

Wittgenstein on the Experience of Meaning and the Meaning of Music

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Introduction

The meaning of words, according to Wittgenstein, is grounded in their use – in the ways they are used. This does not mean only that in order to know the meaning of a word we should look at its use; it is not only a practical recommendation for the linguist or the learner. It is rather a philosophical thesis about the very notion of meaning, according to which use is what constitutes meaning, and about what the very ascription of meaning to a word amounts to. This position calls for a deep investigation of the notion of use – an investigation that preoccupied Wittgenstein throughout his career: What is the notion of use involved here and in what concepts should it be conceived? What are its constituents and what is its extension? How is a word connected with a particular kind of use that constitutes its meaning? What is the nature of the knowledge and the human capacity that are involved in understanding a word and knowing its use?

Words in a language, according to Wittgenstein, are not "dead signs" that are correlated to their meanings by some semantical convention. Nor are they components of use in its behavioristic sense, where use is described in "physicalistic" terms, or in some other reductionistic way that does not presume and rely on the meanings and the concepts involved. Words in a language have, according to Wittgenstein a "soul", "face", "character" that express their inherent relation to the kind of use that constitutes their meaning. This is vital for understanding the inherent intentionality of language – our ability to use language "in the world", and to grasp sentences as directed to and as being about things in the world.

The present article is concerned with the significance of a special experience – common and familiar, though quite neglected in philosophy – that Wittgenstein calls

"the experience of meaning". It is an experience that stands at the basis of our capacity to mean words in particular ways, and at the basis of the direct and immediate way a word is connected with its meaning. This experience is not a psychological (subjective) attachment to the use of a word, but rather an objective feature of it. The ability to experience it – the ability to have this meaning experience – conditions the ability to grasp the soul and character of words and their inherent connection with their meanings - the ability, in short, to understand and use language.

In support of this claim, which is not explicit in Wittgenstein's writings, he proposed various considerations, which I shall try to present as a skeletal argument. The argument is based on a substantial kinship between the experience of meaning concerned and the experience of "dawning of an aspect", which is of great importance in Wittgenstein's conception of perception and thought.

Linguistic understanding has been usually explicated in epistemic terms: From Frege to Davidson and Dummett, philosophers have usually asked what one should know in order to understand a language.¹ The Wittgensteinian considerations sketched here amounts to widening the perspective, and pointing, beyond knowledge, to an **experiential capacity** required for understanding language.

The experience concerned is manifested in "fine shades" of use and behavior, which are characteristic of "mastering a technique" and proficiency in making and assessing relevant comparisons. Wittgenstein often explains these and their relationships to the experience of meaning by reference to musical examples. In music, meaning and understanding are naturally explicated in terms of the fine shades of use, manifested primarily in performance and other kinds of musical behavior. Here, mastery of technique, and the ability to make and assess relevant comparisons are naturally considered as the basis of understanding. This is conspicuous in music precisely because we seem to lack here any grip on an idea of the "meaning body" (Bedeutungskörper), which is so often conceived as the basis of linguistic

understanding, and which is the target of Wittgenstein's criticism. A proper understanding of these ideas, and recognizing that the notions of meaning and understanding in language and music are "much more akin than one may think" (PI 527) are very important for understanding the notions of meaning and use in language. But they also suggest an important route for applying the notions of meaning and understanding to music and for the philosophy of music in general.

I. Background

Words, according to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, have meanings (Bedeutungen) in the context of propositions (3.3).² Their meanings, in such contexts, are the objects they mean, or refer to (3.203). Propositions do not have meaning, but sense (Sinn). Roughly, their senses are the possible situations they represent or depict (2.221; 4.031). Later, much of these doctrines was abandoned or explicitly rejected by Wittgenstein. Although use, in general, is constitutive of meaning in the *Tractatus* conception as well (see e.g. 3.326), beginning with the writings of the early thirties, Wittgenstein came to realize that to get clear about the notion of meaning and the functioning of language, one should, in general, better not talk of what words refer to and what sentences represent, but rather of how words and sentences (of multifarious kinds) are used in various contexts (early formulations are e.g. in PR, p. 59; BB p. 4).³ This underlined the non-representative, intra-linguistic character of his conception of meaning and understanding, in which the kinds of use, their nature and individuation posed particularly acute problems.

Side by side with this, Wittgenstein came to realize that use, in the sense concerned, being primarily the use of a word (or an expression or a sentence), is constituted by such a word having a fixed "character", or "face" of its own, which is unified over its various occasions of use, and in terms of which we group various (token) use-occasions into one kind. It is one thing to talk in general terms of use and its importance, and another to describe various kinds of use, their subtle features, and

the elements that are operative in making such a kind into what it is. But the latter became a prominent task, once the former is granted.

This trend of Wittgenstein's thought developed gradually and became prominent in the late writings (of 1946 and on)⁴, in which he spoke of the meaning of words in ways that were sensitive to subtle and philosophically neglected features of the words themselves, subtle features of their uses and the ways we conceive of them. It is this trend in the later Wittgenstein that is the focus of this paper. I shall present its main components and their philosophical significance, emphasizing ways in which it enhances the non-representative, intra-linguistic and comparative notions of meaning and understanding.

Meaning, for Wittgenstein, is determined by use and behavior (see e.g. PI 432), but it is not always clear how broadly Wittgenstein meant these notions. It should first be noted that use, in general, is primarily the use of words, in which the words themselves are parts of the use. Secondly, Wittgenstein sometimes defends particularly strong notions of meaning, thought and understanding which are sensitive to the very "fine shades of behavior" and use:

We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another, which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.) In the one case the thought in the sentence is something common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions (PI 531; cf. LW II, p. 39; PG, 32, p. 69)

In this sense he attaches special importance to an elusive feature of meaning to which he refers as the "feeling", "voice", "face", "look", "physiognomy", "character" or "soul" of words, and due to which replacing one word by another almost always changes the meaning of the sentences in which the word appears. A Typical example is RPP I, 322:

While any word [...] may have a different character in different contexts, all the same there is one character – a face – that it always has. It looks at us. – For one might actually think that each word was a little face; the written sign might be a face. And one might also imagine that the whole proposition was a kind of group-picture, so that the gaze of the faces all together produced a relationship among them and so the whole made a *significant group*.⁵

In explaining these fine aspects of meaning Wittgenstein often turns to musical allusions, and points to the special “feeling” that a chord, an instrument, a rhythm, or a turn of melody may have. The presumption here, I suppose, is that in music the significance of these “fine shades” of feeling and expression are particularly prominent and relatively clear; comparing language to music may therefore clarify and sharpen our appreciation of these features in language too.

What we call “understanding a sentence” has, in many cases, a much greater similarity to understanding a musical theme than we might be inclined to think. But I don’t mean that understanding a musical theme is more like the picture which one tends to make oneself of understanding a sentence; but rather that this picture is wrong, and that understanding a sentence is much more like what really happens when we understand a tune than at first sight appears. For understanding a sentence, we say, points to a reality outside the sentence. Whereas one might say “understanding a sentence means getting hold of its content; and the content of the sentence is *in* the sentence” (BB, p. 167; cf. PI 527).

The significance of the last sentence, with its emphasis on the content being *in* the sentence, and the importance of the connection of this to the notion of the “feeling” or “face” of words for Wittgenstein’s conception of meaning, will occupy us in the sequel. But the general kinship Wittgenstein notices between understanding a musical theme and a sentence, and his late conception of meaning are, I believe, of great importance for the philosophy of music as well. They present a fruitful way of applying the notions of meaning and understanding to music, in which the “fine shades” of meaning are so conspicuous and important. This, on many traditional, non-Wittgensteinian conceptions of meaning has notoriously proved to be hopelessly metaphorical and stubbornly resistant to any insightful use.

