WITTGENSTEIN AND KÖHLER ON SEEING AND SEEING ASPECTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Janette Dinishak

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Graduate Department of Philosophy
University of Toronto

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Abstract
Janette Dinishak, Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto
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This thesis examines the relation between philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s 1940s writings on seeing and seeing aspects and Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler’s theory of perception as set out in his *Gestalt Psychology* (1929). I argue that much of the existing literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation distorts Köhler’s ideas and thus also Wittgenstein’s engagement with Köhler’s ideas. This double distortion underrates Köhler’s insights, misconstrues Wittgenstein’s complaints against Köhler, and masks points of contact between the two concerning the nature and description of human perceptual experience.

In my view, Wittgenstein sympathizes with Köhler’s call to reflect on basic psychological categories such as “experience”, his respect for the “ naïve” experience of the layperson, his method of “rediscovering” pervasive features of experience that escape our notice, and his efforts to identify intellectual prejudices that stymie inquiry. But a warning emerges from Wittgenstein’s discussions of seeing and seeing aspects: It is especially difficult to command a clear view of ‘seeing’ and its interrelations with other everyday, psychological concepts. I argue that Wittgenstein’s far-reaching criticism of Köhler is that the latter’s account of visual “organization” overextends an analogy between seeing and seeing aspects and pushes aside other justifiable comparisons, for example between seeing and thinking and seeing and imagining. A consequence of Wittgenstein's criticism is that Kohler falls short of his aim to depict faithfully naïve visual experience. Moreover, despite Kohler's commitment to battling prejudices, the latter's emphasis on similarities between seeing and seeing aspects to the exclusion of their differences is a form of intellectual prejudice. For Wittgenstein various comparisons are justifiable by appeal to the interrelations between ‘seeing’ and other psychological concepts. A perspicuous view of the concept ‘seeing’ involves steady appreciation of the multitude of justifiable, criss-crossing comparisons. So although Wittgenstein does not deny Köhler’s claim that organization is a feature of visual experience rather than thinking, he does not unqualifiedly endorse it either. We have conceptual grounds for various ways of speaking about our experiences of aspects.
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List of Abbreviations

Köhler’s Works

GP 1929 Gestalt Psychology, first edition, 1929
GP 1947 Gestalt Psychology, second edition, 1947

Wittgenstein’s Works

BB The Blue and Brown Books
CV Culture and Value
LPP Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946-47, notes by P.T. Geach, K.J. Shah and A.C. Jackson
LW I Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume I
LW II Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume II
PG Philosophical Grammar
PI Philosophical Investigations
PO Philosophical Occasions
RC Remarks on Colour
RPP I Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology
RPP II Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology
Z Zettel
General Introduction

Wolfgang Köhler (1887-1967) and William James (1842-1910) stand out as the two psychologists Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) refers to frequently in his 1940s writings on philosophical psychology. Whereas much has been written about Wittgenstein’s interest in James, there have been few attempts to understand in detail Wittgenstein’s reflections on Köhler’s ideas. This dissertation is a study of the relation between Wittgenstein’s 1940s writings on seeing and seeing aspects and Köhler’s theory of perception as set out in his *Gestalt Psychology* (1929). I argue that much of the available literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation distorts Köhler’s ideas about the nature and description of visual experience, and thus misreads Wittgenstein’s engagement with Köhler. This double distortion underrates Köhler’s insights, misconstrues Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler, and masks points of contact between the two concerning the nature and description of human visual experience. A comparative study of the present kind is important in three ways. First it fills a significant gap in Wittgenstein scholarship. Second it draws out the philosophical implications of Köhler’s Gestalt account of perception, an influential theory in the history of psychology. Third it provides the groundwork

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1 Considering that explicit references to other thinkers are relatively rare in Wittgenstein’s published remarks, he frequently addresses ideas from James’ *Principles of Psychology* during this period. See for example the index listings for ‘James’ in *RPP I* and II and *LW I*: *RPP I* §§173, 193, 219, 254, 335, 451, 695, 727, 777; *RPP II* §§214, 264, 321, 575; *LW I* §§841, 843. For comparison’s sake, these remarks are listed under ‘Köhler’ in the indexes: *RPP I* §§561, 869, 971, 977, 982, 1023, 1035, 1117; *RPP II* §§224, 334; *LW I* §645.

2 Although there are very few sustained discussions of James and Gestalt psychology. Woody 1999 claims that as of 1999 there were only two other scholarly papers devoted to comparing James with Gestalt psychology: Calkins 1926 and Henle 1990. Woody discusses both.

3 There have been scattered studies of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy and Köhler on memory traces, psychophysical parallelism, and scientific progress. For examples see Malcolm 1977; Hark 1995; Hacker 1996, “Chapter V: Methodology in Philosophical Psychology” and “Chapter VI: Memory and Recognition”; Harré and Tissaw 2005, but only pp. 141-62.

4 *GP* for short.
for a critical assessment of current debates in philosophy of mind concerning the “contents of experience”.  

The methodological and substantive issues in visual perception that exercised both thinkers are interesting in their own right—history aside. For Köhler, behaviorism and introspectionism share the same tendency to displace sensory experience as we understand it in ordinary, pre-theoretical life. One feature of sensory experience, what Köhler calls “sensory organization”, interests him especially. In the visual field, for example, certain areas of the field seem to belong together. That is, the visual field organizes into circumscribed units or Gestalten. Our visual experience has an “object” character. Organization is a pervasive feature of everyday sensory experience, but both the layperson and the theoretician are prone to neglect it. Appreciating it requires a “rediscovery of the obvious” and the shaking off of prejudices of thought. Köhler argues that visual organization is not the result of projecting acquired meaning into the visual field. Further, organization “belongs to” visual experience as much as paradigmatic visual properties, such as color. Put another way, organization is not an intellectual act superadded to sensory experience; it is a “sensory fact” no less than color.

In my view, Wittgenstein sympathizes with Köhler’s call to reflect on basic psychological categories such as ‘experience’, his aim to provide a faithful description of the uncritical, “naïve” experience of the layperson, and his attempts to undermine false dichotomies. And yet a warning emerges from Wittgenstein’s discussions of seeing aspects: It is especially difficult to command a clear view of our concept ‘seeing an aspect’ and its interrelations with other psychological concepts, such as ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’. I argue that Wittgenstein’s far-reaching complaint against Köhler is that (despite his commitment to shaking off intellectual

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5 For more on the many ways that studying the history of philosophy can be fruitful (and sometimes necessary for certain philosophical projects) see Hatfield 2005a.
prejudices) the latter’s account of sensory organization privileges an analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing that overlooks other justifiable comparisons, for example between seeing an aspect and thinking. Because Köhler does not attend to alternative comparisons in his descriptions of our visual experience, he falls short of his goal to depict it faithfully. For Wittgenstein, various comparisons are justifiable by appeal to the interrelations between the concept ‘seeing’ and other everyday psychological concepts. So although Wittgenstein does not deny Köhler’s claim that organization is a feature of visual experience rather than of thinking, he does not unqualifiedly endorse it either. We have conceptual grounds for both ways of speaking. I end the study by arguing that Wittgenstein and Köhler’s methodological aims and attitudes toward the ordinary, pre-theoretical viewpoint intersect and overlap in interesting ways.

The general layout of the dissertation is as follows. Chapter One surveys the available literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation to motivate the scholarly need for a more detailed study of the relation. In my tallying of the survey’s results, I argue that there are serious problems with the literature’s portrayal of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. For example, commentators rarely and only briefly consider points of contact between Wittgenstein and Köhler. Further, Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler on aspect perception are discussed without careful presentation of Köhler’s ideas. At most, the reader of these commentaries is left with a general impression of why Wittgenstein found Köhler’s views problematic. There is little attention paid to terminological difficulties, which is especially troublesome when the comparative study is one between a philosopher and an experimental psychologist who have quite different outlooks on their contributions to human understanding. Finally, there is an unusual lack of dialogue amongst commentators on the subject. This makes improving the collective understanding of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation difficult. Chapter Two is an
exposition of Köhler’s views as stated in his *GP* (1929), the only work by Köhler Wittgenstein is known to have read. The exposition gives special emphasis to Köhler’s methodological aims and elucidates the portions of his theory of sensory organization that are the focus of Wittgenstein’s critical attention. *Chapter Three* is an overview of key insights in Wittgenstein’s 1940s discussions of seeing and seeing aspects. These insights serve as the important background to understanding Wittgenstein’s engagement with Köhler’s ideas. Two themes dominate this overview. First Wittgenstein holds that there is an intimate connection between seeing and describing what we see. We come to appreciate all that we call ‘seeing’ by appreciating the great variety in our practices of describing what we see. Second the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ straddles other psychological concepts such as ‘seeing’, ‘thinking’, ‘interpreting’, and ‘imagining’. A consequence of this in-between place of the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ is that we have conceptual grounds for saying that seeing an aspect is seeing and for saying that seeing an aspect is not seeing. *Chapter Four* is a comparative study of Wittgenstein and Köhler on the nature and description of visual experience. The study divides into three parts. First I present Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler. I argue that Wittgenstein’s root criticism of Köhler is that he privileges an analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing to the detriment of differences between them. Second I explore two consequences of Wittgenstein’s assessment of Köhler. I investigate Wittgenstein’s judgment that Köhler is guilty of intellectual prejudice. I then argue that Köhler’s intellectual prejudice contributes to his failure to deliver on his aim to depict faithfully the visual phenomena that figure in his theory. In the third part of the chapter I argue that there are interesting broad affinities between Wittgenstein and Köhler. Both thinkers give precedence to the naïve point of view. Both thinkers sought to carve out new intellectual
spaces by undermining false dichotomies. And both thinkers bring to our attention features of human experience that are so pervasive that they escape our notice.
Chapter One: Portrayals of the Wittgenstein-Köhler Relation

Introduction

This chapter is a critical survey of commentaries on the relation between Wittgenstein’s discussions of aspect perception and Köhler’s theory of sensory organization. I begin with a few context-setting reflections on the style, character, and editorial state of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect perception. I then address some preliminary scholarly issues that confront commentators on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. Next, I present my survey. I identify two umbrella questions that guide discussions of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relations: Is the experience of a change in aspect an intellectual or sensory change? Is all seeing, seeing as? I then discuss the literature’s portrayal of Köhler’s answers to the two questions and Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler’s answers. Finally, I argue that my survey reveals five main problems with the literature’s portrayal of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation: (i) there is little mention of points of contact between Wittgenstein and Köhler; (ii) accounts of Köhler’s ideas are underdeveloped; (iii) there is little attention paid to terminological difficulties; (iv) there is little attention paid to Köhler’s opponents in presentations of Köhler’s ideas; and (v) there is a lack of dialogue between commentators on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. My overall assessment of the available literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation is that this literature distorts Köhler’s ideas and Wittgenstein’s engagement with the latter’s ideas. Thus the literature misconstrues Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler and masks points of contact between the two thinkers.

