

Words as Deeds:  
Wittgenstein's 'spontaneous utterances'  
and the dissolution of the explanatory gap

*Abstract*

Wittgenstein demystified the notion of 'observational self-knowledge'. He dislodged the long-standing conception that we have privileged access to our impressions, sensations and feelings through introspection, and more precisely eliminated *knowing* as the kind of awareness that normally characterizes our first-person present tense psychological statements. He was not thereby questioning our *awareness* of our emotions or sensations, but debunking the notion that we come to that awareness via any *epistemic* route. This makes the spontaneous linguistic articulation of our sensations and impressions nondescriptive. Not descriptions, but *expressions* that seem more akin to behaviour than to language. I suggest that Wittgenstein uncovered a new species of *speech acts*. Far from the *prearranged* consecration of words into performatives, utterances are deeds through their very *spontaneity*. This gives language a new aura: the aura of the *reflex action*. I argue, against Peter Hacker, that spontaneous utterances have the categorial status of deeds. This has no reductive consequences in that I do not suggest that one category is reduced to another, but that the boundary between them is porous. This explodes the myth of an explanatory gap between the traditionally distinct categories of saying (or thinking) and doing, or of mind and body.

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But instead of the intonation and the accompanying gestures, I might ... treat the word itself as a gesture.

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*

Since Descartes first put it in the machine, not many philosophers have attempted to get the ghost out. Based on the mechanics of the body and still alive in the Physicalists and Functionalists of today, the idea is that whatever we think or do must have first been processed in some way. This, in itself, would be trivially acceptable if the process were not posited as explanatory. If that is, it were a mere mechanical description of what happens in our bodies when we speak or move, a description having no significant link with *why* we speak or move – with our (particular) *reasons* for saying 'Good morning' or waving good-bye. But according to Physicalists and Functionalists, our thinking and acting are not only *causally* dependent on some hardware, be it a neurological or functional (computer-like) framework, they are *grounded* on it, or reducible to it. The brain is not merely one of the vital organs without which we cannot live, and therefore think or act, it is -- unlike the heart or the liver -- the very source of our acting and thinking. Not simply a mechanical *enabler*, the brain is the *generator* of our wills, desires, intentions and actions. Of course the outside world has some impact on us (e.g. I see an apple), but in order for the body to react, this impact must be translated or transmuted into something that can trigger a move. A belief ('this is an apple') or will ('I want this apple') is therefore posited as the *reason* that *causes* the body to move (I reach out for the apple). But how can something as ethereal as a belief or a will activate something as physical as my hand and make it reach out for the apple? How can a mental state *cause* a muscle to contract? In an attempt to bridge this explanatory gap between the mind and the body, philosophers have sought to formalize or to naturalize our intentions, beliefs or thoughts. Like Searle and Fodor, they have vainly attempted to transform our intentions into efficient, physically empowered triggers that can move our tongues to speak and our hands to reach out; they have sought to transmute a ghostly belief or thought into some biological, formal or propositional form that could then supposedly activate the machine.

According to such Ghost-in-the-Machine philosophers<sup>1</sup>, we think the thoughts we do and perform the acts we do *because* of some prior internal cognitive processing. Some spectral belief, will or intention must be there to preface what we say and to trigger our moves. Spontaneous utterances, however, are exemplary cases of expressions that are not the result of any cognitive process. They also precipitate the dissolution of the explanatory gap, itself an avatar of body-mind dualism, in that -- as will be argued here -- a spontaneous utterance is equivalent to a deed. To say as much is not to herald a behaviourist revival. It is not claimed that *all* words are reducible to acts, but that the case of spontaneous utterances evinces that there is no logical categorial gap between words and deeds, between mental states and behaviour, which would require a reductive transformation of one into the other. That is, the categories of speaking (or thinking) and doing are still alive and well, but they are porous.

### 1. *Not a question of knowing*

- *Do you feel like singing?* said Camier.  
 - *Not to my knowledge,* said Mercier.  
 From *Mercier and Camier* by Samuel Beckett

I have often come upon tentative readers of Wittgenstein who tell me how, offended by his stabs at what can be called 'observational self-knowledge', they have turned away in disbelief: 'how can it be said I don't know I'm in pain!' What these readers fail to grasp is Wittgenstein's precision here: he is eliminating *knowing* as the kind of awareness that normally characterizes being in pain. His aim is not to invalidate *awareness* of one's pain, but to debunk the notion that one comes to that awareness via introspective observation, or via any epistemic route at all. We say we *know* something when we have acquired that information from observation, recollection, inference or research. But it is through none of these routes that I am aware of my own pain. In fact, I follow no route at all, for there is no gap between my pain and my awareness of it. I cannot be in pain without being aware of it. Moreover, the problem with *knowing* is that it is not infallible. To acquire knowledge is to acquire information, and information is susceptible of error. I can be wrong about something I thought I knew, but I *cannot* make a mistake about being in pain. Even in cases of self-delusion, the (phantom) pain is felt. The logical infallibility characteristic of one's awareness of being in pain is not covered by *knowing*. But this is true of many other first-person present tense uses of psychological verbs:

"I know what I want, wish, believe, feel, ....." (and so on through all the psychological verbs) is either philosophers' nonsense, or at any rate *not* a judgement *a priori*.

"I know..." may mean "I do not doubt..." but does not mean that the words "I doubt..." are *senseless*, that doubt is logically excluded.