Wittgenstein, I suppose, can hardly be credited with presenting a philosophy of music, but his writings are abundant in scattered remarks about music, perhaps more (in number and weight) than any other philosopher of his rank. Some are quite perceptive and can teach us a lot about Wittgenstein’s musical taste and knowledge.⁶ Some, moreover, are also important for understanding various features of his

philosophy of meaning. Conversely, his philosophy of meaning is very important, I believe, for the philosophy of music. In the following I shall focus on one theme in which these inter-relationships are manifest: it is in understanding Wittgenstein's notions of the "experience of meaning", the "feeling", "face" or "soul" of words, as ingredients of their meaning and use. Musical allusions and analogies are of particular importance here. Likewise, this conception of meaning is of great significance for the philosophy of music.

One of the great problems in the philosophy of music is that, although intuitively music seems to be meaningful (sometimes even of "deep" and "illuminating" meaning), it seems to be particularly stubborn and resistant to any "semantic" treatment: It has always been difficult to see how "meaning" could be fruitfully ascribed to music, i.e. in a way that enhances a theory of understanding music, in anything like the way this notion is applied to language. Here and in the sequel I use "meaning" rather vaguely, more or less like Wittgenstein's use of "content" in the above quote from BB, roughly, as what we grasp or get hold of in understanding a word, a sentence, or a musical passage. Now, on the "negative" side of his philosophy of meaning, Wittgenstein's general rejection of any conception of what he calls "meaning-body" (RPP I, 42), and his critique of a conception of meaning as a correlation of words to something "external" (extra-linguistic), seem to free philosophers of music from their permanent frustration in trying to find any such "meaning-body", or any such correlations in music. On the positive side, Wittgenstein's conception of the use of words as criterial manifestation of their meaning and understanding seems to provide a natural way of applying these notions of meaning and understanding to music, by regarding performance and "musical behavior" in general, as "musical surrogates" of linguistic use, and as the foundation of a theory of meaning and understanding in music.

This view of the role of performance as a criterial manifestation of musical understanding is a large topic, which deserves a discussion of its own.⁷ I do not

expand on this general topic in the present paper. I shall rather assume that our musical experience is sufficient for appreciating the musical analogies of features of Wittgenstein's notion of the "face", "character" and "feeling" of a word (or sentence or phrase), and the related notion of the "experience of meaning".

I first try to clarify this notion of feeling and its relationship to meaning in Wittgenstein's conception, emphasizing its central role in music as explanatory of its use in language. The feeling of words, in this sense, is an objective feature of their meaning and use, and should be distinguished from feelings as psychological processes or experiences that "accompany" our use of words (section II). I then explain its philosophical significance by arguing that word-feeling and the "experience of meaning" are basically instances of Wittgenstein's general conception of aspect and aspect-perception, which are important elements in his later conception of meaning and of thought (section III a). The nature of this experience is explicated as a grasp of internal relations and comparisons, which is manifested in a "mastery of a technique", or "feeling at home" in a certain practice (section III b). In this sense, I shall argue, the ability to experience the meaning of a word is an essential feature of the very intentionality of our thought and language (section III c-d). The ability to experience meaning is also a precondition for using words in a "secondary sense", which is of great significance in itself (section III e). I shall conclude by briefly pointing to the application of these notions of understanding, feeling, and experience, as well as their explication in terms of comparisons, internal relation and mastery of technique, to music, where they are so apt and natural (section IV).

II. The Feeling of Words and the Process of Meaning

A. Meaning is not an accompanying process

Wittgenstein persistently objected to identifying the meaning of a sentence (or a word) with a process or event that "accompanies" it or a meaningful utterance of it.

"The meaning of a word is not an experience one has in saying or hearing it" (PI 181c; cf. PG, 6, p.45; BB, p.5; LW I: 361).

Wittgenstein proposes various reasons for this, on which he makes endless variations. One is that very often there just isn't any such identifiable process or experience accompanying the meaningful use of the word. The other, more radical reason is that even when there is such an experience or process connected to the meaningful use of a word, and even if such a connection were a constant one, it would simply not be what constitutes meaning, for it neither determines nor is it objectively manifested in use:

Even if someone had a particular capacity only when, and only as long as, he had a particular feeling, the feeling would not be the capacity (PI p. 181d).

The view expressed here of capacities and feelings is, in fact, Wittgenstein's view concerning meaning and accompanying phenomena of all sorts:

Meaning is not a process which accompanies a word. For no *process* could have the consequences of meaning (PI, p. 218).
Meaning is as little experience as intending (ibid. 217).

From the point of view of a theory of meaning, in trying to understand what gives words (as signs) their "life" (as symbols), mental processes and images are as dead as words are – they are just other signs. Therefore, connecting or correlating words with them would just amount to connecting a sign with another sign. Hence, as a general view of what meaning is, when meaning is conceived of in terms of use, it is untenable. This, in general, is the gist of Wittgenstein's opposition to explaining the notion of meaning in terms of interpretation, which, on his view, is basically such a correlation of signs with signs:

But an interpretation is something that is given in signs. [...] So if one were to say "Any sentence still stands in need of an interpretation" that would mean: no sentence can be understood without a rider (PG, 9, p.47).
Whenever we interpret a symbol in one way or another, the interpretation is a new symbol added to the old one (BB, p.33, cf. ff.).

This is an aspect of Wittgenstein's insistent distinction between meaning (Bedeutung) and interpretation (Deutung), and of his view that

"Any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support" (PI 198).

Understanding depends on a basic level of meaning which is not an interpretation (PI 201).⁸ This, of course, is not to deny that sometimes we do interpret sentences and words; for instance, when we interpret an English sentence by a German one (which has its own meaning). As Wittgenstein notes we may even imagine making such a process as a rule - always thinking a German sentence as what we mean by uttering an English one. The important thing is that what we take here as giving the meaning is itself a meaningful linguistic expression, belonging to a well-understood language, which “gives it life”.⁹

b. The process of meaning

However, Wittgenstein was also interested in what he called “the process of meaning”, which should be distinguished from the above notion of a (psychological) process accompanying an act of meaning. In the Blue Book, in which he repeatedly insists on separating the meaning of a word from all sorts of psychological processes that may accompany its use, he tries to illuminate this special process of meaning by alluding once again to music:

A process accompanying our words which one might call the “process of meaning them” is the modulation of the voice in which we speak the words; or one of the processes similar to this, like the play of facial expression. These accompany the spoken words not in the way a German sentence might accompany an English sentence, or writing a sentence might accompany speaking a sentence; but in the sense in which the tune of a song accompanies its words. This tune corresponds to the ‘feeling’ with which we say the sentence. And I wish to point out that this feeling is the expression with which the sentence is said, or something similar to the expression (p.35).

What is this “feeling”, and how is it related to the meaning of the sentence? Is it an element, a component of this meaning? Or is it rather an attached accompaniment to the meaning, something, which is not essential to or constitutive of the meaning? What is the point of the contrast between the relationship between the music and the words of a song, and the relationship between an English sentence we utter and a German one we think to ourselves that may accompany it?

Wittgenstein is trying to explain here the sense in which the feeling with which we utter a sentence, the modulation of the voice, vocal emphases, facial expressions, etc. “accompany” an uttered sentence as parts of its meaning, and not as e.g. psychological processes that may accompany it. We might think that the main point here is that all these are undetachable from the (uttered) sentence itself. This is true, but falls short of what Wittgenstein wants here. For if that is all he wants, the musical example would seem puzzling: The music of a song may be heard as a separate “process” from its words, just as a German sentence is separate from an English one. What then is the point of the example? We can get closer to Wittgenstein’s meaning, I believe, by asking in what sense we speak of the music as a real accompaniment of the words. The music is not just an accompanying process in the sense of taking place simultaneously or along with the words. It is accompanying the words in that it gives expression to the specific feeling with which the words are meant. In this sense it expresses a feature of the meaning of the words. It belongs to, and is an expression of this feature. We sometimes say that a tune “fits” the meaning, or the feeling of the words. This may be misleading in suggesting two identifiable things here that are somehow related. While in fact the tune is a constitutive expression of this feature of meaning. And this, Wittgenstein says, corresponds to the feeling in which the sentence is said.