Wittgenstein wrote about and lectured on ‘seeing as’, ‘hearing as’, ‘seeing an aspect’, ‘noticing an aspect’—concepts that pick out a motley group of experiences and the descriptions and expressions associated with those experiences. In the Wittgenstein literature, the term ‘aspect
perception’ is often used to collectively designate this diverse group. Wittgenstein’s explorations of aspect perception are part of his 1940s writings on philosophical psychology. The most well known and well studied discussion of aspect perception is in “Part II”\(^6\) of *Philosophical Investigations*.\(^7\) Interpreters often take this collection of remarks to be Wittgenstein’s most settled expression of his thoughts on the topic, and so it often serves as the focus text for commentaries. Over thirty years after the publication of *PI*, many of Wittgenstein’s less settled 1940s remarks were posthumously published in the following collections: *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*\(^8\) volumes I and II (published 1980); *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*\(^9\), volumes I and II (published 1982). A few years later some notes taken by students attending Wittgenstein’s 1946-47 Cambridge lectures were published as *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946-47*\(^10\) (published 1989).

Why do I characterize the 1940s remarks on philosophical psychology as “less settled”? These writings were published after Wittgenstein’s death, and his literary executors formed the collections of remarks mentioned above from various manuscripts and typescripts in his *Nachlass*. Wittgenstein would most likely have been less happy with these remarks than, say, the first part of *PI* because they are drawn from writings in the earlier stages of his painstaking editorial process, and he did not intend on publishing them in the state they were in when he died.

Yet the unsettled state of these writings is somehow suited for the subject. In his review of *RPP*, Hacking helps Wittgenstein’s readers appreciate an unusual fit between Wittgenstein’s

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\(^6\) It is a bit misleading to talk of “Part II” of *PI*. There has been debate about whether Wittgenstein intended the remarks therein to be part of the same work or whether the remarks would have been part of a separate volume on philosophical psychology. See Hacker 1996. Hacker cites two papers by von Wright in this connection: 1982 and 1992.

\(^7\) *PI* for short.

\(^8\) *RPP* for short.

\(^9\) *LW* for short.

\(^10\) *LPP* for short.
style and the content of his later work, including the remarks on philosophical psychology that inspire this study:

Strange possibilities are described and the same phenomenon will be held up again and again to be glimpsed from different perspectives...Wittgenstein's thought keeps on illustrating related themes from successive vantage points, shooting off, recollecting, transcending, backsliding. It is not unlike a mind that talks to itself in a half dozen different conversations at once, but the successive paragraphs are the subtly organized, intensely disciplined product of unending toil. (Hacking 2002, p. 215)

The alluring and elusive character of these writings invites interpretive mayhem. Readers of Wittgenstein must guard against the urge to portray him as more settled in his views than he is. 11 Wittgenstein is in medias res. The unannounced quick exchange of voices in the text makes it all too easy to misidentify Wittgenstein’s sympathies with and departures from the ideas he examines, especially in those of his writings that are the focus of this study, the 1940s writings on aspect perception.

Surge of Interest in Aspect Perception

Before narrowing the focus to the literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation, I briefly sketch a few trends in recent discussions of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect perception more generally. In the 70s, 80s and 90s there was a steady interest in Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect perception. The bulk of the literature from this time falls into four groups: (a) discussions of links between aspect perception and Wittgenstein's series of attacks against the urge to posit private objects; 12 (b) Kuhn-inspired discussions of the theory-ladenness of scientific observation; 13 (c) discussions of the role of aspect perception in aesthetics; 14 (d) discussions of

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11 “It’s no accident that I’m using so many interrogative sentences in this book” (LW I §150).
12 For example see Dunlop 1984.
13 The philosophy of science debate about the possibility of theory-neutral observation has a long history. Discussions of 'seeing as' in this connection have a long history too—dating back to the publication of
the role of aspect perception in philosophy of religion. Arguably, these popular themes reveal that scholars were less interested in making sense of Wittgenstein’s remarks than they were in applying the ‘seeing as’ locution in other domains of thought and drawing out consequences of Wittgenstein’s insights. In the 90s Mulhall wrote a book comparing Wittgenstein with Heidegger. The first half of the book is one of the first detailed expositions of *PI* Part II Section xi. Mulhall offers an interpretation of Wittgensteinian terms of art that had not been mentioned much in the literature before—most notably ‘continuous aspect perception,’ ‘picture-objects,’ and ‘regarding-as’. He argues that interpretations of the text that claim that Wittgenstein’s primary aim is to dissolve a paradox associated with the experience Wittgenstein calls ‘noticing an aspect’ are highly incomplete. By opening up discussion on the myriad of terms Wittgenstein coins in Part II Section xi and by doing some serious exegetical work to uncover the links Wittgenstein suggests exist between aspect perception and experiencing the meaning of a word, Mulhall set off a minor explosion in the literature on aspect perception.

Despite the steady interest in Wittgenstein’s investigations of aspect perception and a fair amount of literature that includes some discussion of relevant remarks, little serious attention has been paid to Wittgenstein’s engagement with the ideas of Köhler. Before officially beginning my survey of the literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation, I address some scholarly issues.

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Wittgenstein’s *PI* (1953) and Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). For the time period relevant to the above assessment (80s and 90s) see for example Wright’s 1992 overview of some main contenders in the debate. His paper has a useful bibliography.
14 For example see Lycan 1971; McFee 1994; Scruton 1974; Tilghman 1984; Wollheim 1974 and 1980; Wilkerson 1991 and 1978.
15 For example see Hick 1967 and Richmond 1970.
17 See *PI* Part II.xi, p. 214.
To begin, what did Wittgenstein read and when? A survey of secondary literature shows that commentators agree that Wittgenstein read Köhler’s *GP*. What is less agreed upon is when Wittgenstein read it and whether he read the first edition (1929) or the second edition (1947).\(^\text{18}\)

Establishing when Wittgenstein read Köhler matters insofar as it helps to determine the extent of Köhler’s influence on Wittgenstein’s work. By “extent” I simply mean that if Wittgenstein read Köhler earlier than the mid 1940s, then *GP* can be viewed as a possible influence over Wittgenstein’s work *before* the 1940s. Relatedly, establishing whether Köhler influenced Wittgenstein’s writings in the 1930s matters for settling questions about the continuity and discontinuity between Wittgenstein’s early, middle, and late writings. As a case in point, Cook’s ongoing argument that Wittgenstein “remained a behaviorist in his later years even though his choice of words occasionally suggests otherwise” (Cook 1994, p. 135) leans heavily on the hypothesis that Wittgenstein read Köhler’s *GP* in 1930. Cook’s hypothesis that Wittgenstein read Köhler in early 1930 is fairly speculative. The Wittgenstein text he cites to support his claim does not show Wittgenstein explicitly referring to Köhler.\(^\text{19}\) Cook’s argument seems based on the hopeful suspicion that ideas taken up in the relevant Wittgenstein texts and and Köhler’s *GP* are just too similar to deny that Wittgenstein is addressing Köhler specifically in the passages Cook cites to make his case. Nevertheless, based on this “internal evidence”, Cook argues that reading Köhler in 1930 was one of two primary reasons for Wittgenstein’s abandonment of the Tractarian idea that our ordinary way of speaking is misleading in some cases (Cook 1994, p.136).

Most commentators say that Wittgenstein read Köhler in 1946 or 1947. Glock writes that Wittgenstein read Köhler’s *GP* in 1947 although he does not make a case for this claim (Glock

\(^\text{18}\) I am grateful to Gary Hatfield for motivating me (via email correspondence) to consider which editions of *GP* Wittgenstein could have read.

1996, p. 287). Peter Hacker cites a 1947 manuscript (MS 135) from Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass* that has Wittgenstein mentioning Köhler specifically, but he does not say explicitly that Wittgenstein’s first contact with Köhler was in 1947 (Hacker 1996, p. 111). Hallett cites MS 131 (dated 1946) (Hallett 1977, p. 680),20 where Wittgenstein refers to Köhler. A 1946 letter Wittgenstein wrote to Rush Rhees confirms that Wittgenstein talked about Gestalt psychology in his 1946-47 Cambridge classes: “I’m talking about problems of Gestalt psychology and am frightfully unclear myself and unable to get to the deep aspects of the matter” (McGuinness 2008, p. 395). Going on the few bits of textual evidence available, contrary to Cook, it is highly unlikely that Köhler’s *GP* exerted any influence on Wittgenstein before 1946. It is more likely that Wittgenstein read *GP* during the time he was writing about philosophical psychology.

Another scholarly issue concerns which edition(s) of *GP* Wittgenstein read. Some commentators merely rely on other commentators for their information about which edition of *GP* Wittgenstein read because they do no take it to be of any importance for their interpretations.21 But determining which edition Wittgenstein read would be helpful for comparing Wittgenstein and Köhler’s terminology (and as we will see there are some terminological difficulties that make straightforward comparison difficult). There are three editions of *GP*. Two editions, the first (1929) and third (1947) are written in English. The first edition is—as Gary Hatfield put it22—English written like German. The second English edition is less forbidding, in this respect. In terms of substantive changes between the two English editions, Köhler reworked sizable sections of the text, sometimes altering his vocabulary. He did not, however, change his position on the problems at hand. Köhler also published a German

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20 I am grateful to Gary Hatfield for this lead.
21 For example in his 1991 critique the historian of psychology Nicholas Pastore relies on Monk and Hallett, who both claim that Wittgenstein read the first edition of *GP*. Pastore decides to cite the second, more readable, edition because he does not think his interpretation hangs on the issue.
22 In email correspondence.
edition, *Psychologische Probleme*, in 1933, between the two English editions. Obviously, knowing when Wittgenstein read Köhler can help pinpoint which edition(s) of *GP* Wittgenstein could have read. If MS 131 is dated correctly (1946) and the 1946 letter to Rush Rhees is reliable, then it looks like Wittgenstein must have read the first edition (1929) of *GP* since the second edition was not published until 1947. Whether he read other editions in addition to the first is an open question.

