

**Zeitschrift:** Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie = Revue philosophique et théologique de Fribourg = Rivista filosofica e teologica di Friburgo = Review of philosophy and theology of Fribourg

**Band:** 46 (1999)

**Heft:** 3

**Artikel:** Karl-Otto Apel's interpretation of Wittgenstein

**Autor:** O'Grady, Paul

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-761239>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 17.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

PAUL O'GRADY

## Karl-Otto Apel's Interpretation of Wittgenstein

### *Introduction*

Karl-Otto Apel is one of a small but growing number of philosophers who attempt to bridge the gap between the analytical and hermeneutical traditions. His work is influenced by the historical researches of Dilthey, Heidegger's phenomenology and Frankfurt school social theory. However he also eclectically uses ideas from C.S. Peirce, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Noam Chomsky to effect *a transformation of philosophy*, the title of a collection of his essays.<sup>1</sup>

To achieve this transformation Apel develops a critical hermeneutics. He explains this as an attempt to establish the transcendental grounds of *understanding* in the concrete situation of the communicative community. He believes that merely laying bare the grounds of the possibility of understanding is not sufficient for hermeneutical philosophy, a criticism levelled against Gadamer's hermeneutics. Criteria must be established to normatively judge the validity of understanding. He claims that such criteria are to be found in the concept of the *ideal communicative community*, which is presupposed in every concrete act of understanding and which provides standards against which such acts can be evaluated. This implies that understanding is rooted in historically and sociologically specific contexts, and improved understanding implies improved levels of emancipation in society.

Apel uses Wittgenstein's idea of the language-game as a central strategy to draw the connection between language and the concrete situation in which it is embedded. His interpretation of Wittgenstein has been influential, as Thomas McCarthy points out in *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, when he says «Habermas draws heavily upon Apel in his interpretation of Wittgenstein.»<sup>2</sup> Thus Apel's use of Wittgenstein is central to his own philosophy and also to others who attempt similar enterprises.

In this paper I would like to examine Apel's interpretation of Wittgenstein, leaving aside questions about the feasibility and effectiveness of his overall criti-

<sup>1</sup> APEL, Karl-Otto, *Transformation der Philosophie*, Frankfurt a.M. 1972. English Translation: *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, (Adey, G./Frisby, D., trans.) London, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> APEL, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy* (cf. note 1), p.56.

cal hermeneutics. He has written at length in a number of articles and books since the 1950's about Wittgenstein. I shall focus on the seminal essay «*Wittgenstein and the Problem of Hermeneutical Understanding*», which appears in the collection *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*,<sup>3</sup> since he directly outlines there his interpretation of the notion of language game and how it applies to hermeneutics. I shall argue that he has misunderstood Wittgenstein and misrepresented his ideas about language games, basing this claim on a textual analysis of Wittgenstein's work. I shall also argue that Apel's misappropriation of Wittgenstein breeds confusion rather than clarity and creates a range of problems which are precisely the type of thing which Wittgenstein wanted to eradicate. The paper has three sections, first Apel's interpretation of Wittgenstein, second my own understanding of the notion of language game and third a critique of Apel's views.

### *I. Apel on Wittgenstein*

In his essay Apel contextualises his discussion of Wittgenstein in a comparison of the hermeneutical with the analytical traditions. The topics of understanding and meaning are seen by Apel as being central to both, yet the two traditions have had little contact with each other and have developed their positions in mutual isolation. Apel looks to Dilthey as the major figure in the development of the German tradition and elaborates the question of hermeneutical understanding in the light of Dilthey's work. The questions of interpretation which appeared in diverse areas such as jurisprudence, scriptural exegesis and classical philology were united into the general question of the possibility of historical understanding, cast in Kantian terms as a «*critique of historical reason*». The presupposition that historical texts have a meaning to be retrieved through careful historical methodology is thus enshrined in such a project. Apel contrasts this with the intellectual background of Wittgenstein, which was that of specific and detailed problems in engineering, the foundations of mathematics and mathematical logic, with the dominant influence being that of Bertrand Russell (he doesn't mention Frege). The problems of history and the humanities were not within the sphere of Wittgenstein's philosophical interests. Apel acknowledges the influence of Kant, via Schopenhauer and Hertz on the young Wittgenstein, but says that he chooses to ignore that for the purposes of his study.

