4 The user perspective: a Wittgensteinian view

So far in my discussion of Moore’s paradox in this thesis, I have shown that philosophers who try to solve the paradox by locating a formal contradiction and who do so by reference to the sentence itself and its surface structure have not succeeded in getting rid of the paradox. I have discussed the formalist approach (looking for a contradiction within the proposition) and the pragmatic approach (finding the fault in the application of the sentence/the communication of it). I have concluded that the proposed solutions differ in their view of the aim and method of philosophy and that a further discussion of those differences and possibilities is needed. In discussions of Moore’s paradox, there is an alternative approach left to investigate, one which focuses on sentences in their ‘use’, and sentences in context.

Already earlier on in this work, I have engaged with thinking which I take to stem from Wittgenstein. One of these ideas was suggested by Hertzberg: only propositions-in-use can be said to have definite sense. In other words, propositions only have definite sense in their contexts of use, and what the relevant context is, depends on what the speaker had to say. This is a circularity, but not a vicious circularity. It constitutes a fundamental shift of perspective on the question what propositions are.⁴

Wittgenstein, in his later work, wrote that “Words only have meaning in the river of thought and life”⁵ and later held, in David Stern’s words, “that the significance of a particular utterance is a matter of its location within the stream of conversation, or ordinary use of language”.³ This idea of ‘ordinary use’ is very different form the pragmatic idea of the ‘application’ of a sentence. In this chapter, I will enter into dialogue with some Wittgensteinian discussions of Moore’s paradox in order to get a clearer picture of what this difference in view if meaning and propositions and use amounts to on behalf of a philosophical problematic like Moore’s paradox.

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⁴ Importantly, not all philosophers inspired by the later Wittgenstein have internalized this shift of perspective.
⁵ Zettel §174.
4.1 A Wittgensteinian View?

Although I have subtitled this chapter “a Wittgensteinian view”, my intention is not to look for Wittgenstein’s own presumptive solutions to Moore’s paradox with the aim of presenting a coherent picture of his solution. Instead, I will take a look at some suggestions about Moore’s paradox, which have been presented by representatives of what I call ‘the user perspective’, a perspective inspired by the later Wittgenstein. The user perspective, as it will turn out, is in an important sense not an alternative to the proposed solutions to Moore’s paradox which I have criticized earlier in this work. In this chapter I will discuss this idea of a relevant non-solution a little further.

The sort of questions asked by philosophers who keep the user perspective at the fore is: How do we ordinarily speak? How does belief enter conversations and how are assertions made? How do belief and assertion ordinarily relate to each other? Some suggestions along these lines have already been presented in my discussion of Malcolm’s critique of Searle. Some of the themes discussed by the Wittgensteinian philosophers are also the themes discussed by Wittgenstein, but their approaches are often also independent. Two dominant themes taken to be of crucial importance to Moore’s paradox are (1) the relation between the first person and (2) the grammar of belief. A third theme is (3) the question of the very Moorean feature of the sentence under discussion.

The very starting point for the formalist and the pragmatic approaches was the realization that the Moorean sentence cannot be used. Contrary to this starting point, however, it is in fact possible to use a sentence of the very schema that characterizes the Moorean one. I have called this reminder ‘the usability argument’. The usability argument is not intended as a flat counterargument to other approaches – I do not doubt that the philosophers involved are unaware of the possibility. I wish to dwell on the usability argument for the reason that I believe that there are insights, with far-reaching consequences, to be gained by way of it. The usability argument deflates the idea of a certain form of a sentence – ‘the schema’ – as its defining feature and in this way renders the user perspective anti-formalist. Later on in this chapter, I will discuss the consequences of the deflation of this idea further.

The reason why there may seem to be an absolute obstacle to using a Moorean sentence is that our view of language and the way it works is oversimplified. We expect to be able to read off from the surface of a sentence whether it – indefinitely – can be used or not. This expectation is connected with another feature of the user perspective: that it is not in its interest to create a theory or a politics of language use in any restrictive or regulative sense. In this sense, the user perspective differs radically from the formalist and the pragmatic approaches to Moore’s paradox.

I have already discussed one part of Moore’s formulation of the paradox; the thought that the Moorean sentence (the schema) is acceptable as such, that it is possible to judge whether such a

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4 For an exegetic overview, see Schulte 1993. For further discussions of interpretation of Wittgenstein’s specific observations on issues related to Moore’s paradox, see Stroll 2010.
schema could be used. That the ‘same proposition’ can be used about me although not by me was part of the initial problem. This was Moore’s reason to assume that the schema should be in order.

The other part of the conundrum is that it would yet be absurd to assert that ‘otherwise non-problematic schema’. Now this issue may be put in another way: why is it that we would like to accept this schema as such? Furthermore: how would it be possible for us to rid ourselves of this tendency to take the Moorean sentence seriously?