In any case, Köhler’s *GP* is a major influence on Wittgenstein’s interests during the mid to late 1940s. Monk reports that Wittgenstein often began his last lectures given at Cambridge in 1946 and 1947 with a reading from Köhler: “It is Köhler’s *GP* (1929), and especially the chapter on ‘Sensory Organization’, that Wittgenstein has in mind in much of his discussion. Many of the lectures began with Wittgenstein reading a short passage from the book” (Monk 1990, p. 508). References to Köhler and occurrences of Köhler’s turns of phrase are prominent in Wittgenstein’s writings from this period. For example, if the index from the first volume of *RPP* can be trusted, ‘Köhler’ occurs almost as many times as ‘James’ in this collection of remarks.

Whether or not Wittgenstein read or was familiar with other works by Köhler or the works of other Gestalt psychologists is not clear. Michel ter Hark claims that Wittgenstein was familiar with several of Köhler’s works. Hark offers no proof, but it is surely possible, if we keep in mind the rich cultural and intellectual exchange of the Vienna Wittgenstein grew up in and his contact with psychologists throughout his time at Cambridge. But is there any textual proof of his having read works other than *GP* 1929? In one remark, Wittgenstein alludes to Köhler’s “monkeys” in a case he wants his readers to imagine (*RPP* II §224). This allusion suggests that Wittgenstein may have been familiar with Köhler’s research concerning the

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24 Note that ‘Affen’ is translated as ‘monkeys’ in this passage. ‘Apes’ would be a better translation.
intelligent behavior of apes. Köhler’s major written work detailing his research on apes is in *The Mentality of Apes*, but there are also short references to this research in *GP*. Thus it is also possible that Wittgenstein came across these references in *GP*. As for whether Wittgenstein read the work of other Gestalt psychologists, there is some evidence to suggest that he may have been familiar with the work of Kurt Koffka, who was a close colleague of Köhler’s. In the lecture notes from Wittgenstein’s 1946-47 lectures on philosophical psychology, Jackson has Wittgenstein referring to Koffka’s sail example25 and Hallett traces Wittgenstein’s double-cross example back to Koffka (Hallett 1977, p. 691).26 Finally, while expressing his frustration about Wittgenstein’s failure to cite sources, Pastore points out that Wittgenstein may have made an error when he speaks of Köhler’s interpenetrating hexagons:27 “To follow Wittgenstein’s discussion of the two ‘hexagons,’ it is essential to consult Köhler’s figure. However, this figure does not appear in any of Köhler’s writings” (Pastore 1991, p. 344). Hallett suggests that it is more likely that Wittgenstein is referring to one of Koffka’s illustrations but mistakenly cites Köhler (Hallett 1977, p. 686).

**Literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler Relation**

Only a small portion of the aspect perception literature focuses on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation.28 Most of this literature was written in the late 80s and early to mid 90s. These discussions show more intrinsic interest in understanding Wittgenstein’s remarks than other

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25 *LPP*, p. 332.
26 In “Appendix: Authors Wittgenstein Knew or Read” of Hallett 1977 he notes that there is some evidence that Wittgenstein was familiar with Köhler’s *The Mentality of Apes*.
27 *PI Il*.xi, p. 203. This is the lone occurrence of “Köhler” in *PI*.

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portions of the literature on aspect perception. They attempt to uncover how Köhler is often explicitly and implicitly influencing the direction of Wittgenstein’s remarks. Because those of Wittgenstein’s remarks that are traceable to Köhler address several facets of Köhler’s work—his methodology, his psychophysical parallelism, his theory of memory, his work on primates, and his theory of perception—a further narrowing of focus needs to be made. The focus of this study is the relation between Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect perception (in PI and the post-PI writings listed above) and Köhler’s theory of sensory perception. My focus text for Köhler is GP (1929) since this is the only work by Köhler Wittgenstein is known to have read, lectured on, and written about. From now on when I refer to the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation, I mean specifically the relation between Wittgenstein’s discussions of aspect perception and Köhler’s theory of sensory perception.

**Problems Addressed By the Literature**

There is no one problem addressed or connection made in the literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. Yet it is safe to say that broadly speaking those discussions all center around interest in the relations between thought or conception (broadly construed, in most cases) and sensory experience (especially visual experience\(^{29}\)). These discussions explore whether there is a tidy distinction between thought and sensory experience, and if so how the distinction is drawn. In this connection, two questions are repeatedly posed: Is the experience of a change in aspect an intellectual or sensory change? Is all seeing, seeing as?

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\(^{29}\) Although the literature tends to focus on visual experience specifically, it is important to note that both Wittgenstein and Köhler extend their analysis to other sensory modalities. Wittgenstein devotes a handful of remarks to hearing, and Köhler intends his theory to cover sensory experience, behavior, and memory more generally. Discussion of seeing dominates both thinkers’ discussions, however.
These two questions will serve as a frame for grouping otherwise disparate discussions of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect perception and for critically assessing their treatment of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. I will proceed as follows. I begin by developing and motivating the questions. Next I present the literature’s portrayal of Köhler’s answers to the two questions. Then I consider how the literature construes Wittgenstein’s reactions to those facets of Köhler’s theory of perception that are amplified by Köhler’s answers to the questions. Finally I end with a critical discussion of problems with the literature’s portrayal of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. All in all, this survey of the available literature reveals that commentators overwhelmingly tend to portray Wittgenstein as rejecting both Köhler’s method of tackling the problems that interest him and his doctrines.  

Wittgenstein is described as interested in Köhler insofar as Köhler’s theory of sensory organization illustrates the kind of conceptual confusion Wittgenstein aims to dispel.

**Question One: Is the experience of a change in aspect an intellectual or sensory change?**

This question is taken to encapsulate Wittgenstein’s most immediate concern in his discussions of the experience of a change of aspect. Commentators note that Wittgenstein’s paradigmatic example of aspect perception is the experience of a change in aspect or suddenly noticing an aspect. For instance, I can shift from seeing the duck-rabbit drawing as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit. Although I recognize that the drawing has not changed, once I undergo the shift, I see the drawing differently than I did before the shift. One way I might capture the paradoxical quality of the experience is by saying “I see that it [in this case, the drawing] hasn’t changed; and yet I see it differently” (PI II.xi, p. 193). Is the shift I experience sensory or

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30 To preview one of my arguments in Chapter Four, I argue that Wittgenstein and Köhler would agree on some methodological points.
intellectual? Has there been a change in what is seen, or have I merely interpreted what is seen in a different way? Is the change a change in seeing or a change in thinking?

**Question Two: Is all seeing, seeing as?**

To answer the question, we must first determine what it could be asking. The slogan “all seeing is seeing as” is unpacked in different ways in the Wittgenstein-Köhler literature. Three interpretations of the slogan help organize discussion of the relevant literature. (I do not claim that these are the only ways to read the slogan.) On one understanding, the slogan claims that perception involves making inferences from or placing interpretations on sensations (i.e. what is given through the impact of the world on the sensory apparatus). Philosophers cite sense-data theorists, and psychologists often cite Hermann von Helmholtz as influential proponents of the view. Hark characterizes this view as a form of empiricism: “[T]he senses are only capable of registering form and color, the intellect being the instrument for all other visual aspects” (Hark 1990, p. 165). On this story, perceptions are products of intellectual work carried out on sensations, but it is not clear how the seeing-seeing as distinction maps onto the sensation-perception distinction. One could hold that sensation is seeing and perception is seeing as. Alternatively, one could hold that only perception is seeing but all seeing is seeing as (and thus there is no distinction between seeing and seeing as). A second, closely related way of taking the slogan is that all seeing is conceptualized seeing. Johnston’s discussion of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation relies on a variant of this understanding of the slogan (Johnston 1993, pp. 240-41). He argues that the Gestalt view of perception threatens to leave us with the view that we only perceive a conceptualized reality. A third way to interpret the slogan is to say that it merely points to an obvious fact about descriptions of visual experience: Describing our perceptual

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experiences, describing what we see (for example) often involves employing concepts other than those of color and shape. For instance, I can give a mundane report of what I see: “I see the conference poster on the library wall.” The example illustrates that even a meager description could include concepts other than those of color and shape. Johnston and Hark in particular emphasize this point about our verbal expressions of visual experience.

Next I should flag an interpretive debate that bears on the second question especially: Why was Wittgenstein so interested in aspect perception? A key thread in this debate tries to determine the subject matter of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect perception. Wittgenstein’s frequently quoted remark serves as the entry point for discussion along these lines:

What is the philosophical importance of this phenomenon? Is it really so much odder than everyday visual experiences? Does it cast an unexpected light on them? – In the description of it, (the) problems about the concept of seeing come to a head. (LW I §172)

Glock writes “Wittgenstein attached enormous importance to aspect-perception, since he thought that in this phenomenon ‘problems about the concept of seeing come to a head’ (LW I §172). Presumably this is because it exemplifies in a precise form the concept-saturatedness of perception” (Glock 1996, p. 37). Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect perception bring into focus problems about the concept of seeing. Thus, Glock reasons that Wittgenstein is interested in perception in general. The passage from Glock’s densely packed entry on aspect perception brings out that there is an important interpretive question to address: According to Wittgenstein what problems about the concept of seeing come to a head in aspect perception? Glock’s next sentence implies that one problem about the concept of seeing is the concept-saturatedness of all perception. The phrase “concept-saturatedness of perception” is rather metaphorical and general.

31 Although his account of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation is largely derivative, McFee brings into focus the importance of asking: what is the subject matter of PI II.xi? McFee himself argues that “Even if this disingenuously plays down the idea of seeing-as, attention to the passages where the topic of aspect-perception is central reveals a different focus to the discussion; namely, a focus on seeing (sans phrase)” (1999, pp. 267-68).
What does it mean to say that perception is saturated by concepts? The use of ‘perception’ here adds to the confusion because it is not clear how this usage relates to the ordinary use of ‘see’. Is the idea that all seeing is seeing as? But we have already seen that this slogan is open to multiple interpretations. Perhaps Glock means that perception itself requires the application of concepts? But which concepts? To see a dog must I have the concept ‘dog’? Or is the view rather that to see the dog as a dog I must have the concept ‘dog’? Or maybe the view is that when I see the dog I see it as something even if I do not see it as a dog, and thus some concept is always involved in my seeing the dog. Glock could also mean that we employ concepts to describe our experience. The point is that the claim he attributes to Wittgenstein (i.e. Wittgenstein’s explorations of aspect perception aim to highlight the concept-saturatedness of all perception) does not help to determine the importance of Wittgenstein’s focus on aspect perception because the claim (as stated) is ambiguous.