Despite this, Apel gives a Kantian reading of the *Tractatus*, interpreting it as a critique of pure language. He says that Wittgenstein established a transcendental semantics in this work, transposing the centre of philosophical concern from psychological understanding to semantical understanding. The question of the logical form of consciousness of objects becomes the question of the logical form of descriptions of objects. The logical form of description is the transcendental framework within which things can be said, the a-priori precondition for communication. Since the *Tractatus* had established the principles for a complete

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 1–45.

and comprehensive theory of language, the hermeneutical problem doesn't arise. If a text cannot be analysed into a form which can be dealt with by Tractarian semantics, then it has crossed the boundaries of sense. Thus many of the texts studied by hermeneuticians are literally nonsensical, attempting to say what cannot be said, transcending the a-historical limits of language. Thus the position of the *Tractatus*, in Apel's interpretation, is one which renders hermeneutical understanding redundant.

The *Philosophical Investigations* provides more congenial reading for the hermeneutically minded philosopher, according to Apel. The topics of meaning and understanding are central to this work, but the transcendental theory of language of the *Tractatus* has been dropped. The borders between sense and nonsense have been redrawn, allowing a pluralism to exist in the city of language. Language operates in a proliferation of different ways, each with its own internal consistency. A centralised prescriptive theory of language in general has been abandoned for piecemeal descriptive analyses of small segments of actually used language, which is the study of language games.

The interpretation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is fraught with problems, since he attempted to do philosophy in a new style and tried to avoid explicit theorising, linking the activity of philosophy to the activity of therapy. Apel is aware of this, citing many quotations from the *Philosophical Investigations* to that effect. However he decides to place Wittgenstein's later thought within a theoretical framework, saying,

«We shall conclude the necessary digression on the fundamental difficulties which confront the interpreter of Wittgenstein with the decision to understand Wittgenstein's examples and ladder sentences' in such a manner that they incorporate a theory of language, meaning and understanding which is relevant to our topic.»<sup>4</sup>

My contention will be that Apel's reconstruction of Wittgenstein distorts the notion of *language game* generating a number of needless problems. Here are the basic elements in Apel's discussion of language games and their relevance to hermeneutics.

He says that the transcendental unified framework of the *Tractatus* has changed to that of a great multiplicity of language game units. Hence,

«All the functions which are attributed to the logical form of language or the linguistically representable world in the *Tractatus* are transferred in the *Philosophical Investigations* to the rule of the respective language game.»<sup>5</sup>

The differentiation of the transcendental aspects of the *Tractatus* into a multiplicity is brought about, says Apel, by the inclusion of human activity in the notion of the language game. Meaning and understanding are now rooted in actual lived situations, which provide the preconditions of sense. Thought and action are intrinsically linked up in linguistic usage. Meaning is not something fixed, as

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

in the logical atomism of the *Tractatus*, but depends on the context, the particular language game used. Hence the notion of there being an ultimate level of analysis which will reveal the basic semantical and ontological units is dropped. Names, the basic semantical units of logical atomism, are not basic or fundamental, they derive their meaning from context and usage. The doctrine that there are ultimate ontological simples corresponding to names is revealed to be an illusion. The idea of an absolute degree of precision, which motivated the theory of logical atomism is abandoned. Precision is determined by the need of the context, there is no absolute standard. Thus meaning, levels of analysis, levels of precision etc. depend on the particular language game in which they are used.