Wittgensteinian philosophers such as Elizabeth Wolgast, Norman Malcolm, Peter Winch, Martin Gustafsson and others have presented attempts to answer that question. Authors on Moore’s paradox after Wittgenstein have different approaches and aims with their writings. The exegetical attempts at the theme often try to clarify Wittgenstein’s remarks on issues related to Moore’s paradox. Some try to find Wittgenstein’s final word on the problem (Heal 1994) whereas others try to unify the discussions and perhaps even to unify them into a consistent account (Schulte 1993). Others again use Wittgenstein’s remarks as inspiration for their own thinking (for example Malcolm XXXX). I will not take an exegetics approach here. Rather, I will use the suggestions of these philosophers not as secondary literature but as independent contributions on Moore’s paradox.5

As a note for a general overview, the responses to Moore’s paradox by Wittgensteinian philosophers come in two classes: some focus on the differences between the first and the third person position. They investigate the use and practice of talking in these two different positions and based on the investigations try to show that there is nothing ‘surprising’ here. Rather, when we expect the sentence to work, we are expecting language to be symmetrical for different personae in a way which it is not, and in a way which we have no reason to suppose that it should be.

Others again, focus on the concept of belief. The Moorean sentence, in this mode of explanation, is an illegitimate combination of two parts because it contains the word ‘believe’ and the whole concept of belief, when it comes to this use, is ‘misrepresented’ in the presentation of Moore’s paradox. This is the line that Wolgast takes when she claims that one of the problems in Moore’s paradox is that belief and assertion are not related in the way that they are expected to be by Moore and others who end up in paradox. Malcolm takes a similar stance to Wolgast’s.

Gustafsson (2000) takes a road in between. He defends the sentence as such but aims to exclude the faulty use. He writes that nothing can make out a conjunction of the two parts suggested; that the schema would not arise under any normal circumstances. He considers the usability argument, that one may perfectly well use a sentence of that schema, but replaces the idea of a ‘schema’ with a conception of ‘normal use’. This debate concerns the idea of a schema and bound up with it is the theme which Wittgenstein also discussed: the idea of a formal description of language use, and the role of contradictions in our language and in philosophy. I have touched upon this issue already, and which I will go into at length later.

5 For an overview of Wittgenstein’s discussions of Moore’s paradox, see Schulte 1993.
First, let us discuss the grammar of belief, and then first and third person differences and tensions and how this thinking affects our conundrum.

4.2 The grammar of belief

Elizabeth Wolgast writes that assertions express beliefs, that “the most fundamental expression of belief is a simple assertion”, ‘p’ (“A”). By “most fundamental” she means that it is logically prior when it comes to understanding what is said: if we did not understand the use of A, we could not logically speaking understand the use of B (‘I believe that p’). It is in this way that ‘p’ is connected with ‘I believe that p’. That assertions express beliefs is characteristic of the de facto normal use of assertions, Wolgast claims. She adds that to say something that one does not believe is not merely “saying something”, i.e. neutral, but it is speaking misleadingly.

This thought is parallel to the critique I directed at Searle’s treatment of the sincerity condition as something external to a proposition in the section on the pragmatic solution. The critique was that there is no such thing as expressing something in a way which is neither sincere nor insincere. According to Wolgast, the fact that to say something that one does not believe is speaking misleadingly does not exclude the possibility of other uses for sentences like “There was frost in the night” in which belief is not expressed. For example, the sentence may appear in a poem. “But their most usual and typical and important use is to tell something to someone, and in this use they express beliefs...” she claims. She goes on to say that the concept ‘expression of belief’ may be auxiliary in shedding light on the relation between lying and ‘correct use’. The feature that sentences such as “The cat has been fed’ usually express belief ...”allows us to misrepresent our beliefs, that is, to lie. It would be a misuse, on the other hand, to use the sentence as if it expressed no belief at all, for this would show a misunderstanding about its role.”

According to Wolgast, an investigation of the concept ‘the expression of belief’ of the kind displayed above, may sort out some of the confusion created by the Moorean sentence. Apart from this, she claims that the expression of belief does not center around the use of the word ‘believe’ but that the basic or “most genuine” example of expression of belief is a situation in which the word is not used at all. That is where the uses of the two parts of the Moorean sentence cross.

I have argued that the practice of expressing beliefs is much wider than the use of ‘I believe’ and the function of that phrase is in consequence a specialized one. Its function is to signal the expression of a weak belief; stronger forms of belief expression have no signal.5

One would expect that a connection in which the word ‘believe’ is used has to be in some way primary in relation to a situation in which it is not used. This point opens up for another

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6 Wolgast 1977, p. 104.
7 Wolgast 1977, p. 105.
8 Wolgast 1977, p. 113.
discussion as to whether it is reasonable to point to a certain use as primary. For Wolgast, the primary expression of belief is an assertion, and this claim may be understood as a general empirical claim, which could be the first step in the formation of a theory of language and communication. Wolgast may not intend to make suggestions of that sort, but where it the case, a different discussion would be needed and the claims of primacy would require further argument or evidence. She is nevertheless right in pointing out that the description of the deep grammar for ‘believe’ may give us an objection to the expectation of symmetry in our use of language – the expectation being a precondition for the possibility of surprise in the confrontation with a Moorean sentence.

