Contextualist Ethics and the Later Wittgenstein

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All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality–without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human.

–*George Eliot,* **The Mill on the Floss**

I now want to trace some of the congruencies that exist between the thought of the later Wittgenstein and what I have decided to name 'contextualism' in ethics. To do this, I shall first adumbrate some of the main insights of contextualism. After doing that, I shall show how these insights have their counterparts in the thought of the later Wittgenstein. Along the way, we shall see that the dialectical movement of contextualism parallels that of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The presence of Wittgensteinian elements in contextualism, I hope to show, is close to ubiquitous.

A. Contextualism in Ethics

Contextualism begins with the particular. In many ways, as Martha Nussbaum notes, it is "an Aristotelian defense of the priority of the particular."(Nussbaum, 1995c: 165) Furthermore, and in its concern with the particular over the universal, contextualism emphasizes the importance of developing our "abilities of perception."

(Nussbaum, 1995c: 154) In fact, developing these 'abilities of perception' is viewed as a moral task and exercising them is seen as being a "moral achievement." (Nussbaum 1995c: 154) As John Kekes says, a "crucial moral task is to perceive accurately the situation in which one is called upon to act." (Kekes, 1984: 10) In the spirit of contextualism's stress on minutiae and individual cases, then, I'd like to jump-start and show just how picturing something in a certain way could be – *in itself* – a 'moral achievement' by relying on a model that stems from my own experience.

When I was eighteen, I lived for seven months in a Buddhist forest monastery in northeastern Thailand. Our monastery did not have electricity or running water. Our two sources of freshwater were a well and gigantic raised urns that captured rainwater that fell off the main meditation *sala's*[1] roof. These huge urns were somewhat like beer kegs and had taps located at the bottom of them. One day, a large snake (to this day I do not know what kind of snake it was) made its resting spot underneath one of the urns. It just so happens that this urn was our 'favorite' one, as it was conveniently located near the back entrance of the *sala* – the one that we monks used most frequently. The snake's presence under the urn, however, made it dangerous to use that urn, and, so, we had to – inconveniently – make use of the other urns. This went on for three days. (Chasing the snake away or killing it was not an option since monasteries are viewed by Thais as sanctuaries for humans *and* animals. Outside of the monastery, however, the Thais would have swiftly disposed of it.)[2]

I can vouch for the other monks and say that we were all pretty anxious and looking

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[1] '*Sala*' is a word that Thais pronounce with delight. The 'main *sala*' refers to a building in which monks eat, give talks, meditate, and chant with villagers. There is another *sala* in which monks, and only monks, congregate.

[2] This is true and is not a stereotype. I mention it only because I was always amazed at how Thais would undergo almost complete personality changes when moving from the world of the monastery to the world of 'the world'. (Of course there were and are exceptions.)

forward to when this snake would move on its way. It was at this time that Ajahn Jayasaro, a British monk in his late thirties who had lived in the monastery since the age of nineteen, had a somewhat eccentric gestalt. Whereas the other monks – including myself – saw the snake as nothing more than a nuisance: a hindrance, and a clog to our daily routine, Ajahn Jayasaro saw things differently. He saw things, so to speak, from the perspective of the snake. Ajahn Jayasaro had the idea that maybe the snake was lying under the urn, not in order to annoy us, but, rather, because it was thirsty! (Put differently, he looked at the snake from the perspective of *its* "interests, desires, and loathings" – not from his (or our) own.) (Frye, 1983: 75) He filled a bowl with water and, slowly, brought the bowl and placed it near the snake, presenting it as a gift. Strangely, and magically, within a minute after having placed the bowl of water near the snake, the snake moved on its way and went back into the forest. It did not drink from the bowl of water mind you (I don't think – nor do I think that Ajahn Jayasaro thought – that snakes do that sort of thing), but, nonetheless, it was as if that snake was waiting there all that time as a way of testing us monks in order to see whether or not we were really skilled at acts of kindness and at practicing the teachings of the Buddha. Whatever the 'real reasons' why the snake moved on its way just when it did (– perhaps Ajahn Jayasaro's movement simply scared it away), it is nonetheless the case that Ajahn Jayasaro's gesture created something magical out of what had – *for three days* – been nothing more than an annoying situation. His gesture truly required skill in mindful and caring perception. His picturing the situation in the way he did was truly a 'moral achievement' – a lesson to us all.[3]

