Does Wittgenstein Support Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Model?

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The philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein was invoked within Anglo-American theology

somewhat sparingly at first (in the 1960s), and increasingly afterward until it became a familiar

fixture in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in North America. Once the practice of appealing to

Wittgenstein was broached, its popularity should not have surprised anyone. After all, it's

usually not much of a risk to enlist, as a resource, one of the most important thinkers of the

twentieth century. Unfortunately, the rush to invoke Wittgenstein for a particular skein of

thought resulted in a smuggling of several foreign ideas into his writings. Although he said many

things that would benefit theologians, nearly all the theological appeals to his philosophy were

based on egregious misreadings of his work. The purpose of this paper is to show that he never

propounded most of the ideas that endear him to the theologians who use him the most.

Any attempt to understand the theological reception of Wittgenstein should probably

begin with the so-called Yale school,[1] which has been far and away the principal clearinghouse

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[1] George Hunsinger contends that the notion of a "Yale school" as "largely the invention of theological journalism" ("Postliberal Theology," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer [ed.], *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003] 42-57, esp. 42), but to sustain this view, he must exaggerate the theological distance between those who comprise the Yale School. He does this especially by downplaying Barth's (admittedly indirect) influence on Lindbeck. I can see no reason to reject David Tracy's reference to Lindbeck's position as "a methodologically sophisticated version of Barthian confessionalism" ("Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection," *The Thomist* 49 [1985] 460-72, esp. 465 ["The hands may be the hands of Wittgenstein and Geertz but the voice is the voice of Karl Barth"]). On differences and developments among the members of this school, see Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Challenges in Contemporary Theology; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006) 25-28.

for theological readings of his work. Several leading members of that school, including Paul

Holmer, Hans Frei, and George Lindbeck, appealed regularly to Wittgenstein's writings as

supports for their own ideas. Holmer, who appears to have been introduced to Wittgenstein

sometime in the late 1950s, seems to have been the font of most of the Yale school's

programmatic use of Wittgenstein.[2] He taught a course on "Wittgenstein and Religious

Language" at Yale in the fall of 1967.

There are a few evident problems with the Yale school's approach to Wittgenstein which

should be noted at the outset. One such problem has to do with that school's leap from affirming

the social constitution of language to propounding a full-blooded communitarianism, a problem

thrown into relief by the way Wittgenstein's putative understanding of the community's relation

to its shared language compares with the thinking of other language philosophers. As there has

never been a language philosopher anywhere in the modern world who denies that language is a

matter of communal conventions,[3] the question arises as to why Wittgenstein's view of the

community as a sort of linguistic gatekeeper should be singled out as especially communitarian,

as over against what others had theorized. What makes Wittgenstein more communitarian than

his peers and predecessors?[4] Obviously there is a difference between saying that the community

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The following abbreviations for Wittgenstein's works are used in this paper: *OC = On Certainty*; *PG = Philosophical Grammar*; *PI = Philosophical Investigations*; *RPP* II = *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* vol. 2; *TLP = Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; *Z = Zettel*.

[2] Gene Mason claims that he might be the one to have introduced Holmer to Wittgenstein's thought—see Bruce Carlson, "Tribute to Paul Holmer," *Pietisten* 19 (2004) at http://www.pietisten.org/xix/1/paulholmer.html. Frei started reading Wittgenstein about 1962, and Lindbeck cites Wittgenstein as early as 1971.

[3] For the nearest thing to an exception to this, I believe we have to go back to the time of J. G. Hamann (1730-1788), who held to the ancient rabbinic view that language is hard-wired to the world (independently of any community agency). But can Hamann really be considered a "modern"?

[4] William Edward Schmitz refers to the Saussurean view that "in analyzing language we are analyzing social facts" as "an appropriate summation of Wittgenstein's attitude in the *Philosophical Investigations*" ("Linguistic Representation and the Determinacy of Sense," Ph.D. dissertation; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984, 11). On the similarities between Saussure and Wittgenstein, see Garth Hallett, *Wittgenstein's Definition of Meaning as Use* (The Orestes Brownson Series on Contemporary Thought and Affairs 6; New York: Fordham University Press, 1967) 196 n. 38; Charles S. Hardwick, *Language Learning in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy* (Janua Linguarum, series minor, 104; The Hague: Mouton, 1971) 47-48; Roy Harris, *Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games*

determines how we must use words if we hope to be understood, and saying that truth is a function of what we say with those words.[5] To put it in Claudine Verheggen's terms, there is a widespread failure, among Wittgenstein's interpreters, to differentiate between that which is truly "communitarian" and that which is merely "interpersonal."[6] How exactly does one get from the community-determinedness of language to the community-determinedness of *truth*?

In what follows, I intend to visit a number of problems besetting a whole constellation of ideas. All of these problems can be found—to one degree or another—within the Yale school's understanding of Wittgenstein. Some of these problems are endemic within Wittgenstein studies in general, while others are mostly confined to the Yale school.

How Wittgenstein Became a Communitarian

It was the book that popularized the term "postliberal"—Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984)—that did the most to establish Wittgenstein's place within Anglo-American theology. That book also promoted the idea that Wittgenstein viewed the proper interpretation of *texts* as a matter of how those texts were used by the communities that consumed them—a view that had been floated by Frei ten years earlier. Lindbeck made Wittgenstein's appeal to "use" and its correlative notion of rule-following the philosophical underpinning for a "cultural-linguistic" view of doctrine—a view he preferred to the "cognitive-propositional" view of the conservatives and the "experiential-expressive" views of the liberals. The cultural-linguistic view held that

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with Words (Routledge History of Linguistic Thought Series; London: Routledge, 1988); Violetta Stolz, *Sprachspiel: L. Wittgenstein und F. de Saussure* (Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag, 2002). On the relation of Wittgenstein to linguistics more generally, see Tullio de Mauro, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: His Place in the Development of Semantics* (Foundations of Language Supplementary Series 3; Dordrecht: Reidel, 1967).

[5] Colin McGinn calls "meaning is use" a "nebulous slogan" (*Wittgenstein on Meaning: An Interpretation and Evaluation* [Aristotelian Society Series 1; Oxford: Blackwell, 1984] xii).

[6] See Claudine Verheggen, "How Social Must Language Be?," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 36 (2006) 203-19, esp. 203. Verheggen writes, "[T]he fact that the recognition of linguistic standards can only be a joint achievement does not entail the communitarian view but only the interpersonal view" (204).

doctrines are not intended as (informational) propositions, but rather as (noninformational) rules

for those belonging to a religion.[7] He also called this a "rule theory of doctrine"—one for which

meaning is "intrasemiotic" rather than referential or propositional.[8] In Lindbeck's hands,

Wittgensteinian "meaning" becomes a sort of floating potential into which the community might

tap for purposes of forging its own identity.[9] And so he quotes Wittgenstein's claim that "there is

a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call

'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases" (*PI* §201).[10] The end result of all this is

the startling thesis that the Nicene Creed "in its role as a communal doctrine" does not make

"first-order truth claims": "Doctrines regulate truth claims by excluding some and permitting

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[7] Lindbeck took the term "cultural-linguistic" from the social sciences, especially the work of Clifford Geertz. He writes that this approach's roots "go back on the cultural side to Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, and on the linguistic side to Wittgenstein" (*Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984] 20).

[8] Or, Christianity's truth claims convey "instrasystematic" rather than "ontological" truth (Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 63-69). See Mark Randall James, "The Beginning of Wisdom: On the Postliberal Interpretation of Scripture," *Modern Theology* 33 (2017) 9-30, esp. 14.