Other Wittgenstein commentators who explore the claim that perception is concept-saturated, laden with concepts, etc. spell out the claim in different ways without taking note of other possible interpretations or explaining their use of ‘concept,’ which makes the debate all the more confusing. For instance, Hark claims that one issue at stake in Wittgenstein’s discussions of Köhler’s theory is whether or not the descriptions of some or all cases of aspect perception require mastery of concepts (Hark 1990, p. 170, for example). Is it just the description of aspect perception experiences that requires employing concepts, or do concepts somehow figure in the experiences themselves? McFee argues that Wittgenstein is primarily concerned with “standard” perception, in particular the relation between what we see and what we know: “[T]he question is not about seeing-as, but about perception quite generally – it relates to how what we know

\[32\] For a biting attack on philosophers who have seemingly lost sight of the relation between the theorist’s word ‘perceive’ and our ordinary word ‘see’, see Austin 1962.
translates (in some mysterious way), first, into the cognitive stock that we have and, second, into the concepts (from that stock) that we can mobilize in our experience” (McFee 1999, p.271). Here McFee draws the distinction between seeing and seeing as in a way not covered by the various readings of the slogan “all seeing is seeing as” discussed above. He suggests that standard perception (seeing, for example) involves the mobilization of concepts. But McFee also wants this claim to be distinguished from the claim that seeing is seeing as. Notice too that McFee’s use of ‘concept’ does not jibe with Hark’s use of ‘concept’ quoted above.

Yet another murky use of the seeing-seeing as distinction is Johnston’s. He claims that Gestalt psychologists hold that seeing as is involved in all perception and implies that this view suggests that “concepts are a part, indeed a dominant part, of our perception” (Johnston 1993, p. 240). Johnston argues that this suggestion is a dangerous one because it leads easily to the idea that we only perceive a “conceptualized reality” (Johnston 1993, p. 241). He contrasts this “Gestalt” view with his own argument regarding the concept-ladenness of perception: “Concepts are ‘part of perception’ only in the sense that we use concept words to describe what we see, and it would be misleading to infer from this that we only really perceive a conceptualized reality” (Johnston 1993, p. 241).33 Notice that this quote from Johnston answers the question I raise about the passage from Hark cited above (i.e. is concept employment required for having an experience, describing an experience or both?). Also notice that Johnston takes for granted that two claims are interchangeable: (i) that seeing as is involved in all perception; (ii) that concepts are a dominant part of our perception. He explicitly attributes (i) to the Gestaltists and implies that this commits them to (ii) but provides no textual support from Wittgenstein’s discussions of

33 In his second footnote for the Appendix on seeing as and perception, Johnston writes: “It would also be misleading to say that an element of cognition is involved in all vision. If we ask someone who is seated at a table what she sees in front of her, she will reply ‘A table’, but this does not necessarily mean she has been thinking about the table or meditating upon its tableness. Although our representation of what we see necessarily involves concepts, this does not mean that all vision is preceded by a process of cognition” (1993, p. 249).
aspect perception or any of the works of any Gestalt psychologist. Notice that McFee’s account is seemingly in tension with Johnston’s insofar as McFee is arguing that Wittgenstein is interested in perception “quite generally”, not seeing as (McFee 1999, p. 271), but neither commentator elaborates his claims enough to enable a resolution of the tension.

This short list of characterizations of the seeing-seeing as distinction presented in discussions of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation illustrates a difficulty in summarizing and assessing the literature’s portrayal of Wittgenstein’s relation to Köhler. Commentators have not adequately glossed their terminology or explicated their claims about the concept-saturatedness, etc. of perception. All that is clear is that commentators take Wittgenstein to be interested in the connection between sensory experience (or perception or seeing) and thought (or knowledge or concepts or cognition).³⁴

Before considering how Köhler might answer the two questions posed, two caveats and a word about the organization of subsequent discussion are in order. First, of course some substantial discussions of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation do not sit neatly in this classification.³⁵ I am not claiming that these two questions are always the commentators’ primary focus, but they do appear consistently when discussing the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. And this is no surprise since both Wittgenstein and Köhler express interest in links between

³⁴ Dretske 1990 in Schwartz 2004 has sound advice that applies here: “When cognitive scientists speak of visual perception, it seems reasonable to suppose that they are referring to something that we normally describe using the verb to see...To avoid misunderstanding, though, one should ask, at the very beginning, whether visual perception (or seeing) is to be reserved for objects, facts, or something else...If these are all to be counted as instances of visual perception, as they appear to be in ordinary language, then care must be taken in a scientific study of visual perception to specify what is being perceived: an object, a property, an event, a state of affairs, or a fact. For it is not at all clear that the same processes and mechanisms are, or need be, involved in the perception of these different things. Quite the contrary” (2004, pp. 269-70). Dretske argues that while cognitive psychology seems to stipulate that all visual perception is a kind of visual coming to know (‘visual cognition), he recommends that we allow ‘perception’ to include two ways of seeing, two forms of perception—sense perception and cognitive perception. This excerpt from Dretske illustrates that there are important philosophical and psychological issues that arise even from reflection on the relation between the verb ‘to see’ in ordinary language and the theorist’s word ‘visual perception’.

³⁵ For example see Pastore 1991. Pastore argues that Wittgenstein completely misrepresents Köhler’s views and is himself committed to a version of dualism that Köhler shows to be untenable.
thought and sensory experience in the relevant texts. Second, it should be kept in mind that the two questions are umbrella questions deployed to broadly characterize trends in the literature’s handling of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. This is particularly true of the second question (is all seeing, seeing as?), which—if the related interpretive issues flagged above are any indication—dissolves into many questions.

The Literature’s View of Köhler’s Answers to the Two Questions

Put briefly, Köhler’s answers to both questions, according to commentators, follow from his claim that organization is a sensory fact. No time is spent unpacking what Köhler means by ‘sensory fact’. It seems that commentators take it as another way of saying that organization is a perceptual feature. It would be premature to assess this interpretation of Köhler before I have provided my own overview of his theory of perception, so assessment of this reading will have to wait. Returning to the task at hand, commentators argue that since organization is a sensory fact, Köhler’s answer to the first question is that changes in organization are sensory changes. Regarding the second question, there is no clear cut way to summarize the literature’s take on Köhler’s answer. Some commentators say that Köhler answers in the affirmative while others claim that one of Köhler’s major aims is to deny the claim that all seeing is seeing as. As we will see, the answer to the second question depends on how the slogan “all seeing is seeing as” is taken, so my earlier clarificatory work on how to unpack the slogan will be important.
Elaboration of Answers

Is the experience of a change in aspect an intellectual or sensory change?

Seizing on Köhler’s claim that organization is a sensory fact, commentators attribute to him the following view: Since changes in aspect are changes in organization, changes in aspect are sensory changes. ‘Sensory change’ gets cashed out in terms of changes in features of the visual impression or visual field, but no one stops to gloss ‘visual impression’ as used by Wittgenstein or ‘visual field’ as used by Köhler. For instance, Hark writes: “Some, like Köhler, explain the change of aspect by a sensory change – a change in organization and the visual field…If a change of aspect occurs, the person in question experiences a change in the organization of the visual impression” (Hark 1990, pp. 173-74). Budd also omits discussion of this terminological issue. He understands Köhler’s claim that change in organization is a sensory change in terms of a change in the “intrinsic character of his visual impression” (Budd 1989, p. 84). But he does not gloss “intrinsic character”.

Regarding Budd’s interpretation of Köhler, I gather that the former’s talk of intrinsic features of the visual impression is meant to make more precise Wittgenstein’s claim that organization is not on the same level as color and shape.36 But more needs to be said about what makes a feature or property a contribution to the intrinsic character of the visual impression. Budd offers the reader no way of determining whether a feature is intrinsic, so we do not know how we are supposed to make the selection. Nor does he indicate whether there are extrinsic features of the visual impression that are meant to be contrasted with the intrinsic ones. Furthermore, why should we believe that in order for some feature to be visual it must be intrinsic to the visual impression?

36 Various phrases are used to discuss whether organization is comparable to color and shape in the way Köhler appears to be claiming: ‘on a par with,’ ‘on a level with,’ ‘on the same level as’. For more occurrences of these phrases see LPP, pp. 229, 331; LW I, §§465, 512; RPP I §§8991, 1066, 1131; PI II.xi, p. 196.
Is all seeing, seeing as?

Köhler’s answer to the second question is murkier because the question is murkier. The question is ill-defined, so it does not straightforwardly reflect his interests. Nonetheless commentators repeatedly associate versions of the question with him. Which of the three interpretations of the slogan articulated above is most helpful for understanding Köhler’s view on whether all seeing is seeing as? On the first interpretation (i.e. perception involves making inferences from or placing interpretations on sensations) Köhler is reported as rejecting the slogan that all seeing is seeing as. Glock writes: “According to Köhler, what we perceive immediately is not a mosaic of discrete and unorganized stimuli…as empiricism and behaviorism have it” (Glock 1996, p. 37). All agree that one of Köhler’s aims is to provide an alternative to the view that what we really see are isolated, fragmentary and independent stimuli. Commentators cite behaviorism, introspectionism or empiricism as proponents of the view. While it is true that Köhler takes all of these schools of thought to be mistaken, as will be shown in my overview of Köhler’s theory, his ultimate target is what he called the constancy hypothesis. So none of these ‘isms’ is mistaken per se—rather they are mistaken because of their unwarranted adherence to the constancy hypothesis. Again, further discussion of this will have to wait until I have presented Köhler’s theory in the second chapter.

As for the second reading of the slogan (i.e. that all seeing is conceptualized seeing) some commentators argue that Köhler holds that we only perceive a conceptualized reality. For example, recall from above that Johnston attributes the following claims to the Gestaltists: “[A]ll perception involves seeing an aspect” (Johnston 1993, p. 241) and “we only ever really perceive a conceptualized reality” (Johnston 1993, p. 241). Johnston does not clarify what “perceive a
conceptualized reality” means. In particular, he does not give us the tools to compare or contrast this claim with the less controversial view that our perception of reality is concept-laden.  

According to Johnston’s rendition of the Gestaltists, their view that all seeing is conceptualized seeing includes the claim that an everyday instance of seeing a chair involves seeing the chair as a chair. He argues that Wittgenstein would question such a use of the ‘seeing…as…’ locution:

“This is certainly not how we normally use the phrase ‘seeing as’ and so the meaning of the [Gestalt] claim is uncertain” (Johnston 1993, p. 241). Johnston cites RPP I §983 to support his argument that Wittgenstein would reject the idea that seeing a chair involves seeing the chair as a chair. Note though that the example Wittgenstein investigates at RPP I §983 involves grasping (\textit{auffassen}) an object as an object not seeing a chair as a chair. It is not clear that grasping an object as an object is the same sort of experience as seeing a chair as a chair. To grasp an object as an object the perceiver does not need to know what the object is.  