One says "I know" where one can also say "I believe" or "I suspect"; where one can find out. (PI p. 221; first emphasis mine)

First-person present tense psychological statements Wittgenstein views as *typically* nonepistemic expressions, some of which are more akin to behaviour than to sentences. They predominantly belong to our primitive, not to our sophisticated use of language. A 'that-clause' is not always a harbinger of propositional thought. We shall see that some articulations of so-called *propositional attitudes* are not really *propositional* at all: to say 'I believe that ...' or 'I want that...' is not always to adopt a *propositional* attitude. It is not only mental events such as pain that are not subjectible to propositional form, but some cases of belief, desire, expectation, intention etc. The deciding factor here is whether a deliverance is a *description* or an *expression*. And in some cases, deliverances of belief, desire, expectation, intention are just such expressions.

## 2. Descriptions vs. Expressions (or Utterances)

For words do not all have the same function: some steer, some describe, others express<sup>2</sup>. As regards our first-person present tense psychological statements (e.g. 'I am in pain', 'I hope he comes', 'I am afraid'), they have traditionally been regarded as *descriptive*: the utterance 'I am in pain' thought to be a privileged and infallible description resulting from my introspection of my mental state of being in pain. Wittgenstein, however, perceived that our first-person psychological statements are, for the most part, not descriptions, but *expressions*:

Surely one doesn't normally say "I wish ..." on grounds of self-observation [*Selbstbeobachtung*], for this is merely an expression [*Äusserung*] of a wish. Nevertheless, you can sometimes perceive or discover a wish by observing your own reactions. (RPP II, 3)

Or, to return to our first example, when asked by my doctor to describe my present state, I reflect and answer: 'I am in pain' as I seek to describe the symptoms of the pain, point to its localization, say when it started, etc. Wittgenstein did not then -- as is often assumed -- rule out a descriptive or self-observing use of first-person psychological verbs, but he held it to be secondary to the expressive<sup>3</sup>, which is nondescriptive. He usually refers to the

nondescriptive deliverances of our psychological states as "utterances" (*Äusserungen*) or "expressions" (*Ausdrücke*)<sup>4</sup>.

To say that an expression is nondescriptive is to say that, in using it, the speaker does not *describe* anything (like an emotion or sensation that she allegedly has privileged, introspective access to); she is not articulating an informative conclusion she has come to from self-observation, not issuing a proposition open to falsification and verification. A nondescriptive expression *can* be informative, but only to third parties. My spontaneous 'I want to die!' is nondescriptive in that it is not a propositional rendering of a desire I have observed in myself, but it may be news to my therapist.

### 3. *Spontaneity: the distinguishing feature*

It is not always easy to distinguish between descriptive and expressive language-games. Indeed, the very same string of words may be either descriptive (a report) or expressive (a manifestation) of a state of mind:

When someone says "I hope he'll come" -- is this a *report* [*Bericht*] about his state of mind, or a *manifestation* [*Äusserung*] of his hope? -- I can, for example, say it to myself. And surely I am not giving myself a report. It may be a sigh; but it need not. (PI 585)

I say "I am afraid"; someone else asks me: "What was that? A cry of fear; or do you want to tell me how you feel; or is it a reflection on your present state?" (PI p. 187)

The difference lies not in the words themselves, but in the circumstances of their pronouncement:

The exclamation "I'm longing to see him!" may be called an act [*Akt*] of expecting. But I can utter the same words as the result of self-observation [*Selbstbeobachtung*], and then they might mean: "So, after all that has happened, I am still longing to see him." The point is: what led up to these words? (PI 586)

What is the setting, the context, the origin of utterance? In expressive utterances, no reflection *leads up* to the words. They are uttered, as it were, *without a thought*. We can gather from Wittgenstein's numerous comparative analyses that the distinguishing feature between descriptive and nondescriptive uses of first-person present tense psychological utterances is: *spontaneity*; a *spontaneous* deliverance being one that is not *due* to thought, that no reflection or 'self-observation' has 'led up to'. *Spontaneous* expressions of pain do not

describe our internal states, or at least they never *intend to*. There is no room where description can take place, no self-observing gap between the feeling or sensation and its spontaneous expression: "For how can I go so far as to try to use language to get between pain and its expression [*Äusserung*]" (PI 245). In our *spontaneous* deliverances of desire, belief, sensation and emotion, the word is not a detached *report* of the pain or desire felt, not a *description*, but the *expression* of pain or desire. Spontaneous expressions are nondescriptive, unverified, unreasoned expressions. They are not due to introspection, self-observation, cognition or recognition:

"Does someone crying out "Help!" want to describe how he is feeling?  
Nothing is further from his intentions than describing something. (LW I,  
48)

Spontaneity, then, forms the dividing line between first-person present tense psychological *expressions* and *descriptions*. But *within* the category of spontaneous expressions, a further dichotomy must be made. Whilst no reasoning informs the use of *any* of our spontaneous utterances, some are emotionally (or sensationally) charged, and others emotionally (or sensationally) neutral. In *Insight and Illusion*, Hacker gives varied examples of spontaneous utterances (which he calls 'avowals'<sup>5</sup>):

...exclamations ('I'm so pleased'), cries of pain ('It hurts, it hurts!'), sighs of longing ('Oh, I do hope he'll come'), expressions of emotion ('I'm furious with you') or expectation ('I expect you to come'), avowals of thought or belief, expressions of desire ('I want a glass of wine') or preference ('I like claret') and so forth. ... (1989, 298)

These are all spontaneous utterances, but they are not all of the same nature. Rather than follow Hacker in distinguishing them according to their being or not "expressions of *experiences*" (ibid.), I shall distinguish between *compulsive* and *neutral* spontaneous expressions<sup>6</sup>. *Compulsive* spontaneous utterances are compelled by, expressive of, and (we shall see) sometimes also *part of*, active states of emotion and sensation<sup>7</sup>. These, *we can't help using*:

Suppose I said: The expressions get their importance from the fact that they are not used coolly but that we can't help using them. (LPE 281)

First, let us examine our less compulsive spontaneous utterances.