Ajahn Jayasaro brought the 'best possibility' out of the situation we were in. He

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[3] It should be clear that the ethical import of this example can be found/made to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to situations in which only humans are involved. Nevertheless, and for those who don't like the example of the snake, I suggest reading Maria Lugones's discussion of her ongoing relationship with her mother in "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception" Hypatia, Summer 1987; 2: 3-19.

fashioned[4] a work of art out of a snake lying under an urn. What he did was beautiful and it brings a smile to my heart to this day. But, and as Nussbaum points out and emphasizes (in relation to a different example of course), the moral significance of Ajahn Jayasaro's picture of the situation does not lie "only in its causal relation to his subsequent speeches and acts [(i.e. his bringing the bowl of water and offering it to the snake)], but as a ***moral achievement in its own right***." (My emphasis. Nussbaum, 1990c: 151.) Ajahn Jayasaro's viewing things from the perspective of the snake was, on its own, and even before it led to his bringing the bowl of water to it, a moral achievement. As Nussbaum tells us, "picturings, describings, feelings, and communications – actions in their own right – have a moral value that is not reducible to that of the overt acts they engender." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 153) In fact (and in this case at least), the overt acts that they engender can be quite ridiculous (– bringing water to a snake!), but the picture motivating them can still be very meaningful and illuminating. Furthermore, it should also be clear that a strict or simplistic utilitarian interpretation would have difficulty applying here. In the case of Ajahn Jayasaro, one cannot give meaning to his action with regard to its effects: snakes, after all, don't drink water from bowls, and, also, even if the snake had not left, but, rather, had remained under the urn, it is evident that Ajahn Jayasaro's action would have still been illuminating and meaningful to us (– although it would have been a bit less dramatic!).

Picturings, then, *can* be moral achievements. Part of the reason for this, as Nussbaum explains, is that "situations [like persons] are all highly concrete, and they do not present themselves with duty labels on them." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 156) Although we monks had it as our task (indeed, our duty and our 'categorical imperative') to be kind and compassionate, unless we were able to perceive or picture things in certain ways, we would not always have been able

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[4] What Ajahn Jayasaro did truly was an act of creative interpretation. It required an active and engaged 'moral imagination'. The type of seeing going on in this case was not at all passive…

to perform that task well. As Nussbaum says, "without abilities of perception, duty is blind and therefore powerless." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 156) This leads Nussbaum to conclude that "in good deliberation and judgment, particulars [– concrete perceptions –] are in some sense prior to general rules and principles." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 165) "Without the ability to respond to and resourcefully interpret the concrete particulars of a context," she says, "[we] could not begin to figure out which rules and standing commitments are operative in them." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 156) In the example of Ajahn Jayasaro, it was his abilitiy to picture things in a certain way, his shift in attitude, that allowed him to act as a true monk should (i.e. compassionately and lovingly towards all sentient beings).[5] As Nussbaum says, we are "responsible… for getting the detail of… the context, for making sure that nothing is lost on [us], for feeling fully, for getting the tone right." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 156) Not doing so – as was the case for all of us monks except Ajahn Jayasaro – and being obtuse, "is a moral failing." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 156) Perhaps my example is a bit extreme, but I do think that it is telling. Certainly, it establishes the importance of abilities of perception in such a way as to work against viewing standard Kantian conceptions of the ethical in a fully sympathetic light. Without "a fine-tuned perception of particulars," without an awareness of context and situation, without, that is, the ability to "see some new aspect[s] of the concrete case[s] at hand," it is very difficult to see how a Kantian ethics of duty could ever come into play to begin with. (Nussbaum, 1990c: 157; 160)

The ability to 'perceive a situation accurately' requires that one have a 'fine-tuned perception' and that one becomes what Nussbaum calls a "'mistress of shades', a reader of nuance and complexity." (Nussbaum, 1990b: 134) Becoming a 'mistress of shades', on its part, requires that one have "moral imagination: the ability to shift one's point of view so as to imaginatively recreate the perspective and emotional tone of others

