But one thing

is clear. He himself cannot be in the visual room. He knows Frege's doctrine by heart, and Frege says: 'I have an idea of myself but I am not this idea.'¹⁰ And, in the same wonderful passage, Frege goes on to argue that one cannot be part of an idea that one has either. So, there is no place for a faithful Fregean within his visual room.

This is important to note because Wittgenstein immediately turns to the question of ownership again. Who has (or owns) the visual room? Let us take stock before we deal with this question. The Fregean found it hard to say, in the first round, what exactly it is that he (thinks he) has and what he means by saying that he has it. In the second round, he is granted room-talk; he may now fairly freely talk of windows and heaters (as long as he interposes a 'visual' or 'visually' here and there, in the right places). Still he must take a firm stance on the question in what way and in what sense he has the visual room. Otherwise his claim that he *has* something would be as dubious as his descriptions of what he claims to have. And the first thing, on this topic, to put on record is this: he cannot visually-have it, whatever exactly this might be. For in order to visually-have the visual room, the Fregean would have to be inside it. At least he would have to be an entity that can, in principle, be met in the realm of those 'visual' things. But, as we just observed, there is no place for the Fregean within the visual room (and not even within the visual space). The Fregean is no idea, and he is no idea-like entity either. 'The visual Fregean' does not denote the Fregean. But the word 'I', when used by the Fregean, denotes the Fregean himself and none of his visual counterparts.

So then it seems that if the Fregean has the visual room at all, he must, according to his doctrine, have it from the outside. (It must be he himself who has the visual room.) But how could he have it this way, namely, in the way that ordinary material rooms are possessed? There is no obvious answer. For material rooms can, at least in principle, be owned by different people; and it must be distinctive of a visual room that it can, in principle, have only one owner. In what other way may the Fregean claim to have the visual room from the outside? Maybe in such a way as regular material pictures of rooms (be it pictures of rooms, be it pictures of imagined rooms) are possessed? Again, this does not work, and for the same reason: material pictures can be owned by different people, at least in principle.

What else can the Fregean offer in order to elucidate in what sense and in what way he has the visual room? I do not know. The Fregean definitely has a problem at this point. For it is part of his doctrine that he cannot be in the visual room; hence if he has it, he must, so to speak, have it from outside; and if he has it from the outside, the question arises why anybody else is logically excluded from having it. But has it been shown that he cannot come up with an answer? Might he not, as things stand right now, find a way of describing the visual room which makes it acceptable (or at least makes intelligible what he means by saying) that (a) he has it, (b) nobody else can have it, and (c) there is no reason to deny its existence? The Fregean might be very inventive and clever.¹¹

But Wittgenstein is at once very apodictic. As soon as he has granted 'visual room' terminology, he continues:

That which has no owner is the 'visual room'.

This is surprising. Here Wittgenstein pounds out his conclusion even before he tries to provide an argument. What he subsequently offers as an argument for this claim is even more surprising. Here is what he says:

I can as little own it (the visual room) as I can walk about it, or look at it, or point to it.

This does not mean that the Fregean cannot own the visual room *because* he cannot walk about it, look at it, or whatever. Wittgenstein has merely repeated his claim. The reason he offers for it is this:

It does not belong to me insofar as it cannot belong to anybody else.

Wittgenstein has made this point before (in the first paragraph). The point is forceful, however, only as long as the Fregean, with regard to sentences of the type

(v) x has y

prefers an analysis like

(vii) $\text{Has}_x(x,y)$

to an analysis like

(vi) Has(x,y_x).