#### 4. *Neutral spontaneous utterances*

Though they are spontaneous in that they are not the product of self-observation, description, or reflection, some first-person psychological expressions do not compulsively spring from the heart, but soberly inform ('I like claret') or demand ('I want a glass of wine'). Where the sole *raison d'être* of compulsive utterances is *expression*, and where their utterance is comparable to a reflex action, *neutral* spontaneous utterances are intentional: they are intentionally informative and require a third party. Spontaneous, but not compulsive; they do not resemble reflex actions. Still, like compulsive utterances, neutral utterances are not propositions insofar as they are not descriptions, not falsifiable conclusions of self-observation. It must be stressed that for some spontaneous utterances to be emotionally neutral does not mean that they are the product of reflection or self-observation. In no way are they descriptions.

Of course, there are many cases where our formulations of belief or preference *are* descriptive. Upon being asked whether or not he believes in an after-life, someone who had not before given it much thought, will do some soul-searching to come to a conclusion. Or again, when questioned as to whether she prefers the wines of Bordeaux or Burgundy, someone who had never previously considered it, will hesitate and ponder before replying. In both these cases, replies will be first-person present tense psychological deliverances (e.g. 'I guess I don't believe in an after-life'; 'Come to think of it, I prefer Bordeaux -- I tend to buy it more often than Burgundy'), but not of the spontaneous type. These are neither compulsive nor neutral *expressions*, but *cool* (they are 'used coolly'; cf. LPE 281 above) or reflective *descriptions*: statements resulting from thought, deliberation, reflection and possibly intent on deceiving.

In contrast, someone well acquainted with wine, who has come to have a well-seasoned preference, need undergo no such precursory reflection. Her response will be automatic -- which does not mean that she has never given the matter a thought, only that she did not do it, did not need to do it, *on this occasion*. Having for many years frequented the small, welcoming vineyards of Burgundy, familiarized myself with their warm, textured, dark-fruity, flowery flavours, built up a respectable collection of Vosne-Romanées and the like, and having comparatively sampled many a stern, majestic Bordeaux, I, upon being asked, express my predilection for Burgundy without hesitation or pondering. My expression of preference is as little due to reflection, introspection, and therefore as barred from the possibility of pretence as 'My name is Danièle'.

'I prefer Burgundy': this may be a spontaneous utterance or a pondered description. Circumstances, not appearance, determine the nature of our words. Identical strings of words will form, in one context, a spontaneous utterance; in another, a report or description. Whereas *spontaneous* deliverances of what one believes or prefers are more likely to fall under the neutral category, spontaneous utterances of emotion or sensation are likely to be of the compulsive variety.

##### 5. Compulsive spontaneous utterances: words as verbalized reactions

... sometimes it seemed as if speech came to me without any will of my own, and words were given to me that came out as the tears come, because our hearts are full and we can't help it.  
From *Adam Bede* by George Eliot

When utterances are compulsive, it is as if we did not *use* words, rather they seem to come out -- unprompted by ourselves -- in a bang or a whimper:

In this way I should like to say the words "Oh, let him come!" are charged with my desire. And words can be wrung from us, -- like a cry. Words can be hard to say: such, for example, as are used to effect a renunciation, or to confess a weakness. (Words are also deeds.) (PI 546)

*Words are also deeds.* This, then, not only alludes to the active aspect of language generally -- to speak is to act -- premised in speech-act theory; nor is it sufficiently covered by Wittgenstein's overall pragmatic view of language -- words are *used* and language in use is a language-*game* -- rather, it points out a particularity of *some* words. If, generally, words are *also* deeds, specifically, some words are, in some contexts, *only* deeds. They do not *describe* a psychological state but are the *verbal* replacement of the *nonverbal* expression of a psychological state: "words are connected with the primitive<sup>8</sup>, the natural, expressions [*Ausdruck*] of the sensation and used in their place" (PI 244). So that nonverbal expressions such as a *cry* of pain or despair, an *act* of desire or surrender are replaced with verbal ones, such as: 'I am in pain', 'I grieve', 'Oh, let him come!', 'I want to die'. As children, we were taught to thus replace our nonverbal reactions with verbal ones:

A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour. (PI 244)



The word, exclamation, or sentence assimilated as a replacement of the natural expression is itself behaviour. It is not a clearer, more eloquent *description* of the sensation, but constitutes an alternative *expression* of the sensation -- an *alternate mode of behaviour*. "the verbal expression [*Ausdruck*] of pain replaces crying and does not describe it" (PI 244). So that where we use words in the place of groans, this replacement does not *entail* a categorial change; but only a change of manner or manifestation. In emotion and sensation, where our original spontaneity has been least subject to the mutations of sophistication, the word, often *is* a deed, *nothing but* a deed:

The exclamation "I'm longing to see him!" may be called an *act* of expecting (PI 586; my emphasis)

We must however beware not to confuse the deed or behaviour with the sensation itself. That some words are in some contexts categorially assimilable to behaviour does not make them identical to the sensation or feeling expressed. Peter Hacker does well to remind us: "behaviour is not a sensation!" (1993, 262). And yet Wittgenstein *does* mention cases where we could not dissociate the behaviour from the sensation itself. It is sometimes possible to say that the behavioural expression is *part of* the feeling or sensation:

For think of the sensations produced by physically shuddering: the words "it makes me shiver" are themselves such a shuddering reaction; and if I hear and feel them as I utter them, this belongs among the rest of those sensations. (PI p. 174)

This is how words are best at being deeds. This is also where the boundaries between world and language dissolve; where behaviour and language melt into one another, become indistinguishable; where the word *is* behaviour, a reflex action<sup>9</sup>. Here, Wittgenstein has uncovered a new category of utterances, never before picked out by philosophy. Resembling Austin's *performatives* in that they are linguistic utterances whose grammatical determination as *acts* is dependent on context, they part company in their being independent of conventional procedure. Far from the *prearranged* or *conventionally fixed* consecration of words into *performatives*, *utterances* are deeds through their very *spontaneity*. This gives language, or a part of language, a new aura. The aura of the unpremeditated *act*, the reflex action.