Apel points out that a general target for Wittgenstein's work is the cluster of theories of meaning drawing inspiration from Cartesian anthropology. These argue that meaning and understanding are mental processes or states and are essentially private. The detailed discussion of rule-following and private language in *Philosophical Investigations* #184–314 attacks these views, attempting to show their incoherence. Briefly Wittgenstein argues that meaning and understanding are based in the public realm, included in a multiplicity of institutions and conventions and that the intersubjective level of community is a necessary precondition for language and intelligibility. Apel believes that this attack on psychologistic theories of meaning has great significance for hermeneutics. Hermeneutics can now be understood as the task of describing language games, one no longer has recourse to such techniques as empathetic relivings or mental reconstructions to understand a text from a different context – one needs to identify and describe the language games contained therein. Apel gives an example,

«From Wittgenstein's perspective the meaning of Godfrey of Bouillon's intentions is determined by the rules of the language game or life form of the medieval crusade.»<sup>6</sup>

Only in the framework of a language game does human behaviour become accessible, that is meaningful and intelligible. Thus a philosophy embodied in language games opposes modern philosophies of the subject. Apel makes a passing comparison with *Being and Time* # 26 and # 31 which he believes adopts a similar approach.<sup>7</sup>

However he does see a problem with the use of language games in hermeneutics. He wonders whether hermeneutical language games are of a special kind, since they describe and analyse other language games. What is the connection between the primary and secondary language game? How does one gain critical leverage, so to speak? Specifically he sees problems with historicity, how

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Apel develops the similarities between Heidegger and Wittgenstein in the untranslated essay from *Transformation der Philosophie*: «Wittgenstein und Heidegger: Die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein und der Sinnlosigkeitsverdacht gegen alle Metaphysik.»



can one make a connection between a hermeneutical language game in one epoch and a totally different one in another? He says,

«Wittgenstein, with his conceptual model cannot actually apprehend what is historical in understanding, the mediation between the disintegrating and emerging language-games (the normal phenomenon of the mediation of tradition) and on the other hand mediation over the ages, the revitalisation of the past and its assimilation into the present life-form.»<sup>8</sup>

Apel has focussed on a particular aspect of a more general problem which could be called the problem of the monadology of language games. They seem to be hermetically sealed off from each other, not allowing any level of criticism. For example some philosophers of religion claim immunity for religious discourse since it operates within its own language game and cannot be criticised from without. However the same would be true for the language game of paranoid schizophrenia or that of fairy tales and thus the very notion of language game seems to lead to intolerable conceptual difficulties. Therefore to summarise Apel's views on language games – he believes that the notion is useful to hermeneuticians because it implies a public rather than a psychologistic theory of meaning, thus resolving some problems there. However language games are problematical in their relation to each other and don't seem to be able to deal with historical development, which would be a major drawback for a hermeneutician.

## II. Wittgenstein on Language Games

Wittgenstein developed the notion of language game to deal with the relation between language and reality.<sup>9</sup> In the *Tractatus* he had presented a position which he believed had solved the problem of that relation, showing that language is basically a calculus. Syntax is explained by the theory of truth-functions, semantics is supplied by the picture theory of meaning. Logic is the totality of all possible arrangements of language, which mirrors the metaphysical form of reality – the totality of all possible arrangements of atomic objects. Implied in this view were the doctrines of metaphysical atomism, of the possibility of an ultimate level of analysis in language, of the independence of all elementary propositions from each other. The fundamental elements of a theory of language and its corresponding ontology were given in this, hence Wittgenstein stopped doing philosophy, since on his view there was not much more to be done.