To see a chair as a chair the perceiver needs to know what the object is. So Johnston’s portrayal of Wittgenstein’s criticism of Köhler is problematic because he passes seamlessly from the case of seeing a chair as a chair to the case of seeing an object as an object. Perhaps he thinks that Wittgenstein’s point about the impoverished character of the concept ‘seeing an object as an object’ and its lack of fit with our everyday concept ‘seeing as’ would apply equally well in both cases. But arguably, these cases should be distinguished because the possibility of such a distinction is partly what is at stake in the Gestalt arguments against the view that the organization sensory data into objects is only possible after a certain amount of knowledge has been acquired.

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37 Yet he seems to think Wittgenstein rejects the less controversial formulation as well. Johnston writes: “Our concepts do not stand between us and reality, rather they are the tools we use to describe it” (1993, p. 241).

38 Some might argue that to see an object as an object the perceiver needs a concept ‘object’, however primitive. In this connection, see Spelke 1988 for interesting and important work on infant object perception.
By contrast, the consequence of other interpretations of Köhler’s theory of perception (e.g. Hark, Schulte, and McFee) is that Köhler would deny that perception is only of a conceptualized reality. These commentators emphasize that Köhler’s view is that we can see organized units without knowing their significance or assigning meaning to them: “[O]ne first recognizes objects or groups of objects as gestalts (and thus sees them as visual objects, for example) and then, in a second step, gives them a meaning” (Schulte 1993, p. 82).39

The third reading (i.e. that apt description of many of our perceptual experiences involves mastery of concepts other than those of color and shape) turns out to be a line of criticism against Köhler, as will be shown below. For now, a more precise way of thinking about the third reading of the second question will aid discussion. Consider a distinction Wittgenstein makes between optical and conceptual aspects.40 Wittgenstein never provides even loose definitions of the two kinds of aspect, but Hark formulates the difference in the following way. Optical aspects “occur automatically and change shape rather like after-images” (Hark 1990, p. 168). Also, less conceptual mastery is required to describe experiences of optical aspects. The double-cross figure serves as an example (PI II.xi, p. 207). While viewing the double-cross figure a perceiver might say, “I see it [the figure] as a black cross on a white ground”. Although we may choose to use “other than visual concepts” to describe experiences of optical aspects, we may be indifferent about such descriptions (Hark 1990, p. 168). Conceptual aspects are those for which “there is often an apt formulation”, and the experience of these aspects “can only be expressed by other

39 In an influential paper on the topic, Fodor and Pylyshyn 1981 in Noë and Thompson 2002, include a footnote that may help clarify a philosophical stake in the first two readings of the slogan “all seeing is seeing as”. They argue that it is probably right to hold “that every case of seeing a thing involves seeing the thing as something or other. True, you can see the Pole Star and not see it as the Pole Star. But, quite plausibly, you cannot see the Pole Star without seeing it as either the Pole Star or a little speck of light, or a firefly, or a star that Granny likes best…or something. If this is right then though seeing is an extensional relation, some of the logically necessary conditions on ‘x sees y’ are intentional” (2002, endnote 19, p. 226).

40 To make his case, Hark cites RPP I §§970, 1017; RPP II §509. I intentionally refrain from elaborating on Hark’s rendering of the optical-conceptual distinction. In Part II of Chapter Three I discuss my own rendering of the distinction.
than visual concepts” (Hark 1990, pp. 168-90); sometimes a “purely visual” or geometrical
description can be hard to imagine; “the description of conceptual aspects requires mastery of
many alternative concepts (LW §699)” (Hark 1990, p. 169). In the case of conceptual aspects,
we tend to care more about which non-visual concepts we use in our descriptions. According to
Hark, Köhler’s “aspects of organization” are more on the purely optical side of the spectrum.
Köhler holds that organization is a sensory feature that pervades all perception. He argues that a
perceiver’s visual field can contain organized entities without the perceiver knowing the use or
significance of the entities. Thus if the question is restricted to organization (i.e. an optical
aspect) Köhler would say that all seeing is seeing as. As we will see, according to most
commentators (including Hark) Köhler conveniently ignores or downplays conceptual aspects,
and so he would not claim that all seeing involves seeing conceptual aspects. \(^{41}\)

**Wittgenstein’s Reactions to Köhler’s Answers**

As we will see, the literature’s final analysis of Köhler is this: In his quest to provide an
alternative to the view that we must construct organized entities out of collections of raw data, he
assimilates organization to color. This assimilation is taken to be evident in Köhler’s insistence
that organization is a sensory fact and in his attempt to show that the organization of, say, the
visual field does not depend on projecting acquired knowledge (‘meaning’) into the visual field.
Wittgenstein is portrayed as showing how and why this assimilation is misleading and
dangerous. Next I discuss how and why assimilating organization to color is misleading and
dangerous, according to the literature.

\(^{41}\) See also Cook 1994 and McFee 1999.
Wittgenstein’s Complaints

Four claims are repeatedly introduced in expositions of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation:

(i) Köhler assimilates organization to color.
(ii) Köhler reifies organization.
(iii) Köhler prioritizes gestalt over meaning.
(iv) Köhler is guilty of conceptual confusion.

These claims represent the literature’s portrayal of Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler on seeing aspects. Each claim attributes a mistake to Köhler. I take it that the first two mistakes are most readily detectable in the way Köhler answers the first question (i.e. is a change of aspect sensory or intellectual?). The third mistake comes out most clearly in his answer to the second question. The fourth mistake is a general one that is mainly the result of the mismatch between the problems that vexed Köhler and his method of solving them.

(i) Köhler assimilates organization to color.

The literature’s most recurring criticism of Köhler is that he assimilates organization to color. I choose this generic formulation to designate commentators’ focus on the relation between organization and color in Köhler’s theory. Now for more detail. Budd writes: “The claim that organization of the visual field is a sensory fact likens organization to color – for color is also a sensory fact; and it insists that organization resembles color in being an original feature of the visual field, not something that is imported into visual experience by learning” (Budd 1989, p. 84). Here the focus is the metaphysical status of organization. The complaint is that Köhler takes organization to be a visual property, no less a feature of the visual impression than color or shape. Organization is “another visual feature…which, although more fundamental than form and color, is ‘just as’ visible (Köhler, pp. 30, 201)” (Hark 1990, p.174). Or as Wayne
Stromberg puts it: “One of the faults in Köhler’s exposition of his nomenclature is his insistence that this visual ‘organization’ is just the same sort of sensory datum as is color” (Stromberg 1980, p. 135). Alternatively, the criticism is sometimes framed in terms of the character of seeing: On Köhler’s view seeing organization “phenomenologically similar” to seeing color.\footnote{Cf. Stromberg 1980, p. 129.} Another way the criticism is framed is in terms of perceptual reports. The criticism is that Köhler takes reports of color perception to be a model for all descriptions of perceptual experience. Cook says, for example: “Köhler’s mistake, according to Wittgenstein, is that he treats ‘I see some red here’ and ‘I see his sly smile’ as being alike in a particular way: he takes the former as a paradigm and assimilates the latter to it” (Cook 1994, p. 144). The base of all these worries is that Köhler exaggerates the comparison between color and organization by taking color perception as a model and assimilating perceptual organization to it.

On behalf of Wittgenstein, commentators argue that Köhler’s assimilation is unwarranted. This criticism is launched in the context of discussing the first question raised earlier (i.e. is the experience of a change of aspect sensory or intellectual?). Köhler wants to say that a change in organization is a sensory change, just as a change in color is. The charge is that Köhler does not appreciate a relevant difference in how we register changes in organization and color. Our ways of determining whether there has been a change in color perception do not apply in the cases of change of organization. And this difference throws doubt on the claim that changes in organization are sensory changes. (Good examples of this line of reasoning are found in Glock and Budd especially.) The implied reasoning here is that for Köhler’s claim that organization is a sensory fact to hold, color and organization must be comparable in this respect. Yet color and organization are not comparable in this respect. For example, by making an exact copy of an object of sight we can represent perceived changes in the color of that object, but the
exact copy cannot likewise capture perceived changes in organization when we experience a change in aspect because the organization of the object of sight has not changed. This is supposed to be one result of Wittgenstein’s examination of the puzzle-picture in PI II.xi, p. 196. In the absence of any alternative way of determining whether there has been a change in organization of what is seen, Köhler’s claim (that organization is a sensory fact) is rather thin. It relies on an unsupported comparison between organization and color.

Different conclusions can be drawn from this criticism. For instance, that organization is not a sensory feature at all and thus a change in organization is not a sensory change. Along these lines, Budd argues that organization is not a perceptible feature of the material object of sight, like color or shape (Budd 1989, p. 85). A milder conclusion to draw is that the above considerations only show that organization is not sensory to the same degree as or in the same respect as color. This assumes a willingness to talk in terms of degrees of being sensory or different senses of ‘sensory’. Stromberg takes this interpretive route. He writes: “The desire to say that ‘what changes’ in an aspect change is something quite like our color sensations is wrong; but perhaps not totally wrong” (Stromberg 1980, p.136). Stromberg notes that Wittgenstein considers cases of change in attitude where we might want to say that there has been an alteration in the visual impression. This is meant to support the idea that change of aspect and change of color are similar in this respect.

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43 In Chapter Four I argue that at PI II.xi, p. 196 Wittgenstein is challenging the idea that a change in organization cannot be captured in a pictorial representation of what is seen by showing that the exact copy is not an ideal description of what is seen in aspect-seeing contexts.

44 See Zettel (Z for short) §205. At several junctures in GP, Köhler argues that changes in the organization of the sensory field are a matter of changes in attitude. At the same time, he wants to distinguish this use of ‘attitude’ from the use that is associated with intellectual acts.
(ii) Köhler reifies organization.

Perhaps a more familiar Wittgensteinian charge is that Köhler reifies *Gestalten* and organization because his descriptions of the organization of the “sensory field” include talk of objects and existence. Köhler characterizes organization with such terms as ‘concrete individual’, ‘visual thing’, ‘visual reality’, and ‘sensory fact’. The reification is not merely terminological (Glock 1996, p. 37); Köhler’s use of these terms shows that seeing different aspects (*Gestalten*) is literally a matter of seeing two visual objects that differ in organization. Further, Köhler takes organization to be as much a visual feature of the objects as color and shape. His theory “treated the *façon de parler* of speaking of the duck-rabbit in terms of ‘two different visual objects’ as though it embodied ontological commitment: it reified visual objects—and these could readily be taken (mistaken) for ‘mental images’” (McFee 1999, p. 272).