The *compulsive* expression -- whether the act of crying or that of saying 'I am in pain' -- is in both cases a *reaction*, though the latter, a more complicated form of the reaction. It is not, that is, available to infants or animals. Not a

translation or description resulting from my observation of my internal state, compulsive expressions are simply another version of the tears or the cry of agony -- “articulated crying” as Fogelin eloquently puts it (1987, 170).

#### 6. *The leveling of the linguistic and the nonlinguistic*

... why should the wordless shudder be the *ground* of the verbal one? (PI, p. 174; my emphasis)

Nonverbal expressions have traditionally been categorized as deeds; verbal ones as language<sup>10</sup>, regardless of function. And yet it is precisely function, use, grammar, not appearance, that should determine categorial distinctions. The Wittgensteinian motto: “nothing is hidden” is not everywhere applicable. The configurations of ordinary language mask and misrepresent grammatical differences. Wittgenstein has uncovered an analogy, a sameness in what *appear* to be disparate language-games. In those cases where the linguistic expression *springs* from an emotion or sensation, in the manner of a moan or a groan, of a *cri du coeur*, the linguistic is *at par* with the nonlinguistic: my spontaneous: ‘It hurts!’ is as much an *act* as my groaning or moving my finger away from the flame. Although a groan does not physically resemble a sentence, when both are spontaneously expressed their ‘grammar’ is fundamentally the same, and so a crucial rapprochement is wanting. We must be able to *neglect* the linguistic *aspect* of an expression in our assignation of grammatical function; and embrace the idea of the assimilation of *all* spontaneous utterances, regardless of form. This assimilation is rejected by Peter Hacker:

It is important to emphasize that Wittgenstein was not *assimilating* avowals to the natural expression of ‘inner states’. An avowal of pain is not *just like* a groan, and it would be as misleading to say that it has the same logical status as a groan as it is to assimilate it to description. For there are differences as well as similarities. An utterance (*Äusserung*) of pain, unlike a moan, is articulate; it is a linguistic expression consisting of words in grammatical combination. A sentence that can be used in a spontaneous avowal has other uses too. It can be embedded in the antecedent of a conditional, it has an intelligible negation, and there are tense transforms of such a sentence. These cases are not expressions or manifestations of inner states and must be treated differently. (1993, 90)

Of course an avowal of pain is not *just* like a groan. It looks or sounds different: it is comprised of words, as opposed to mere sounds. And yet this should not lead to the conclusion that its logical status is thereby different from that of a groan. Here, Hacker is guilty of the sort of confusion Wittgenstein was wariest of: conflating appearance and use. Identical appearance does not give

words used in different contexts the same meaning, but neither does it give them the same logical status. That a sentence has, in *one* of its uses, the potential to be embedded in the antecedent of a conditional or negated should not presume on the logical status of its *other uses*. There is no infectious symmetry here, no transitivity. Granted, Hacker is not conflating two distinct uses of the same string of words; he is not saying that an avowal can be embedded in the antecedent of a conditional etc., but he *is* saying that the fact that in another use, it *can* be, affects the logical status of the avowal itself. It does not. The syntactic and propositional characteristics of the description do not overlap into the nondescriptive, nonreflective utterance, even when the latter is identical in appearance to the former. What applies to four words that make up a descriptive statement does not apply to four identical words when they are used as the spontaneous expression of a sensation. We must dismiss appearance as contributing to use, and accept that something that has the *appearance* of a sentence can be grammatically barred from sentential *use*: “If you look at the use of what appears to be a statement you may find it is not a statement” (AWL 156). *Looking like* a statement does not condemn a string of words to the logical status of a description. The *descriptive*: ‘I’m in love’ can be embedded in the antecedent of a conditional, put in the interrogative, negated etc., *not* the nondescriptive one. The nondescriptive one is grammatically equivalent to a sigh. And a sigh cannot be negated.

#### 7. *The new boundary line: spontaneous versus descriptive*

Traditional focus on the linguistic aspect of spontaneous utterances has blinded us to their often *exclusively* pragmatic nature: their being the linguistic *equivalents* of acts, such as groaning or crying. Wittgenstein’s point was that something’s being couched in words does not *entail* a difference in nature with something that is not couched in words. Our spontaneous linguistic expressions are not (vertical) *derivations*, but (horizontal) *extensions* of our primitive, *spontaneous* language-games: “why should the wordless shudder be the *ground* of the verbal one?”; “The primitive reaction may have been a glance or a gesture, but it may also have been a word” (PI, pp. 174, 218; my emphasis). Using words, in some contexts, has no further resonance than making a “natural sound” (RPP II, 176). Many of our first-person psychological statements have the grammatical status of behaviour. That they should be verbal does not entail that they are the product of reasoning, conceptualization or self-observation. As Norman Malcolm puts it: “The learned verbal expressions of pain, or fright, are

no more due to thinking or reasoning than is the unlearned preverbal behaviour” (1986, 148). There is a use of words which does not grammatically differ from nonlinguistic, indeed from animal, behaviour.