[9] It should be noted that Lindbeck's misuse of Wittgenstein is by no means the most obvious flaw in his attempt to fashion a cultural-linguistic view of theology. That distinction belongs to the very idea of using a cultural-linguistic viewpoint—the native element of cultural anthropologists—as a *prescriptive* aspect of theology. (As Lindbeck describes "religion," it is "[l]ike a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities" [*Nature of Doctrine*, 33].) Lindbeck accuses Peter Berger of "fail[ing] to make theological use of his own cultural theory, not because it is intrinsically unusable for religious purposes … but because it belongs to a way of thinking about religion that has heretofore scarcely ever been employed except 'atheistically'" (20). That Lindbeck should fail to see that cultural theory *is* "intrinsically unusable" for *theological* purposes is hard to fathom. Sociologists of religion honed the cultural-linguistic view in service to their project of interpreting religions as aspects of culture, *consciously bracketing the truth commitment presupposed by the respective religions' theological perspectives*. In other words, their project was (and is) thoroughgoingly *etic* in perspective, and is not conceptually situated to describe those religions along the lines of their *emic* workings. Alethiologically speaking, the commitments of the one stand at a right angle to the commitments of the other. To co-opt the cultural-linguistic viewpoint as a mapping of theological verities and their possibilitating commitments is either an implicit claim to dissolve the emic/etic distinction—and to do so on undisclosed grounds—or it is an indication that Lindbeck doesn't understand the alethiological aspects of that distinction. That is, it is to commit a category error of overwhelming proportions—one that short-circuits religious belief. See Gorazd Andrejč, *Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement: A Philosophical and Theological Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 78-79. But cf. Mike Higton's claim that Lindbeck's reliance on "ethnographic" studies is "an *ad hoc* borrowing," not necessary for his larger argument ("Reconstructing *The Nature of Doctrine*," *Modern Theology* 30 [2014] 1-31, esp. 2).

[10] Quoted in Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 111 n. 25.

others, but the logic of their communally authoritative use hinders or prevents them from specifying positively what is to be affirmed."[11]

Perhaps the strangest part of all this is that Lindbeck takes a religion to be, not a set of propositional beliefs, but rather "a set of acquired skills."[12] He illustrates the difference this all makes by considering the notion of the immortality of the soul on both the cognitive-propositional and the cultural-linguistic approaches—*viz.*, "between interpreting a truth and obeying a rule":

> If … the immortality of the soul is a first-order proposition, then those who stand in a tradition for which this has been doctrine, but find its mind-body dualism unacceptable, are obligated to discover what truth it enunciates, however improbable this truth may seem from the dualistic viewpoint of the original formulators. They are virtually forced into that endless process of speculative reinterpretation which is the main stock-in-trade of much contemporary theology, both Protestant and Catholic. If the doctrine, in contrast, is taken as a rule, attention is focused on the concrete life and language of the community. Because the doctrine is to be followed rather than interpreted, the theologians' task is to specify the circumstances, whether temporary or enduring, in which it applies.[13]

Lindbeck sees the propositional approach, in this example, as an instance of what Wittgenstein called the "idling" of language (cf. *PI* §132). But it should be noted that Lindbeck's reasoning, with regard to what one is to do with the notion of the immortality of the soul, hangs pendant from a commitment to Scripture as "true" *in some thoroughgoing fashion*—as opposed to being true with respect to its preservation of the Gospel. (Note that Lindbeck restricts his illustration of the cognitive-propositional approach to "interpreting a *truth*" rather than "interpreting a *text*"—a text that [*contra* Lindbeck] might *not* be "true" in all its particulars.) Apart from Lindbeck's Barthian (= hyper-Origenist) view of Scripture, there is nothing forcing us to demythologize

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[11] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 19. Hunsinger charges Lindbeck with taking liberties at this point: "[N]ot even Wittgenstein dichotomized first-order and second-order discourse as Lindbeck does" ("Postliberal Theology," 50).
[12] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 33.
[13] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 107.

those elements in Scripture we cannot accept literally.[14] It should also be noted that

Wittgenstein's reference to language "idling" has nothing to do with whether propositions hit

pay dirt—it has to do, rather, with whether a word or phrase denotes what it describes *literally*.

Some fifteen years after *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck would describe meaning in

these terms:

> [T]he meaning ascribed to texts is underdetermined to the extent that their use in shaping
> life and thought is unspecified. Or, to put it another way, the same sentences, concepts,
> and images say very different things and help project very different worlds depending on
> their use to shape thought and behavior. Their meanings are as numerous as the universes
> in which one can imagine them being significantly employed; and, conversely, what one
> thinks the life world and symbolic world of a text is will determine how one understands
> it.[15]

There are quite a few problems with Lindbeck's reasoning in this passage. First there is the fact

that he confuses the notion of being alethiologically "underdetermined" with that of being

epistemologically "underindicated." And why does he say that the sentences found in a text are

used "to shape thought and behavior," without first asking about the opposite relation: the way

thought shapes sentences, and how that shape functions to map that thought? When he writes that

the meanings of these sentences "are as numerous as the universes in which one can imagine

them being significantly employed," why does he not point out that the sentences, as we find

them, have in fact already been employed in a specific way *by their writers*, and that their

relation to their writers is regarded, by the very convention of writing, as a limiting factor in their

proper interpretation?[16] The most disconcerting aspect of this passage, however, lies in its

complicity in a terminological shell game involving the word "meaning": Lindbeck uses the

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[14] Andrejč notes that Lindbeck considered the propositionalist view of Scripture to be "more or less passé"
(*Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement*, 69).
[15] George A. Lindbeck, "Postcritical Canonical Interpretation: Three Modes of Retrieval," in Christopher Seitz and
Kathryn Greene-McCreight (eds.), *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 1999) 26-51, esp. 36.
[16] B. A. Gerrish faults Lindbeck for needlessly complicating the propositionalist view (review of Lindbeck, *The
Nature of Doctrine*, in *Journal of Religion* 68 [1988] 87-92, esp. 87).

multidefinitionality of the word "meaning" to swap out one hermeneutical concern (the author's intention) for another (readerly investment). That, in fact, is what enables him (rhetorically) to bypass the above-named questions. These problems do not derive from Lindbeck's reading of Wittgenstein, but they form the system into which he thought Wittgenstein would naturally fit.

The Nature of Doctrine began a powerful trend within theology. Soon Wittgenstein was hailed far and wide as having laid the foundation for a communitarian hermeneutic of Scripture. But if Lindbeck's interpretation of Wittgenstein has been accepted unquestioningly by his followers, this is in spite of the fact that even *he* warned that it runs wide of what most Wittgensteinian scholars would grant.[17] It seems as though many, in 1984, were primed to accept Lindbeck's reading of Wittgenstein, as scarcely any of his readers sought to determine how faithful he was to Wittgenstein's purpose. That question, therefore, falls to us. The biggest part of that question, obviously, turns on Lindbeck's use of the community, and his attempt to ascribe that use to Wittgenstein. When we turn to Wittgenstein's writings, what role do we find there for the community? And what does Wittgenstein mean by "use"? One needs to spend only a little time there to realize that he never meant the "use" of language as a privileging of certain notions as "true," much less as a readerly commodity.

I asked above whether there are grounds for thinking of Wittgenstein as somehow more "communitarian" in his understanding of meaning and language than his peers. For those assuming an affirmative answer, the determining factor seems to lie with the word "use." When Brian Clack tells us, for example, that Wittgenstein eventually came to recognize the "essentially *social* nature" of language, he wants us to believe that the notion of "use" marks the difference

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[17] Lindbeck writes that Wittgenstein's "stimulus" to his thinking has been "in ways that those more knowledgeable in Wittgenstein might not approve" (*The Nature of Doctrine*, 24). As Andrejč notes, "it is clear that [Lindbeck] did not aspire or pretend to be a Wittgensteinian philosopher" (*Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement*, 73).

between the early and the later Wittgenstein.[18] This view not only obscures the fact that

Wittgenstein had employed the notion of meaning-as-use at every point in his career—including

the *Tractatus* and its predecessor writings—but also that "use" characterized the thinking of

numerous other linguistic theorists.[19]

Did Wittgenstein Have a Nonintentionalist View of Meaning?

One thing that makes Wittgenstein especially attractive for certain streams of theology is the

widespread belief that he divorced the meaning of texts from authorial intention. Such a belief

would clearly endear him to the Yale school, which approached texts more along the lines of

New Criticism or Deconstruction—two approaches entrenched in the Yale English department at

the time. It is therefore important to examine what Wittgenstein said about intention, and why he

said it.

At one place in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Frei quotes Wittgenstein's challenge to

the notion that the "sense" of an expression is something like "an atmosphere accompanying the

word, which it carried with it into every kind of application," but he unpacks the significance of

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[18] Brian Clack, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh: University Press, 1999) 18 (italics original).

[19] Cf. Max Black's description of John Dewey's view: "Dewey provides an extraordinary variety of lapidary formulas for meaning. For example, he says that 'meanings are rules for using and interpreting things' (*EN*, p. 188) and tells us soon after that a rule is 'the standardized habit of social interaction' (*EN*, p. 190). So, according to him, the meaning of a given word must be a standardized habit of social interaction" (*Margins of Precision: Essays in Logic and Language* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970] 236 [citing Dewey's *Experience and Nature*]). See the chapter on "Meaning as Use" in Paul Horwich, *Meaning* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 43-102. Note that it is wrong to speak of "use" (for Wittgenstein) as the *ground* of meaning. In *PI* §43, use is not the ground of meaning, but rather the meaning itself. Cf. Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) 29.