Wolgast argues that the most fundamental expression of belief takes the form of an outright assertion. However, in the philosophical literature, beliefs have often been taken to be best accounted for by the examination of cases in which ‘I believe that p’ is uttered, that is, cases when a signal or marker is used to point to a belief. In these stories, belief has been sketched as an intentional state, something which only I myself am in contact with, something private.

Wolgast’s suggestion still finds some support in the literature. Robert Brandom gives an overview of the phenomenon of belief in his review entitled “Expressing and Attributing Beliefs”. He writes that our talk of beliefs involves both first person expressions of belief, as in ‘I believe that p’, and ascriptions of beliefs to others, ‘John believes that p’. And if we are to give “a theory of belief”, it needs to accommodate a list of “facts about these two aspects of belief talk”. Brandom suggests among other things that “Explicit expressions of belief (like third person ascriptions of beliefs) exhibit a pattern of truth values across different situations that is different from that of implicit expressions of belief”. Therefore, we must admit that not-p and “I believe that p” might both be true, as well as that not-p and “John believes that p” might be true.

There is an important difference between Brandom’s and the user perspective. His aim is to provide a unified theory of belief by making use of a technical apparatus. In contrast, the aim of the philosophizing of the user perspective is not to make general claims, but merely to lead the way out of the spell of paradox. The observations on belief are correct and suffice for that. These remarks on belief in the discussion of Moore’s paradox are not meant to show that belief is in some way undefined or indeterminate, but they may be taken as a positive response to the usability argument: expressions and ascriptions of belief may be used in more than one way. Also, Brandom’s list of ‘facts’ shows that there is diversity at play here, one that I quoted Malcolm for, when he tried to argue against Searle. This diversity explains the fact which the usability argument points out, that a sentence of the schema can be used at times without problem. And it loosens the core of the Moorean sentence.

Brandom, Robert B.: "Expressing and Attributing Beliefs”, Mind 54, 4:1994 (905-912). Brandom uses ‘truth functions’ and ‘commitment’ as factors in his four-step overview of the different ‘facts’ about expression and ascription of belief which he says would have to be accommodated by a ‘theory of belief’. Brandon maintains that in spite of the distinction between first person expressions of belief and third person ascriptions, there must be “some univocal sense of ‘belief that p’ in play in both sorts of belief statement. For in an important sense, John and I say the same thing when I assert “I believe that p,” and he asserts “Brandom believes that p.” Both are entailed by the claim that everyone believes that p and both entail the claim that someone believes that p.”
A post-Wittgensteinian expression for this is that “the grammar of belief” is not as simple as one might expect, if one thinks that words carry in them specific and definite meanings. There is a range of uses of the concept of belief in which the word does not figure, or in which the word figures but has more than one definite function. The idea that belief is always a mental state, the presence of which is reported by saying “I believe it is raining” is a presupposition which will make the Moorean sentence arise.

4.3 The expectation of symmetry

The descriptions of deep grammar for the two sentences ‘I believe that \( p \)' and ‘\( p' \)', which the supporters of the user perspective have provided, are supposed to show why we should reject the Moorean sentence. The descriptions often play the role of reminders of the asymmetry of certain language games. In other words, we carry expectations or preconceptions of how language works, and therefore may stand in need of reminders or correction.

The reminders of the expectation of symmetry, which surfaces on our philosophizing about Moore’s paradox, are justified by the fact that in so far as we are able to let go of the expectation, we are also able to let go of the idea that it is possible to explain why the Moorean sentence seems reasonable even though it is not. In other words, the reminders can help us.

At this point, Frege’s stricture between the psychological and the logical may be of help. Diamond’s and Hertzberg’s version of the stricture differs to some extent from Frege’s, but nevertheless provides us with a tool to handle a confusion. The Moorean sentence, or its form, seems generally feasible to us because of our psychological inclination – the fact that we know sentences similar to the Moorean one (for example of the “same form” or pattern but in the third person, “He believes it is raining but it is not”) which we also often make use of. To hustle this psychological inclination I will render some of the arguments which have been presented.

A sentence of the Moorean schema is not weird or absurd in any way, as long as it does not appear in first person present tense. The question is why language displays such asymmetry when it comes to the verb ‘to believe’. Calling it an ‘asymmetry’ here, not just a ‘feature’ shows that symmetry, regularity, is what is expected.

According to Norman Malcolm, one thinks that the Moorean sentence must be intelligible because it is intelligible in the past tense and in the third person. In other words, one expects or hopes for a regularity or symmetry of the meaning of a sentence between different tenses or persons. That is, the meaningfulness of the sentence is expected to be preserved from one tense to the other. There is a measure of friction to accepting that this regularity is lacking and to giving up the attempts of finding an explanation to it. Malcolm refers, as an explanation, to Wittgenstein’s reflections that one often, when one says ‘I believe \( p' \)', means ‘\( p' \) although

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10 Hertzberg 2001, p. 91ff.
hesitantly, with reservation. To say that one sentence means approximately the same as another sentence is to claim that people react in approximately the same way to them, and if someone did not understand what was said, one could use the other sentence instead of repeating the first one. In Wittgenstein’s words in RPP 1, §504: “And that is why ‘I believe p’ can be equivalent to the assertion of ‘p’”. Malcolm points out that ‘I believe’ can also be used to assert ‘p’ with emphasis. Thus Wolgast’s categorical statement that stronger forms of expression of belief, assertions that is, do not require any signal, may be supplemented with Malcolm’s reminder. On the one hand, then, an assertion counts as an expression of belief that p, but on the other hand, in “I believe that p”, the “signal” may be used as an amplification of an assertion – when the latter is called into question. These reminders are related to the talk of “locutionary force”, which is the idea that the ‘sign’ is one, but can be ‘used’ in different ways. The point is that the relation between ‘p’ and ‘I believe that p’ is sometimes a sort of equivalence.