What Wittgenstein does not sufficiently make clear is that his analogy between words and deeds is not one between spontaneous words and *any* deed, but between spontaneous words and *spontaneous* deeds. For, to equate some strings of words with deeds or behaviour is not necessarily to remove them from the realm of premeditation or indeed, deception -- a groan can be as intentionally deceptive as a statement: it can be used in the place of a word or a sentence as a response to a question, and that response can be the fruit of pretence. What *does* exclude both acts and words from the possibility of deception is their spontaneity, their not being, as Malcolm puts it, "due to thinking or reasoning". To say that some utterances are *spontaneous* is to say that they are not descriptions, and therefore *cannot* be lies. First-person psychological spontaneous expressions are the most reliable strings of words uttered by human beings. Again, Peter Hacker disagrees.

#### 8. *Spontaneous lies?*

Reflecting on the spectrum he has drawn, which opposes “*Avowals and descriptions*”<sup>11</sup>, Hacker admits that *all* avowals (be they, in his terms: *experiential* or not; in my terms: *compulsive* or *neutral*) are nondescriptive and not susceptible of mistake, but some, he believes, can nevertheless be lies:

At this end of the spectrum the concept of *description* gets no grip, nor does that of *truth*. Of course, dissimulation and deceit are possible. (1989, 298)

One wants to ask: how are deceit and dissimulation possible where truth gets no grip? Hacker’s continuum is linguistic, and he also views it as propositional (1996, 181). Yet propositionality implies susceptibility to truth and falsity, and Hacker rightly insists that truth gets no grip at the ‘avowal’ end of the spectrum. So where does Hacker stand? In *Meaning and Mind* (1993), he reiterates the inapplicability of the concepts of truth, falsehood, mistake and description to avowals and again does not thereby eliminate the possibility of dissimulation and deception, but he is clearer as to which avowals are open to this possibility:

The diversity is indefinitely large... But in all these cases the concept of *description* gets no grip. ... Indeed the concepts of truth and falsehood are typically out of place here, although *dissimulation and deception are possible in such contexts*, as indeed they are with groans, smiles, or laughs. Similarly, the more utterances approximate to exclamations, the less room there is for evaluating them as sincere or insincere; for this dimension of evaluation gets a firmer grip in relation to articulate expression of one's inner life, confessions, and telling others how one feels or what one thinks. (1993, 93; latter emphasis mine)

Here, Hacker makes a distinction between avowals that are more linguistically articulate (i.e. that more resemble and are closer to the 'descriptions' end of the continuum), such as confessing -- and there, sees room for dissimulation and pretence -- and those, like exclamations, where he sees less room. Utterances are evaluated as open to dissimulation or insincerity the more linguistically articulate they are. And pretence can be logically excluded only in extreme, presumably nonlinguistic, cases: "If someone is thrown into the flames, etc., it makes no sense to say 'Maybe he is not in pain, but just pretending'. There are circumstances in which one may say that there is no such thing as pretending" (1993, 264). But Wittgenstein's point is precisely that pretence is logically excluded not only in extreme, unambiguous cases such as someone being thrown in the flames, or a baby crying, but in *all* spontaneous utterances. They are all, *at par* with such obvious cases. It is their being spontaneous, not their being exclamations, that makes them logically impervious to pretence. It isn't the brevity of an expression or its apparent similarity to a nonverbal expression that makes an utterance spontaneous -- a three year-old can say: 'Ouch!' although her fall did not hurt, merely to get her mother's attention; conversely, a spontaneous outpouring of emotion can last a very articulate hour. The determining feature here is whether or not the expression is *spontaneous*, not whether or not it resembles a sentence.

#### 9. *There are confessions and there are confessions*

A confession is not always sincere or spontaneous: it can be premeditated or the result of more or less elaborate preparations, such as Augustine, Rousseau or De Quincey put in their *Confessions*. We can speak of a false confession, such as a mother wanting to save her child, confessing to his crime; of a mistaken confession, such as someone confessing to a murder they thought they had committed (it was a set-up and the gun fired blanks); of a fictional confession, such as the *Confessions of Felix Krull: Confidence Man*. A confession can consist of two volumes, three pages, a single word, a nod or an eye movement. Whether it is a truthful or a deceptive confession has nothing to

do with its appearance, but only with the circumstances of its pronouncement. The very same words (e.g. 'I did it!') can be used to formulate a premeditated or a spontaneous confession, a truthful or a deceptive confession. Rather than decide that not all cases of confessing are spontaneous avowals, Hacker places "articulate expression of one's inner life, confessions, and telling others how one feels or what one thinks" *en masse* in the avowal end of the spectrum, and is then left having to account for cases of *deceptive* avowals. He does this by insisting that their being, by (his own) definition, spontaneous, nondescriptive, not susceptible of truth or falsity does not prevent some avowals from being lies. So that, on Hacker's view, a person can lie unthinkingly, and can lie about something which she does not hold as either true or false. Granted, an avowal cannot be mistaken because it is not a description, but it can be insincere, contends Hacker:

My confession of my thoughts may be inadequate, but not because I have made a mistake -- rather because I have been untruthful or have held something crucial back, have exaggerated or understated. (1993, 95)

Hacker believes that excluding the possibility of *mistake* sufficiently guarantees the nondescriptive status of 'avowals'. It does not. The possibility of *pretence* too must be excluded. For to lie about something is to make a consciously false *description*. And Hacker himself recognizes that "in all these cases the concept of *description* gets no grip". So how can he admit lies, which are false statements or descriptions, into the category of nondescriptive avowals? In *Insight and Illusion*, Hacker foresees the objection -- that lying presupposes knowing (so that their being noncognitive logically makes avowals impervious to pretence):