Over ten years later he was led to abandon this view of language and reality – there were too many insurmountable problems contained in it. He saw that

<sup>8</sup> P. 37

<sup>9</sup> I shall adopt the convention of abbreviating Wittgenstein's works in the following footnotes as follows *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP), *Philosophical Investigations* (PI), *Blue Book* (BB), *Philosophical Grammar* (PG), *Philosophical Remarks* (PB), *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (WWK), *Zettel* (Z), *On Certainty* (OC).

elementary propositions are connected with each other in a variety of ways – for example the impossibility of saying ⟨this is red⟩ and ⟨this is blue⟩ simultaneously, what was known as the ⟨colour exclusion problem⟩. He saw that language could be analysed in a variety of ways, depending on the context, there was no ultimate level of analysis. He saw that his ultimate metaphysical units, his simple objects, were a demand, not a result of his theory. They were a dogmatic assertion with no foundation. The beautiful edifice of the *Tractatus* was destroyed, and the question as to the relation of language to reality still unanswered.

He needed a new way to understand this relation. Throughout the 1930's such a way appeared gradually. Two images seemed useful to him to explain the workings of language – language as tool and language as game. The important point which both of these images emphasised was that use confers meaning, a position which was already latent in parts of the *Tractatus*. He says in *Philosophical Remarks* (1930) that «A word only has meaning in the context of a proposition: that is like saying only in use is a rod a lever. Only the application makes it into a lever.»<sup>10</sup> This tool motif continues into the *Philosophical Investigations*, where he says that the functions of words are as diverse as the functions of tools, yet we are confused by the uniform appearance of words.<sup>11</sup> He uses the cabin of a steam locomotive to illustrate this. There are handles all looking more or less alike, yet they are used differently and do different things – one is a crank which is moved continuously to open a valve, one is a switch which has only two positions, one is a brake lever, which has to be pulled hard, one is a pump which is moved to and fro etc.

However the game image seemed to be even more useful for his purposes. In conversations recorded with Carnap and Schlick in 1931 he compares the use of an axiomatic system with playing chess. There are rules laid down which can be appealed to in order to explain the operation of the system.<sup>12</sup> He develops this view in *Philosophical Grammar* (1933), explicitly comparing mathematics with chess. However he realises that chess is not a paradigm for all games, and that language does not always work like a calculus. He says «Augustine does describe a calculus of our language, only not everything that we call language is this calculus.»<sup>13</sup> Shortly after this, he uses the term ⟨language game⟩ for the first time, to describe the teaching of words to a child by showing it objects and uttering words.<sup>14</sup> Using the image of a game emphasises the connection between human activity and language, there is an interconnected and complex whole in the interplay of the two.

The comparison of language use and game playing is fruitful for a number of reasons. Firstly games are rule-governed, just as language use is. One can learn the rules through practice, without ever being able to explicitly formulate

<sup>10</sup> PB section 14.

<sup>11</sup> PI section 12.

<sup>12</sup> WWK p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> PG p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> PG p. 62.

the rule, yet they are there and can be appealed to. Secondly games aren't exhaustively rule governed – there are no rules for example for the height of a tennis service, yet this doesn't mean that tennis cannot be played. Similarly language isn't totally rule governed. Rules appear when there is a need for them, they are made. Thirdly there are a multiplicity of different types of game, «game» is a family resemblance concept. There is no single defining characteristic which connects all games together, but rather a mesh of interconnecting similarities. Likewise there is no essential core to language, rather there is a vast network of interconnections. Fourthly games do not need foundations – they occur as part of the complex of human interaction. They can be taught, enjoyed, amended, abandoned etc., but they need no justification. Language is similar in that it is a central part of human interaction, but requires no foundations – a point I shall return to in the third part of the paper. Finally I would like to draw attention to a common mistake which appears in discussions of the similarity of language and games. Because the word «game» sometimes has the connotation of triviality, it is occasionally argued that Wittgenstein is trivialising the understanding of language. Yet many games are not trivial – look at international contests, or look at the life-style of a professional game-player there is a degree of commitment and seriousness seldom found elsewhere. Likewise some language use can be trivial or recreative, others can be deeply serious. It is a mistake to see in the connection of language and game a trivialisation of language.