Frei interprets Wittgenstein's dictum, "Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use," as governing words appearing in "ordinary language" as opposed to technical terms like "atom": "atom" has "a fixed, stipulated meaning" calling out a "fixed, stipulated concept," while "ordinary language does not work that way" ("On Interpreting the Christian Story," lecture 2: "Interpretation and Devotion: God's Presence for us in Jesus Christ" [1976], quoted in Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* [London: T & T Clark International, 2004] 190). Although language does indeed work the way Frei claims, it is not clear that *PI* §43 was intended to point up the distinction between technical and ordinary language. It is worth noting, however, that Wittgenstein does (elsewhere) note that it is "everyday" terms that lack "a unified employment" (see *RPP* II §194).

this challenge in terms of what it means to interpret a *text*, as he sets the Wittgensteinian view *over against* "the assumption of the accessibility of the original meaning or sense (*Sinn*) of texts, a sense that transcends and therefore controls the difference and relation between the activities of explication and application."[20] By counterpoising Wittgenstein to this commitment to the original meaning of texts, his insight into our use of words to convey our intentions is made to underpin an approach to texts that *ignores* those very intentions. Frei would develop this way of reading Wittgenstein further in *Types of Christian Theology*, where he construes Wittgenstein as wanting to "drop the term 'meaning' altogether" (!)—a move which implies (for Frei) that "'interpretation' is making grammatical remarks about the ways in which texts are used, or interpretation is a matter of the interest we bring to the reading of texts, specifying what aims we have in mind in reading."[21] By interpreting Wittgenstein in this way, Frei has taken him far from his native ground, and abandoned him in a setting completely unfamiliar to his working assumptions.

The notion that a text might have a meaning (or shades of meaning) unintended by the author was already current in Wittgenstein's day, but it was limited to circles influenced—directly or indirectly—by the German Romantics. There is nothing in Wittgenstein's writings to suggest that he ever entertained such a notion—or that his views are compatible with such a notion. When he characterizes propositions as those things by which "we make ourselves understood" (*TLP* 4.026), there is no reason to confine his remark to unwritten speech, or to a special class of communicative writing—as if he thought some writings were not communicative. In fact, the program of taking Wittgenstein as a support for a nonintentionalist

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[20] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) 110. Frei identifies the view that Wittgenstein (supposedly) displaced as an assumption of "[h]ermeneutical theory in the late eighteenth century."

[21] Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 85.

hermeneutic appears to be the main impetus in spreading the notion of nonintentionalist meaning

beyond the realm of poetry (= literature), where it had been confined by Structuralists, Russian

Formalists, Poststructuralists, and New Critics.[22] When Wittgenstein uses the ideogram of an

arrow to illustrate the conventionality of a symbol's meaning (*PI* §454),[23] we have every right to

ask whether he would be scandalized by an unintended interpretation of the arrow, as in the case

of a "One Way" sign accidentally twisted out of its original alignment.

The question is not whether Wittgenstein thinks that *some* aspects of language use

involve the community. Clearly he understands that the community's use of words is what

standardizes their application, for purposes of communication. Thus, meaning on a lexical

level—that which is explicated in a dictionary—is plainly the product of the community's use.

The question about Wittgenstein reduces to whether the use of words on a specific occasion is a

matter of the community's understanding *as opposed to* the speaker's or writer's intention. That,

of course, is a different question altogether. In other words, the debate is not about lexico-

semantics (the way a community gives a word its available range of word-meanings), but about

rhetorico-semantics (the way a speaker or writer uses words to convey a thought), and much of

the confusion surrounding the debate has to do with a widespread failure to recognize the

difference.[24] Further confusion arises from the fact that the word "use" can be used properly (in

English generally) in connection with *both* lexico-semantics and rhetorico-semantics, and that

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[22] Ferdinand de Saussure's remarks gave rise to structuralism, but only after being twisted out of context. In correct usage, therefore, "Structuralist" excludes Saussure.

[23] See David H. Finkelstein, "Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism," in Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2000) 53-73, esp. 65-66, 68.

[24] Cf. Robert B. Brandom's differentiation between "*semantic* theorizing (about the sorts of contents expressed by various locutions)" and "*pragmatic* theorizing (about the linguistic practices in which those locutions are employed)" (*Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994] xiii). Cf. Jay F. Rosenberg, "Ryleans and Outlookers: Wilfrid Sellars on 'Mental States'," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 28 (2004) 239-65.

Wittgenstein can be shown to use the word "use" in connection with both of these aspects of language/application.[25]

Lindbeck thinks he is faithfully unpacking the Wittgensteinian notion of "use" when he writes that "[m]eaning is constituted by the uses of a specific language rather than being distinguishable from it,"[26] but his statement of the matter reveals an unfortunate knack to regard language and the *use* of language as one and the same thing. In point of fact, the conceptual gap between language and application is an important component of Wittgenstein's thinking—as it was for Saussure, and as it has always been for most of the Analytic tradition.[27]

Holmer expressed his disagreement with the notion of an intentionalist Wittgenstein by characterizing intentionalism as part of a "spiritualization of language," and by imposing an "either/or" on the question of whether meaning something involves a "mentalistic" intention *as opposed to* a "public and ruled access" to the meaning of words:

> A kind of spiritualization of language takes place among us, and most of that finds its fruition in a notion that the realm of meaning is mentalistic, inside of our heads, and finally the sort of place or region to which a person has only his private and highly privileged access. For if we "mean" (now using that word as a verb) by some kind of intentional activity like thinking or knowing ("I know what I mean"), then there is no public and ruled access to anything but the sound and shape of the words. We can then see why Humpty Dumpty was so easily tempted to believe that words meant exactly and only what he wanted them to mean. For words are indeed words, but meanings are not

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[25] Regarding "use" as establishing word meaning, McGinn writes, "Wittgenstein is committing himself to the idea that 'meaning is *created* by use': that is, the meaning of a word is progressively constituted or created by its use over time—determinate meaning is the final *result* of temporally extended use. It is not, according to this suggestion, that meaning produces (is the source of) use; rather, use produces (is the source of) meaning. So when Wittgenstein says that a new *decision* is needed at each stage he is, on this interpretation, suggesting that each occasion of use is *undetermined* by prior meaning and functions as one phase in what is in fact the *construction* of a meaning: the meaning of a word is thus in some way indeterminate until the sum-total of its use has been reckoned with" (*Wittgenstein on Meaning*, 134). On the varieties of uses of "use," see Elmar Geir Unnsteinsson, "Wittgenstein as a Gricean Intentionalist," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24 (2016) 155-72, esp. 163.

[26] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 114.

[27] Anna Aloisia Moser interprets the notion of "language idling" (*PI* §109) as denoting language *not in use* (= rule), which she pits over against the notion of language in use (= application) ("Language Idling and Language in Use: Wittgenstein on Following Rules," *Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society 2002*, 173-75, esp. 173). She thus takes her understanding of Wittgenstein's wording to imply that "language" spans the gap between rule and application. In point of fact, Wittgenstein's phrase "language idling" refers to language *applied*, but in such a way that its literal interpretation conflicts with its use—it "idles" in that it doesn't *picture things as they really are*.

quite like them. We cannot see, hear, or apprehend the latter save by the same activity that makes them. Certainly, this kind of "mentalism" disguises many mistakes of a rather subtle sort. But there is also something very ordinary and popular about the view, and lot of ordinary and feasible talk about symbols, thoughts, consciousness, and intending give it a currency among literate people.[28]

One wonders what might be so wrong about putting the "realm of meaning" inside the head: if "the head" stands for what we intend *to convey* when we speak or write, it would seem quite extraordinary to put *communicative* meaning anywhere else. And Holmer's exchange between intentionalist meaning and "ruled" meaning couldn't be any clumsier: it depends on the grammatical illusion that there is only one thing out there called "meaning"—or only one thing called "meaning" pertaining to the working of texts. The most ordinary accounts of how speakers and writers convey their intentions shows the problem with this way of thinking: when we speak, we use *words* that "mean" certain things (on a lexico-semantic plane) to convey what *we* "mean" (on a rhetorico-semantic plane). It's clearly missing the underlying logic of language use to play these two uses of "meaning" against each other. From the standpoint of how texts work, it is wrong-headed to eliminate one or the other of these uses of "meaning." Wittgenstein clearly understood all these matters well enough: "we *understand* the meaning of a word when we hear or say it; we grasp the meaning at a stroke, and what we grasp in this way is surely something different from the 'use' which is extended in time!" (*PI* §138).