What distinguishes ‘I believe that p’ and ‘I believed that p’ is not only the tense – the expression in the past tense is never an assertion that p. Through contrasts, Malcolm shows how ‘believe’ is used in other ways too and that the expectation of symmetry is not always warranted.

Malcolm discusses Wittgenstein’s reflection on the relation between a supposition and an assertion when it comes to the expression ‘I believe that p’. This relation is relevant since it shows why a philosopher would think that the combination of words which forms a Moorean sentence is intelligible.

Another thing that Wittgenstein’s remark may suggest is that this difference between the assertion and the corresponding supposition could be called ‘paradoxical’, not because there is anything logically dubious about it, but because it is surprising; it goes against our expectations. For in other cases the relation between an assertion and the corresponding supposition is that what is asserted and what is supposed is the same.

This “surprise” is again a reminder of our expectation of symmetry. There is room for speculation as to whether there could be another supposition, which would ‘match’ the assertion ‘I believe it is raining’ better. Malcolm asks “What other assertion would be the corresponding one? There is no answer. We must simply accept this peculiar feature of the logical grammar of ‘I believe’.” The same is true of past tense – there is no construction which would seem less unmatched to ‘I believe’ in the past tense, which would also be an assertion that ‘p’.

According to Peter Winch one may take the use of the verb ‘to believe’ to be irregular if one compares it to ‘to walk’ for example. This is another reminder of the expectation of symmetry in the grammar of different verbs. Winch takes an important further step:

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12 This thought is sometimes ascribed as a discovery to J. O. Urmson, “Parenthetical Verbs”, Mind 61 (1952): 481-496.
16 Ibid. p. 199.
17 Ibid. p. 199.
But it would be a mistake to regard the irregularity as a sort of *ambiguity*, in the sense that “believe” is taken to mean something quite different when it is used in the first person from what it means in the third. Our use of the verb has a unity about it, in the sense that what we mean when we use it in the first person is *interdependent* with what we mean when we use it in the third person.\(^\text{18}\)

Winch emphasizes the relation between the first and the third person. Traditionally, first person is taken to be primary to third person: the labels for the *I*-expression and the expression *he/she*: *first* and *third* person is an obvious reminder of this. But when it comes to language acquisition and use, he suggests that third person may be primary to first person. It is clear that first and third person uses are not independent of each other – aspect shifts\(^\text{19}\) in the uses of ‘I believe’ and the transition to ‘he believes’ can be taken to be evidence of this. In relation to Moore’s paradox it might seem natural to disregard this connection, but as we recall, the riddle was presented as the problem that it might very well be true that I went to the cinema last Tuesday, although I do not myself believe that I did, and others can say this about me, but I cannot do that myself. That the Moorean sentence is not problematic in the third person is a starting point for the conundrum, but from the outset, this fact was a part of the story. The uses of ‘believe’ in the first and the third person sometimes cross, sometimes fit, and they feed off each other. Note that Winch moves on to talking about the meanings of the word ‘believe’ and the ‘uses’ as something established.

Wittgenstein, Wolgast, Malcolm, Segerdahl and Winch have shown that the grammar of expressions does not always follow analogous patterns, as in this case with ‘to believe’ and other expressions: expressions do not always work the way in which general theories which philosophers and other theoreticians of language set up will make us expect them to. This expectation of symmetry is not met, and being baffled by that is being baffled by the Moorean sentence.

#### 4.4 The relation between the first and the third person

The relation between the first and the third person is thus central to the setup of Moore’s paradox: the paradoxical feature arises because I cannot myself assert the same as others can assert about me. This phenomenon has been called *counterprivacy* by A. Gombay\(^\text{20}\) – what others may think or mean about me, which I myself cannot think. Moore’s problem was that he thought that he caught a glimpse of a logical obstacle here. It would be ‘absurd’ to assert that ‘I believe it is raining but it is not raining’ whereas ‘He believes it is raining but it is not raining’ seems perfectly in order.

The Moorean sentence seems acceptable because of the schema ‘\(A\) believes \(p\) and not \(p\)’ which is associated with it. The schema does not display or discern whether the sentence is in the third or the first person, and philosophers who do not take the lack of tense indication as a problematic

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\(^\text{19}\) “Aspect shifts” – see section 4.4.