These comparisons led to the development of the notion of the language-game, a specific example of the rule-governed mixture of words and activity which constitutes meaning for Wittgenstein. The connection of language and reality is no longer seen as a two place relation, with language describing reality, but language is embedded in a specific context and intertwined with a cluster of activities which allow meaning. The concept of language is extended to include activities and even objects, used as samples. In a key passage in the *Blue Book* (1934) Wittgenstein outlines the usefulness of the notion of language game. I shall quote it in full,

«I shall in the future again and again draw your attention to what I shall call language games. These are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language. Language games are the forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words. The study of language games is the study of primitive forms of language or primitive languages. If we want to study the problems of truth and falsehood, of the agreement and disagreement of propositions with reality, of the nature of assertion, assumption and question, we shall with great advantage look at primitive forms of language in which these forms of thinking appear without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought. When we look at such simple forms of language the



mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears.»<sup>15</sup>

Hence the purpose of language games is to clarify the actual use of language, to allow one to see perspicuously what is happening in a specific situation, without importing other extraneous and confusing elements.

In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein uses different examples of language games, but he doesn't develop a theory of them. Firstly they are used to deconstruct the theories of the *Tractatus*. Looking at concrete situations, such as shopkeepers selling apples, builders passing slabs, someone sorting out coloured squares, someone analysing the parts of a brush, Wittgenstein shows that the doctrines of the *Tractatus* were illusions. Language doesn't operate according to the model of a calculus, with the doctrines attendant on that position. He then moves on to examine the notions of understanding and meaning. Again concrete instances wean us away from ontological or psychologistic theories of meaning. The meaning of a word isn't the object it refers to, or some mental experience associated with the word, but rather the meaning is conferred by context and use. Wittgenstein uses language games as a method of bringing to light prejudices we bring to language, exposing the glasses through which we uncritically examine it, especially around the interlinked notions of understanding and meaning.

To complete this account of Wittgenstein's use of language games I need to examine the terms 'forms of life' and 'grammar'. 'Form of life' is mentioned only seven times in Wittgenstein's published work.<sup>16</sup> There is no clear definition of it given. However there are indications as to how it is to be understood. A form of life is the basis for a particular use of language, it is the activity associated with the linguistic usage. Wittgenstein says «The term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of a language is part of an activity or a form of life.»<sup>17</sup> These activities are linked with, but not determined by, our biological nature. There is no unique, uniform human form of life, but multiple forms of life characteristic of different epochs and cultures built on our basic biological structures. Our perceptual concepts are founded on shared discriminatory capacities for colour, taste, sound smell etc. We can and do develop different schemes for interpreting these, bounded by our biological limits. Even such abstract schemes as mathematics depend on a biological framework – our power to manipulate digits, our ability to recognise shapes, our attention span, our ability to act regularly. The mathematics we produce is not determined by these factors, but is shaped by them. Hence a form of life is an integral part of a language-game.

The notion of grammar is central in Wittgenstein's discussion of language-games. It replaces the notion of logical syntax, but is wider in application. It

<sup>15</sup> BB p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> PI sec 19, 23, 241, pp.174, 226; OC sec 358.

<sup>17</sup> PI sec 23.

consists of the heterogeneous rules for the use of symbols in the vast variety of different contexts. Conceptual problems are resolved by examination of grammar, the conceptual framework within which propositions make sense. Colour words have a grammar, a scheme within which certain propositions make sense and others don't. Thus the colour exclusion problem, that something cannot be both red and blue simultaneously, derives from the grammar of colour, not due to the nature of reality. A grammar of colour different to ours could perhaps conceive of something both red and blue, with possibly the new name «bled». Wittgenstein comments in *Zettel* (1945–48),

«We have a colour system as we have a number system. Do the systems reside in our nature or in the nature of things? How are we to put it? – Not in the nature of numbers or colours.»<sup>18</sup>