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[5] Of course this – at least according to Buddhists – applies to everyone, not just to monks.

with whom we are interacting." (Mason, 1998: 5) It requires the ability to 'see some new aspect(s) of the concrete case(s) at hand'. As Sheila Mason notes, "the quality of attention at the center of this view of moral life is one capable of focusing on the 'inexhaustibly rich' detail of human situations." (Mason, 1998: 7)

Interestingly enough, affect, especially love and care, is seen by many contextualists to be crucial if one is going to achieve "fineness of perception" and, *ipso facto*, be a 'mistress of shades'. (Kekes, 1984: 14) Just as it is when one loves and cares about someone that the "thought that this person is not replaceable," that he or she is unique, occurs, so too does a loving attention to things/persons/situations/etc., contribute greatly to an awareness of the uniqueness and particularities of those things/persons/situations/etc. (Nussbaum, 1990c: 167) A loving vision, then – and on this take – is a vision that sees particulars. Furthermore, it is a "loving scrutiny of appearances," a scrutiny informed by "affective engagement," that will make it such that any of the various features of situations/persons/things/etc. will strike one as being morally salient,[6] and, *ipso facto*, call forth action and the application of whatever moral

[6] Here I can't help but think of Max Weber's claim that "[e]mpirical reality becomes 'culture' because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas." (Weber, 1949: 76) Or, as he majestically puts it: "[c]ulture is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance." (Weber, 1949: 81) What Weber is pointing to in these statements – fifty years before Thomas Kuhn and almost seventy-five years before feminist philosophers of science would do the same (only across the board, and not just in the social sciences) – is that, at least in the cultural sciences, there is an intimate relationship between the object of study and the perceiving subject. This is true to such an extent that in the cultural sciences the object of study only emerges when the *interests* (i.e. the values, points of view, evaluative norms, biases, etc.) of the subject lead it to focus upon a particular aspect of the "infinite richness of reality." (Weber, 1949: 111) In other words, *in the cultural sciences biases have a positive cognitive importance*. Whereas discussion of objectivity in the natural sciences has traditionally (i.e. pre-Kuhn and pre-feminist philosophy of science) stressed the importance of the elimination of personal and collective bias, in the social sciences those very biases become a pre-condition for ever having an object of study. As Weber says, "we cannot discover what is meaningful to us by means of a 'presuppositionless' investigation of empirical data. Rather perception of its meaningfulness to us is the presupposition of its becoming an object of investigation." (Weber, 1949: 76) Put differently, Weber thinks that "an attitude of moral indifference has no connection with scientific 'objectivity'." (Weber, 1949: 60) In fact, this leads directly to Weber's re-definition of 'objectivity' as it applies to the social sciences. "The 'objectivity' of the social sciences," he writes, "depends on the fact that the empirical data

principles and concepts one may have.[7] (Nussbaum, 1990c: 162; Little, 1995: 118) To sum up, the epistemological stance of contextualism, its idea of what a 'fined tuned perception' entails, is one that is not consonant with a dispassionate and detached stance. In Nussbaum's terminology, contextualism seeks "perceptive" rather than "reflective equilibrium."[8] (Nussbaum, 1990d) Part of what's involved in all of this is the idea that the type of seeing that is called for in contextualism is not a 'passive' one, but, rather, an *active* one.[9] On this view, "seeing itself is a task." (Little, 1995: 118)

The practical outcome of this "intense scrutiny of appearances," of this paying attention to detail, is that one becomes more and more aware of the "unreality of... sharp distinction (s)," one becomes aware, instead, of the multi-faceted, aspect-lush, Janus-faced nature of things/concepts/persons/situations/etc. (Nussbaum, 1990c: 18; 153) It turns out, in other words, that it is the development of a 'fined tuned perception' *itself*

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are always related to those evaluative ideas which alone make them worth knowing and the significance of the empirical data is derived from these evaluative ideas." (Weber, 1949: 111) Part of the idea behind this definition is that the social scientist should always (try to) make explicit the values, biases, interests, etc., on which his or her research is *necessarily* based.