In later writings Wittgenstein gave prominence to this feature of the meaning of sentences and words - the intonation, the facial expression, the “soul” of a word and the way it “feels” to us - are all inseparable elements of the word or the sentence itself (cf. LW I 366-371). They are not independent processes, which are identifiable in themselves. This is not to say that Wittgenstein has changed his view that psychological processes that may accompany a word are irrelevant to its meaning. Rather, he has discovered, or came to appreciate better, an additional element - the

face, character, or feeling of a word - as an ingredient of its objective meaning and use.

c. Two senses of “feeling”

In order to understand this additional element, it is important to distinguish between two senses of “feeling” here: In one sense, feelings are psychological processes (or states) that we may have when we use words. In this sense Wittgenstein talks interchangeably of feelings and sensations (BB 79). In the other sense, the feeling of a word is an objective feature of the word and its meaning, which may be causally connected to the (psychological) feelings more or less as the color of a flower is connected to the feeling we may have on seeing it.¹⁰

[...] From this it follows that we cannot be dealing with the same concept of experience here. It is a different though related concept (PI, p.208j)

A major point in Wittgenstein’s opposition to the identification of feelings which may accompany words with the meaning of the words was that these feelings were conceived as psychological occurrences or states that are identifiable in themselves; that they could, in principle, be felt or thought independently of the words and as accompanying other words. All this is not true of the other use of “feeling”, in which the word-feeling is intrinsically connected to the word itself - it is not something that could, even in principle, be separated from the word and identified independently of it (LW I, 366-7).

In PI, p. 182b (cf. LW I: 362-4) Wittgenstein wonders whether a person may have the same ‘feeling’ for “if” and “but” (supposing that we don’t) and still use them right.¹¹ Much depends here on how broadly we want to take the notion of “right” use. When we take it broadly enough, Wittgenstein’s answer is, I believe, negative - we cannot conceive of all these aspects as separate from the use of the word. He first emphasizes that the feeling of a word is not something separate that accompanies the word (LW I 368, 378), for “Otherwise it could accompany other things too” (ibid. 369).

The feeling of a word is an integral part of it; it is part of the look, the gesture it casts at us, just like its sound (ibid. 366-371):

The if-feeling is not a feeling which accompanies the word "if".
The if-feeling would have to be compared with the special 'feeling' which a musical phrase gives us [...]
But can this feeling be separated from the phrase? [obviously not] And yet it is not the phrase itself, for that can be heard without the feeling. (PI, p. 182e; cf. LW I, 378)

We cannot separate a word from the way it sounds, the way it looks, and the way it feels, for then what would be left of it? We might say - its use; this is after all the essential thing, and this could remain untouched by all these changes. The use of a word is what determines its meaning; it is how the meaning of the word is made manifest. Our problem is, then, to get clearer about the relationship between the feeling of a word and its meaning and use. Wittgenstein's point, I suggest, is that this feeling is a constituent of use.

Here again Wittgenstein finds it helpful to allude to the feeling a musical phrase (in a context) gives us, and to the "expression" with which it is played (cf. also LW I: 373-382). Again, he emphasizes that the feeling of a passage, like the expression with which it is played, are experiences which are not separate, or separable, from the passage itself:

The special feeling this passage gives me belongs to the passage, indeed to the passage in this context (ibid. 381; cf. also 374, 379).

There is, therefore, no contrast between associating the feeling of a word with its meaning, and insisting that the meaning of a word is not a separate experience one has in using it (cf. RPP I, 654; PI p.208j).

Wittgenstein holds, however, that there is a narrower sense of "sense" and a wider sense of "feeling" in which we can say that the same passage can give different feelings, or be played with different expressions, and likewise, that the same feeling and expression may be associated with different passages (ibid. 380). But this, far from being meant to imply that the feeling and the expression do not really belong to

the objective sense of a word (or the meaning of a passage), has quite the contrary aim: it is intended to bring out the objectivity of these notions of feeling and expression - the fact that they are not private or idiosyncratic features of our subjective experiences. Once this is realized, there should be no special problem in admitting that feelings can be identified and compared, so that two passages could have the same feeling.

A somewhat related observation is made with regard to the notion of understanding. We have a narrow notion of understanding, according to which replacing a word by a “synonymous” one, does not affect the overall sense or understanding of a sentence, in which the word appears. But, as we have seen, we also have another notion in which we cannot replace a word by another, leaving the overall sense unchanged, “any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another” (PI 531). Wittgenstein then asks:

Then has “understanding” two different meanings here? - I would rather say that these kinds of use of “understanding” make up its meaning, make up my concept of understanding. For I want to apply the word “understanding” to all this (PI 532).

We can generalize this point and speak of notions of sense and understanding in which they are sensitive not only to changes of words of different meanings, but also to changes in the feeling, voice, gesture, etc. in which words are heard or expressed:

I say: “I can think of this face (which gives an impression of timidity) as courageous too.” [...] I am speaking of an aspect of the face itself. [...] The reinterpretation of a facial expression can be compared to the reinterpretation of a chord in music, when we hear it as a modulation first into this, then into that key. (PI 536).

It is quite clear in this context that a change of aspect of a face, or a change in the way it looks and what it expresses and projects are regarded by Wittgenstein as analogous to a change in how a word “feels”. This is shown by the fact that this passage is brought as an answer to the question Wittgenstein raises in PI 535: “What happens when we learn to feel the ending of a church mode as an ending?” And this question

about the feeling of a chord derives, in the context, from talking about how words feel to us.

The upshot of this discussion is, therefore, that the notion of the soul of a word and how it feels to us is a part of the wide notions of meaning, use and understanding to which Wittgenstein appeals here. The soul of a word is not something separate from its meaning and use - an inner phenomenon that can be grasped independently of the “outer” word and its use. It is rather an intrinsic feature of the word, its meaning and use themselves. This, evidently, is part of the point of Wittgenstein’s use of the word “soul” here. We should bear in mind the very last sentence of LW I: 979:

The idea of the human soul, which one either sees or doesn’t see, is very similar to the idea of the meaning of a word, which stands next to the word, whether as a process or an object.

This remark is meant to be degrading of a certain view of the soul (and meaning) as a separate “entity”, attached to a person (or a word). But the rejection of this false view strengthens the alternative conception of the soul as an objective feature of the human person and its life (and of meaning as an objective feature of a word and its use).

d. Feeling - “Only a means of comparing”

Granting the special objective sense of feeling and expression as features of the meaning of words (and music), we might try now to get clearer about their exact role and the ways in which they are manifested in use. With regard to music, which is his permanent explanatory analogy, Wittgenstein cryptically says,

“Here this concept [of the feeling and expression with which a passage is played] serves **only** as a means of comparing different performances of this passage” (LW I, 382).

We may point out the difference between such performances by appealing to the different expressions with which they are played, or the different feelings they give. This should not be taken lightly as concerned with secondary or superfluous aspects of our understanding words or musical passages. We shall see later that such comparisons, and a clear view of them, is, according to Wittgenstein, the core of our

understanding - of music as well as language. Hence, appeal to these feelings, as what is manifest in the ways we distinguish, appreciate and compare performances, is, in this respect, central to the sense or meaning of a passage (cf. LC, pp. 20, 29).