One reason Wittgenstein is often characterized as a nonintentionalist is that he disparages the habit of associating meaning with mental processes—and it is usually assumed that such a position could leave no room for intention. But in this regard one needs to spend only a little time with Wittgenstein's motivations and his peculiar view of what counts as "mental." One of the fronts on which he fought against the notion that meaning is grounded in something beyond use *per se* is that of the mental picture that often accompanies the use of words. In response to

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[28] Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 119-20.

the bid to view the mental picture as a mainstay of a word's meaning, or even as a possible *ground* of meaning, Wittgenstein points out that most words in a sentence do not conjure pictures in our minds, and that those that *do so* actually conjure a variety of pictures among those using the words —*without*, however, affecting the range of meaning with which those words are used, and *vice versa*: "What is essential is to see that the same thing can come before our minds when we hear the word and the application still be different. Has it the *same* meaning both times? I think we shall say not" (*PI* §140).[29] Thus there can be no one-to-one correspondence between word meanings and mental pictures.[30] In other words, Wittgenstein acknowledges that mental processes often accompany the use of certain words, but he refuses to give such processes a determining role in these words' semantic profiles:

> And nothing is more wrong-headed than calling meaning something a mental activity! Unless, that is, one is setting out to produce confusion. (Similarly, one might speak of an activity of butter when it rises in price; and if no problems are produced by this, it is harmless.) (*PI* §693)

Wittgenstein extends these limitations to all sorts of mental processes, for which we can co-opt McGinn's list: "knowing, believing, attending, recognising, comparing, reading, wishing, intending, willing."[31]

Kripke notes that Wittgenstein uses the terms "mental state" and "mental process" somewhat idiosyncratically.[32] Not many people, that is, are quick to agree when Wittgenstein

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[29] As Moi notes, "To stare at a scan of someone's brain when he is thinking about 'tea' is (obviously) not the same thing as to understand the word 'tea'" (*Revolution of the Ordinary*, 38). See Verheggen, "How Social Must Language Be?," 206. Cf. F. Waismann, *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1965) 159. Waismann writes, "Let the reader make the attempt to visualize the letter G in Gothic script; if he is not trained, he will hardly succeed in doing so; but nevertheless he does recognize the letter at first sight when he sees it" (160-61). See McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning*, 3-4, 96-97.

[30] Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "*Words are behind me, like things behind my back, or like the city's horizon round my house*, I reckon with them or rely on them, but without having any 'verbal image.' … I do not need to visualize the word in order to know and pronounce it. It is enough that I possess its articulatory and acoustic style as one of the modulations, one of the possible uses of my body. *I reach back for the word as my hand reaches towards the part of my body which is being pricked;* the word has a certain location in my linguistic world, and is part of my equipment. I have only one means of representing it, which is uttering it" (*Phenomenology of Perception: An Introduction* [London: Routledge, 1962] 180).

[31] McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning*, 10.

writes that "understanding is not a mental process" (*PI* §154), or (especially) that "[i]t is misleading … to talk of thinking as of a 'mental activity'" (*Blue Book* p. 6; cf. *PG* p. 106; *RPP* II §193; *Z* §§123, 605-6).[33] But Kripke assures us that our misgivings are not pursuant to Wittgenstein's concern, which is the "philosophical" use of these terms:

> 'Mental states' and 'mental processes' are those introspectible 'inner' contents that I can find in my mind, or that God could find if he looked into my mind. Such phenomena, inasmuch as they are introspectible, 'qualitative' states of the mind, are not subject to immediate sceptical challenge of the present type. Understanding is not one of these.[34]

According to Russell Nielli, Wittgenstein wants to view the mental aspect of these states and activities as an "epiphenomenon," and the "plane of observable behavior" (especially *parole*)[35] as the true theater of the phenomenon in question.[36] As Wittgenstein writes in the *Blue Book*: "I have been trying in all this to remove the temptation to think that there '*must* be' what is called a mental process of thinking, hoping, wishing, believing, etc., independent of the process of expressing a thought, a hope, a wish, etc. … If you are puzzled about the nature of thought, belief, knowledge, and the like, substitute for the thought the expression of the thought, etc."[37]

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[32] Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 49-51.

[33] As Kripke notes, for most people "[c]oming to understand, or learning, seems … to be a 'mental process' if anything is," while "[a] pain's growing more and less, and especially the hearing of a tune or sentence, are probably not ordinarily thought of as 'mental' processes at all" (*Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 49-50). Wittgenstein writes, "'Thinking', a widely ramified concept. A concept that comprises many manifestations of life. The *phenomena* of thinking are widely scattered" (*RPP* II §220).

[34] *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 50-51.

[35] "*Parole*" is not a Wittgensteinian word, but it should be.

[36] *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language. A Study of Viennese Positivism and the Thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (SUNY Series in Philosophy; Albany: SUNY Press, 1987) 214. As Nieli notes, "Surely no descriptive account of how ordinary people use ordinary mental terms would suggest a view of mind anything like that suggested by Wittgenstein" (215).

[37] *Blue Book*, 41-42. See Charles M. Wood, *Theory and Understanding: A Critique of the Hermeneutics of Joachim Wach* (AAR diss. Ser. 12; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975) 92-94. Wittgenstein writes: "No supposition seems to me more natural than that there is no process in the brain correlated with associating or with thinking; so that it would be impossible to read off thought-processes from brain-processes" (*Z* §608).

For Wittgenstein to claim that speaking can "be done without thinking" (*RPP* II §193)[38] alerts us to the narrowness of his working concept of thinking. In spite of what the scarecrow said to Dorothy, most people do not believe that speaking can be done without thinking, unless by "thinking" one refers only to that part of conscious brain activity that displays a certain rigor of concentration.[39] This is just another indication that Wittgenstein's reasoning with regard to what he calls the "psychological" verbs almost always proceeds on definitions and assumptions that the average reader will not readily accept. But this is, nevertheless, an aspect of Wittgenstein's thinking with which we must come to terms. His phobia of dualism is so overpowering that he cannot even admit that *remembering a face* involves an aspect of information storage.[40] Given the hopelessness of such a denial, his attempt to explain how recognition can happen on other terms remains unclear.[41]

Fortunately, there are places where Wittgenstein speaks rather directly about intention, so we don't have to base our understanding of Wittgenstein's stance on an argument from silence, carved out of ground recaptured from competing readings.[42] In the second volume of his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*—based on manuscripts written sometime after the *Philosophical Investigations* was written—Wittgenstein gives a fairly extended discussion of

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[38] Cf. *RPP* II §7: "… thinking is neither an accompaniment of speaking nor of any other process"—§8: "… it wouldn't be completely wrong to call speaking 'the instrument of thinking'."

[39] Cf. *RPP* II §7: "… when we do speak of a 'thought-process' it is something like operating (in writing or orally) with signs. Inferring or calculating might be called a 'thought-process'." In §201, he tells us that thinking is something that (e.g.) fish do not do. Cf. *OC* 475.

[40] On Wittgenstein's rejection of Cartesian thought, see John W. Cook, "Human Beings," in Peter Winch (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method; New York: Humanities, 1969) 117-51, esp. 149.

[41] Wittgenstein writes: "I saw this man years ago: now I have seen him again, I recognize him, I remember his name. And why does there have to be a cause of this remembering in my nervous system? Why must something or other, whatever it may be, be stored up there *in any form*? Why *must* a trace have been left behind? Why should there not be a psychological regularity to which *no* physiological regularity corresponds? If this upsets our concepts of causality then it is high time they were upset" (*Z* §610). See Nieli, *Wittgenstein*, 215-18 (cf. the "common sense" protests that Nieli quotes there). Cf. Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (2nd edn; London: SPCK, 1997) 90.