This not to say that they derive totally from us, but rather they are a regular patterned reaction to aspects of reality which we encounter. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein spends much time examining the grammar of specific concepts, for example pain, to see how it makes sense. The way we use pain words derives from the grammatical conventions we establish, not from the «nature» of pain as such. Therefore we look at the language surrounding pain – is it descriptive or exclamatory, what sort of temporal or spatial constraints do we place on pain words, what analogies or disanalogies are there with other types of language? The results of such an unusual investigation have immediate impact on philosophical discourse, for example empiricist theories of knowledge, which are based on a particular (mistaken) view of how pain words work. One could sum up Wittgenstein's views on grammar in the following three brief quotations, «essence is expressed by grammar»,<sup>19</sup> «grammar tells what kind of object anything is»<sup>20</sup> and «what belongs to grammar are the conditions necessary for the understanding of the sense of propositions.»<sup>21</sup>

To summarise this interpretation of language games, Wittgenstein says that language achieves meaning in specific contexts, there is no overarching theory of meaning. The best way to examine language is to look at particular situations where language is used in a circumscribed way – a language game. The language is intertwined with a variety of activities, the form of life, which gives it the meaning it has. The conceptual framework of the language game is its grammar – the rules of grammar arise from the interactions of humans with their environment. The task of philosophy is to clarify grammar and so get a clear view of particular stretches of discourse, dismantling various mistaken metaphysical theories in the process. It is now time to pit this view of language game against that of Apel.

<sup>18</sup> Z sec 355.

<sup>19</sup> PI sec 371.

<sup>20</sup> PI sec 373.

<sup>21</sup> PG p. 88.

### III. *Against Apel*

The first and basic problem with Apel's interpretation of Wittgenstein is that he presents Wittgenstein's ideas as a system, as a theory of meaning, which is a distortion of those ideas. Apel asserted that the transcendental framework of the *Tractatus* had been replaced by the differentiated framework of the language game. Yet Wittgenstein didn't present a theory of language games to replace the earlier semantics. He used the notion as a heuristic tool to look at language use in particular circumstances in order to deal with specific philosophical problems. He never presented an overview of language in its entirety, understood as a network of interlinking language games. Language in its entirety is too immense and protean to deal with. A major concern of Wittgenstein's later work was to prevent the assimilation of different ideas into prefabricated slots, which would breed confusion. To present a general theory of language would be a prime example of such an assimilation. The actual language-games which Wittgenstein presents are much smaller and particularised than those envisaged by Apel. The language game of the medieval crusade would be just too big and unwieldy – one would learn very little from a study of it. Wittgenstein emphasised the primitive or basic aspect of the language game – it is a slice of language chosen for its usefulness in clarifying particular problems.

The task of philosophy, as Wittgenstein saw it, was chiefly therapeutic. Its purpose was to clarify the language we use in particular areas of discourse in order to get rid of problems caused by the misleading forms of language. «*The task of philosophy ... is to remove particular misunderstandings; not to produce a real understanding for the first time.*»<sup>22</sup> That this can seem rather negative and unimportant was clear to Wittgenstein. However he was also convinced of the importance of this task and the illusory nature of much that seemed important,

Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are cleaning up the ground of language on which they stand.<sup>23</sup>

Where Apel differs from Wittgenstein is that he attempts to use some of Wittgenstein's tools to create a theory of meaning and understanding. Wittgenstein firmly resists such an attempt, and so do the tools he devised – since when pushed into such use, they begin to produce further problems.

The problem of the monadology of language games, which appears when one uses the term as part of a theory of language, never arises in Wittgenstein's own methodology. Since language isn't understood as a large homogeneous structure, the question of the relation of language games doesn't arise. Language games are used to solve problems, not to generate further ones. One may use

<sup>22</sup> PG p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> PI sec 118.

the notion of language game to analyse particular problems, but it doesn't mean that all language must be seen as a vast interlinking structure of such games. Wittgenstein does not present a theory of language as being analysable into language games. What would count as a language game differs according to perspective and usefulness, there are no fixed language games – they are themselves family resemblance concepts. Thus the idea that there are special hermeneutical second-order language games which relate more or less problematically to certain first order games is an illusory problem generated by constructing a fixed edifice out of Wittgenstein's work.