Let me mention here in passing, a point to which we shall return later on, that the fact that the point or function of this concept of feeling in music is in comparing performances has great significance of its own. For, a performance is the primary case of the kind of practice and use which give music meaning; it is the outer manifestation of our understanding music in general and of the particular way we understand a particular piece of music (cf. Z 161-5).

III The Significance of the Feeling of Words

Up to here I have presented some of Wittgenstein's observations about the objectivity of the feeling of words (and related notions), and its distinction from a psychological process or event that may accompany their use. But how important are these phenomena or features of meaning? And what is their significance for understanding our language? It is clear that there are, according to Wittgenstein, various features, or manifestation of language-use for which the experience of meaning and word-feeling are necessary. They are, for instance, necessary for understanding puns, and various kinds of jokes (LW I, 711). They are obviously manifested in "bizarre" cases like recognizing a fit between a name and its bearer, a vowel and a color, a sound and a color, etc. which we shall mention in the sequel. At a higher level, they are necessary for understanding "high" and sophisticated use of language, like in art and poetry.

But all these seem to be very special cases of "higher level" or "secondary" uses of language. Beyond these it is doubtful whether Wittgenstein thought that these phenomena are of great significance.¹² He has many skeptical pronouncements in this spirit. He often mentions that we can imagine languages and cultures that lack these phenomena, or even people who use our language with a purely informational, or "prosaic" attitude, in which these phenomena are lacking (see PI, 530, p.218I, Z 145;

RPP I, 342; 355-360; 687; RPP II, 571; LW I, 784); and he often writes as if these phenomena were epiphenomenal to meaning and understanding as manifested by the basic or primary use of words (PI, p. 218; Z 145; RPP II, 245-6; LW II, p.3).

It seems to me, however, that this doesn't do full justice to the phenomena in question and to their significance in Wittgenstein's philosophy. The feeling of words and the experience of meaning are connected with some general features of language and thought, wherein their general significance lies. The main ones are: aspect perception and the notion of seeing-as; the connection between understanding and mastering of a technique; meaning blindness and the distinction between meaning and interpretation; and the notion of secondary sense. I shall turn now to discussing these topics with a view to establishing the general thesis that the feeling of words and the experience of meaning are important not only for understanding special "higher level" uses of language, but are objective features of our understanding of basic primary uses as well.

The nature of the "connection" and "importance" I speak about is subtle and varies from case to case. It is difficult to explain it in a general way. Roughly, I would say that the feeling of words and the experience of meaning are characteristic of our attitude towards our language; having them is, moreover, a precondition of our ability to mean, to intend and to use language intentionally. Much of what follows is directed to this end.

The skeletal structure of the argument for this is the following: (i) meaning a word in a particular way (in a particular meaning) is akin to the idea of seeing-as - seeing something as something. (ii) Seeing-as is basically seeing under an aspect, which is an objective feature of what is seen. (iii) This in turn depends on our ability to see something under different aspects (multiple-aspect-ability - MAA). (iv) This ability, however, depends conceptually on a special experience - the experience of noticing an aspect and an aspect change. (v) This experience, as well as the ability to see

something as something, are manifestations of a basic feature of our attitude to pictures and to symbols (like words) – that we often see their objects **in** them (“picture-objects”). (vi) It is correlative to the experience of meaning or the ability to experience meanings.

The kinship mentioned in (i) and the correlation in (vi) are presented and elucidated by Wittgenstein with the notions of the meaning-blind, or the form-blind, which will be discussed in the sequel. Thus, the experience of meaning is shown to be involved in the very idea of meaning.

a. Seeing an Aspect, Visual Experience and What Is Seen

Meaning and its relation to the feeling of words and the experience of meaning are likened by Wittgenstein to seeing, and to various features of what he calls “aspect-perception” – (i) the noticing of aspects, as noticing the similarity between two faces (PI, p. 193c), seeing a face in a drawing (PI, p. 196c), the sudden recognition of a face (PI, p. 197i), a change of aspect, as in seeing a drawing once as a duck, then as a rabbit (PI, p. 194b) etc. (ii) continuous aspect perception, where the noticing of the aspect is not episodic as in the above cases, but continuous, where something is seen continuously under a certain aspect (PI, p.194b).

The importance of this concept [aspect blindness, G.B.] lies in the connexion between the concepts of ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘experiencing the meaning of a word’. For we want to ask “What would you be missing if you did not *experience* the meaning of a word?” (PI, p. 214e; cf. also LW I, circa 784).

Hence, we shall better understand the nature and significance of the experience of meaning if we understand the nature and significance of aspect-perception.

The issue is extensively discussed in RPP and LW, and much of it is distilled in the celebrated section xi of PI II.

Noticing or seeing an aspect, and an aspect-change, as when a picture is seen once as a rabbit, and then as a duck, are, Wittgenstein says, experiences (PI, p. 193a, 199b). “I am now seeing it as....” is akin to “I am now having *this* image” (PI, p. 213c) – The point of noticing the kinship here is that they are both temporal experience. As

such they might seem to be totally subjective and distinct from the content of what is seen. But this is not Wittgenstein's view. According to him the aspects concerned are rather objective features of what is seen. They are not subjective experiences, which somehow accompany what is seen. Faced with these phenomena, we must be cautious in making any sharp distinction between what is seen and the way it is seen.

What is seen, Wittgenstein claims, is an elastic notion - it is as elastic as its representations and descriptions:

The concept of a representation of what is seen, like that of a copy, is very elastic, and so together with it is the concept of what is seen. The two are intimately connected (PI, p. 198a).

Thinking and concepts are thus absorbed in what is seen and in the visual experience:

“Hence the flashing of an aspect on us seems half visual experience, half thought” (PI, p. 197c; cf. 199b, 212c; LW II, p. 14).

The perceptual content - what is seen - and the perceptual experience are thus regarded as indistinguishable from a thought - the content of thinking:

You can think now of this now of this as you look at it, can regard it now as this now as this, and then you will see it now this way, now this” - What way? There is no further qualification. (PI p. 200d)

Now, when I know my acquaintance in a crowd, perhaps after looking in his direction for quite a while, - is this a special sort of seeing? Is it a case of both seeing and thinking? Or an amalgam of the two, as I should almost like to say? (Ibid. bottom of 197)

The fact that what is seen is thus half thinking and conceptual (LW II, p.14c), and that we can see the same thing once as this and once as that, is important for understanding an important feature of our attitude to pictures (and as we shall see, to words): Normally, when we look at a picture we see “its object”, what is depicted, right in it. When we see a picture of e.g. a face, we see the face there. We don't just see lines and colors at certain configurations, and interpret them, as a representation of a face (of course, there could be cases like this, but this is not the regular case). The face there is what Wittgenstein calls a picture-object (PI, p. 194d). This notion of picture-object epitomizes an important feature of our attitude towards pictures, which we may call their intrinsic intentionality – we **see** the picture as a picture of so and so,

not just interpret it or know it, or regard it to be so. We see the so and so *in* the picture. It is this that explains, and lies at the bottom of the peculiar feeling we have in the “dawning of an aspect” or an aspect change. Since we see the object depicted there in the picture, we have the peculiar feeling we have when we suddenly realize that it is there where nothing was there before (the dawning of an aspect) or where something different was there before (aspect-change). These experiences would be unintelligible if what is seen would be just lines and colors, which get interpreted once this way, once that. Hence, the ability to see aspects and to notice aspect-changes depends conceptually on this intrinsic intentionality of pictures – we see objects in them.

However, the dependency goes also the other way around: Seeing an object in a picture is not a regular way of seeing objects; rather, it is seeing a picture in a particular way – under a certain aspect. One, who is deprived of this ability, an “aspect blind” man, who never sees something as something,

“would generally have a different attitude toward pictures than we do. It might be the kind of attitude which we have toward a blueprint” (RPP II, 479; cf. PI, p. 214b; p. 204j).