\(^\text{20}\) Ref. FATTAS
feature of the schema, will be troubled by Moore’s paradox. Earlier on in this chapter, it has been suggested that a mistaken view of the relation between the first and the third person is one of the main cords of the tangle at hand: a mistaken view of this relation will generate and support the idea of a schema.

In this section, I would like to investigate the argument that when it comes to belief, there are relevant features of the relation between the first and the third person, which are not merely psychological but also logical in character. The relation between the first and the third person sheds light on the usability argument. The grammatical irregularities presented above are reflections of the way we live and the way we relate to ourselves and each other.

It is not only when we are to relate to a Moorean sentence in contrast to another sentence that the alleged asymmetry between the first and the third person becomes important. The relation between the sentence in the third and first person corresponds to the relation between the sentence in the present and past tense. The fact that we are inclined to see the Moorean sentence as good, and feel the need to explain why it does not behave in the way it “should”, hinges on another fact: that we have taken the surface form seriously. The surface form is the common denominator for the Moorean sentence and these other sentences, the superficial similarity which makes us expect further agreement (symmetry). Our image of the general relation between the first and the third person has consequences for how we treat the Moorean sentence as such, i.e. for the conflict which we are inclined to observe when we see the Moorean sentence as consisting of two parts. Our understanding of this relation has consequences for which diagnosis we will give. Therefore, we need to take a closer look at the deep grammar of the relation between the first and the third person than we did above.

When you say "Suppose I believe…." you are presupposing the whole grammar of the word “to believe”, the ordinary use, of which you are master. [...] You would not know at all what you were supposing here (i.e. what, for example, would follow from such a supposition), if you were not already familiar with the use of “believe”.21

Winch quotes this passage from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (part IIx) and writes that Wittgenstein wants to show that the uses in the first and the third person are related or connected, that they stand in a relation of mutual dependence to each other.22 The point in the paragraph quoted above is that in order to be able to discuss an example of this kind – understand what would be supposed – we must already know the use of the word ‘believe’. For

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22 It may be the case that the paragraph is directed at Moore, since many of Moore’s examples contain the phrasing which Wittgenstein shows to be problematic. Moore also connects belief with sense impressions: for example “Suppose that…”, and the comparison of belief to sense impressions. G. E. Moore: “Beliefs and Propositions” in *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, George Allen &Unwin, London 1953, s. 253: "Well, suppose that somebody somewhere were believing now that some one of us is now hearing the noise of a brass-band. As I say, I suppose it is not at all likely that anybody anywhere is actually making this mistake at the present moment with regard to anyone. But it is a sort of mistake which we do quite often make. We often make mistakes which consist in supposing that some other person is at a given moment experiencing sense-data, which he is not in fact experiencing at that moment.”
instance, we judge that someone believes so and so from observing him, from looking at what the person does. We say about someone that he believes that it is going to rain – that’s why he is walking around in his wellingtons. Others take it that I believe something when I myself simply assert it. And if we ourselves would express that we believe it in addition to our simple assertion, this saying that one believes something may function as giving additional assurance, a natural response in a case where someone has cast doubt on our assertion. When I say “Suppose I believe…” and thereby ask someone to imagine that I believe (first person) something, it will be as in the case with the wellingtons – the image of me, believing that it rains, will follow the pattern of the third person. In that image, I may be by the window, looking out, worried. Peter Winch discusses this feature of belief in terms of ‘aspect shifts’.  

Expressions of belief have an aspect shift feature, meaning that sometimes these expressions are talk about ourselves, and other times they are about that which we are talking about.

Malcolm notes that Moore’s paradox (that it would be absurd to assert the sentence) only arises in the first person but not when the expression “I believe that p” arises from “self-observation and recollection”. In those cases, it is as if I had observed myself. Malcolm’s thought here can be taken as a deepening of the usability argument. The Moorean schema is not a Moorean sentence in those cases: one could say that when I explain to my companions at the restaurant why I keep feeling with my hand behind my chair, that ‘I keep believing that I have my purse with me, and I do not have my purse with me’, I speak in the way others talk about me, I observe myself and explain my behavior, but in a case like that, “believe” does not mean the same thing as in the problematic sentence. I am not expressing my belief but ascribing it to myself. (I would not say “I probably have my purse with me”.) As a matter of fact, this is a way in which I sometimes talk about myself. We do sometimes – I now mention this as a note about a contrast to an alleged normal use – talk about ourselves in a way which could be described as talking about ourselves as if we were someone else, or as if we saw ourselves from the outside. I do not wish to generalize this suggestion at all: the reminder that we sometimes talk like this is merely intended as a remedy for the psychological tendency to take sentences and words to carry their meanings with them. These explanations of how we normally use words and how we use them at other times are merely reminders and do not solve the problem that we tend to take the Moorean sentence, ‘the schema’, as something that we are able to give an analysis of once and for all without considering it in a particular use. Attempts to exclude the Moorean sentence by finding faults by contrasting other sentences with it or short-circuiting it, is not getting at its source – it will not keep it from arising. Malcolm tends to understand ‘use’ as a set of possible language games and this is not a solution but a mere extension of the problem, since the language games and the reminders of ordinary use are still a version of the nimbus thinking of linguistic ‘signs’. In this picture, signs carry their meanings with them as a cloud – a picture negligibly distinct from the package theory of meaning (which I discussed in Chapter 3).