Commentators take the temptation to posit a private object to be an outcome of the tension between two ideas: (i) the comparison between organization and color or shape is mistaken because unlike changes in color or shape, changes in organization cannot be registered in an exact copy of the object of sight; and (ii) organization is, nonetheless, a visual feature. To hold on to (ii) in the face of (i) is to “[proceed] from the idea of the visual impression as an inner object” (*PI* II.xi, p.196). In other words, although the outer object of sight, the puzzle-picture for example, has not undergone any change in organization, the organization of the perceiver’s inner object is said to change. Budd writes: “Wittgenstein asserts that if we yield to the temptation to credit a visual impression with the feature of organization – a feature that is comparable to color

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45 Monk writes that the trouble begins in the initial characterization of a *Gestalt*, not just in cases of change of organization. Köhler describes a Gestalt as ‘a concrete individual and characteristic entity, existing as something detached and having a shape or form as one of its attributes’. This already makes it sound as if what was being described was an object, a private object,” (Monk 1990, p. 512).

46 See also Schulte 1993, p. 81.

in being sensory, rather than intellectual – then we are thinking of a visual impression as an inner object or materialization, the organization of which changes when a change of aspect takes place” (Budd 1989, p. 86). The upshot is that Köhler posits private objects with private features, and this is incoherent.

(iii) Köhler prioritizes gestalt over meaning.

An obscure yet intriguing line of criticism of Köhler has to do with “meaning” and its contribution (or lack thereof) to the perception of organized wholes (Gestalten). To clarify the context of this line of criticism, I will briefly summarize some main ideas in Köhler’s account of the relation between organized wholes and meaning. In GP (1929) Köhler uses ‘meaning’ to collectively describe acquired knowledge; for example, knowledge about the practical significance or use of an object of perception are part of the meaning of that object (GP 1929/72). Meaning theory, as Köhler calls it, holds that the visual field is a mosaic of unorganized bits. On this view, the visual field is structured or organized only insofar as the perceiver projects meaning onto the visual. The projection of meaning onto the visual field is an intellectual process. Köhler rejects meaning theory. He denies that the “original” or “primary” organization of the sensory field is the product of some intellectual process that follows sensory experience. Further, he argues that we organize discrete stimuli into structured wholes prior to the acquisition of knowledge about the objects in question. An even stronger claim Köhler makes is that meaning “follows the lines drawn by” organization (GP 1929/152). Wittgenstein commentators take this last claim to mean that perception of Gestalten is a precondition for meaning (McFee 1999, p. 85). Hark reiterates the point in a variety of ways:

48 I save my fuller account of the relation for Chapter Two.
The perception of aspects and meaning is in any case determined by the purely optical principle of organization. (Hark 1990, p. 169)

Köhler expressly denies the effect of knowledge and meaning on the formation of the original organizations... As a sensory-unit the object exists prior to the process of meaning-acquisition... So meaning is not explained by prior association, but association by prior organization. (Hark 1990, p. 174)

As a sensory unit the object exists prior to the process of meaning-acquisition. (Hark 1990, p. 174)

What, according to commentators, is problematic about this “prioritizing gestalt over meaning”? A consequence of the view is that it is not clear how ‘seeing as’, ‘seeing’, ‘visual object’ and other concepts should be characterized in Köhler’s theory. His uses do not match familiar, everyday uses. Recall an interpretation I attributed to Johnston. He claims that Köhler is committed to the view that seeing objects always involves “seeing an object as an object”.

Johnston tries out ways to define the concept ‘seeing an object as an object’ to find not only that the concept differs significantly from what we normally mean by ‘seeing as’ but also that insofar as it has character of its own, it is minimal. The concept ‘seeing an object as an object’ seems to differ from aspect perception “in that it neither defines a relation (i.e. something that has a variety of manifestations through time) nor an experience that can be continuous” (Johnston 1993, pp. 241, 242).

Schulte also examines the consequences of Köhler’s claim that seeing Gestalten is independent of meaning. He distills Köhler’s thought in the following way: “The perception of pure gestalts is a precondition of the possibility of lending sense to an object” (Schulte 1993, p.

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49 Here I borrow Schulte’s phrase (1993, p. 83, for instance).
Schulte takes this idea to be equivalent to a two-step view\textsuperscript{50} of perception of objects: “[O]ne first recognizes objects or groups of objects as gestalts (and thus sees them as visual objects, for example) and then, in a second step, gives them a meaning” (Schulte 1993, p. 82). On this interpretation, Wittgenstein takes issue with this thesis about perception on the grounds that noticing a change in aspect or gestalt switch is seeing a \textit{meaning} (Schulte 1993, p. 83). Schulte cites \textit{RPP} I §869 for support.\textsuperscript{51} A consequence of Köhler’s view that \textit{Gestalten} take priority over meaning is that we can perceive them without giving them a meaning (Schulte 1993, p. 83). But how should we understand “perceive a \textit{Gestalt} without giving it a \textit{meaning}?” Schulte holds that it is undeniable that we can see something as an independent, separate object without being able to specify what kind of object it is (Schulte 1993, p. 84). However this reading of “perceive a \textit{Gestalt} without giving it a \textit{meaning}” treats Köhler’s claim as a plausible scientific hypothesis, and taken as such it is irrelevant to “foundational problems about our psychological concepts” (Schulte 1993, p. 84). According to Schulte we should instead take Köhler’s thesis as one about our concepts. Then Wittgenstein’s criticisms appear convincing. On this reading Wittgenstein’s insight is that we cannot speak of perception at all if we try to talk in terms of “pure gestalts” without further characteristics (Schulte 1993, p. 84). To say “I see an object” or “I see a thing” is “legitimate and intelligible only in a context which is well defined in most other respects” (Schulte 1993, p. 84). Descriptions such as “I see an object beyond the hill and barn over there” are intelligible, but we cannot and do not offer descriptions such as “I see a thing over there to the left of that object” (Schulte 1993, p. 84). The latter example deserves sustained discussion if it is to serve as a criticism of Köhler. In particular, Schulte should say why we can and do offer

\textsuperscript{50} I have not encountered any passages in \textit{GP} (1929) that indicate Köhler holds this view. By the contrary, he appears to say just the opposite, especially in the final chapters of \textit{GP} where he argues that we do not infer the emotions of others from observing their behavior. We see their emotions.

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. \textit{LPP} pp. 102, 333.
descriptions such as “What’s that over there?” while pointing. He must explain how this kind of
description differs from the kind(s) he claims are unintelligible. As we will see in the next
chapter, this example (“I see a thing over there to the left of that object”) is quite similar to one
Köhler gives in his arguments against meaning theory.

Cook cites RPP I §423 as proof that Wittgenstein rejects the idea that we see an object as
an object or unit. I reproduce it here for easy reference:

Can I, e.g., say: I see the chair as object, as unit? In the same way as I say I see now the
black cross on a white ground, and now the white cross on a black ground?
If someone asks me "What have you there in front of you?" I shall of course answer "A
chair"; so I shall treat it as a unit. But can one now say I see it as a unit?
And can I see the cross-figure without seeing it this way or that?

Like Johnston, Cook applies what he gleans from Wittgenstein’s remarks on seeing a table as a
table52 to RPP I §423. But unlike Johnston, Cook notes that ‘see the table as a table’ and ‘see the
table as a unit’ are distinguishable. Nevertheless Cook argues that Wittgenstein would make the
same claim about both cases: “Unless Köhler could show how we could see a table otherwise
than as a unit, there’s no sense to the idea that we do see the table as a unit” (Cook 1994, pp.
145-46). Here it is not clear what kind of cases of seeing Cook has in mind. In plenty of
everyday cases of seeing we see objects without seeing them as units (e.g. when some of the
boundaries of a unit are occluded by the boundaries of other units or when the background
obscures the boundaries of the unit). On the other hand, Wittgenstein does say that when we, for
example, use the noun ‘chair’ we treat that something as a unit. When we see a chair we
sometimes walk over to it, take hold of it and take ourselves to be touching the same thing as we
see. What is the difference between seeing the table as a unit and (merely?) treating it as a unit?
Cook does not pursue the issue. Nor does he properly specify his claim that there is no sense to

52 See RPP I §§411-12.
the idea that we see the table as a unit unless we could see it otherwise than as a unit. For this claim to be plausible, it needs to rule out cases where we can and do see objects or units otherwise than as objects or units. For instance, it makes sense to say someone sees an object other than as an object when that object is partly occluded, or when its boundaries are obscured because of poor lighting or camouflage.

The upshot of criticisms of Köhler’s claim that there can be perception of objects (Gestalten) without meaning playing any role in that perception is that it makes the divide between Gestalt and meaning too neat. Thus McFee writes: “[G]estalt psychology was mistaken, Wittgenstein thought, about the degree to which perceiving gestalts should be contrasted with acquiring knowledge” (McFee 1999, p. 272). Commentators agree that Köhler disregards the fact that our descriptions of perceiving objects typically involve meaning, knowledge, or interpretation. He overlooks the possibility that some aspects cannot be specified without interpretation. These commentators imply that if Köhler had appreciated this fact about how we describe our perceptual experience, he would have recognized the extent to which meanings and interpretations inform our perception of the world.

(iv) Köhler is guilty of conceptual confusion.

The final complaint against Köhler that I will examine is not so much a stand-alone criticism as a summation of the commentators’ other three criticisms: Köhler is guilty of conceptual confusion. For example, regarding the third criticism (i.e. Köhler prioritizes gestalt over meaning) Schulte writes: “The thesis of the priority of gestalt over meaning does not agree with the content of our normal concept of seeing something; and that is why Köhler’s attempt to give pride of place to pure gestalts runs the risk of causing conceptual confusions” (Schulte
1993, p. 85). The natural question to ask is: What concepts are confused in Köhler’s theory of perception, according to commentators? A host of concepts get mentioned in this connection: ‘seeing’, ‘seeing as’, ‘thinking’, ‘interpreting’, ‘change of aspect’, ‘organization’, ‘visual object’, ‘seeing something’, ‘what is perceived’. The charge of conceptual confusion gets developed along several lines of thought. Commentators discuss a variety of symptoms of Köhler’s conceptual confusion. The predominant one is that Köhler ignores two conceptual links: those between the concepts ‘seeing as’ and ‘thinking’ and those between the concepts ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’. (In Chapter Four, I agree with this facet of the literature’s portrayal of Köhler’s mistakes.) Hark’s presentation of this point stands out. Recall his distinction between optical and conceptual aspects. Using this distinction, Hark argues that Köhler’s theory of perception makes all seeing of aspects the seeing of optical aspects (Hark 1990, pp. 167-70, esp. 168) and that Köhler’s theory downplays any role of the conceptual in describing optical aspects. Thus Köhler conveniently ignores conceptual aspects, and his theory allows for too strong a contrast between optical and conceptual aspects. According to Hark, Wittgenstein holds that optical aspects are distinguishable from conceptual aspects in that it often makes sense to talk of the aptness of a description of conceptual aspects, but the description of optical aspects still requires some conceptual skill: “Optical aspects are not fundamental because they are supposed to be the truest copy of reality, but because less conceptual skill is required for their description” (Hark 1990, p. 170). Here it is not clear what “less conceptual skill” means. Does describing a conceptual aspect require more skill at employing the same concepts used to describe an optical one, or is the idea that describing a conceptual aspect requires the employment of different, perhaps more sophisticated concepts than those employed to describe an optical one? Returning to Hark’s argument, contrary to Köhler, not all aspects are optical aspects, and even in the description of
optical aspects we may need to employ concepts other than those of color and shape. There may be a question of aptness of description even in the case of optical aspects. All in all, the divide between conceptual and optical aspects is not so stark as Köhler’s theory is in danger of suggesting.