Such an aspect blind man may be taken as interpreting the picture, and he may interpret it correctly. But, Wittgenstein says, such interpretations would be hypotheses, and seeing something as something, in contrast, is not a hypothesis, just as seeing something red isn't (PI, p. 212e,f; Z 208).

In sum, there is a (two ways) conceptual connection between the ability of seeing aspects (and noticing aspect-changes), and the intrinsic intentionality of pictures - our attitude to pictures which is epitomized by the notion of picture-object.

Is every case of seeing a case of seeing-as or seeing under an aspect? Some scholars have suggested this, but it doesn't seem to be Wittgenstein's view.¹³ In some places he seems to reject it explicitly (LPP, p. 103). Moreover, seeing-as, unlike regular seeing, is in principle subject to the will (we can try to see a triangle as hanging from its apex, instead of standing on its base, but not to see it red (PI, p. 206b; RPP II

544-5; LPP, p. 113). Seeing-as is dependent on circumstances: it makes sense to say that we see x as F only when it is natural to say that we could have seen it also as G. But this is unnatural (and hardly makes sense) in normal seeing situations (LPP p. 108). Hence, not every case of seeing is seeing-as. What then is the significance of the latter?

In the light of our previous discussion the answer may be summarized by the following: (i) The notion of seeing-as brings to the fore the conceptual character of seeing and of what is seen; (ii) It, on the one hand, manifests an essential element in our attitude towards pictures and representations, namely, their intrinsic intentionality, while, on the other (iii) it is at the basis of the intentionality of seeing pictures and representations in general (including linguistic ones). (iv) It makes clear that not only in normal seeing, but also in our regular attitude to pictures, seeing is not knowledge gained by an (indirect) interpretation of a “raw” (non-conceptual) datum which is “directly” given to our senses.¹⁴

Important as these results are for a general theory of perception, their main significance for Wittgenstein, as we have seen, is in the kinship he draws between seeing an aspect and the experience of meaning. Consequently, experiencing the meaning of a word, grasping the meaning **in** the word, are objective features of our language, which make manifest an important aspect of our attitude to words – their intrinsic intentionality.

b. Internal Relation and the Mastery of a Technique

Having thus explained the objectivity and significance of the experience of meaning, the intrinsic nature of this experience may seem the more puzzling: How should we explain in what this experience consists? Wittgenstein’s approach to this question may be explained by focusing on the following two particularly important and cryptic sentences:

“The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique” (PI, p. 208h).

“By noticing an aspect one perceives an internal relation” (LW I, 733; cf. PI, p.212a).

“Substratum” here does not refer to something corresponding to the experience, or to a causal dependency, but to a conceptual one. This mastery of a technique (or of a practice) is what knowing the meaning of words consist in:

“To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of technique” (PI 199)

“Seeing-as” and the aspects under which something is seen are objective features of perception, which find their expression in the mastery of a technique and in the “fine shades of behavior” which are often the sure mark of such a mastery:

I meet someone whom I have not seen for years; I see him clearly but fail to know him. Suddenly I know him [...] I believe that I should do a different portrait of him now if I could paint (PI, p. 197f; cf. the examples on 198; cf. RPP II, 506). When my understanding of a theme is expressed by my whistling it with the correct expression, this is an example of such fine shades [of behavior] (PI, p. 207a).

The mastery of a technique, which Wittgenstein is discussing here, is the performative competence of a good painter, a good poet or a good musician. It is the ability of a good musician to discern minute expressive features of a work or a performance by comparing it with other possible performances or works (or passages) - for instance, his ability to discern the expressive power of a certain harmonic step by comparing it with other possible ones, or the subtle expressive features of a variation by the relevant comparisons with the theme and other variations on it. It is the ability of a performer to hit upon the particular way in which she hears or plays a piece by endless trials and comparisons with other possible performances. This is why Wittgenstein says:

“...the concept [of the expression with which a passage is played] serves only as a means of comparing different performances of this passage” (LW I: 382; cf. BB, p. 166-7; PI 527; LC p.6).

Normative phrases in music are very revealing here: “You should hear it as an introduction” (PI, p. 202k) is analogous to: “You should see it as...” This naturally implies not only that these ways of hearing and seeing are subject to one’s will, but

also that they are capable of justification. One can give reasons and explain (up to a point, which is relative to the context) why one should hear a passage or see an object in a particular way. After the above quoted sentence from LW I: 733: “By noticing an aspect one perceives an internal relation” (cf. PI xi p. 212a), Wittgenstein adds:

“It is only if someone can do, has learnt, is master of, such-and-such, that it makes sense to say he has had a certain experience [like noticing an aspect, G.B.]” (LW I: 734).

And so it is also in music. Hence, grasping an aspect in music is the discerning of relevant comparisons and relations, which manifest features of the “inner logic” or “grammar” of the music, and its inner relations to other phenomena, such as bird-singing, a war victory or an emotion:

“The concept ‘timid’ can be used to describe what is visually perceived, just as the concept ‘major’ or ‘minor’ can be used to describe the melody I hear” (LW I: 735) “... ‘major’ and ‘minor’... certainly have emotional value, but can also be used purely to describe a perceived structure” (PI xi, p.209c; cf. also BB p. 166; LC, section 8).

The ability to make the right or relevant comparisons and connections, to “know one’s way about” (PI, p. 203b), to feel “at home” in dealing with them (cf. RPP II, 259), is the content of both the mastery of a technique and of perceiving the inner relations involved in the experiences concerned and in having the feeling for something:

One could speak of a ‘feeling for’ something. And in what does my feeling for a sentence I utter consist? [...] In the connections, the tie-ups, which I make (RPP II, 261).

Understanding a piece of music – understanding a sentence. I am said not to understand a form of speech like a native if, while I do know its sense, I yet don’t know, e.g. what class of people would employ it. In such a case one says that I am not acquainted with the precise shade of meaning. But if one were now to think that one has a different sensation in pronouncing the word if one knows this shade of meaning, this would again be incorrect. But there are, e.g., innumerable transitions which I can make and the other can’t. (RPP I, 1078).

The familiar physiognomy (Gesicht) of a word, the feeling that it has taken up its meaning into itself [...] How are these feelings manifested among us? – By the way we choose and value words [...] How do I choose among words? Without doubt it is sometimes as if I were comparing them by fine differences of smell (PI, p. 218j).

c. The Meaning-blind and the Ability to Mean

In RPP I: 344 Wittgenstein explains what he means by meaning-blindness thus:

Anyone who cannot understand and learn to use the words “to see the sign as an arrow” - that’s whom I call “meaning-blind”. It will make no sense to tell him “You must try to see it as an arrow” and one won’t be able to help him in *that* way.

Now, Wittgenstein makes clear that a meaning-blind person can behave superficially very much like us - he can recognize arrows, understand and act on orders like “Go in the direction of the arrow”, etc. He is, moreover, even able to “take something as something” (PI, p. 213g-214b). It is only this special thing that he can’t understand: to mean something as something. But what is it? What is involved in this special ability that he lacks?

The relevant discussion in RPP begins in I: 168:

What should we say about men who didn’t understand the words “Now I’m seeing this figure as... now as...”? Would they be lacking in an important sense; is it as if they were blind; or colour-blind; or without absolute pitch?

This, combined with the former citation, suggests that the ability of seeing-as - seeing x as an F - involves (is conceptually dependent on) the ability to see x now as F, now as G, etc. (MAA), for which the ability of experiencing the dawning of an aspect and of aspect-change serve as a criterion. Hence, Wittgenstein says: “The aspect-blind man is supposed not to see [i.e. not to be able to see, G.B.] the aspects A change” (PI xi, p.213f).