[42] Brandom writes, "In the twentieth century, the great proponent of the thesis that *intentionally* contentful states and acts have an essentially *normative* pragmatic significance is the later Wittgenstein" (*Making It Explicit*, 13).

intention and its relation to meaning. It is not that intending does not belong to the first-person

"manifold," but rather that it is distinct from the episodic aspect of mental life:

> I want to talk about a "state of consciousness", and to use this expression to refer to the seeing of a certain picture, the hearing of a tone, a sensation of pain or of taste, etc. I want to say that believing, understanding, knowing, intending, and others, are not states of consciousness. If for the moment I call these latter "dispositions", then an important difference between dispositions and states of consciousness consists in the fact that a disposition is not interrupted by a break in consciousness or a shift in attention. … Really one hardly ever says that one has believed or understood something "uninterruptedly" since yesterday. An interruption of belief would be a period of unbelief, not, e.g., the withdrawal of attention from what one believes, or, e.g., sleep. (*RPP* II §45)[43]

None of this, of course, obviates the relation of intention to the concept of meaning:

> How important is the experience of meaning in linguistic communication? What is important is that we intend something when we utter a word. For example, I say "Bank!" and want thereby to remind someone to go to the bank, and intend "bank" in the one meaning and not in the other.—But intention is no experience. (*RPP* II §242; cf. §§179, 272)[44]

And if Wittgenstein tells us that "intention has no content," he immediately clarifies this by

saying, "One can call its content what explains its verbal expression" (*RPP* II §274). By this he

means to highlight the *pragmatic* emptiness of a poorly expressed intention—not the emptiness

per se of the (prelinguistic) intention:

> The man I call meaning-blind will understand the instruction "Tell him he is to go to the bank—and I mean the river bank," but not "Say the word bank and mean the bank of a river".
> He will also not be able to report that he almost succeeded, but that then the word slipped into the wrong meaning. It does not occur to him that the word has something in it which positively fixes the meaning, as a spelling may; nor does its spelling seem to him to be a picture of the meaning, as it were.—For instance, it is very tempting to think that

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[43] Cf. McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning*, 12-13. Unnsteinsson refers to Wittgenstein's view of intentions as one of "nonepisodic mental states" ("Wittgenstein as a Gricean Intentionalist," 161).

[44] Cf. Unnsteinsson, "Wittgenstein as a Gricean Intentionalist," 167. Wittgenstein writes, "That it is possible after all to utter the word in isolation, far removed from any intention, 'now with one meaning, now with another', is a phenomenon which has no bearing on the nature of meaning; as if one could say, 'Look, you can do *this* with a meaning too'.—No more than one could say: 'Look at all the things you can do with an apple, you can eat it, see it, desire it, try to form an image of it.' No more than it is characteristic of the concept 'needle' and 'soul' that we can ask how many souls can fit on the point of a needle. – We're dealing here, so to speak, with an *outgrowth* of the concept" (*RPP* II §245).

a different spelling will lead to at least a very small difference in pronunciation, even where this is certainly not so. (*RPP* II §571)

Elmar Geir Unnsteinsson notes that Wittgenstein clarified his view of intention as early as the

Blue Book:

> It seems clear, then, that Wittgenstein was an intentionalist about representation as early as the BB, where he writes that '[a]n obvious, and correct, answer to the question "What makes a portrait the portrait of so-and-so?" is that it is the *intention'* (BB, 32, emphasis in original; cf. PG, 102; PPF, §§17–18; LW I, §318). By analogy, I think, he should have said that only the intention of the speaker S makes it the case that by uttering, say, 'she' S means one contextually salient woman rather than another (cf. PI, §§661–663).[45]

For Wittgenstein, then, intention "cannot be equivalent to a symbol used in thought. It can only be *what uses a sign in thought and gives the final interpretation*."[46] Unnsteinsson also points out to Wittgenstein's reference to the possibility of uttering a word "in isolation, far removed from any intention" as "a phenomenon which has no bearing on the nature of meaning" (*RPP* II §245). Wittgenstein refers to such an utterance as "an *outgrowth* of the concept" of using the word. As Unnsteinsson notes, Wittgenstein's reasoning implies that "[o]ne does not latch on to the concept itself by exploring simply what *can be done with it regardless of the speaker's actual intention*."[47]

The Yale School on "Truth"

We have seen that the Yale school appealed to Wittgenstein's discussion of meaning as "use" as a groundwork for a communitarian understanding of the meaning of Scripture. The operative notion was that, if "use" is socially determined, then the community must be a principal in the "making" of meaning (*a la* Ricoeur). This error was compounded when its purveyors carried its implications into the area of epistemology, where it was taken to obviate a correspondence view

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[45] Unnsteinsson, "Wittgenstein as a Gricean Intentionalist," 161-62.
[46] Unnsteinsson, "Wittgenstein as a Gricean Intentionalist," 168.
[47] "Wittgenstein as a Gricean Intentionalist," 167-68 n. 13.

of truth. It hardly follows from investing word meaning within the community that *truth* is also made a function of the community as well.[48]

Lindbeck's attempt to delineate three distinct notions of truth made a mare's nest of these issues. He associated these three notions (severally) with his three views of religion. Those taking a cognitive-propositional approach hold to a correspondence view of truth, while those taking an experiential-expressivist approach saw truth as "a function of symbolic efficacy."[49] For Lindbeck's favored cultural-linguistic approach, however, the question of truth "focuses on the categories (or 'grammar,' or 'rules of the game') in terms of which truth claims are made and expressive symbolisms employed."[50] One obvious question immediately arises: How does a focus on the "categories … in terms of which truth claims are made" detract from the question of the truth of a proposition? Propositions, after all, are embroiled in categories, and getting those categories straight is part of what it means to engage a proposition.

According to D. Z. Phillips, Lindbeck's view of "religious truth" comes "dangerously close to Rorty's conception of the dominant voice in the hermeneutic conversation, or to Berger's claim that what we mean by reality is determined by who wields the bigger stick."[51] Phillips writes that Lindbeck coined the term "intrasystematic truth" because he had already dispensed with the notion of "ontological truth" having anything to with religion.[52] (Phillips would have preferred Lindbeck to speak in terms "of 'the independently real' in a religious

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[48] As Michael Dummett notes, the conflation of truth and knowledge was an error that Frege "never tired of repudiating" (*The Seas of Language* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1993] 155). Cf. Edmond Ortigues, *Le Discours et le symbole* (Philosophie de l'Esprit; Aubier: Montaigne, 1962) 43.

[49] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 47.

[50] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 48. According to Lindbeck, "We need, first, to distinguish between what I shall call the 'intrasystematic' and the 'ontological' truth of statements. The first is the truth of coherence; the second, that truth of correspondence to reality which, according to epistemological realists, is attributable to first-order propositions. Utterances are intrasystematically true when they cohere with the total relevant context, which, in the case of a religion when viewed in cultural-linguistic terms, is not only other utterances but also the correlative forms of life" (*The Nature of Doctrine*, 64).

[51] D. Z. Phillips, *Faith after Foundationalism* (London: Routledge, 1988) 221

[52] Phillips, *Faith after Foundationalism*, 206.

context.") According to Gorazd Andrejč, Lindbeck's "intrasystematic" notion of "truth" is "permeated by Wittgensteinian idioms but, when fleshed out, goes creatively—and … theologically—beyond what Wittgenstein said or wrote."[53]

According to Wittgenstein, "It is what human beings *say* that is true or false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (*PI* §241). As such, Wittgenstein does not predicate *truth* on communal agreement about what words mean.[54] Rather, he predicates the *possibility* of speaking truth (or falsity) on the possibility of meaningful expression. The ability to express oneself within a linguistic community does not create the conditions for the truth of propositions, but only for the meaningful expression of their truth. In other words, Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following does not imply that we construct the world by means of language.[55]

Incommensurability and Rationality

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[53] Andrejč, *Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement*, 85. Andrejč explains Lindbeck's multiplication of types of truth as "an extension of a particular version of Barthian Christian theology" (92).

[54] Verheggen writes, "[I]t is not the case that whatever seems to be so to a community is so. Shared practices put people in a position to recognize the independence of the world around them and hence of standards, and so also in a position to recognize that they could sometimes all be wrong about their environment" ("The Community View Revisited," 622). Timothy Binkley writes, "There is one relatively infrequent word which, in a way, sums up Wittgenstein's interest in Gebräuche, language-games, natural history, myth, etc. It is: Lebensform. To Wittgenstein, language does not appear as an isolated repository of signs, but instead as something which is integrally connected with a form of life. The form of life is what is 'accepted': it is the 'agreement' which makes agreement and disagreement possible (Cf. *Z* §348). This is what Wittgenstein tries to reach with his language-games and myths: the basic forms of living which define us as what we are, the bedrock beyond justification and explanation on which we stand to give justifications and explanations, the accepted" (*Wittgenstein's Language* [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973] 110).