An analysis like (vii) burdens the having-relation with the task of guaranteeing exactly-one-havership; an analysis like (vi) does not. If the Fregean adopts (vii), his claim is that there is a special relation of having which, as it were, glues an idea to only one person. This analysis (let us call it *the sticky relation account*) assigns a peculiar meaning to the word 'have' in sentences of type (v). In the first paragraph, Wittgenstein attacked such an analysis. But the Fregean is not forced to opt for the sticky relation account. He may instead prefer an analysis like (vi) which we might call *the sticky objects account*. In this case, the having-relation that he talks about in sentences of type (v) does not carry the weight of logically guaranteeing that an idea is had by only one person. This is to say: in case the Fregean chooses the sticky-objects account, he may well claim that the word 'have', as it occurs in sentences of type (v), has its ordinary meaning - it does not do any extra semantical work. So the Fregean might reply to Wittgenstein's last remark that it attacks the wrong target. What is at issue in the second round, he might hold, is not the sticky relation account; this was dealt with in the first round. The issue of the second round ought to be: can the sticky objects account be rendered intelligible by means of the new terminology? Is there a way to elucidate the content of 'I have the visual room', as this sentence is used by the Fregean, in accordance with the Fregean conception of ideas, namely as a contingently true proposition (about the obtaining of an ordinary relation between the Fregean and some sticky object) which entails that nobody else stands in that relation to this object?

In brief, as long as Wittgenstein concentrates on what it is to have something, he may either doubt the intelligibility of the Fregean's new way of using the word 'to have' (in this case, he attacks the sticky relation account only), or he may claim that 'to have', in the ordinary sense of this word, does not apply to sticky objects. In the second case, Wittgenstein also attacks the sticky-objects account - but only by making a sweeping linguistic claim for which he has not yet offered any good reason. Wittgenstein goes on:

Or: it (the visual room) does not belong to me insofar as I want to apply the same form of expression to it as to the very material room in which I sit.

To this the Fregean ought to object. He does not want to apply 'the same form of expression' to the visual room as to the material room. By courtesy of Wittgenstein, he has his 'visual'-proviso. As we have seen, the details of this proviso may still be highly unclear, but it has not yet been shown to be for the birds. As a rebuttal of Wittgenstein's charge, the Fregean may point out that the material room can be described as having two windows but that the same form of description does not apply to the visual room: it has two visual windows instead. So Wittgenstein's objection seems not to be valid.

What else does Wittgenstein offer at this stage of his argument? He adds a rather strange remark:

The description of the latter [i.e. the material room] need not mention an owner, in fact it need not have an owner. But then the visual room *cannot* have one.

This remark is strange because it looks like a humdrum *non-sequitur*. There seem to be two readings for the remark. The first reading is this: (xv) entails (xvi).

(xv) The description of the material room need not mention an owner.

(xvi) The visual room cannot have an owner.

The second reading is that (xvi) follows from (xvii).

(xvii) The material room has (or may have) no owner.

Obviously, both readings fail to yield a good argument because the alleged entailment-relations simply do not obtain. I fail to see what the suppressed premiss might be which could impress the Fregean. Wittgenstein adds:

'For it (the visual room) has no master within it or without it', one might say.

One might say this. But then one still has not given an argument. The Fregean already knows that he cannot own the visual room from within it. But where is the argument to show that he cannot own it from outside either?

To sum up our findings in the second paragraph of §398, the Fregean may well feel undefeated by Wittgenstein's objections. Even if one concedes that Wittgenstein has raised serious problems for the sticky relation account in the first paragraph, one

may still have some hope of saving sticky objects. Certainly, the Fregean has not yet found a convincing way of describing his visual idea in such a manner that makes it plain that only he can have it (in the full normal sense of 'having'). But on the other hand, Wittgenstein has not, in this section, offered a knock-down argument against the sticky objects account.

THE THIRD PARAGRAPH

Think of a picture of a landscape, an imaginary landscape with a house in it - and someone were to ask 'Whose house is that?' - The answer, by the way, might be: 'It belongs to the farmer who is sitting on the bench in front on it.' But then he cannot, for example, enter his house.

This is the last paragraph of §398. There are three kinds of difficulties I have in trying to understand this little passage. The first concerns the question what Wittgenstein is up to. What role is this paragraph supposed to have in the context of the whole section? Is it meant to support, by way of illustration, a point that has been made already? Or is it meant to add something new which has not yet been pointed out?