[7] This is Margaret Olivia Little's central argument, namely, that although rules cannot come with a further set of rules telling us how to apply them, affective engagement itself allows one to 'see aspects' of situations as being morally salient, and, *ipso facto*, it is affective engagement that acts as the 'conversion manual' that allows one to apply one's moral concepts to the world. As an example, it is loving attention that allows one to picture a situation involving a person's pain as being one that includes or exudes suffering, and, thereby, as one that calls forth compassion, i.e., more loving attention *and action* (of some sort). (Little, 1995) (The main idea here, namely that rules cannot come with a further set of rules telling us how to apply them, is, we already saw in chapter two, Wittgensteinian to the core.)

[8] In Love's Knowledge Nussbaum suggested that John Rawls's account of 'reflective equilibrium' (i.e. a state in which our considered judgments and our principles are harmoniously adjusted) has a Kantian bias against emotion. (Nussbaum, 1990d) Such a bias, she there thought, "might have been dispelled by considerations of feminist arguments that show emotions to be intelligent and discriminating ways of considering reality." (Nussbaum, 2003: 490) But Nussbaum today thinks that "this criticism of Rawls... is not a deep one." (Nussbaum, 2003: 491) "It just asks him," she writes, "to reconsider his unfortunate use of dismissive Kantian language about the passions in some methodological contexts in favor of the subtler discriminations he actually exercises in the composition of the text." (Nussbaum, 2003: 491) Insofar as she suggested more than this in Love's Knowledge, Nussbaum says, "I hereby retract that suggestion." (Nussbaum, 2003: 516fn)

[9] After all, if seeing was passive how could it be a 'moral achievement' to picture things in certain ways? How could one give praise (or blame) to one who had (or had not) pictured things in, as it were, their 'best possibility'? Furthermore, the terms 'scrutiny', 'engagement', 'loving', all suggest an active participation on the part of the subject.

that leads to the realization of just how 'inexhaustibly rich' the details of our world and life are. Paying attention to detail has the same effect for ordinary folk that being thrown into the world would have on a person who, for the sake of illustration, had been born and raised in a laboratory, studying and performing experiments only in ideal conditions: she wouldn't be able to fit the world into her intellectual framework unless she quickly began to loosen and open up that framework. In much the same way, Little shows us how, for example, the multifarious nature of cruelty (– things as diverse as "kicking a dog, verbal taunting, and forgetting to invite the neighbor's child to your daughter's birthday party" are all classified as cruel) makes it such that the term 'cruel' resists both a strict definition and a universal rule that would tell us how, where, and when to apply it. (Little, 1995: 129) If one approached the world with a fixed universal definition of 'cruelty', the limits of that definition would make it such that one would not be able to call 'cruel' many of the things that we would want to, and, in fact, already do, call 'cruel'.[10] Put differently, the 'real' world resists fitting into the picture of the universe that a Physics 101 textbook gives you. Indeed, the awareness of just how complicated and multi-faceted our world and life are, the awareness that our world and life are a "mystic lake" and that they are open-ended, leads to the realization that no system of universal principles and fixed concepts can ever serve as an unfailing guide to our actions. (Nussbaum, 1990c: 160) With Aristotle, then, contextualists recognize that even the "best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part," and that "if one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, [no matter how] subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would

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[10] To see just how difficult it is to come up with universal definitions of things, look at Plato's dialogues, especially the 'early' ones.

inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong." (McDowell, 1979: 336) A codified system of rules, as McDowell puts it, always runs into "hard cases". (McDowell, 1979: 340)

This has lead to the conclusion, on the part of contextualists, that just as the world is multi-faceted, just as its "features... are often present in novel or subtle combinations," i.e., just as the world is open-ended, so too should our general principles (for we do need some sort of principles – like 'Do not kill', 'Keep your promises', 'Be kind' – in ethics)[11] be open-ended and not fixed.[12] (Little, 1995: 122) This lack of fixity, this openness in the framework of one's life, may make one vulnerable to change, but this vulnerability will also give one the capacity to be touched and to touch life. In Nussbaum's words, it can be the source of "[an]other kind of strength." (Nussbaum, 1990d: 183) Although one will no longer, as it were, be like an Indian saint who passes through the world like a duck through water, and although one will no longer be able to