[55] According to MacDonald, "Wittgenstein affirmed agreement in forms of life as a principle of metaphorical measurement, but he did not affirm a community conception of truth insofar as this is taken to mean that the community decides by consensus, as it were, what is true and what is false. Truth itself is not reducible to mere inter-personal agreement. … 'Agreement in form of life' *constitutes* what counts as the stability it maintains" (*Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible*, 316-17). One of the things that sets Woods apart from the rest of the Yale school is his understanding of Wittgenstein's understanding of "truth": "In one of his discussion [*sic*] of the 'groundlessness' of our linguistic behavior, [Wittgenstein] anticipates the charge that he is granting language an ultimate power over reality: '"So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?"—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in forms of life'" (*Theory and Understanding*, 95-96).

Another well known (or widely alleged) feature of the Yale school is that of the incommensurability of religious beliefs. The notion of incommensurability, or course, is usually connected with Thomas Kuhn, and as such belongs primarily to the debate over the nature of science. It is not surprising, however, that the idea of incommensurability would appeal to some theorists of the nature of religion.

There is some debate as to how many members of the Yale school are incommensurabilists in the strong sense.[56] It is undeniable, in my view, that the second generation of the Yale school was more entrenched in the incommensurability thesis than the first generation—due especially to the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of local rationalities.[57] But it appears that Lindbeck can be classed with the incommensurabilists, as his cultural-linguistic approach held discrete religions to be independent of other thought-worlds, not only in terms of their root commitments, but also in terms of their very *rationalities*. In other words, Christianity is hermetically sealed from competing discourses, and therefore can only be judged by an insider—on the basis of its own narrative. This effectively insulates it from external criticism.[58]

This incommensurability thesis is one of the main indicators that *The Nature of Doctrine* harbors a form of "Barthianism."[59] It was Barth who argued that non-Christian thinkers are *principially* incapable of understanding Christian theology, and that no one who does not profess

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[56] Frei's views on the matter may be too complicated to include him under the "incommensurabilist" label. Cf. Higton, "Reconstructing *The Nature of Doctrine*," 4.

[57] But cf. Michael G. Harvey, *Skepticism, Relativism, and Religious Knowledge: A Kierkegaardian Perspective Informed by Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013) 14.

[58] On incommensurability, see Robert B. Brandom, "Vocabularies of Pragmatism: Synthesizing Naturalism and Historicism," in Robert B. Brandom (ed.), *Rorty and His Critics* (Philosophers and Their Critics; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000) 156-83, esp. 179.

[59] The charge that *The Nature of Doctrine* presents a form of "Barthianism" is most closely associated with Tracy—see his "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology," 465. Cf. Andrejč: "The more we examine Lindbeck's professedly non-theological theory, the more levels we find on which Lindbeck's theology attempts to mask itself as conceptual theory" (*Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement*, 87-88). Cf. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 64.

to be a Christian can have anything to offer in the way of critique. (John E. Smith has noted that Barth's own application of this principle was inconsistent: while Barth denied that the atheists Sartre and Heidegger were capable of understanding Christianity [*CD* III/3, p. 344], he also claimed that he, a Christian, was capable of understanding Sartre and Heidegger.[60] Phillips notes the same sort of inconsistency in Barth's followers at Yale, but in a reverse direction, in the guise of Holmer's congratulatory remarks regarding Nietzsche's and Voltaire's abilities to see the true shape of the Christian faith.)[61] Although the Barthian stance that Lindbeck adopts is an extreme view, it is easy to see how the Reformation's emphasis on the perspicuity of Scripture could lead one in the direction of such a scheme. It is worth noting, in this connection, that the early church's emphasis on the clarity of Scripture was not limited to believers. In the words of Irenaeus: "[T]he entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them" (*Adv. haer.* 2.27.2). Whatever we are dealing with in Lindbeck, therefore, we can be sure that he would feel more at home in a Reformation context than in a Patristic context—which is hardly surprising, of course, for a form of Barthianism.

While we're at it, we might point out that Frei's student Wood held the very notion of "sacred hermeneutics" to imply a sort of incommensurability: "The revival of sacred hermeneutics … tends to support the notion that only the members of a particular religion, only those whose life and thought are shaped by a particular text or body of doctrine, are qualified to

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[60] John E. Smith, "The Significance of Karl Barth's Thought for the Relation between Philosophy and Theology," *USQR* 28 (1972) 15-30, esp. 20. Smith writes, "[I]t did not seem to occur to Barth that, from his own standpoint, he should not have presumed to understand, for example, Sartre's analysis of nothingness. For if Sartre is prevented by his 'atheistic blindness' from understanding the Christian message, Barth by his God-enlightened stance is equally cut off from understanding Sartre. Or is it rather that if you understand God, you understand everything else, but if you understand only man, you know nothing about God?" (29).

[61] Phillips, *Faith after Foundationalism*, 241-42. Cf. Paul Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978) 194.

render a correct account of that religion or its literature."[62] Unfortunately, Wood fails to explain why a more open view of potential critique could not also be termed "sacred," or why, indeed, such a critique could not be made on terms entirely congenial to Scripture's own implied openness to a more general rationality. (After all, Paul's arguments are indeed *arguments*, and presumably invoked a universal grasp of rationality.)

The main hook by which incommensurability language has been connected with Wittgenstein is found in the notion of the "language game." Wittgenstein employed the notion of the language game in order to simplify the working of language for purposes of illustrating his claims about how language works. His theological admirers, however, have tended to look upon language games as self-contained and *hermetically sealed* rationalities in the strong (MacIntyrean) sense—a view promoted, in no small measure, by Wittgenstein's connection of the language game with "forms of life."[63] The problem with this design upon Wittgenstein's notion, of course, is simply that he never meant it to be taken that way. For him, the language game is merely an illustration of how language works.

How should we judge Lindbeck's attempt to make Wittgenstein a proponent of the incommensurability thesis? Andrejč's judgment is that the thesis itself is "too radical," and that it is based on "a certain methodological confusion … which, from Wittgensteinian perspective, is particularly problematic."[64] As the incommensurability thesis depends in no small measure on the notion of "language games," and since the Yale school pursues the notion that discrete

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[62] Wood, *Theory and Understanding*, 9.

[63] On Lindbeck's understanding of Wittgenstein's "forms of life," see Phillips, *Faith after Foundationalism*, 214.

[64] *Wittgenstein and Interreligious Disagreement*, 67. Andrejč accuses Lindbeck of reading Wittgenstein "selectively and narrowly" on this point. McGinn, for his part, seeks to pull down the incommensurability thesis by way of pulling down Kripke's understanding of "private" rules: "It might now be said that the community conception should not have required *membership* in a community at all, not even sometime membership; what it should require is rather the mere *existence* of a rule-following community to which the candidate individual rule-follower stands in various relations—notably agreement of response. The idea here is that rule-following on the part of an individual should be conceived as a kind of behavioural similarity or isomorphism, and that does not in itself require actually *interacting* with those with whom one's behaviour is isomorphic" (*Wittgenstein on Meaning*, 197-98).

language games correspond to discrete (and incommensurable) ways of thinking, we should turn

to the Yale school's view of how language relates to thought.

Is Thought Bound Up with Language?

Most interpreters of Wittgenstein labor under the assumption that he held a form of linguistic

determinism—a view sometimes called the "Sapir-Whorf" thesis—the view, that is, that thought

is dependent on language, or is indistinguishable from it.[65] This group includes several leading

representatives of the Yale school, who take the linguistic determinism they think they see in

Wittgenstein to empower the incommensurability thesis and the communitarian view of truth.[66]

As Frei puts it: "We are, and are able to think, only by way of the language in which we think."[67]

The Sapir-Whorf thesis contends that language mediates the world to us so exclusively

that we cannot see the world *neutrally*, so to speak. This view has had myriad proponents over

the years, but has been called into question recently in a couple of high profile studies. The

subtitle to one of these studies—John McWhorter's 2014 work—presents this counterclaim to

Sapir-Whorf with appreciable clarity: "Why the World Looks the Same in Any Language."[68] (As

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[65] As Kerr expresses this view, "There is nothing inside one's head that does not owe its existence to one's collaboration in a historical community" (*Theology after Wittgenstein*, 76). Raymond Tallis lists three different levels at which reality might be denied its language-independence: (1) language "*stabilises* the categories into which the objects we perceive fall," (2) our perception (is permeated through and through by language," and (3) reality "is differentiated only in or through language" (*Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurean Literary Theory* [Language, Discourse, Society; London: Macmillan, 1988] 14-15).