One is inclined to think that the possibility of insincerity betokens the necessity of knowledge. For if I can lie to you about my thoughts, I *must* know them! To lie is surely to say what one knows to be false with intent to deceive. (1989, 300)

Hacker then attempts to justify the possibility of lying *without being aware of doing so* by rightly disconnecting lying from knowledge:

One will still want to object: surely when I lie about my thoughts or feelings I *know* or am conscious that I am really thinking or feeling thus-and-so and not as I said? This is wrong, for the very phrase 'to know that I am lying' is misleading. One ... does not *find out* that one is lying. One does not 'know' that one is lying ... Of course I *know* later that I have lied, but not because I *knew* earlier, but because I *lied* earlier. (1989, 300)

All in all, if I don't *know* my feelings to start with, how can I be said to be lying about them? Because we cannot be said to *know* we are lying -- for reasons similar to those that preclude us from *knowing* that we are in pain, Hacker concludes that it is possible to lie unawares, as it were -- spontaneously. But that is to neglect other types of assurance, *noncognitive* types of assurance, that give pretence its needed awareness. *Knowing* is not our only way of being sure, as Wittgenstein makes clear in *On Certainty*<sup>12</sup>.

Of course, there are premeditated, insincere confessions, but *they* are *not* avowals; they are cases where the concept of description *does* get a grip. Inasmuch as Hacker has placed 'confessions' in that end of the spectrum where "the concept of *description* gets no grip", he has made them *ipso facto* immune to the possibility of *deception*. To evaluate a *spontaneous* confession as possibly deceitful is as much grammatical nonsense as to evaluate a *spontaneous* moan as possibly deceitful. In certain circumstances, it will be grammatical nonsense to think of *any* expression -- be it a confession or a moan -- as dissimulative:

When I say that moaning is the expression of t[oothache], then under certain circ[umstance]s the possibility of it being the expression without the feeling behind it mustn't enter my game.

*It is nonsense to say: the expression [Ausdruck] may always lie.*

*The language games with expressions of feelings (private experiences) are based on games with expressions of which we don't say that they may lie. (LPE 245; my emphasis)*

It is nonsense to say that the expression may *always* lie. Of course expressions can be deceitful, but not *spontaneous* expressions. They are the genuine item, the pretence-free basis which deception learns to imitate. There is no room for dissimulation in a spontaneous utterance because it is an unreasoned expression: "How is a lie possible in a case where there is no justification?" (LPE 250). If an expression is spontaneous, it is *by definition* not mediated, and therefore cannot be contrived, deceitful, premeditated or manipulated: "The expressions get their importance from the fact that they are not used coolly but that *we can't help using them* " (LPE 281; my emphasis). Sincerity is inherent in, *definitive* of, spontaneous utterances; and not, as Hacker seems to think, optional.

A spontaneous utterance is an *élan*, an uncontrolled movement, an impulsive act: "the word which you *utter* is a reaction" (LPE 249; my emphasis). In the realm of the spontaneous, the utterance is itself the measure or criterion

of sincerity; its mere occurrence guarantees its truthfulness<sup>13</sup>. Spontaneous utterances are not *propositions*, *descriptions*, or *lies*. Some words are, in some contexts, nothing but *unknowing deeds*.

#### 10. *Nonpropositional Attitudes*

Words and deeds. Analogously: mind and body. To insist on the insuperability of the distinction between words and deeds betrays an aversion to throwing off mind-body dualism. Hacker's claim that because sentences (in their most common use) can be syntactically manipulated, they cannot (in *any* use) be the equivalent of deeds, denotes a conservative reluctance to relax traditional dichotomies. But Wittgenstein's philosophy, his contribution to our better understanding of ourselves, hinges on precisely such a relaxation, if not wholesale rejection, of our traditional dichotomies. A more perspicuous *rearrangement* of our concepts can only result from a *disturbance* of our dormant dichotomies, not a smug brandishing of them. The attenuation of word-deed or language-act dualism is crucial to Wittgenstein's philosophical enterprise. It is not only conspicuous in his treatment of rules, hinge beliefs (in *On Certainty*<sup>14</sup>), and of course spontaneous utterances, it is the very life-blood of his later pragmatism. To suggest that Wittgenstein could not have envisaged the possible equivalence of act and deed is not only to ignore his various injunctions to "treat the word itself as a gesture" (PG 66), it is, more consequentially, to trivialize his pragmatism, to prevent it from solving or rather, dissolving, one of our most persistent philosophical problems -- that of the explanatory gap.

The body-mind problem can be approached from several angles. Ryle's *bête noire* was the category mistake of viewing mental phenomena as if they were ethereal versions of physical phenomena. Envisaging the mind as functioning in ways analogous to the body forces us to posit *inner causes* of our words and deeds. But because it is after all the realm of the mind that is in question, these causes cannot be outrightly mechanical, and so *reasons* take the place of mechanical *causes*. Beliefs, intentions, desires, are posited as the reasons prompting what we say and do. They are the ghosts that activate the machine. The really damaging consequence here is reductionism -- *reducing* mental phenomena, such as thoughts, desires, beliefs to physical entities so as to invest them with some concrete efficacy. Attempts to reduce the mental to the physical are altogether misdirected. What needs be done is to deny the very



existence of a gap: rather than strive to materialize ghosts, we should denounce their fictitiousness. In cautioning us against the overriding influence of mechanical pictures in our understanding of the mental, Ryle's intention was not to urge that we steer both categories well clear of each other, thereby deepening an alleged gap. Far from stressing a *categorical* categorial division between the mental and the physical, Ryle did more than his share to *dissipate* "the hallowed contrast between Mind and Matter" (1949,23).