Malcolm refers to Wittgenstein’s “explanation” of why the sentences ‘It is raining’ and ‘I believe it is raining’ can mean approximately the same: there is a decisive logical difference between first and third person when it comes to belief: we come to know that someone believes this-and-that

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23 Winch (2001) takes seriously the fact that in the PI, the section about aspect shifts follows directly on the section on Moore’s paradox.

by observing him. In contrast, he claims, we do not determine what we ourselves believe by observing ourselves: “The grammar of the word ‘believe’ reflects a striking feature of human life, namely, that there is an attentive observation which we direct on other people, and not on ourselves”, Malcolm writes. In fact, I replied with the usability argument, we sometimes do at least talk as if we direct this attention on ourselves too.

Sometimes, we could admit, we do talk about ourselves as if we saw ourselves from the outside; we explain our behavior to others, as in the case with the purse. We learn things about ourselves through others – remember for example how children learn first person pronouns, children who call themselves by their first names instead of ‘I’, or say things like “I’m beginning to look tired”, peeking out after being sought after: “Here I was!” (not “Here I am!”). We learn things about others through ourselves too, and through our own reactions. This is what Winch is getting at when he writes that we must

…refrain from trying to understand the nature of the anomaly presented by “p and I don’t believe that p” in terms of what ‘states of affairs’ its component sentences report, but rather in terms of ‘language games’ into which reporting and expressing what one believes enter; or, in the phraseology I have already quoted, in terms of “the natural behavior towards human beings” of which our language “is but an auxiliary and extension”.

Winch certainly points out an important insight; that it is not only by looking at possible situations where the word ‘believe’ is uttered, but that there are practices which come first, circumstances in which these ways of speaking do their work. I still would like to respond by saying that it is possible that these situations would be different – that embroidery around a phrase into a proposition or a phrase carrying the language game to which it belongs will not do to settle its sense in advance of an actual situation of use. This would be yet an example of a quasi-empirical view of language games.

We may cast a light on these forms of behavior, these forms of life, through a discussion of Moore’s paradox. And Moore’s paradox in turn, lives off of the mistake of thinking that we should be able to say anything about ourselves which others could say about us. But that is not the only problem.

The difference between my talk about me and about others does not rid us of the Moorean sentence altogether. However, this is how these reminders may do some work: a simplified picture of the relation between first and third person plays a role in generating the schema which I have called the Moorean sentence. However, the suggestions about this relation which Malcolm and Winch find in parts of Wittgenstein’s treatment of Moore’s paradox, although they are correct, are not enough to rid us of the tangle: the problem is not merely the surprise at an irregularity between me and you and those who talk about our beliefs. They resolve parts of the problem but they do not keep it from arising.

25 Malcolm 1995, p. 206. I do not wish to suggest a sort of “direct” as opposed to “indirect” access picture of our mental lives as opposed to our relation to others’ mental lives, but merely point out that the expectation that we should relate to everything (even our own intentions and impressions) as others do is not philosophically innocent.

4.5 Grammar and logical grammar

I have talked about ‘the grammar of belief’, a description of which Wolgast and Malcolm have given as a remedy to the Moorean sentence. Now what is the difference between grammar in the grammarian’s sense, and logical grammar in the sense intended by Wittgenstein and some followers of his? In the use of the verb ‘believe’, there is nothing irregular to grammar in this ordinary sense. The differences between first person and third person use of ‘believe’ presented above would perhaps be described as pragmatic differences by the linguist. In relation to traditional grammar, in order to incorporate the differences in use, the concept of grammar must be considerably extended; the discussion goes beyond the rules of combination of words into a sentence. Moore’s paradox, however, is also a challenge to traditional grammar, if grammatical correctness is taken to induce meaning. Wittgenstein made a distinction, which may be of use here, between deep grammar and surface grammar in Philosophical Investigations, §664:

In the use of words one might distinguish ‘surface grammar’ from ‘depth grammar’. What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence [Satzbau], the part of its use — one might say — that can be taken in by the ear. — And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word “to mean”, with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about [sich auszukennen].

Traditional grammar research does take wider snapshots than an analysis of simple sentences into its components. The aim here is not to put forward a critique of the work of grammarians. With the help of a collection of examples of — a few or all — uses of a certain word, extensive mappings of evidence for these uses, one may also find unexpected uses, which one had not thought would be accepted by speakers of a particular language, seeming irregularities which are widely used. The perspective of a grammarian and the aim of the mapping are quite different from those of the philosopher. If someone makes a grammatical mistake, we can correct it if we like — we already understand what was meant. But for deep grammar, this can’t be supposed — we are already lacking in understanding. In this case, we already stand before a tangle, and we are looking for the ingredients which are necessary for producing the problem. One of these may be the expectation that all verbs work the same way, and that individuals in the face of language use and expression, are one kind of thing. That is, that what can be said and what is said do not vary according to who it was that asserted something, and what that was.