We have already noted the close kinship between this experience and the experience of meaning:

The importance of this concept lies in the connexion between the concepts of ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘experiencing the meaning of a word’. For we want to ask “What would you be missing if you did not *experience* the meaning of a word?” (PI, p.214b-c; cf. also LW I, circa 784).

This is clearly manifested in the close connection between seeing-as and the idea of the meaning-blind: A meaning-blind person would not understand orders like “You must see it as...”, “You must hear it as ...” (RPP I: 247;cf. also *ibid.* 250); and just before the above quotation from PI. p. 214c, Wittgenstein likens both to the lack of musical ear: “Aspect-blindness will be *akin* to the lack of a ‘musical ear’ “.

One who lacks a “musical ear” (in a radical way) may very well hear notes, but not music. Think of this lack in a radical way. For instance, think of someone who is “interval deaf”, who can sharply hear notes and somehow (e.g. by having absolute pitch) knows what notes he is hearing (can be very good at music “dictation”), but is completely deaf to intervals: he wouldn’t hear, and wouldn’t be able even to understand that people hear G-C and A-D as the same (or a similar) interval (though he would be able perhaps to “calculate” it); he wouldn’t hear a minor third as somewhat modified major one, and the like. Think of him also as “function-deaf”: he wouldn’t hear or grasp the notion of a leading tone, of tonic and dominant, or of basic harmonic functions. We can imagine such a person playing notes “correctly”, passing a solfeggio exam, and writing accurately the tones he hears. But would he be hearing music?

Hearing music, just like seeing, is thoroughly conceptual – it is at least “half thinking”. It is not merely hearing notes, but rather hearing themes and thematic relations, melodies and contrapuntal relations, harmonic functions and harmonic progressions, rhythm and structure, etc. One who lacks musical ear in this radical way may hear notes, but would be deaf to all these – he won’t hear the music.

These (conceptual) abilities somehow involve, or are even conditioned by the ability to have appropriate experiences, in much the same way in which aspect perception is conditioned, as we have argued, on the ability to experience the flashing of an aspect, or an aspect change. Thus a certain harmonic experience, or the ability to have it, is involved in hearing harmonic functions and modulations; certain other experiences are involved in hearing intervals and contrapuntal relations, etc.

The understanding of music is neither sensation nor a sum of sensations. Nevertheless it is correct to call it an experience inasmuch as *this* concept of understanding has some kinship with other concepts of experience (Z 165).

And likewise, a certain experience – the dawning of an aspect – is involved in, or even conceptually conditions, the ability for multiple aspect perception (MAA), and in seeing aspects. The point now is that, in much the same way, a certain experience – the

experience of meaning – is involved in meaning-as or meaning in a particular way. The meaning blind would behave and act upon words very similar to us, and yet only “calculate” with them, not mean anything by them (RPP I, 171).

d. The Meaning Blind, Reference to Time, and the Lightning Speed of Thought

Wittgenstein characterizes the meaning blind also as one who can't understand expressions like “At that time the word meant so and so to me” (RPP I 175; PI p.175a-c). How is the lack of the ability to experience meaning connected to this characterization? And how important is the ability to mean at a time, which the meaning blind man lacks?

First, it should be noticed that for Wittgenstein the temporal reference in such meaning ascriptions should not be understood as reference to a psychological experience or process at that time (PI, p. 216l, 217g) One should rather understand these expressions by their function in our language, which may be to explain our behavior or attitudes, rather than to describe past experiences. (PI p. 217k; RPP I 204; cf. LW I, 99-138). It is to the same effect that Wittgenstein argues that ascriptions of meaning-at-a-time, like “at that time I thought you meant...” cannot be regarded as reports, like reports of a dream, for otherwise “we would be dreaming all the time” (RPP I, 232-5).

For Wittgenstein, meaning and intending are characterized by what he calls “the lightning speed of thought”. They are not processes of forming and interpreting representations (mental or physical). (RPP I 178). In this respect the language game of meaning is different from that of “as I said this, I thought of...”(PI p. 217k; cf. RPP I 197-8). The latter refers to an actual process or event in the past, and “operates on it”; the former does not. “The lightning speed of thought” metaphorically expresses the direct and intrinsic intentionality of meaning and intending; these are not operations on a given word, sentence or picture (like interpretation), but they rather “hook on” their objects immediately and directly (cf. Also BB p. 38-9).

Johnston accuses Wittgenstein that by depriving the meaning blind man of the lightning speed of thought and of the ability to understand meaning ascriptions in the past, he deprives him of the ability to think in general, and in fact of his humanity. Johnston suggests that we should separate these two marks of the meaning blind from the main characteristic: the inability to experience meanings (75-84).

In contrast, our discussion rather suggests that these three inabilityes (of the meaning blind) are three facets or manifestation of the same deficiency: the inability to mean, or to think intentionally; the inability to see words as (direct) manifestations of their meanings. This indeed makes the meaning blind man, when he is not just reacting to words by habit, a permanent interpreter, who is unable to think intentionally. His "thinking" is always a manipulation and interpretation of signs on which he may act and behave somewhat like us; but for all that he is a sort of an interpretive machine - he doesn't have the lightning speed of thought, he doesn't think of objects; he doesn't really mean anything by his words in the sense that one may be wrong in meaning something. For what he "means" cannot be independently identified - he cannot have the idea of attaching the wrong (or unintended) meaning to a word (cf. RPP I, 197-8, where Wittgenstein speaks of the meaning blind as behaving like an **automaton**, and RPPI 324, where he speaks of them like **robots**); since he cannot understand "at that time I meant...", on each occasion of being given the word he would react or interpret it anew. Therefore he also cannot grasp the possibility that his meaning something by a word is accompanied by the wrong behavior: You tell him "Hold M" (where "M" may mean either x or y); he holds x; you correct him and say: "No, I meant the other one"; he then behaves "correctly" and holds y. But there is no way in which he can grasp that he was mistaken the first time - that he did not understand what you meant then. For him, your "correction" would be just another input for interpretation.

We have seen before that the intentionality of our thought is reflected in the ability of seeing-as, and of continuous aspect perception. For this reason Wittgenstein says

that the meaning blind man cannot understand the words “to see the sign as an arrow” (RPP I 344). This makes him not only *very* different from us: In light of Wittgenstein’s strictures on the corresponding view of rule following and the paradox of interpretation (PI 198-203), this makes the idea of the meaning blind, in as much as he is a permanent interpreter (and except for sheer reacting by habit, he is), an incoherent idea.

The same goes for imagining. When we imagine someone we imagine him, rather “directly” - we don’t have a sign - say, a drawing - which we interpret or take as signifying him (this is emphasized in PI, p. 177). In RPP I: 172 Wittgenstein speculates on someone who thus “imagines” by drawing - that is, where we imagine, he draws (on paper or “in his mind” - it does not matter) and then identifies the person whom that drawing signifies (interprets it). Such a person is a permanent interpreter - he has a (representative) medium (of signs, figures, words, or whatever) which he is always interpreting or taking to signify something (cf. *ibid.* 182). In contrast to these kinds of “blind” people, we imagine and mean with the “lightning speed of thought” (*ibid.* 173) - the capacity to think directly about objects, to imagine them, etc.