My second question is: what exactly are we invited to do? What is it that Wittgenstein suggests to the reader? How, for example, are we supposed to imagine the little scene in order to render the answer ('It belongs to the farmer. . .') appropriate?

A third question is this: what is this paragraph about? Is it about the concept of possession? Is it about the distinction between 'in the picture' and 'in reality'? Is it about identity (e.g. about identity conditions for farmers, for farmers as they are pictured, and for picture-farmers)? Or is it about essence (e.g. about questions like the following: 'Is it part of this farmer's essence that he is sitting in front of the house?')

I shall begin with the second question - not because I have a definite answer to it but rather because there is something quite irritating about this little paragraph which I want to point out right at the outset. Imagine the following. Harvey and I have just entered a room in a museum. It contains paintings which have been assembled for an exhibition announced as *Imaginary Landscapes in the Sixteenth Century*. There are paintings by Flemish artists and by the Danube school, and right now we

stand in front of a painting which shows a farmhouse in a beautiful scenic setting. In front of the house there is a farmer sitting on a bench. Harvey asks, 'Whose house is that?'. This little scenario is meant to fit the first sentence of the last paragraph:

Think of a picture of a landscape, an imaginary landscape with a house in it - and somebody were to ask 'Whose house is that?'

Harvey's question may be a little strange, but serious problems of understanding start with Wittgenstein's next sentence:

The answer, by the way, might be: 'It belongs to the farmer who is sitting on the bench in front of it.'

Whose answer is that? Here are three cases. First case: it is my answer; I amuse myself with giving a stupid answer to a question which I consider stupid. I do not know anything of relevance about the painter; what I know about the painting is just what I see in front of me. Second case: it is the best answer at hand; as it happens, a specialist on these paintings stands right next to us; he has overheard Harvey's question and is kind enough to give this answer. Third case: it is the right answer.

Which case is meant by Wittgenstein? Not the first one, for he would have expressed himself differently; he would have written 'Now somebody might answer. . .', or something like that. Most probably not the second case as distinct from the third, or the third as opposed to the second; again, Wittgenstein would have been careful enough to say more clearly which one of the two remaining cases is meant if his argument were to draw on one of them specifically.

What makes the specialist's answer (about whose house it is) correct? Let us assume that the farmer in the picture is as imaginary as the rest (once again, it is reasonable to assume this because otherwise Wittgenstein should have said explicitly that it is only the landscape which is imaginary). What makes it correct to say that the imaginary farmer in question owns the imaginary house? Obviously, facts about the painter and the painting. Here is what the specialist tells us: this big key which hangs down from the farmer's belt is, in the school to which the painter of this picture belongs, a conventional means to indicate house-ownership; moreover, there are passages in the painter's diary and

letters in which he refers to the farmer as the owner of the house. And what the specialist tells us is true.

But why, for heaven's sake, should we now conclude that the farmer cannot enter his house? Is he lame? Nothing we have heard so far seems to justify this conclusion. The only way to justify this claim about the farmer's handicap is to introduce further information about the painting. (The picture clearly illustrates, say, a very popular fairytale about a farmer and his bewitched house which he could not enter.) Wittgenstein mentions nothing of this kind. Obviously he means to claim that

(xviii) Given that it is correct to say that the house in question belongs to the farmer in question, still it follows from what has been said so far about the farmer and the house that he cannot enter it.¹²

Offhand, I see no other way of reading the last two sentences of §398. But this reading is very poor. For, first, what is claimed in (xviii) is highly implausible and, second, it does not fit in the context of this section.

To make vivid what I find immediately irritating about the third paragraph, think again of the little museum-scenario. The specialist has just presented his reasons for saying that the house belongs to the farmer, and now Harvey remarks, about the farmer in question, 'But then he cannot, for example, enter his house'. We should be baffled by such a strange comment. Given the previous conversation with the specialist, it is at least eccentric and unwarranted to draw such a conclusion. Harvey must be joking.