Categories have their purpose, but they should serve not dominate. It was the tyranny of (Frege's) concepts with *sharp boundaries* that gave impetus to Wittgenstein's *concepts with blurred edges* (PI 71) and *family resemblance concepts* (PI 67). The intellectual craving for neat, hermetic compartments can blur, rather than clarify philosophical analysis. Categories, like concepts, must be seen to be permeable if we are to get rid of explanatory gaps. We should have learned long ago, since Descartes proceeded to bridge the explanatory gap with the pineal gland, that relegating the body to one impermeable category and the mind to another will not do. We separate the mental (thought) and the physical (act) into incommensurable categories, but in fact what we call an act can manifest itself verbally (spontaneous utterances and, with added paraphernalia, performatives); and what we call thinking (believing, expecting, intending) need be nothing but a way of acting. Where propositionalists, so to speak, insist on logically prefacing our acts with a proposition or a thought, there need be only the act: *my standing up* need not be preceded by: 'I *believe* that my feet are still there'; *my cringing* need not be justified by: 'I *expect* the dentist to hurt me as he approaches with his hypodermic needle'; *my opening the door* need not be prompted by: 'I *intend* to go out'. The acts of standing, cringing and opening the door are not *prompted by* but *embody* or *manifest* or *enact* a belief, an expectation, an intention. Our beliefs, expectations, intentions are not always, as has traditionally been assumed, *propositional* attitudes. They can manifest themselves in *what we do*. This is Wittgenstein's late version of the saying-showing distinction<sup>15</sup>:

... we can see *from their actions* that [people] believe certain things definitely, whether they express this belief or not. (OC 284; my emphasis)

If someone is looking for something and perhaps roots around in a certain place, he *shows* that he believes that what he is looking for is there. (OC 288; my emphasis)

To believe something may be equivalent to *acting in a certain way*. Belief can be expressed propositionally (*said*), but also nonpropositionally (*shown*) -- *in our*

acts. And if a belief, a desire, an expectation or an intention can come in the form of a *way of acting*, philosophers need no longer seek to give them some functional, biological or propositional form that will explain how they prompt behaviour. If beliefs and intentions sometimes *are* behaviour, there is no logical incompatibility in kind between our beliefs and our actions. And therefore no gap. This is not to say that there is no categorial difference between words and deeds, only that the categories are porous. Or as Wittgenstein put it:

Different concepts touch here and run some way together. But you need not think that all lines are *circles*. (PI p. 192; my translation)

### 11. Conclusion

... for is what is linguistic not an experience?  
(Words are deeds.)  
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*

Just as our words sometimes combine to form *descriptions* or falsifiable sentences -- that is, propositions -- they can also combine to form nonmanipulable *expressions*, the logical equivalent of acts. Wittgenstein's assimilation of some words to deeds effects precisely that crucial blurring of categories which shows that there is no necessary gap between our thoughts and acts. Word and deed *cannot* be incommensurable if they are sometimes commensurable, of the same nature. If some words *are* deeds, then the incommensurability between words and acts, and between mind and body vanishes. If *some* cases obviate the need for an explanatory link, then it can no longer be *systematically* postulated that there is a feeling, or sensation, or thought or anything *behind* our words or our acts that prompts them in some mysterious way. In some cases, to say 'I want an apple' *is* to want an apple. And in those cases where the expression does not constitute *the whole* of the belief, feeling, desire, it can be seen as one of its *manifestations* rather than as its consequence. Thereby eluding the need for justification. And where there is no need for justification, no explanatory gap occurs.

Recognizing the exclusively pragmatic character of some first-person psychological deliverances is part of a larger task: that of conjuring all ghosts out of the machine -- which, it must be stressed, is not the same as saying that we have no inner life. It contributes to the general realization that what we say is not the result of an *inner, nonverbalized thought process*, and that *some* of what we say can be a primitive reaction -- part of our nonreflective, animal behaviour<sup>16</sup>. The immediacy of spontaneous utterances, their similarity to

reflexes, makes them exemplary instances of language not doing its traditional, representative act, but more radically pragmatic work. It is in such nonpropositional manifestations that language best shows itself as an *extension* of behaviour, which implies that, at some point, it must be of the same nature as behaviour -- that somewhere, these concepts touch and run some way together. It is in this fringe area that one suddenly perceives language as as much part of our natural expression of ourselves as are our feelings and actions and reflexes. Glimpsing the nature of spontaneous utterances changes our perspective on the whole landscape of language. The sophistication our language is capable of should no longer blind us to its origins, to its intimate relatedness to the behaviour we share with animals. Animals need no ghostly proposition to prompt their actions. Why should we? The fact that we are capable of intricate thought does not make intricate thought essential to our every move.

Peter Hacker has greatly contributed to the clarification of Wittgenstein's attempts to get the ghost out of the machine. But his insistence that words are *never* (for that is what it comes to) assimilable to deeds, and that some of our most spontaneous (unreflective) expressions are propositions open to pretence, prevents the ghost from vanishing. Hacker does not go all the way with Wittgenstein. He draws back at the crucial point. He acknowledges the forays, recognizes the clarifications, the demaskings, some of the reclassifications and rearrangements, but not the upheaval, not the revolution itself. Hacker's reading of Wittgenstein is a *weak* reading of Wittgenstein. Hacker's teetering on the brink prevents him from making the leap Wittgenstein made, and hinders our viewing the paradigm shift at hand.