Wittgenstein does imply that language games are autonomous, but this is quite different to saying that they are hermetically sealed off like monads. *Autonomy* in this context means that there are no 'foundations' to language games, whether ontological or transcendental. Language occurs as a cultural patterned response to an environment – it doesn't rest on ontological simples or mental acts as foundations. There is a tendency to understand autonomy as implying isolation, being cut off from – but rather autonomy in this context is connected to the notion of grammar. Our grammar, or conceptual scheme, structures our understanding of reality. It will alter according to «the fixed point of our real need.»<sup>24</sup> It is autonomous in the sense of not being rigidly determined by external factors – such as supposed ontological or cognitional structures. However this doesn't mean that it is arbitrary – reasons can be given as to why one grammatical scheme is preferable to another. Thus language games operate with particular grammars, the task of philosophy is to gain an overview of the grammar of the particular area in question. The problem about the interrelation of language games arises only if one interprets Wittgenstein as presenting a general theory of language – which he does not do.

Finally there is one aspect of Wittgenstein's thought which is strikingly similar to hermeneutics, an aspect which Apel ignores in his discussion. This is the ongoing task of the uncovering of prejudices, the revelation of the dominant images which inform our thought. When faced with self-evidence, necessity, absolute demands, Wittgenstein suggests that we try looking at the issue in another way, specifically looking at how our language leads us to think in a certain way. He points this out by noting, «*But surely you can see ... That is just the characteristic expression of someone who is under the compulsion of a rule.*»<sup>25</sup> The absolute demand is determined by the rules of grammar. The conversion to this view is the process he underwent in the move from the philosophy of the *Tractatus* to the later work. He said,

«A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably»<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> PI sec 108.

<sup>25</sup> PI sec 231.

<sup>26</sup> PI sec 115.

and also,

«The ideal, as we think of it, is unshakable. You can never get outside it; you must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe. – Where does this idea come from? It is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off.»<sup>27</sup>

The philosophy of the *Tractatus* was the result of hypostatising prejudices, producing a structure that was built in mid air, with no supports. The later work exhorts us to go back to the rough ground, to get off the slippery ice where there is no friction and we cannot move – an image reminiscent of Kant's characterisation of Plato's metaphysics, which is compared to a dove flying in a vacuum with no friction and again no real movement possible.<sup>28</sup>

I hope to have, at this stage, shown my reasons for challenging Apel's interpretation of Wittgenstein. The basic problem rests in Apel's systematisation of Wittgenstein's work. This distorts what Wittgenstein actually says and generates the type of problem Apel outlines. Ironically, Apel's appropriation of Wittgenstein to hermeneutical philosophy itself involved a great degree of hermeneutical violence. Thus I have claimed that Apel's exegesis is faulty and that the interpretation I present coheres better with Wittgenstein's texts. More importantly I would claim that this interpretation dissolves the apparent problems through close examination of the notion of language game itself and leaves us with a useful conceptual tool, rather than a welter of ramifying confusions.

This critique of Apel doesn't attack the task of linking together hermeneutics and Wittgenstein's philosophy, which I consider to be a fruitful enterprise, having shown I hope some significant areas of contact. Neither is it a challenge to his general strategy of critical hermeneutics, which I have left alone. It is rather intended as an effort to lure the fly from the flybottle,<sup>29</sup> to rescue Wittgenstein's ideas from the traps they were designed to dismantle.

<sup>27</sup> PI sec 113.

<sup>28</sup> Critique of Pure Reason b9.

<sup>29</sup> PI sec 309.