Is Wittgenstein joking? But what could be the joke's point? Well, it would be a wonderful point if it were about the impossibility of having ideas from the outside. Such a point is exactly what is still missing in this section. So we might try to read the third paragraph as follows. The house in question corresponds (in Wittgenstein's parable) to the visual room. Nobody outside the picture can own this house, not even the owner of the picture. A house of this kind cannot be owned. And even if we say that it is owned by somebody inside the picture (for example by the farmer in question), we do not mean that literally; for the farmer in question cannot, literally speaking, even enter this house. When we say that he owns it, we are speaking in scare-quotes. Transferring this point back to the

visual room (and, more generally, to all ideas in the Fregean's sense), the result is: it is completely out of the question to speak of an idea as being had (or of the visual room as being owned) from the outside, that is, by a real person; and it is at best a metaphorical way of putting things if we say that it is had from the inside, for nothing which is in the realm of ideas can literally be said to own anything.

But this is not a feasible interpretation for the third paragraph. Wittgenstein very clearly does not deal there with the question whether the house in the picture can be owned from the outside. Furthermore, he appears to have no misgivings about the answer to the question whose house it is. On the contrary, accepting this answer is the point of departure for the subsequent remark about the farmer's not being able to enter *his* house.

So let us try another interpretation. It goes like this:

The picture is a product of the painter's imagination, and that is to say, among other things: there is no flesh-and-blood farmer and no stone-and-brick house which are represented. If, in spite of this, we speak here of a farmer and a house, then what we mean is a *picture-farmer* and a *picture-house*. (The qualifying prefix 'picture' in front of 'farmer' and 'house' corresponds to the qualifying prefix 'visual' in front of 'room' and 'window'.) The picture-farmer is no flesh-and-blood farmer, but he is no material part of the painting either: he is no oil-on-canvas farmer. In calling him a picture-farmer, 'picture' refers to the *pictura*, not to the *tabula colorata* of the painting. Compared to a flesh-and-blood farmer or to the oil-on-canvas farmer, the picture-farmer is fairly intangible. Where is he? What is his mode of existence? What is his *principium individuationis*? His very nature gives rise to many difficult questions. One of these questions is: what properties can be attributed to him? Flesh-and-blood farmers can do lots of things: sow and plough, feed the cattle, breed horses, and so on. Moreover, in weaker senses of 'can', they can do a variety of things: they can age, they can have sisters and they can own a house. Oil-on-canvas farmers are more passively gifted: they can lose their brightness, they can be photographed, transported and restored, and much more of this variety. What is it that a picture-farmer can 'do'? Well, he can for example sit on picture benches, in front of picture-

houses (which may, or may not, be owned by him). Now if a picture-farmer sits in front of a picture-house, can he enter it?

No, he cannot. For it is part of his essence to do only those things that he may be recognized, by looking at the material picture, to be doing. What he cannot be seen to do in the picture, he cannot do at all. For he owes his existence, identity and essence to the material picture (and in particular to the oil-on-canvas farmer who is part of it). All his possible doings have to be in accordance with what actually is to be seen in the picture. Can he think of his wife? Yes, for nothing which is to be seen in the picture is in conflict with his doing this. Now, if he sits in front of a picture-house, can he own it?

Yes, he can. For owning is not a doing, therefore his owning the picture house is not in conflict with what is to be seen in the picture. The crucial difference between owning the picture house and entering it is this: this very painting allows for a house-owning farmer (or, if you wish, for a picture house-owning picture-farmer); not one brushstroke would have to be added or changed to make it a picture of an imaginary farmer-who-owns-the-house-in-front-of-which-he-sits. But entering the house is different; this very painting does not allow for a house-entering farmer. It takes a different painting to produce a picture of an imaginary farmer-who-enters-his-house. But a different painting generates a new picture-farmer, therefore the original picture-farmer cannot enter the picture-house even if he owns it.