Budd argues along these lines too, but he focuses specifically on Köhler’s treatment of the experience of a change of aspect and draws the stronger conclusion that organization is not a visual property. Köhler says that changes in organization are sensory changes and that organization is no less sensory than color and shape. Evaluating these claims Budd writes: “[T]he claim that there is a third feature of a visual impression, as directly or immediately visual as color or shape, is not only unilluminating, but obfuscating. It obscures the subject because the insistence that a change of aspect consists in the change of a feature comparable to shape or color is designed to blind us to characteristics which a change of aspect shares with thought, rather than with what is specific to vision – colored shapes” (Budd 1989, pp. 85-6). Budd frames his criticism in a more metaphysically loaded way than other commentators when he claims that Wittgenstein holds that organization is not an intrinsic, directly perceivable feature of the visual impression. Yet the salient point is the same; namely, that Köhler wrongly insists on a comparison between paradigmatic visual properties and organization.

Thus Köhler ignores links between ‘seeing as’ and ‘thinking’ when in fact all aspect-seeing is not the seeing of optical aspects, and even the descriptions of optical aspects require some conceptual skill. ter Hark claims that essentially Köhler reduces ‘seeing as’ to ‘seeing’ in his quest for a purely visual account of the organization of the visual field. He writes: “[O]ther kinds of aspects – conceptual aspects – are left out of consideration (RPP I, §1113). And since conceptual aspects illustrate so well to what extent the logic of ‘seeing as’ is bound up with
‘thinking’ and ‘interpreting’, it is no surprise that Köhler has trimmed off these branches of the concept” (Hark 1990, p. 176).53 Regarding the reduction of ‘seeing as’ to ‘seeing’, Hark emphasizes that when one experiences a change of aspect “the optical image remains to an important extent the same” (Hark 1990, p. 186).54 This feature shows that it misrepresents the logic of ‘seeing as’ to unqualifiedly claim that organization is visual. Köhler’s account of organization as a sensory fact does not properly appreciate this feature of the experience (Hark 1990, p. 186).

A less detailed exploration of Wittgenstein’s charge that Köhler is guilty of conceptual confusion is based on the claim that Köhler prioritizes gestalt over meaning. The worry is that prioritizing gestalt over meaning allows for uses of ‘seeing as’ that fail to fit our ordinary concept of ‘seeing as’. For instance, Johnston claims that Köhler’s view requires the concept ‘seeing an object as an object’, and this concept is mysterious and confusing (Johnston 1993, p. 241). Likewise, Köhler’s uses of ‘organization’, ‘visual object’, ‘what is perceived’, or ‘what changes’ fail to do justice to the familiar uses of these concepts. Schulte writes: “[W]hen Köhler claims that seeing two different aspects of something is literally a case of seeing two different objects, he goes beyond the meaning of the concepts ‘visual object’ and ‘see’” (Schulte 1993, p. 81). On Schulte’s interpretation, Wittgenstein distinguishes two ideas: (i) we might find talk of two different visual objects more apt a description of our experience in a given situation; and (ii) there really are two different objects seen. Wittgenstein is sympathetic with (i) but holds that (ii) is misleading. In a similar vein, citing RPP I §1068 and 1102, Cook claims that Wittgenstein’s

53 See also Hark 1990, pp. 179, 182, 184.
54 The qualifier “to an important extent” is a bit odd here. In other places Hark unqualifiedly states that in the experience of a change of aspect “nothing changes optically” (1990, p. 167), that “the object of perception does not undergo any change in color, form, or distance to the observer” (1990, p. 171), that “optically and geometrically speaking everything stays the same” (1990, p. 171), and “[i]f there is any geometrical or optical change, no matter how slight, the mystery immediately disappears, since a physical explanation can be given” (1990, p. 171).
main complaint is that Köhler’s view that organization is no less sensory than color disregards differences between two concepts of ‘what is perceived’ (Cook 1994, p. 143).

Stromberg presents another variation of Wittgenstein’s accusation of conceptual confusion. He argues that “Wittgenstein is troubled as well by Köhler’s typification of all aspect changes as changes in visual ‘organization.’ Köhler’s mistake seems the same as Helmholtz’s: he has forgotten that what may sensibly be said in describing an aspect change will vary from case to case…The search for a univocal description of ‘what changes’ when the aspects of all ambiguous drawings change, is an exercise in the concoction of nonsense” (Stromberg 1980, p. 137). Stromberg’s rendition of the charge of conceptual confusion highlights Wittgenstein’s persistent reminder that when philosophers and psychologists go searching for a single description to cover all cases of a phenomenon (in this instance, aspect perception), ignoring differences and exaggerating similarities between cases, the resulting account will not only be incomplete but out of touch with our everyday notions of the phenomenon.

**Trains of Reasoning**

Before noting some worries about the literature’s portrayal of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation, let me reiterate the main lines of reasoning of the commentators who, to a greater or lesser extent, explore the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. Commentators typically start by reporting Köhler’s key claim that organization is a sensory fact. They argue that this claim amounts to assimilating organization to color. The assimilation proves faulty, but instead of granting relevant dissimilarities between organization and color and acknowledging relevant similarities between organization and thinking, Köhler holds onto the claim that organization is a sensory fact without examining its implications for our concepts ‘seeing’, ‘thinking’, ‘visual’,...
‘object’, ‘what is seen’, ‘organization’ and related concepts. Ultimately the claim that organization is a sensory fact (and the consequence that changes in organization are sensory changes) is unhelpful and dangerous because relevant dissimilarities between the concepts ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing as’ are overlooked. Köhler ends up reifying organization. Thus, in the case of visual perception for example, he treats visual organization as a visual property or feature of the visual impression. All in all, unqualified allegiance to the claim that organization is a sensory fact may tempt one to posit a private object. For example, take Wittgenstein’s puzzle-picture case (PI II xi, p. 196). Somebody suddenly sees the solution to the puzzle—before there was a senseless tangle of lines, and now there is a human shape. We want to ask, “What changed?” There has been no change in the color and shape of the visual impression. But to explain the change can we say that the experiential shift is a change in another feature of the visual impression, a change in its organization? The correspondence between the color and shape of the visual impression with the color and shape of the puzzle-picture is such that any changes in the color and shape of the puzzle-picture would be reflected in an exact copy of the puzzle-picture, but there is no such correspondence between the supposed organization of the visual impression and the puzzle-picture. So the copy of the puzzle-picture both before and after the subject sees the solution will be the same. No change in organization is shown. At this point Wittgenstein’s interlocutor (Köhler?) insists that the shift from seeing a tangle of lines to seeing the solution to the puzzle-picture is a change in organization, but now he must say that the organization is a feature of his private picture, not the publicly viewable puzzle-picture.

The other main line of reasoning in the literature’s portrayal of Wittgenstein’s interest in Köhler’s ideas starts with Köhler’s claim that organization of the sensory field is independent of the influence of acquired knowledge or meaning. Commentators claim that this amounts to, as
Schulte puts it, “prioritizing gestalt over meaning”. Consequently, Köhler disregards or conveniently ignores links between seeing and thinking and seeing as and thinking. For example, Köhler does not discuss conceptual aspects because these are the aspects that “illustrate so well to what extent the logic of ‘seeing as’ is bound up with ‘thinking’ and ‘interpreting’ (Hark 1990, p. 176). Some aspects cannot be specified independently of interpretation, and Köhler disregards this fact in his theory (Hark 1990, p. 180). Thus, Köhler’s claims that organization is a sensory fact and that organization occurs independent of meaning are misleading because they misconstrue the concepts ‘seeing,’ ‘seeing-as,’ ‘thinking,’ ‘interpreting,’ ‘organization’ and the relations between these concepts.

Overwhelmingly, commentators who write about the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation argue that Wittgenstein takes Köhler’s theory of sensory organization (as found in his GP) to be an instructive example of rampant, gross conceptual confusion. Budd implies that Köhler’s theory of perception is among those theories that demonstrate “an inclination to assimilate elements of the mind to a small set of favoured but inadequate paradigms” (Budd 1989, p. 79). And Schulte begins his analysis of Köhler’s theory with the following announcement: “In order to see what a psychologist who is knowingly or unknowingly involved in foundational problems can learn from Wittgenstein, it will be helpful to take one of these problems as an example” (Schulte 1993, p. 80). Furthermore, Köhler is portrayed as guilty of a mismatch between problem (conceptual) and method employed to solve the problem (experimental). Wittgenstein’s interest in Köhler is thus largely represented as a negative one—Köhler is guilty of a number of key conceptual mistakes in the exposition of his theory of perception. He is portrayed as downplaying links between seeing as and thinking while exaggerating links between seeing as

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55 Budd thinks that Köhler is pursuing an answer to the question: what constitutes a change of aspect? In answering, Köhler falls victim to the empiricist bias to favour the sense-impression as the paradigm of mind, and he thereby fails to recognize features aspect-seeing shares with thinking.
and seeing. By contrast—yet in a similar spirit of reductionism to promote their theories—meaning theory, behaviourism, introspectionism, or empirism/empiricism⁵⁶ are portrayed as downplaying links between seeing as and seeing while exaggerating links between seeing as and thinking. Both Köhler and his opposition (meaning theory & co.) are at bottom, operating with an overly primitive conception of seeing. Both sides unreflectively take color sensation to be their model for sensory experience.

Problems with the Literature’s Portrayal

One question to ask when assessing the literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation is whether important and interesting connections between the two thinkers are underrepresented or even altogether missing in the discussions. Some trends emerge.