[66] Frei is the exception here. In an apparently unpublished review of Barr's *The Bible in the Modern World*, Frei signaled his agreement with Barr's attack on the idea that the Bible's perspective was unique (cited in Higton, *Christ, Providence and History*, 150-51 n. 3). This would at least seem to qualify any agreement he might have with linguistic determinism.

[67] *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays* (eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 209.

[68] John H. McWhorter, *The Language Hoax: Why the World Looks the Same in Any Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). The subtitle of McWhorter's book is a response to the subtitle of Guy Deutscher's *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages* (New York: Metropolitan, 2010). According to McWhorter, "The visceral appeal of Whorfianism is not scientific" (*The Language Hoax*, 136). The Sapir-Whorf thesis has taken some hard hits recently, not only from McWhorter's book, but also from Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* ([New York: Morrow, 1994] 44-73). But cf. the

McWhorter writes, "Languages differ. Thought doesn't.")[69] Such a counterclaim, of course, is

sure to bristle the sensibilities of the Yale school, even on narrowly linguistic terms.[70] But what

surely would stoke the Yale school's ire against McWhorter's position is what that position

would say on the terms of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic view. One can easily imagine Lindbeck

asking whether the world looks the same in any *religion*, an implication that he would view as

consequent upon Wittgenstein's notion of the "language game." If religions are language games,

as Lindbeck held,[71] then we are justified in reasoning from the incommensurability (or

otherwise) of religions to the incommensurability (or otherwise) of languages.

The suggestion is ready to hand that we might simply grasp the nettle, by questioning the

wisdom of Wittgenstein's language game approach. But perhaps it is the Yale school's

understanding of that approach that we need to question. Here it is worth pointing out that when

Holmer exposits Wittgenstein, what one hears is not so much straight Wittgenstein, but rather a

cocktail of Wittgenstein *and Kierkegaard*. And when Holmer's student Stanley Hauerwas

exposits Wittgenstein, the in-mixing is extended even more, in that Hauerwas serves a cocktail of

Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, *and MacIntyre*.

Perhaps one reason some take Wittgenstein to be a linguistic determinist is that he once

referred to language as "the vehicle of thought" (*PI* §329). Considerations of context, however,

speak against taking his remark in that direction. His reason for using this particular phrase is to

assure us that the words preserve the thought that they are meant to convey: "[W]hat constitutes

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duly substantive response to Pinker in Bruce I. Kodish, "What We Do with Language—What It Does with Us," *Et Cetera: A Review of General Semantics* 60 (2003-4) 383-95.

[69] McWhorter, *The Language Hoax*, 103.

[70] It should be pointed out that the Yale school might have learned of the more problematic aspects of linguistic determinism if only they had paid more attention to what the biblical scholars on the other side of the hallway were up to. James Barr had given linguistic determinism a public thrashing in 1962, and few scholars since that time have been seriously tempted to repeat the mistakes that Barr exposed. (See Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* [SBT 33; London: SCM, 1962].)

[71] Cf. *PI* §373: "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)"

thought … is not some process which has to accompany the words if they are not to be spoken without thought." This is altogether different from saying that all thought is governed by conventions of language.[72]

In fact, it is not difficult to find some fairly explicit renunciations of linguistic determinism in Wittgenstein's writings. In his (pre-*Tractatus*) *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein refers to that view as one that he had once held, but which he no longer found convincing: "Now it is becoming clear why I thought that thinking and language were the same. For thinking is a kind of language."[73] If Wittgenstein came to see thinking as "a kind of language" (as he says here), that does not mean that thinking is the *same* as one's (public) language—it merely means it is extended in time and governed by logic in the same way as language.

There are, in fact, a number of ways in which Wittgenstein makes it plain that language does not hold thought captive. When, for example, he warns against our tendency to be misled by the grammar of substantive terms, he always reminds us that the truth about how language threatens to fool us is ready-to-hand for anyone taking time enough to think about the shape of reality *apart* from these linguistic commonplaces. In other words, he holds these episodes of language "gone on holiday" to be evident to anyone giving a moment's reflection to the matter. Such a scheme would clearly be impossible if our thoughts were captive to our language. Wittgenstein's readers must also contend with his claim that "Language disguises thought" (*TLP* 4.002)—a difficult view to square with linguistic determinism.[74]

The Representationalism/Correspondence Fallacy

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[72] Cf. *PI* §330: "Is thinking a kind of speaking? One would like to say it is what distinguishes speech with thought from talk without thinking. And so it seems to be an accompaniment of speech."

[73] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks, 1914-1916* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961) 82.

[74] See Richard McDonough, "Wittgenstein's Reversal on the 'Language of Thought' Doctrine," *Philosophical Quarterly* 44/177 (Oct 1994) 482-94, esp. 486-87.

The past fifty years have seen a particularly invasive type of fallacy take root within the field of language philosophy—especially among those seeking shelter in Continental ways of thinking. That fallacy consists of supposing a representationalist view of language to imply a correspondence view[75] of truth, and *vice versa*. By extension, embracing an *anti-representationalist* view of language is often held to imply that one should *not* embrace a correspondence view of truth. The Yale school and other theological appropriations of Wittgenstein have not been immune to this development. In fact, the belief that anti-representationalism implies the overthrow of a correspondence view of truth drives a great deal of the Yale school's reasoning.

For some reason, when a philosopher or theologian comes to realize that words are not hard-wired to their purported real-world extensions, he or she is often tempted to unpack this newfound gap between words and the world in terms of alethiological implications. The word "llama" doesn't refer to a real-world llama on its own—rather, it simply "conveys a cultural content," as Umberto Eco puts it.[76] The problem arises when this (quite appropriate) dismissal of the "referential fallacy" is turned into an alethiological thesis: according to a reckless unpacking of the referential fallacy, the truth (or otherwise) of any claim made about that real-world llama cannot be a matter of correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs. We can find this reasoning, for example, in Fredric Jameson's famous delimitation of language as a "prison-

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[75] This view is usually discussed in terms of a correspondence "theory" of truth, but I dispense with the term "theory" on the grounds that one's view of truth is really a matter of one's invoking a particular definition of "truth," rather than one's acceptance of a *bona fide* line of theorizing.

[76] Umberto Eco writes, "[F]rom the point of view of the functioning of a code (or many codes), the referent must be excluded as an intrusive and jeopardizing presence which compromises the theory's theoretical purity. Thus, even when the referent could be the object named or designated by the expression when language is used in order to mention something, one must nonetheless maintain that an expression does not, in principle, designate any object, but on the contrary *conveys a cultural content*" (*A Theory of Semiotics* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979] 60-61).

house":[77] "if the process of thought bears not so much on adequation to a real object or referent, but rather on the adjustment of the signified to the signifier (a tendency already implicit in Saussure's original concept of the sign), then the traditional notion of 'truth' itself becomes outmoded."[78]

Unfortunately, this line of inference grossly mismanages the concepts involved. It does so by including propositional claims among the inmates in language's "prison-house," when in fact the referentiality of the proposition is not a matter of representation at the strictly linguistic level, but rather is a matter of a speaker/writer *using* language (*pragmatically*) to describe a state of affairs. Borrowing from Jameson's (Thomistic) expression, we may say that the truth of a proposition—as understood on "correspondence" terms—is a matter of the adequation of *what someone says* to extra-linguistic reality. The fact that our access to that reality is mediated through language should not be viewed as a besetting consideration, as it is already built into our concept of *speaking about the world*. Jameson should have seen all this the moment he sought out Saussure for support, as Saussure saw the truth of these matters more vividly than just about anyone else.

Jameson's line of argument characterized the thinking of the early American Pragmatists—particularly Peirce, James, and Dewey[79]—and it still characterizes most aficionados of Continental thinking. In fact, a number of high profile thinkers fall for this fallacy—and, not uncommonly, they make it the centerpiece of their system. Apart from its investment in this thought habit, Richard Rorty's entire neo-pragmatist project would

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[77] Jameson borrowed the phrase "prison-house of language" from Nietzsche.