What might be said in favour of this interpretation? First, it solves the problem of how to reconcile the last two sentences of §398, which seemed to be incoherent. This interpretation acknowledges that Wittgenstein wants to claim that (xviii) is true, and it makes sense of this claim. Second, it seems to fit in nicely with other occasional remarks that suggest that Wittgenstein took a strong line with regard to what is in a picture and what is not.¹³

But this interpretation has its drawbacks. First of all, the metaphysical account behind it (whatever its details may be) is hard to swallow for somebody who sticks to our common ways of looking at, and talking about, pictures. Certainly, given our usual ways of looking at pictures of imaginary situations and talking about them, the farmer can enter his house. Comic strips

prove this immediately: nobody (except maybe a philosopher) would dream of talking about Donald, the very imaginary duck, in the way that this interpretation forces us to speak about the imaginary farmer. Second, the metaphysical account behind this interpretation is not very attractive even for a philosopher who does not care too much about how we commonly look at pictures and talk about them. For the construct of the picture-farmer seems half-hearted, philosophically speaking; it seems to be an ad hoc entity which, on the one hand, can own a house (if only with scare-quotes around the house and the owning) but on the other hand *cannot* enter it (not even with scare-quotes around 'enter' and 'it'). But the reconciliation of the last two sentences of the third paragraph has drawn exactly on this hybrid nature of the picture farmer; he may own but he cannot enter, *whichever way one prefers to distribute one's scare quotes*.

For this, to be sure, is a basic exegetical problem of the last paragraph of §398: the same farmer (whatever his essence might be) is said both to own the house (if only in scare-quotes) and not to be able to enter it (if only in scare-quotes, again). No farmer-switch between the two sentences is consistent with Wittgenstein's words. In the last sentence of the paragraph he speaks of the same farmer as in the sentence before; the anaphorical pronoun 'he' can only refer to the farmer who was said to own the house in question. There being no flesh-and-blood farmer, we are left with two possible choices: (a) the oil-on-canvas farmer, and (b) some other entity, for convenience called 'the picture farmer'. With regard to (a) the sad fact is that the oil-on-canvas farmer cannot literally be said to own the house in question. But the even sadder fact is this: if he somehow (in scare-quotes of indeterminate meaning) can be said to 'own' the house, he can as well - equally well or equally badly - be said to be able to 'enter' the house. This deadlock eventually, and inevitably, leads to the picture farmer. This, after all, is nothing but an entity that can coherently be said to be an owner (or an 'owner') without being able to enter (or 'enter') its possession. If Wittgenstein were dependent upon some such entity, we might as well believe in Fregean ideas.

A third, and particularly serious, drawback of the interpretation in question is that our overall exegetical problem is not solved. This interpretation may yield a coherent reading of the third paragraph, taken in isolation, but what can it contribute to

understanding the whole section? How does the third paragraph, in the light of this interpretation, relate to the rest of the section? How could Wittgenstein hope to persuade the Fregean to get rid of his conception of ideas by drawing on such a strange construction as the picture farmer?

One guess is this. The picture-farmer is a typical Fregean's construct, very much like the visual room and other ideas. When it comes to individuating ideas, the Fregean naturally draws on their content. He insists that the visual room is not a room, but in describing it, the Fregean resorts to idioms that are appropriate, in the first place and without qualification, only for the description of rooms. It is qualities of material rooms which he attributes, if only in scare-quotes, to the visual room. Yet the Fregean must be able to indicate clearly when he is speaking literally and when he is speaking in scare-quotes (or using his 'visual'-modifier). The same holds for the picture-farmer; in describing him, we naturally bring in predicates that, in the first place and without qualification, apply only to people. Because we find it so easy and natural to talk this way, we have a tendency to reify the picture-farmer, to think of 'him' as something over and above the oil-on-canvas farmer. Nevertheless, there is nothing but the oil-on-canvas farmer and our ways of looking at pictures and talking about them. There is no farmer-like entity which is quasi-depicted. There is no picture-farmer, but just a farmer picture with no pictured farmer. He who believes in the picture-farmer misconstrues his way of looking at pictures and talking about them as being confronted with (and referring to) an intangible object. He who believes in Fregean ideas does exactly the same. He misconstrues, for example, his seeing or imagining a room as being confronted with ('having') an object: the visual room.¹⁴

All this is fine and in harmony with what Wittgenstein says in the next few sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*. But it is not a satisfactory interpretation of the last paragraph of §398. For this interpretation does not elucidate the puzzling wording of the paragraph, and it offers no answer to our pending question: what exactly is Wittgenstein's argument against the Fregean's sticky-objects account?