[11] As Nussbaum notes, "an Aristotelian defence of the priority of the particular does not mean discarding the guidance of general principles." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 155) We do need general principles to serve us, at least, as 'rules of thumb' and to give structure to our experience. Just as "duty without perception is blunt and blind," so too is "perception without responsibility dangerously free-floating." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 155) In fact, it is this very need for both perception and principles that, as Sabina Lovibond puts it, "should serve as a warning against any facile classification of ethical theories in terms of 'universalism versus particularism'." (Lovibond, 2002: 30fn) Indeed, and following the advice of Kai Nielsen, it was just this consideration that led to my choice of the term 'contextualism', rather than, say, 'particularism', to describe the kind of ethics dealt with in this chapter and thesis. Similarly, and working specifically within a certain version of contextualism – virtue ethics – Hursthouse has emphasised that while it is true that virtue ethics "[rejects] the idea that ethics is *codifiable* in rules and principles that can provide specific action guidance... [v]irtue ethics can [nevertheless] provide a specification of 'right action' – as 'what a virtuous agent would, characteristically, do in the circumstances' – and such a specification can be regarded as generating a number of moral rules or principles (contrary to the usual claim that virtue ethics does not come up with rules or principles)." (My emphasis. Hursthouse, 1999: 17.) So, for instance, "[e]ach virtue generates an instruction – 'Do what is honest', 'Do what is charitable'; and each vice a prohibition – 'Do not act, do what is dishonest, uncharitable'." (Hursthouse, 1999: 17) These two elements in virtue ethics – rules or principles, but no codes or algorithms – helps us understand why it is proper to classify it as 'contextualist'.

[12] The same, of course – and as we have been given reason to believe in the previous chapters – also applies to our general terms/concepts as well. As Iris Murdoch notes, "we have a different image of courage at forty from that which we had at twenty." (Murdoch, 1970: 29)

possess the autonomous dignity of a Mrs. Newsome,[13] one will – unlike that Indian saint and Mrs. Newsome – be able to triumph in life rather than over it. Indeed, this capacity to touch, and to be touched, can reasonably be construed as leading to the furthering of one's abilities to have an 'intense scrutiny of appearances'. It will in all likelihood allow one to see features of things/persons/situations/etc., that one would perhaps not have been able had one remained fixed within a closed intellectual spectrum. And not only that. A view that considers its general principles and concepts to be open-ended and susceptible to change and variation, makes it likely that one will be open to surprises,[14] i.e., to seeing things that one and one's (open-ended) general principles and concepts would not expect to see. More to the point, it allows one to see things that might call forth a re***vision*** of oneself and one's open-ended principles and concepts.[15] To repeat: since one now views one's general principles and concepts as being open-ended, the "desire for intellectual closure" is not as strong, and not as binding – or *blinding* – as it may be for those who (still) view them as closed. (Little, 1995: 124) In Little's words, the one who views his general principles and concepts as open-ended will no longer "resist (or miss) what is unique." (Little, 1995: 124) Unlike Mrs. Newsome, he will not be strictly limited to two types of reaction: "approval or disapproval." (Nussbaum ,1990d: 177) Instead, he will be open, curious and child-like, having the capacity to be

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[13] Mrs. Newsome is a character from Henry James's The Ambassadors. Nussbaum uses her to exemplify a highly autonomous Kantian ego. (See Nussbaum, 1990d)

[14] For more on the importance of this element of 'openness to surprise' see Nussbaum's "Perceptive Equilibrium: Literary Theory and Ethical Theory," Love's Knowledge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990: 168-194). Page 176 is especially forceful.

[15] The thought contained in this last sentence, I believe, gives life to Kekes's notions of 'breadth' and 'depth'. 'Breadth' would here correspond to the open-endedness of one's general principles and concepts in the sense that one would admit that there are other ways of looking at things. 'Depth' would correspond to the recognition that these other ways of looking at things are 'real possibilities' and that they may press themselves on us in ways that would make it consonant for us to revise our ideas and even ourselves. Phrased differently, we may come to incorporate these 'othernesses' into ourselves and make them our

surprised, bewildered, etc. As Nussbaum notes, "the fine Jamesian perceiver employs general terms and conceptions in an open-ended, evolving way, prepared to see and respond to any new feature that the scene may bring forward." (Nussbaum, 1990c: 157)