Moore’s absurd proposition is a monster made of familiar parts, a creature formed by grammatical union. Such monsters are not uncommon, one might add, in the regions of philosophy.

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27 Wittgenstein is certainly not the same kind of ‘linguistic philosopher’ as Jerrold Katz, who takes it that advances in linguistics (and traditional grammar, including the philosophy of language) can solve philosophical problems once and for all.
29 An alternative way to put this point is that philosophical grammarians and linguistic grammarians study different objects: sentences-as-used and sentences, as was suggested to me by Lars Hertzberg.
30 Wolgast 1977, p. 119.
Wolgast here gives expression to a light version of the natural view of nonsense, according to which the combination of parts which do not fit together gives rise to a monster. Nevertheless, she points out that the union is grammatical, presumably as opposed to logical, or psychological as opposed to logical. The question remains whether this diagnosis resolves Moore’s paradox. For one thing, the burden of proof for a monster, or rather, ghost, of this kind, lies with the one who invented it, and the arguments for it have been hard to find. In philosophy, however, awkward questions are not resolved by being silent about them and although I have criticized Gustafsson and Wolgast, they are set in the position where they must try to argue, to show where it goes wrong. Their attempts at reformulating the problem should not be taken to be generally valid statements of matter of fact (theses, in a Wittgensteinian dialect). The monster will disappear as soon as one realizes that it is a mere brainchild.

An analogy might help here. The hunter may raise his rifle if he thinks he might hear or see a pheasant in the bush, but when he sees that it was just a sparrow, or the wind, he lowers it again. Were he not a hunter he would not have the weapon, nor would he have the pattern of reaction – and he would not be out there looking in the first place. Some philosophers of language are out there looking but they do not realize that the bush is empty, and shoot. In the user view, the bush is observed to be empty before any shots are fired.

The user perspective provides us with reminders about how familiar phrases (which have uses) are actually used. These reminders may demonstrate that some of the expectations we have concerning the way language works are not warranted, in this case, when it comes to belief. Here, the reminders serve to explicate which uses the one part of sentences like the Moorean sentence could have. The function of these reminders or descriptions of language games is to show why the Moorean sentence, seen as a combination of two parts, does not come about, and also to show why one is inclined to think that it does.

4.6 Logical form and the constitution of the Moorean sentence

What is this Moorean sentence, really, if there is anything like it at all? I let a Moorean sentence be the schema ‘I believe that \( p \) and not-\( p \)’ in the introduction to this chapter and in the sections on the formal and the pragmatic approaches. In these discussions, one defining feature of a Moorean sentence was that it would be absurd to assert it. I have tried to show that a sentence which can be formalized in the schema ‘I believe that \( p \) and not-\( p \)’ can be asserted without any absurdity, at least in circumstances in which I talk about myself in the way that I talk about others. I called this reminder the usability argument.

The usability argument shows that it is not the form of the sentence, the schema that ‘excludes the possibility of meaning’. This takes the air out of the idea of a Moorean sentence as a sentence of a certain form which entails that it is not possible to use it. We have to content ourselves with what is left of what we called a Moorean sentence: a sentence which seems to have a form which seems to make it absurd to assert. A Moorean sentence becomes a mere shell, for which we do not know what the content could be – that is, it is difficult to even call it a ‘shell’.
There are uses which are not absurd for a sentence which is essentially of the same “form” as the Moorean sentence. Winch gives the example of a politician who “changes hats”. Martin Gustafsson’s example is a situation in which his brother, a dishonest car dealer, is on the phone with a potential customer and tells him that “The Ford is in excellent shape” and then in an aside to Martin says that “And I don’t believe it is in excellent shape”.\(^{31}\) My own example was that I explain why I keep feeling with my arm behind my chair: “I believe I have my purse with me but I don’t”. What role may the usability argument play in the investigation of Moore’s paradox? Is it shallow to point out that it seems that a sentence or its surface structure may sometimes but not always have a function? The usability argument does no more than remind us of this fact about the guise of a sentence – that it is a mistake to suppose that the “form” or guise is all that matters in meaning and use, for whether a sentence may be used or not, can have meaning or not.

The usability argument is an objection to the view of meaning according to which there are surface structures or schemas about which we can determine in advance whether they are acceptable or not – schemas which are valid before an actual attempt at a use, devoid of context. This view lies at the foundations for those who are looking for a contradiction to terminate the Moorean sentence. To them, the contradiction would be the crack that conclusively determines whether the form is broken or unusable. An extension of this view would be to say that there are rules which determine which types of words are allowed in certain types of structures. This view of language is what I, with Hertzberg and Diamond, want to argue against by claiming that a sentence has a form only as it is seen in use, that only in the light of its context does a sentence have meaning. One could perhaps rephrase it into a question and an answer: “What distinguishes a Moorean sentence (which by definition lacks use) from a sentence of the same form, which has a use?” The best answer would be “The former lacks form.”

Now is there a difference here between this “lack of use” and contradictoriness? Contradiction is not the only “form” which does not fit in with our ways of speaking, even if some philosophers are inclined to think so. When we philosophize about language, we tend to suppose that all possible combinations of familiar words, which resemble other frequently used combinations, must work. As a matter of fact, these are all the reasons we have to suppose that there is such a thing as a Moorean sentence.