Let us get back to the puzzling wording first. According to the interpretation just envisaged, Wittgenstein's point is highly general: visual rooms are philosophical monsters of the same

kind as picture-farmers; they are the products of a tendency to reify ways of dealing with things. To make this point, Wittgenstein would not have needed to commit himself to such a strange claim as (xviii), nor to imply that the Fregean is committed to it. In so far as Wittgenstein could easily have made this general point much more clearly without bringing in problems of ownership at all, it is doubtful that this is what he is driving at in this passage.

Now what about the still pending question regarding the Fregean's sticky-objects account of his position? Again, the interpretation under consideration offers no satisfactory answer. A satisfactory answer would be an attempt at showing that Fregean ideas cannot, in principle, be described in such a way that their essential subjectivity (their essentially being had by exactly one person) is intelligible. No such attempt is made in this paragraph, according to the interpretation.

So the third paragraph remains puzzling. And we have not found anything in it that could be taken as the argument that Wittgenstein implicitly claims to have presented: an argument to the effect that the visual room cannot be owned from the outside. In the next section, Wittgenstein makes an even stronger claim: the owner of the visual room is not in it, and there is no outside. Certainly, if there were no outside then the visual room could not be owned from the outside. Translating Wittgenstein's statement back into the Fregean's terminology, we get this: whoever has a particular idea is not part of the idea, and ideas are all there is. The Fregean, not being an idealist of any kind, would deny the second part.

But maybe Wittgenstein's argument in §398 after all - and contrary to what we have assumed so far - is directed exclusively against an idealist version of the Fregean conception of the nature of ideas. This does not seem very plausible, since Wittgenstein quite naturally speaks of the material room in the second paragraph; and this would be a flagrant *petitio* if he wanted to refute a certain form of idealism.

In light of our considerations, Wittgenstein in §398 has failed to present an argument that shows that ideas, as conceived by the Fregean, cannot be had.

NOTES

* When I wrote this paper in 1989, the only publication which dealt with §398 of *PI* was P.M.S. Hacker's *Insight and Illusion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986. Hacker discussed §398 only in the context of Wittgenstein's reflections on solipsism. I find this approach interesting but not fully adequate, as will soon become clear.

If I were to write such a paper today (i.e. two years later), I would certainly try to defend my somewhat negative conclusions against Eike von Savigny's careful and stimulating interpretation (see his *Wittgensteins 'Philosophische Untersuchungen'*, vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1989) and Hacker's new exegesis, *Wittgenstein. Meaning and Minds*, Oxford, 1990. Doing this would require a new paper, whereas all I want to do here is to add a footnote to *this* one - and to express my gratitude to Jay Rosenberg and Katia Saporiti for valuable comments on an earlier version of it.

- 1 Karl Leonard Reinhold, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, Jena, 1789, p. 190.
- 2 Cf. G. Frege, *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, Breslau, 1884, §61. A similar point is made by Berkeley in the middle of the last of the *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*. Put in Fregean terminology, Berkeley points out that to speak of ideas being *in* the mind is just to say that they are *had*. Of course, Berkeley would not have accepted Frege's terminology, because his arguments for immaterialism presuppose that ideas can be seen, heard, and so on. Although Frege and Berkeley are in agreement about the conceptual question whether ideas literally can be said to be anywhere, they disagree on the question whether material objects exist and can be sensed.
- 3 That is, of course, to say: name an idea-token, and you've picked out its haver. We are here concerned only with ideas as particular mental occurrences.
- 4 Cf. The *Blue Book* and *NFL*, for example. But see also *PR*, §61 and §71, and the *Brown Book* (*BB* p. 175), where our topic is discussed, although solipsism is not at issue.