To sum all this up, we could say that it is a 'fined tuned perception', one that depends on an openly attentive scrutiny of appearances, that helps us see the various aspects of appearances, and that it is this awareness of the multi-faceted nature of appearances which, in turn, helps us see that our general principles and concepts should be – barring specific purposes – open-ended and that no closed code of rules will ever be adequate when applied to our open-ended world and interests. Furthermore, it is viewing our general principles and concepts in this way (i.e. as open-ended) that makes one welcome to surprises and change, and that allows one to be touched by appearances in ways that those who view their rules as closed and fixed would probably not. In other words, viewing one's general principles and concepts as open-ended can further one's 'abilities of perception', and, since it was having such 'abilities of perception' that was at the beginning of this whole process, we can be seen to have come full circle. ***But this is not a vicious circle, but, rather, a precious one***. It is one that exhibits all sorts of self-reinforcing tendencies: each part of the process reverberating in, and strengthening the other. To capture what we have come across in one sentence, we could say: "*It is an attentive scrutiny of appearances that softens fixed principles and concepts into open-ended ones, and it is having open-ended principles and concepts that allows one to go deeper into attentiveness.*"[16]

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own. (Kekes, 1984)

[16] Although not quite identical, Arne Johan Vetlesen has observed that "[p]erception always requires attentiveness, [and] attentiveness is made possible by receptivity, by the capacity to view oneself as 'addressed' by some situation or incident." (Vetlesen, 1994: 8)

B. Wittgenstein Mirrored in/with Contextualism

We are now ready to point out the traces of Wittgenstein's thought that, as we shall see, permeate contextualism in ethics. This 'permeation' can be found in three main areas. First, just as contextualism focuses on particulars and on developing our 'abilities of perception', so too did Wittgenstein focus on noticing differences rather than similarities, and saw the ability to 'see aspects' as being crucial to doing so. Secondly, just as the type of seeing fostered by contextualists is one that is active and not passive, the type of seeing that is associated with Wittgenstein's notion of 'seeing aspects' is also one that includes an active participation on the part of the agent. Finally, just as contextualists showed how increased 'abilities of perception' can lead to the realization that we should view our general principles and our moral concepts as open-ended, Wittgenstein too showed how the ability to see, for example, the different aspects of our words and the grammatical rules that surround the use of our words, leads to an awareness that these rules can have, and often do have, family resemblance structures.[17]

Wittgenstein aimed to 'teach differences'. He once said of himself that whereas "Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same, my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different." (Hacker, 1996: 300fn) As Hacker notes, Wittgenstein resisted the

> urge to seek for underlying uniformities misleadingly suggested by common grammatical forms of different expressions, to beware of the homogenizing effects of translation into canonical logical notations, and to attend to the innumerable differences that spring into view once we are reminded of the multifarious uses of expressions with common grammatical forms, of the distinct purposes of grammatically similar utterances, of the quite different roles which syntactically identical sentences fulfill. (Hacker, 1996: 99)

[17] Additional connections between contextualism and Wittgenstein will be brought up in chapter four. Here I am only outlining the 'general relationship' between the two.

Wittgenstein, then – and like contextualists – was concerned with particulars rather than universals. In this sense, he too was an Aristotelian; and, in fact, Wittgenstein did – via his influence on the likes of G. E. M. Anscombe and Iris Murdoch – stimulate a resurgence of interest in Aristotle.[18]

In setting out to 'teach differences', Wittgenstein aimed to achieve what he called an '*Übersicht*' – a 'survey' or a 'surview' – of our language. A person possessed of an *Übersicht*, we saw in chapter one, is like a 'mistress of shades' in that she is able to see the nuances, the complexities, and the different aspects of words: perhaps their differing usages or the differences between their 'surface' and 'depth grammars'. Without the ability to see differences, i.e., without the ability to see aspects, we would not be able to have an *Übersicht*, and would, *ipso facto*, often be misled by the similarities between the surface grammars of different words into believing all sorts of strange views. So – and to return to an already used example – the similarities between the grammatical rules we use around the words 'pin' and 'pain' ('I have a pain', 'I have a pin'; 'I feel a pain', 'I feel a pin'; 'My pain is just like yours', 'My pin is just like yours') can lead to the, according to Wittgenstein, 'absurd ideas that pains are privately owned and epistemically private.'[19] A further description, and a greater awareness of the aspects of the grammars that surround the words 'pin' and 'pain', however, would have led to the realization that although "'To feel a pain', can be replaced by 'to have a pain' – there is no difference