Gustafsson claims that there is no such thing as the conjunction between the two parts which purportedly forms the Moorean sentence. This may be taken as attributing to the “parts” of this “sentence” a structure, even if it lacks context. To show why the two parts cannot be combined requires one to take the sentence to have at least a kind of structure (two parts with an ‘and’ in between), and the attempt to show why the two parts cannot be combined is set off by the wish to show why the sentence is nonsense. The problem here is that it is not possible to reach the conclusion that a sentence is nonsensical; it is not a conclusion, something that may result from reasoning or arguments. Taking it seriously along with Frege (according to Hertzberg) that we cannot talk about the logical properties of a sentence which is cut off from its use (the context principle), no explanation needs or can be given here.

\(^{31}\) Martin Gustafsson in an e-mail to Lars Hertzberg 1.4.2002.
In the Moorean case, the sentence is not rejected as nonsense immediately by philosophers, even if they ought to be able to do that. To say that something is nonsense is not to assert a conclusion, but rather to express confusion. We are examining a sentence detached from its context, a sentence which seems absurd, and the only way for this absurdity to be visible is through the contrast with other sentences, sentences which we could immediately imagine a use or a context for. It is after all not the form of the sentence or its words, put in the order they are, which determines the meaning of the sentence. Nothing excludes the possibility that it could be used to say something else in another context – in this general sense, from this general point of view, the sentence is arbitrary in relation to its sense. Use, the possible context of a possible sentence, goes before its “form”. We easily slip into the thought that rules and logic are something built in or internal to the sentence, but they are instead secondary to use – in Hertzberg’s words: we cannot talk about the logical properties of a sentence in isolation, but only as it is uttered by a speaker in a context.\(^\text{32}\)

Winch wrote that the annoying feature of Moore’s paradox is that it gave the impression that there is a logical obstacle to saying something which could be the case. He made the point that anomalies to logic (as a hidden, perfect structure) do not have to lead to our trying to rid ourselves of logic altogether, but logic can play the role of an object of comparison.

The idea that logic comes before sense is mistaken. Winch describes it as “a certain conception of logic as an existing ideal structure to which language is ultimately answerable.” He goes on:

> Wittgenstein’s mature thinking rejects this conception: if we do indeed have a use for a certain expression, then it is, logically speaking, perfectly in order.\(^\text{33}\)

In other words, there is no Moorean sentence with a certain form. Or perhaps it could be put like this: If the “form” which we have called the form of a Moorean sentence is not a given form it is open as to which sentences we could call Moorean (or which “forms” the Moorean sentences could have). David Finkelstein suggests that the sentence ‘I believe it is raining and it is raining’ is just as absurd to assert as the sentence which I have discussed in this chapter.\(^\text{34}\) Austin also notes this possibility but he takes it to be in some way trivial, not absurd. Finkelstein’s sentence could just as well be used in a context which would render it meaningful. If we want to keep the idea of Moorean sentences in circulation, these would be sentences which we tend to accept beforehand outside of any context, but about which it turns out that we do not know how to handle them.

Hertzberg’s point about the role of context shows another interesting feature of the Moorean schema. As soon as I make up a situation in which the schema is used, it is no longer Moorean. That is, the absurdity of the schema which according to the setup would show up in the first person does not appear when a context of use is presented (and this is what the usability argument rests on).

\(^{\text{32}}\) Hertzberg 2001, p. 93.

\(^{\text{33}}\) Winch 2001, p. 207.

4.7 Conclusion

As a consequence of his reasoning in *Ethics*, Moore ends up with the paradox that a person may deserve strong moral condemnation for choosing an action which is in fact right. According to Wolgast, Moore did not see any reason not to accept this paradox. She draws an analogy: a man should say what he believes even if it should be false; and a man may be scolded for lying even if what he says is true:

> It will be my purpose to show, that our beliefs are so intimately connected with our assertions that this ‘paradox’ is instead a thoroughly natural and suitable consequence.\(^{35}\)

I have tried to take the paradox not as a conclusion or a suitable consequence, but a starting point, because what it demands of us to be perplexed about – that we cannot say something in the first person tense which we can say in the third person – is not a mystery once we have been reminded of how we talk and what we are like. Wolgast’s view is that the important thing about a discussion of Moore’s paradox lies in the basic questions for a philosophy about knowledge and belief which it raises. The questions it raises are also concerned with philosophical method and as I promised early on in this investigation, I now return to the issue of the proposition.

Wittgenstein saw that philosophy should be non-dogmatic and that it need not be generalizing. Creating a theory of language is in a sense a positive endeavor which may involve making generalizations and posing theses. I do not wish to turn against such philosophical projects, but take it that Wittgenstein’s lesson is that dogmatism will generate new problems. This is the framework for my discussion: the problems generated through dogmatic views of the proposition, and I have aimed at criticizing terminologies by bringing out their dogmatic elements.

**Literature (selection)**


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\(^{35}\) Wolgast 1977, p. 97.