While on the subject, let me add that neutral monism is not at issue either in §398, although it seems not unreasonable to assume that the first two paragraphs of this section were inspired by a passage in William James's essay 'Does "Consciousness" Exist?'. In the second part of this essay, James argues for a position which, with regard to experiences, avoids any dualism of what he calls *consciousness* and *content*: 'If the reader will take his own experiences, he will see what I mean. Let him begin with a perceptual experience, the "presentation", so called, of a physical object, his actual field of vision, the room he sits in'. This perceptual experience James calls the '*pure experience of the room*'. The ontological nature of such a 'pure experience' he wants to leave open, in this passage, for

[t]he one self-identical thing has so many relations to the rest of

experience that you can . . . treat it as belonging with opposite contexts. In one of these contexts it is your 'field of vision'; in another it is 'the room in which you sit' The presentation, the experience, the *that* in short (for until we have decided *what* it is it must be a mere *that*) . . . [a]s a room . . . has occupied that spot and had that environment for thirty years. As your field of consciousness it may never have existed until now. As a room, attention will go on to discover endless new details in it. As your mental state merely, few new ones will emerge under attention's eye. As a room, it will take an earthquake . . . in any case a certain amount of time, to destroy it. As your subjective state, the closing of your eyes, or any instantaneous play of your fancy will suffice. . . . As an outer object, you must pay so much a month to inhabit it. As an inner content, you may occupy it for any length of time rent-free.

(William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912, 1976, pp. 7-9)

There are striking parallels between the way James puts his point in this passage and how Wittgenstein's interlocutor in §398 expresses what he means. Yet Wittgenstein does not address neutral monism. At most, he borrows from James a way of making vivid what he is trying to get at.

- 5 Cf. G. Frege, 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' (*Kleine Schriften*, p. 146) and 'Der Gedanke' (*Kleine Schriften*, p. 352) - for the English translation, see G. Frege, *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, ed. B. McGuinness, trans. M. Black, *et al.*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1984: 'On Sense and Meaning' (pp. 159f) and 'The Thought' (pp. 361f).
- 6 Occasionally my translation differs from E. Anscombe's.
- 7 Cf. *BB* pp. 171-4, where Wittgenstein remarks in a related context:

I mean the sentence, 'I see this', as it is sometimes contemplated by us when we are brooding over certain philosophical problems. We are then, say, holding on to a particular visual impression by staring at some object, and we feel it is most natural to say to ourselves 'I see this', though we know of no further use we can make of this sentence.

- 8 Frege might well have been impressed by this argument. At the end of §49 of his *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* he argues that if you cannot deny an existential statement, the affirmation of it would lose its content.
- 9 As far as I can see, Wittgenstein has not said this before in *PI*. Maybe this mistaken reference is a relic from an earlier version which contained such a remark.
- 10 Cf. 'Der Gedanke', *Kleine Schriften*, p. 357 ('The Thought', *op. cit.*, p. 366).
- 11 The visual room, under the Fregean's analysis, might turn out to be something like the common cold: (a) whoever catches it has (caught) it; (b) nobody else can catch - or subsequently 'have' - the very same

(token of a) cold; and (c) there is no reason to deny the existence of the cold-token which has been caught. This is a funny way of talking about catching a cold, but the Fregean might find more convincing examples.

- 12 'It follows from what has been said so far . . .' is my long-winded attempt at capturing what Wittgenstein means by the word 'then' in the last sentence of §398.
13. Cf. his reservation about saying that something must be boiling in the pictured pot, even if pictured steam comes out of the pictured pot (*PI*, §297), and about saying that the pictured rock supports the pictured castle (*RFM*, VII, §16).
- 14 Cf. *PI*, §401.