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[18] For more on this influence see Baker and Hacker's Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 610-11). John Kerkhoven's forthcoming M. A. thesis Simone Weil: A Study in Moral Psychology and Observations on Religious Life also has an insightful chapter that discloses some of Wittgenstein's influence on Murdoch, while, at the same time, showing that it was Simone Weil, more than anyone else, that deserves credit for Murdoch's stress on 'loving attention'. (Kerkhoven, 2003.) Peta Bowden has also written a paper tracing this 'Weilian' presence in Murdoch. She goes a bit further, however, and uncovers Weil's impact on the likes of Nussbaum and all the way through to the Hispanic feminist philosopher Lugones. (Bowden, 1998)

[19] I used this example already on pages 18-20 of chapter one. It is a good example, and I do not hesitate to

here – 'to feel a pin' is not the same as to 'have a pin'." (Hacker, 1996: 109) And the awareness of this difference, on its part, would have dispelled the 'absurd ideas that pains are privately owned and epistemically private'. Clearly, having an *Übersicht*, and being able to see nuances and different aspects of our language, is important. But let us look a bit further into exactly what is meant by Wittgenstein's notion of 'seeing aspects'.

The type of seeing that is called for in the seeing of aspects is not done with the eyes; it does not require twenty-twenty vision. This should become clear by one of the examples that Wittgenstein uses to illustrate what he means by the 'seeing of aspects': the duck-rabbit picture. (PI *xi, p. 194) In the duck-rabbit picture, when one's picture of it changes from a duck to a rabbit (or vice versa), the retinal image, the visual impression made on one's eye, does not change: only one's way of picturing *the same* retinal image changes. As Wittgenstein says, "an image is not a picture, although a picture can correspond to it." (PI *301) Later he says, "the expression of a change of aspect is the expression of a new perception and at the same time of the perception's being unchanged." (PI *xi, p. 196) The vision that is entailed in the seeing of aspects, then, is one that allows one to shift one's picturing/perception/understanding of appearances without those appearances having 'actually' changed. For instance, it enables one to shift one's picture of a situation evincing pain, to one that manifests *suffering*. Although the tactile, audible, and visible sensations may not have (physically) changed, the whole way of picturing/perceiving/understanding the situation has. When one sees it solely as involving pain, it may call forth, for example, a simple administration of drugs; but when one sees it as involving suffering it calls forth *compassion*. (See footnote 7 of this chapter.)

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use it twice.

The type of seeing that is involved in seeing aspects is clearly not a passive one. As Mary McGuinn notes, "the case of seeing as... draws our attention to the role of an active responding subject in determining the nature of visual experience, or in fixing what is seen." (McGuinn, 1997: 195) In fact for Wittgenstein, "seeing an aspect and imagining are *subject to the will*." (My emphasis. PI *xi, p. 213) As he says, "there is such a thing as an order as 'Imagine *this*', and also: 'Now see the figure like *this*'." (PI *xi, p. 213) We can imagine, for instance, being told "now see the duck-rabbit picture as a duck." Indeed, and in discussing what he calls the "aspect-blind", Wittgenstein suggests that although it is the case that some people don't see different aspects to words/concepts/general principles/things/situations/persons/etc., this is not because they are unable to do so, but, rather, simply because ***they lack the savvy*** to see that words/concepts/general principles/things/situations/persons/etc., can have different aspects to them. (PI *xi, p. 213-214) The word 'ought' pops up in these sections and Wittgenstein goes so far as to say that if we can't say that the aspect-blind *ought* to see aspects, then "this could not very well be called a sort of blindness." (PI *xi, p. 214) We are not very far here from Nussbaum's contention that being able to picture a situation in a certain way is a 'moral achievement'. Clearly, just as contextualists view 'seeing' as being active, so too does Wittgenstein.