Perhaps we can sum up the main moral of the last two sections thus: Wittgenstein sought his way between the scylla of brute behaviorism and the charybdis of futile interpretationism, which are the only options open for the meaning blind. Our use of words, in contrast, and our behavior on words, though they rely on our having habits (PI 198-201), are not “sheer habits” or reactions. They are also not “only interpretations”, which Wittgenstein’s shows to be an incoherent idea (*ibid.*). They are rather imbued and informed by intentionality and by our intentional concepts, which are epitomized here by the experience of meaning and the lightning speed of thought – the option that the meaning blind lack.

e. The Experience of Meaning and Secondary Sense¹⁵

The experience of meaning is connected with the important notion of secondary sense. The secondary sense of a word is a sort of a natural extension of its regular use, which is yet, definitely different from it (though, Wittgenstein insists, it does not have a different sense; LW I 78-9, 795; this insistence is less clear in PI p. 216). Wittgenstein gives various examples (which typically serve for exemplifying both the feeling of words and secondary sense): when we say that a name fits its bearer ('Schubert' fits Schubert), we use "fits" in a secondary sense (LW I, 69; cf. RPP I, 338); when we say that certain vowels has certain colors (like "e is yellow") (PI, p. 216h), or when we speak of certain days as fat or lean (ibid 216c) these adjectives are used in a secondary sense. In fact, the very use of "meaning" in "the experience of meaning" is regarded by Wittgenstein as secondary, for "meaning is as little an experience as intending" (ibid 217a; see also ibid. 181e; RPP I, 155), and this may even be regarded as the main reason for introducing the notion of secondary sense in this context. Wittgenstein emphasizes that the secondary sense of a word depends on and presupposes its primary, or regular one: "It is only if the word has a primary sense for you that you use it in the secondary one" (PI, p. 216f). He also says that it is a mistake to regard the secondary sense of a word as metaphorical, for in using a word in a secondary sense, like in saying that e is yellow, "I could not express what I want to say in any other way" (ibid. 216g; cf. BB 136).¹⁶

Wittgenstein emphasizes that the issue raised by the notion of secondary sense (or, more accurately, secondary use of words) is a conceptual one, and that efforts to explain it in terms of causal or associative terms would miss the point (LW I, 77-80; LW I, 795 [=PI, p. 216c]). For our present concerns the main point¹⁷ is that the phenomenon of using words in their secondary sense depends on the experience of meaning: our inclination to use just this particular word ("fit", "yellow" "fat" "calculate" etc., as well as "meaning") in these extensions of its regular use, the fact that such

extensions are natural to us, and force themselves on us, so that we can't express what we mean in any other way, depend on our grasping an "intrinsic connection" between the word and its meaning, our grasping words as filled with their meaning, as carrying their meaning on their face. For the meaning blind, who lack this kind of experience, this notion of secondary use would then be utterly unintelligible.¹⁸ My point here is not only that "meaning", in "the experience of meaning", is used in a secondary sense, and does not depend on it. It is rather the experience of meaning itself and its various features and implications that are important, be it called as it may. The fact that we find it so natural to use "meaning" here strengthens this point, but it does not depend on it.

In the above I have tried to explain the notions of the feeling of words, their character and face, and the experience of meaning associated with them. These have been shown to be objective features of the meaning of words and their use. The ability to experience meaning, far from being related to a detached and separate psychological process that accompanies a meaningful use of words, is an essential element of such a use, which conditions the intentionality of meaning and understanding in their regular sense. We have seen it by the analogy between the experience of meaning and the experience of aspect-perception, by the connection between the experience of meaning and mastery of the fine shades of behavior, comparisons and grasp of internal relations, the role of the experience of meaning in explicating the intentional notions of meaning and understanding (which the meaning blind lack), in contrast to interpretation and manipulation of signs, and the relationship between the meaning-experience and secondary sense.

IV The Fine Shades of Feeling in Music

We have seen that the experience of meaning is necessary for certain cognitive capacities, which the meaning-blind lack. These are necessary for understanding and

meaning, for they condition the direct intentionality of our thoughts and the ability to mean something in a particular way (in analogy to seeing-as). This experience of meaning includes sensitivity to the “face”, “feeling”, “character” and “soul” of words and meaning them in a particular expression (cf. RPP I: 243, 322-24; LW I: 366; LW II, p.3). As noted at the beginning of this article, It is remarkable that in many of Wittgenstein’s discussions of the importance of these subtle features of meaning, the analogy to music and understanding music plays a prominent explanatory role. An important section on this in PI begins in 527, which says:

Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme. Why is just this the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? One would like to say “Because I know what it’s all about.” But what is it all about? I should not be able to say. In order to ‘explain’ **I could only compare** it to something else which has the same rhythm (I mean the same pattern) (cf. BB 166-7; LW I, 382; RPP I, 34-6; Z 162-4; CV, p. 70).

It should be noted that Wittgenstein explains what he means in the first sentence by presuming that we are clearer about “what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme”. He then says that understanding a sentence is more akin to **that**. But what is it to understand a musical theme? We have seen before that a musical theme feels a particular way to us - as if it had a particular “face” - it “looks at us” or sounds to us or appeals to us in particular ways, which cannot be separated from the theme (RPP I, 90), and which are manifested in the ways we perform it or react to it (RPP I, 247). We may distinguish various features of this feeling in comparing various performances of, or different reactions to the theme.

In the above quoted passage we find a similar view, according to which understanding music consists primarily in “knowing what it’s all about” (was das alles heisst), where this is not conceived “externally”, as correlating the piece of music with something external to it, which is deemed “its meaning”. Musical understanding consists rather in discerning various features of a theme (a passage, motive, piece, etc.), which become manifest by relevant comparisons: these may be intra-musical

comparisons to other relevant themes, or pieces, or harmonies, or rhythms, or to other performances. But such comparisons need not be confined to music; they may relate a piece of music to a linguistic phrase, a gesture, a dance, a mood, a color or an architectural style (cf. Z 175; RPP I, 34-6; RPP II, 468; CV pp. 52b, 69-70). Such comparisons, when pertinent and insightful, make us perceive the particular aspect under which the music is understood, and they reveal what Wittgenstein referred to by the “internal relation” one perceives in noticing an aspect (LW I, 733); they also make manifest what is involved in the mastery of a technique or practice, which he presents as the substratum of the experience of meaning (PI p.208e).

In his Lectures on Aesthetics Wittgenstein discusses what he calls “the puzzle of aesthetic impression” - e.g. “Why do these bars give such a peculiar impression?” He rejects all sorts of causal explanations and writes:

As far as one can see the puzzlement I am talking about can be cured only by peculiar kinds of comparisons, e.g. by an arrangement of certain musical figures, comparing their effect on us. “If we put in this chord it does not have that effect; if we put in this chord it does (LC p. 20).
What we really want, to solve aesthetic puzzlements, is certain comparisons - grouping together of certain cases (ibid. 29).

This “comparative conception” of understanding, combined with our previous observations about the significance and nature of the experience of meaning, may explain the sense in which Wittgenstein says, in the above quoted passage (RPP II 469), that understanding music is a kind of experience.

The main point that emerges is that our understanding music, just like our understanding the meaning of words, is criterially revealed by grasping it under an aspect, which is manifested in our ability to make relevant comparisons, and evaluate comparisons, by our ability to “move about”, to feel “at home” with the piece, in all of which our grasp of internal relations are manifested. This kind of understanding, of our getting hold of the meaning of a passage, results from our ability to “hear the aspect in the notes”, very much like our ability to “see objects in the (lines of the) drawing”.