## NOTES

I am grateful to Avrum Stroll and Anat Matar for their invaluable comments on a previous draft of this paper. The present version owes much of its motivation to reactions of participants at the ESPP (European Society for Philosophy and Psychology) conference (Warwick, July 1999), notably that of Daniel Statman.

<sup>1</sup> The expression 'ghost in the machine' is Gilbert Ryle's. It appears in his *Concept of Mind* (1949) in the form: 'the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine', denounced as the "Cartesian category-mistake" of representing minds as ghosts harnessed to machines (p. 21). Though Ryle designates this as "Descartes' myth", he acknowledges its origin in Platonic and Aristotelian theories of the intellect as well as in theological doctrines of the soul (24).

<sup>2</sup>Cf. PI 23, but this tripartite division of the function of language is due to Karl Bühler (1934), confirming Kevin Mulligan's thesis that "Bühler finds a system in what Wittgenstein presents as part of the inexhaustible variety of language" (1997, 209). Bühler speaks of 'representation' rather than 'description'.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. RPP I, 693. As Michel ter Hark notes, the first-person *descriptive* language-game is less often played and more demanding than the *expressive* one (1990, 114). A language-game for which I suggest we adopt: 'self-observation' [*Selbstbeobachtung*] (PI 586) to avoid the inner voyeurism suggested by: 'introspection', or Wittgenstein's overly technical reference to 'functional states' (RPP I, 61). Such self-observation reaches its culmination in great thinkers: "myself has watched myself" writes D.H. Lawrence (Letters 1.39).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. respectively OC 510 and RPP I, 572. Wittgenstein does not consistently use these terms in this way.

<sup>5</sup> Hacker repeatedly refers to avowals as 'spontaneous'; see (1993) 86, 89, 90, 92 etc.

<sup>6</sup> I am not using the term 'compulsive' in its specialized, psychopathological connotation of obsessive, neurotic behaviour, of a person's acting *against* her wishes, but rather as alluding to behaviour that occurs not *in accordance with* one's wishes or thoughts, that is not rationally but emotionally driven; coming, as it were, *from the guts*. I want to relate the feature of these expressions that both Wittgenstein (LPE 281) and George Eliot (see epigram to Section 5) characterize in terms of: we *can't help* using them, and of which Eliot specifically writes that they "come *without any will of my own*" (my emphasis) – not *against* her will. Other terms I have envisaged have proved more equivocal: e.g. 'reflexive' (means both 'of the nature of reflex' and 'of the nature of reflection').

<sup>7</sup>As opposed to such 'passive' states of feeling as sensory impressions and kinaesthetic sensations.

<sup>8</sup>Hertzberg (1992) distinguishes two senses in Wittgenstein's use of the notion of 'primitive': a *logical* sense, indicating the place occupied by a type of reaction or utterance in relation to a language-game; and an *anthropological* sense, connected with understanding the place of a reaction in the life of a human being. I would add: *in the history of the human species* -- and so: primitive in the *phylogenetic* sense as well. It is of course the *logical* place of spontaneous utterances in our language-games that is of philosophical interest, but Wittgenstein's method of philosophizing 'by example', appeals to *anthropological* cases in point.

<sup>9</sup>That language is based on convention does not make some of our uses of it less automatic. Our language has been, for the most part, *drilled* into us, and in ordinary usage (vs. specialized usage such as philosophical discussion or scientific classification), we use its more ordinary terms (*table, rain, people, flower, street* etc.) habitually, without precursory reflection, hesitation or recall. We certainly do not reflect before articulating our *spontaneous* utterances.

<sup>10</sup>The notable exceptions to this being Adolf Reinach (1883-1917) and J.L. Austin. The inclusion of nonlinguistic fields in language was precisely effected by Karl Bühler.

<sup>11</sup>A section heading in (1989), p. 297 and a chapter heading in (1993). Hacker consistently uses 'avowal' to denote nondescriptive *linguistic* expressions. Elsewhere, the spectrum is said to be composed of "sentences" (1993, 92) or "propositions" (1996, 181).

<sup>12</sup>Where *objective certainty* is depicted as the fundamental, nonepistemic assurance that underpins and enables knowing.

<sup>13</sup>I cannot here engage in a discussion of the link between spontaneous utterances and what Wittgenstein calls 'secondary meaning', where expressions are governed by criteria, not of truth, but of *truthfulness* or sincerity (cf. PI p. 222).

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of the nonpropositional nature of hinge beliefs, see my 'Wittgenstein distinguished: A Response to Pieranna Garavaso's "The distinction between the logical and

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the empirical in *On Certainty*," *Philosophical Investigations* 21:3 (1998)', *Philosophical Investigations* (January 2000).

<sup>15</sup> I agree with John Koethe's view on the "pervasiveness of showing and seeing" in Wittgenstein's work, but not with his interpretation of the distinction (*The Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), *passim*). I believe that what is *shown* is what, though verbally articulated, in fact cannot *logically* be *said* inasmuch as it is not propositional (in Wittgenstein's consistently bipolar view of the proposition), not susceptible of truth or falsity. I believe Wittgenstein to have focused on two large classes of cases where words do not *meaningfully* say, but only show. These are rules (grammatical and others -- the pronouncements of the *Tractatus* belong here, as well as the 'hinge' beliefs of *On Certainty*) and spontaneous utterances.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Malcolm (*Nothing is hidden: Wittgenstein's criticism of his early thought*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1986 & *Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays 1978-1989*. Ed. G.H. von Wright. NY: Cornell UP, 1995) and Paul Johnston (*Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner*. London, Routledge, 1993) have especially contributed to elucidating this crucial aspect of Wittgenstein's thought.

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