[78] Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton Essays in Literature; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) 133. Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (3rd edn; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

[79]Michael Williams notes that "Peirce, James and Dewey … equate this anti-representationalist outlook as implying rejection of the correspondence theory of truth in favour of some kind of epistemic theory" ("Pragmatism, Minimalism, Expressivism," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 18 [2010] 317-30, esp. 318).

disintegrate into nothing. And Jacques Derrida's entire approach to language and reality is really little more than an excursion to the outer regions of this line of thinking.

Wittgenstein, however, is one really important thinker who never fell for the representationalism/correspondence fallacy. There is nothing in his writings to suggest that his anti-representationalist view of language implied any second-guessing of the notion of truth as correspondence.[80] Quite the contrary: according to Wittgenstein, "When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: this-is-so" (*PI* §95). Those who would tie Wittgenstein's (supposed) dismissal of a correspondence view of truth to his understanding of meaning as "use" typically view the "use" formula as a *replacement* for meaning-as-description. But as Jason Springs notes, "use," for Wittgenstein, does not replace description/reference so much as it *locates* it within the speaker's toolkit: "referring is one of the things people do when they use language and engage in actions."[81] The fact that so many of Wittgenstein's interpreters think that he *does* see a link between representationalism and correspondence says more about the state of Wittgenstein studies than it does about Wittgenstein. In point of fact, Wittgenstein's approach to language recognizes *two* distinct gaps (= pragmatic inferences): (1) the gap between sign and signified, and (2) the gap between literal expression and intended meaning.[82] *Neither* of these gaps is logically connected in any way with questions of the nature of truth.

Those who once taught at Yale are not the only theological consumers of Wittgenstein to smuggle the representationalism/correspondence fallacy into his works.[83] It is interesting to note,

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[80] Contrary to how some view Wittgenstein, he was an anti-representationalist *throughout* his career.

[81] Jason A. Springs, "A Wittgenstein for Postliberal Theologians," *Modern Theology* 32 (2016) 622-58, esp. 645.

[82] The first gap characterizes Wittgenstein's thinking throughout his career, while the second gap is something he called attention to only after moving to Cambridge.

[83] David Tracy writes, "Lindbeck's long footnote (p. 136) on the Yale deconstructionists leads me to believe that he has not reflected very much on the rhetorical (hermeneutical and/or deconstructive) aspects of the question of interpretation of texts and thereby on how grammar and rhetoric (like code and use) inevitably interact in all

in fact, that the Yale school has even been faulted for paying insufficient attention to what Wittgenstein's anti-representationalism (supposedly) says about his view of truth. In 1995, for example, Hans Zorn argued that the linguistic gap opened up by Wittgenstein's "use" doctrine entails the end of truth-as-correspondence, and he attacked Lindbeck, accordingly, for supposing that Wittgenstein's thinking leaves an escape for anyone wanting to make "first-order" claims about reality.[84]

With respect to the question of how reference actually works—its level of abstraction from the notions of language and the *use* of language—one actually finds a variety of understandings among the early members of the Yale school. Holmer is surprisingly on board with the sort of expressivism one finds in Wilfrid Sellars and Robert Brandom—a view that I think gets things *exactly right*: "[W]ords do nothing much by themselves. They neither refer not fail to refer. People do the referring, and most frequently with words."[85] On the other hand, Frei's remarks about the possibility of a text's referring show him to be hopelessly in thrall to the representationalism/correspondence fallacy. Reference, he tells us, is "a difficult thing to get hold of even though one wants to refer."[86] In "Christian usage," he continues, reference "is not a simple, single or philosophically univocal category." The reason he thinks things are messier within a Christian context, of course, is that he takes the notion of referring to God as problematic. Unfortunately for Frei, that problem arises *only* on the terms of an old-world view of language.[87]

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concrete interpretations—even of grammatical codes" ("Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection," *The Thomist* 49 [1985] 460-72, esp. 469).
[84] Hans Zorn, "Grammar, Doctrines, and Practice," *Journal of Religion* 75 (1995) 509-20.
[85] Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith*, 121.
[86] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 210. See Higton, *Christ, Providence and History*, 209.
[87] See DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 123-24.

Those who followed in the footsteps of Holmer, Frei, and Lindbeck often heightened the separation between language and the world "out there," and attributed this view to Wittgenstein himself. Brad Kallenberg, for example, writes as follows:

> Strictly speaking, what language pictures are not objects and events 'out there' but our object-like and event-like experiences. Because Wittgenstein conceived these experiences as themselves a function of language (we think in a language), he could say that language and that which it pictures are internally related.[88]

Wittgenstein "*could* say" that? We might ask, in response: "*Did* he say that?" There is so little actual exegesis of Wittgenstein throughout Kallenberg's book that it's hard to tell where Wittgenstein ends and Kallenberg begins.[89] But the point at hand is really about whether holding a non-extensional notion of the "signified" entails the view that language is "internally related" to "that which it pictures" in such a way that our language determines our understanding of the world. Given that Wittgenstein holds that reference takes place through the *application* of language—and not through some property that words possess on their own—there is nothing in his writings to suggest the sort of isolation from the world as such that Kallenberg imagines. It is true that *language* doesn't picture "objects and events 'out there'," as Kallenberg claims, but he omits to tell us that the *application* of language takes us up close and personal (so to speak) to those same "objects and events."

In light of all this, a question arises as to who the so-called "Platonists" are in Michael Harvey's account of the resistance against a postliberal account of religion: "The Platonists argue that the adoption of a more pragmatic account of the relation between language and reality in

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[88] Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) 168.

[89] One obvious question for Kallenberg, of course, is whether his view differs appreciably from that which Bertrand Russell attributed to Wittgenstein's later work—*viz.*, "that the world of language can be quite divorced from the world of fact." See Erich Heller, "Wittgenstein: Unphilosophical Notes," in Dallas M. High (ed.), *New Essays on Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) 3-24, esp. 11.

place of the classical realist account is tantamount to anti-realism."[90] According to Harvey, these

"Platonists" argued this position because they saw realism and pragmatism as mutually

exclusive—a view that no longer convinces in light of the (supposedly newfound) realization

that "one can be realist with respect to truth and pragmatists with respect to knowledge." Harvey

clearly intends the label "Platonist" to represent those who oppose a postliberal view of things—

historical critics, fundamentalists, liberals, etc.—but all those groups have *long* known that truth

answers better to realist conceptions, while knowledge answers better to pragmatist conceptions.

In fact, it has long been a standard accusation against postliberalism that *it* conflates the realms

of truth and knowledge. It is something of a cheap trick, therefore, for Harvey to invoke this

improved perspective as a *support* for postliberalism.[91]

Conclusion

Wittgenstein can in no way be described as a communitarian, as the role he assigns the

community never goes beyond simply determining ordinary word meanings. That is, he is no

more indebted to the community point-of-view than the ordinary lexicographer is in determining

how a word has been used. Furthermore, his references to meaning being a matter of "use"

should be interpreted in line with the same meaning-as-use viewpoint that had been adopted by

multiple philosophers before him, for whom such a notion was always cashed out in terms of

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[90] Harvey, *Skepticism, Relativism, and Religious Knowledge*, 12. Harvey had earlier defined "the Platonists" as a group "argu[ing] that religious language is meaningless without ontological commitments because it cannot otherwise be about anything objectively real."

[91] Today those who speak most explicitly in the terms I have been invoking are today's "pragmatists"—a breed of "pragmatist" set apart from early American pragmatism and from the Neo-pragmatism of Rorty. These new pragmatists are essentially deflationists in their understanding of what it means for meaning to be a matter of use—a move that allows them, as Michael Williams writes, "to concede to correspondence theorists that truth is a nonepistemic notion, without compromising their functional (use-based) approach to meaning" ("Pragmatism, Minimalism, Expressivism," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 18 [2010] 317-30, esp. 319). The most detailed argument for this new pragmatist understanding is unquestionably Brandom's *Making It Explicit* (1994). There is much in this line of thinking to help us see how reference is a matter of application rather than of the raw nature of language. But this line of thinking also seems to obscure just how widespread this whole way of thinking has always been.

how words obtain their meanings in general parlance, and of how those word meanings, in turn, are used in specific instances to convey a message. It is as ridiculous as it is strange to see in Wittgenstein's notion of meaning-as-use a program for reading texts with principled indifference to how they were intended by their authors. And the fact that so many in the field of theology treat Wittgenstein's association of meaning with use as a radical breakthrough is not an encouraging sign.