Finally, it turns out that just as contextualists see a 'fine tuned perception' as leading to the realization that we should free ourselves from fixed 'templates', and that we should view our general principles and concepts as being open-ended, so too does Wittgenstein see the ability to see aspects and the achievement of an *übersicht* as contributing greatly to the realization that our rules can be, and often are, open-ended.

Just as Little recognizes that we often "project our own template of experiences onto others" in an eager attempt to "catalogue and classify others' experiences... as confirming instances of our favorite generality," Wittgenstein too warns us that 'pictures can hold us captive.' (Little, 1995: 124; PI *115) Wittgenstein, like contextualists, wants to break the spell of these enchained and enchaining 'pictures', and crucial to doing so, he thinks, is the ability to "*look and see*" rather than saying "*must*."[20] (PI *66) In fact, we already encountered the bulk of this in the discussion of family resemblance concepts that took place in chapters one and two. There we saw how it was 'looking [at] and seeing' the numerous ways in which the word 'game' is used that helps dispel the Platonic/logicist view that "[they must have] something in common , or they would not [all] be called games." (PI *66) Just as our life is complicated so too is our language – and this makes the logician's "*preconceived* idea of [the] crystalline purity" of our language, the idea that we can have a logically perfect language with universal definitions and a fixed and complete set of rules for when, where, and how to apply our concepts, a facile and unrealistic one. The logician's (mis)understanding of language is one that evinces a person who has not yet really 'looked and seen'. Furthermore, the open-endedness (and incompleteness) of the rules of our language does not prevent us from using it: the rules of tennis don't cover their ground completely – they don't tell us how high or how hard we can hit the ball – but, nonetheless, we can and do play tennis. Some of us, in fact, become quite good at it.

Clearly, many of Wittgenstein's central views have counterparts in ethical contextualism. Just as contextualists see a keen attentiveness to the particularities of

[20] Crucial to 'looking and seeing' ***skillfully***, of course, is the ability to see aspects.

appearances as leading to the awareness that our general principles and moral concepts are (or, perhaps, should be) open-ended, Wittgenstein too sees the capacity to see aspects – a capacity that is crucial if one is going to be able to 'look and see' with skill – as leading to a keen appreciation of the various usages of words (i.e. an *Übersicht*), an appreciation which, in turn, leads to his replacement of the long-standing desire (in philosophy) for universal definitions with the concept of 'family resemblances', the logician's closed rules with open-ended and indeterminate ones. Furthermore, I don't think that it would be going too far to state that Wittgenstein thought that a recognition that our rules are open-ended leads to greater abilities at seeing aspects. If anything, viewing our rules as open-ended would serve as a motivation to become better skilled at seeing alternative aspects. In other words, just as we were able to summarize the dialectical movement of contextualism in one sentence, so too shall we be able to sum up the dialectic of Wittgenstein's later philosophy in a (paralleling) sentence: "*The ability to see aspects leads to an awareness that our rules can be open-ended, and our awareness that our rules can be open-ended motivates us to develop our abilities to see aspects even further.*"

As we can see, the presence of Wittgensteinean ideas is ubiquitous in contextualism. Just as contextualists place an emphasis on having 'abilities of perception', so too does Wittgenstein stress the importance of being able to see aspects. Just as the contextualist emphasis on a 'loving scrutiny of appearances' and 'affective engagement' indicated a view of 'seeing' that was active, so too does Wittgenstein think that 'seeing aspects' requires an active participation on the part of the subject. In fact, the presence of the word 'ought' in the sections in which Wittgenstein discussed the

seeing of aspects, suggests that he too may have thought that the ability to picture things in certain ways, and in certain cases, was a 'moral task' and a 'moral achievement'. Finally, just as contextualists thought that a 'fined tuned perception' leads to the realization that our general principles and concepts in ethics should be open-ended, so too does Wittgenstein think that 'looking and seeing', and, thereby, noticing aspects, contributes to the realization that our rules or general concepts can be, and (often) are, open-ended. The dialectical movement of both contextualism and Wittgenstein's later philosophy, therefore, can be encapsulated in the same general way: "*'abilities of perception'/the ability to 'see aspects', allow/s one to see that our general moral principles and concepts/rules or concepts can be open-ended, which, in turn, furthers our 'abilities of perception'/our ability to 'see aspects'.*"