And this is somewhat akin to Wittgenstein's picture of understanding language, which consists mainly in having a clear Uebersicht (synoptic view) of relevant connections and comparisons. Rather than trying to correlate a linguistic expression with an "external reality" and its components, as its meaning, this conception of meaning aims at revealing various features of it by comparing it to other expressions (linguistic, as well as others) and their uses. This makes Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and meaning so relevant and fruitful to the philosophy of music. Likewise, his conception of understanding music, founding it on a mastery of a practice and on conceiving relevant and insightful comparisons, and conditioning the capacity for this on a special kind of experiences, gain their significance and conviction from the close kinship between them and the corresponding moves with regard language. It is precisely because music lacks "semantic content" in its regular sense, and that these components of Wittgenstein's conception of understanding are so conspicuous and familiar in music, that it makes it an explanatory model for the role of the corresponding components in language.¹⁹

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- The following abbreviations are used for Wittgenstein's writings. As customary, numbers refer to paragraphs, unless page number is explicitly indicated (by "p."):
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- LC - Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, ed. C. Barrett), Univ. of California Press, 1967.
- LPP - Wittgenstein's Lectures on Philosophical Psychology (P. Geach ed.), Chicago University Press, 1989.
- LW - Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, vol. I (translated by C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue), Basil Blackwell, 1982.
- PG - Philosophical Grammar (translated by A. Kenny), Basil Blackwell, 1974.
- PI - Philosophical Investigations (translated by G.E.M. Anscombe), Basil Blackwell, 1953.
- RPP - Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Vol. I (translated by G.E.M. Anscombe), Basil Blackwell, 1980, Vol. II (translated by C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue), Basil Blackwell, 1980.
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- Zemach, E. - "Meaning, The Experience of Meaning and The Meaning-blind in Wittgenstein's Late Philosophy", Monist vol. 78\4, 1995, pp. 480-95.

Notes

- ¹ "Know" should be understood here in a wide sense, to include, in particular, grasping of Fregean Sinn. On this epistemic construal of Sinn and its significance for a theory of intentionality in Frege, see Bar-Elli, G: *The Sense of Reference*, De Gruyter, 1996, ch. 1.
- ² This, of course, is an adoption of Frege's "context principle", which applies primarily to the sense (Sinn) of a word, and secondarily to its meaning (Bedeutung). For a detailed discussion of this and its significance in Frege's philosophy, see Bar-Elli, *ibid.*, ch. 5.
- ³ This is not to deny the importance of the notion of use in the *Tractatus*, which is often grossly underrated. I cannot dwell into this subtle and large topic, but I shall just state that the notion of use is much more operative in the theory of meaning of the *Tractatus* than the ontological notions (of say, object, state of affairs, etc.), which rather serve mainly in forming general "transcendental conditions for the possibility of language", than in determining the logical syntactic rules which determine the meaning structures of the language.
- ⁴ The main problems, and sometimes the main lines of dealing with them are already widely discussed in the writings of the early thirties, e.g. in chapter II of the *Brown Book*.
- ⁵ Some other places are PI, 530; 568; PI, p. 218j; RPP I, 6, 243, 328, 654; LW II, p.39. It is interesting in this connection to point out the hold that the notion of a picture has on Wittgenstein's conception of meaning from the *Tractarian* notion, in which sentences are pictures of states of affairs having a common logical form, to the late talk of single words as pictures of their meanings, of "picture objects", and of a sentences as a group-pictures. I shall not discuss the differences and the routes in which the earlier transformed into the latter here.

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- ⁶ In his “Biographical Sketch”, included in Norman Malcolm’s: Ludwig Wittgenstein - A Memoir (Oxford University Press, 1984), H. Von Wright writes: “Wittgenstein was exceptionally musical, even if judged by the highest standards. He played the clarinet, and for a time he wished to become a conductor. He had a rare talent for whistling. It was a great pleasure to hear him whistle through a whole concerto, interrupting himself only to draw the listener’s attention to some detail of the musical texture” (p. 7). Various passages in *Culture and Value* are relevant here too.
- ⁷ Wittgenstein often talks of understanding music or understanding a musical tune or a passage as manifested in performance (see, for instance, BB 166-7; Z162; RPP II: 466-9; 502-3; LC p. 6).
- ⁸ Wittgenstein's view is, I believe, more radical, and his opposition to basing meaning on interpreting is not exhausted by the drawbacks of viewing interpretation as correlating signs with signs. Going into it would take us too far a field, and it is not required for our concerns here. I have expanded on it in Bar-Elli, G: "Wittgenstein on Objectivity and Rules" (in Hebrew), Iyyun 52, 2003, 369-398.
- ⁹ E. Zemach is, I believe, wrong in claiming that in Wittgenstein’s later conception meaning and seeing-as are cases of interpretation (see his “Meaning, The Experience of Meaning and The Meaning-blind in Wittgenstein’s Late Philosophy” (Monist vol. 78\4, 1995, pp. 480-95, especially pp. 485-89). Wittgenstein is quite explicit on that, e.g. in PI p. 212d. He is also wrong, I believe, in suggesting that the late Wittgenstein introduced the notion of seeing-as and of meaning-under-an-aspect as an alternative basis for the normativity of use instead of the one offered by the “middle” Wittgenstein (of PI I), which was grounded in conformity to normal use. There is no contrast between the two; the “later” idea is not an alternative to the former. It is rather an addition, an enrichment and deepening of the notions of normal use and human behavior, in terms of which the “earlier” conception (of PI I) was couched. I cannot expand on these important issues here.
- ¹⁰ Wittgenstein often uses the word “feeling” (Gefuehl) in yet another sense, not as indicating a certain mental episode, happening, process or event, but rather as indicating a particular attitude, orientation, and significance towards things. He thus talks about the feelings lovers have towards words they use, and the

feeling one has towards “the world as a whole”, which is the “mystical” in the Tractatus (6.54).

- ¹¹ Wittgenstein was evidently much impressed by (and critical of) W. James’ discussion of the matter (in The Principles of Psychology) which he mentions on several occasions. His main point against James is that on James’ view it is an empirical psychological hypothesis that every word is accompanied by a particular feeling we have in using it. Wittgenstein thought that this hypothesis is wrong as such, but his main point is that it is a logical-phenomenological observation about the meaning of words and how they are understood and used rather than an empirical hypothesis.
- ¹² . This seems to be J. Schulte’s opinion, see his Experience and Expression, Oxford, 1993
- ¹³ . Mulhall seems to suggest it, though he doesn’t say it explicitly. He emphasizes a three-way distinction between seeing something as so and so (which he identifies with and explicates by the notion of continuous aspect perception), the dawning of an aspect, and knowledge that something is so and so (pp. 19, 33-4). This is all right (except perhaps the over-emphasis on continuous aspect perception, which is rare in Wittgenstein). He also suggests that one who cannot experience the dawning of an aspect, who cannot experience the surprise of suddenly noticing an aspect (or an aspect-change), cannot have a continuous aspect perception (31). But by not distinguishing seeing-as from regular seeing he seems to suggest that they are basically the same.
- ¹⁴ . This I believe, also weakens the inclination (to which Mulhall yields) to identify regular seeing with seeing-as, or continuous aspect perception (where we are perhaps unaware of the aspect), since no one would confuse interpreting with regular seeing, and (Wittgensteinian) warnings against such a confusion would be pointless. The dangerous temptation, against which Wittgenstein’s warnings are due, is to confuse seeing-as and aspect perception, with interpretation.
- ¹⁵ This has become the standard translation for “sekundaerer Bedeutung”, though “secondary meaning would be better.
- ¹⁶ Cf. C. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, ch. 8, particularly pp. 226-8.
- ¹⁷ This I find lacking in Diamond’s presentation. She rightly emphasizes that a secondary use of a word depends on its primary one (and on one’s being

familiar with the primary use). She also rightly points out “That there are experiences of meaning a word in such-and-such a way is consistent with the fact that in the primary sense of the word “meaning” meaning a word is not an experience” (p. 233). But all this, I think, is less than half of the story. What is lacking is that being able to use a word in a secondary use depends on the experience of meaning in which a word is “filled with” its meaning. Without this, not only secondary use is unintelligible, but so also the primary one, for it expresses the direct connection between a word and its meaning – its use – which is at the basis of meaning a word, or intending it in a particular meaning. I am aware that this goes ahead of what Wittgenstein explicitly said, but it is, I believe, the main significance of his observations on secondary use.

¹⁸. Cf. Mulhall, p.49.

¹⁹ This article is based on a somewhat larger version that was published in Hebrew in lyyun, 53, 2004.