Little mention of points of contact

The consensus in the literature seems to be that Wittgenstein’s interest in Köhler is a matter of taking his readers through an instructive case of conceptual confusion that results from the attempt to address philosophical problems about seeing with the methods of experimental psychology. Not many commentators go beyond meager mention of points of contact between the two thinkers. Hark 1995 is an exception but in this paper he deals with Köhler’s views on psychophysical parallelism and memory, not visual experience. Cook is also an exception, and he does discuss visual experience. He devotes time to exploring affinities between Wittgenstein and Köhler beyond the usual one-line mention. But both his starting points for interpretation and his philosophical agenda are rather controversial, which makes it difficult to compare his reading

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⁵⁶ In Chapter Two I discuss Köhler on “empirism”. He distinguishes empirism and empiricism. Köhler regularly employs ‘empirism’ although commentators on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation tend to talk of empiricism.
of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation with other accounts in a fruitful way. Earlier I claimed that
Cook believes that Wittgenstein must have read Köhler in 1930. Cook’s only textual support for
this claim is a handful of passages from *Philosophical Grammar*\(^{57}\) that are thematically similar to
topics Köhler addresses—Wittgenstein does not mention Köhler or employ terminology that
would suggest he had read Köhler in 1930. An even more controversial aspect of Cook’s
interpretation is that he hopes to show that reflection on Köhler’s theory inspires Wittgenstein to
abandon the *Tractatus* view and take up a revised version of behaviorism and phenomenalism
that Cook attributes to Köhler as well (hence the supposed affinity). Aside from Cook, there is
brief mention of a shared sensibility between Wittgenstein and Köhler. Such authors usually
point out that Wittgenstein would most likely be sympathetic with Köhler’s rejection of the view
that to perceive objects we must interpret or make inferences from what is given in sensory
experience. Sensory experience does not deliver a mere “mosaic” of sensations or raw stimuli
that must be structured into entities by an intellectual act such as inference or interpretation.
McFee writes that Wittgenstein and Köhler agree that sameness of retinal image does not imply
sameness of visual impression or visual experience. McFee does not elaborate on the
connection, though it could be taken as an allusion to Köhler’s constancy hypothesis.\(^{58}\)

**Underdeveloped accounts of Köhler**

Another trend is that, surprisingly, commentators do not provide detailed study of
Köhler’s ideas or illuminate his terminology despite acknowledging that he is a major influence
on Wittgenstein’s remarks about philosophical psychology generally and aspect perception
specifically. Schulte calls Köhler the most important influence on later Wittgenstein’s

\(^{57}\) *PG* for short.
\(^{58}\) In Chapter Two I discuss the constancy hypothesis and Köhler’s rejection of it.
discussions of philosophical psychology. The commentators are anxious to get on to Wittgenstein’s complaints about Köhler. For example, they do not attempt to spell out what explanatory work ‘sensory fact’ does in Köhler’s theory of perception even though his core argument is that organization is a sensory fact. It is hard to gather the force of Köhler’s claim without understanding what he means by ‘sensory fact’. And rarely are Köhler’s ideas situated in a historical context that sheds light on what motivates his claims about sensory experience. Perhaps this is because more often than not, discussion of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation is embedded within broader discussions of Wittgenstein and thus treated merely as preparatory work or as a means to a different philosophical end.

**Little attention paid to terminological difficulties**

Along the same lines there is little scholarly effort spent addressing the (sometimes) ill fit between Wittgenstein’s terms of art and Köhler’s theoretical vocabulary. For instance, Wittgenstein’s use of ‘aspect’ and Köhler’s widely employed and admittedly ambiguous term ‘organization’ are sometimes taken to be interchangeable. Johnston’s account of Köhler is a case in point. Commentators who do stop to consider the relation between the two argue that Köhler’s use of ‘organization’ is meant to cover all cases of seeing aspects. Then a criticism is launched: Köhler is too reductive in his treatment of aspect perception. Not all aspects are aspects of organization; not all cases of seeing an aspect can be described in terms of the organization of the visual field. To repeat one of Hark’s claims, apt description of conceptual aspects is only possible when a host of concepts other than color and shape are employed. Seeing conceptual aspects does require acquired knowledge or ‘meaning’ (to use Köhler’s term). This equivalence between Wittgenstein’s use of ‘aspect’ and Köhler’s use of ‘organization’ is
misleading. As we will see in Chapter Two and Four, Köhler does not deny that the majority of perceptual experience is influenced by ‘meaning’. To guard against misinterpretation of his view on the matter, he reminds the reader that he is not denying that acquired knowledge influences experience. In addition, at one juncture in GP, he supposes for the sake of argument that all experience is influenced by meaning. He argues that even if this were the case (on his account it is not the case), what reason have we to deny that all of these phenomena are just as real as, if not more real than, the introspectionist’s pure sensations? I have encountered a single exception to this assumed equivalence between Wittgenstein’s use of ‘aspect’ and Köhler’s use of ‘organization’. In his critique of Wittgenstein’s treatment of Köhler and Gestalt psychology, Pastore, a historian of psychology, examines Wittgenstein’s uses of ‘aspect’ and ‘organization’ to determine how they are related. He argues that for Wittgenstein ‘aspect’ and ‘organization’ are synonymous (Pastore 1991, p. 347).

Even the abundantly used but notoriously troublesome word ‘meaning’ does not inspire worry for the majority of the commentators. As I noted earlier, Köhler appears to use ‘meaning’ as a generic term for acquired knowledge. It is doubtful that Wittgenstein’s most common use of ‘meaning’ (i.e. meaning as use) harmonizes with Köhler’s in passages commentators take to be key to Wittgenstein’s denial that seeing Gestalten is independent of meaning.

The meanings of the terms ‘visual impression’, ‘visual sensation’, ‘visual image’, ‘visual field’, ‘visual experience’, ‘retinal image’, and ‘visual perception’ get entangled in commentator’s accounts of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. As with ‘organization’, and ‘aspect’, commentators do not pause to consider how Wittgenstein’s uses of these words fit or fail to fit with Köhler’s terminology. For instance, McFee claims that Wittgenstein and Köhler both challenged the thesis that sameness of retinal image entails sameness of ‘visual
impression/experience” (McFee 1999, p. 269). As far as I can tell Köhler does not regularly employ ‘visual impression’, and it is far from clear that Wittgenstein would grant that ‘visual impression’ and ‘visual experience’ are synonymous here. Budd uses ‘visual impression’ in connection with both thinkers. His interpretation relies on his talk of ‘intrinsic features’ of visual impression, but again, neither Wittgenstein nor Köhler use ‘intrinsic’.\footnote{See Budd 1989, pp. 77-79, for instance.} Often terminological difficulties are not merely terminological. Fruitful work on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation requires sensitivity to terminological differences and some effort to sort out whether anything hangs on these differences.

**Little mention of Köhler’s opponents**

Not many commentators contextualize Köhler’s ideas by characterizing opposing theories. Those who do discuss the ideas Köhler took himself to be exposing, rejecting, or improving tend to talk generally and briefly about empirism/empiricism, introspectionism, behaviorism, and meaning theory without tracing Köhler’s criticisms of these theories to his core criticisms. Köhler holds that all of these viewpoints are at fault for: (i) wrongly supposing that there is a one-one correlation between retinal stimulation and sensory experience; and (ii) silently adhering to the “machine model” of the organism. Few bother to go into any detail about Köhler’s motivations (Hark and [to some extent] Stromberg and Pastore are exceptions). Most rely on an overly general characterization of Köhler’s opposition to theories of perception that claim that ordinary perception of, say, a table requires the perceiver to interpret raw sensory data, what is immediately given. For example, Schulte writes: “One of the basic starting-points of Köhler’s gestalt theory is his fundamental rejection of the traditional explanation of perception by reference to atomic, punctiform stimulations of our sense organs” (Schulte 1993, p. 80).
While this captures the gist of a doctrine Köhler opposes, more detail is required to appreciate Köhler’s motivations for opposing this view as well as the alternative viewpoint he is recommending.

**Lack of dialogue**

Very few who write about the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation write about one another’s interpretations. This is an odd occurrence in Wittgenstein scholarship because the opposite situation is usually an interpretive obstacle: many interpreters of Wittgenstein are only really interpreters of interpreters of Wittgenstein. Or as Stern puts it: “Much of what passes for interpretation of Wittgenstein is really a discussion of other interpreters’ readings, so that a forbidding and intricate secondary literature has taken on a life of its own” (Stern 1996, p. 443). There are three exceptions to the lack of mention. First, Budd notes Stromberg (1989, Chapter 4, endnote 25, p. 176) as a reading recommendation for those who would like to pursue study of Wittgenstein’s interest in Gestalt psychology. Second, Pastore credits Stromberg with sparking his interest in Wittgenstein (Pastore 1991, p. 341). Third, the most recent exception is Benjafield 2008. He critically examines Wittgenstein on Köhler in the light of Pastore 1991. Perhaps the lack of dialogue goes to show that, for the most part, examining Wittgenstein’s interest in Köhler’s ideas is only worthwhile insofar as it can serve as set up for other philosophical agendas. It may also indicate that these commentators do not think closer study would have much philosophical pay-off either for determining Wittgenstein’s contribution to philosophy, philosophical psychology, and psychology or for reaching new understanding of the relations between sensory experience and thought. In subsequent chapters, I hope to show that the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation is worthy of central concern, not only because more work needs to
be done to understand the extent and character of Wittgenstein’s interest in Köhler’s work on perception but also because doing so can yield fresh insights and important reminders about the character of human visual experience.
Chapter Two: Köhler on the Nature of Sensory Experience

Introduction

This chapter is an exposition of Köhler’s views as set out in his GP (1929). It is a first step toward addressing one of the interpretive problems I noted at the end of Chapter One: Commentators on Wittgenstein-Köhler relation omit careful discussion of Köhler’s views, if they refer to him specifically at all. This chapter aims to fill some of the interpretive gap in the literature by paying close attention to both Köhler’s methodological commitments concerning the description of human experience and his substantive views concerning the nature of sensory organization. The discussion divides roughly into two parts. The first part presents Köhler’s main arguments against introspectionism and behaviorism. I highlight Köhler’s aim to undermine the introspectionism-behaviorism dichotomy by exposing and criticizing their common biases and untested hypotheses concerning brain physiology and its relation to sensory experience. The second part presents Köhler’s own theory of sensory organization. Here I emphasize Köhler’s commitment to giving a faithful description of the visual phenomena he wishes to explain with his theory of sensory organization and elucidate his claim that organization is a ‘sensory fact’.

But first a few words about Köhler’s background. Köhler along with Kurt Koffka and Max Wertheimer are generally regarded as the founders of the Berlin School of Gestalt psychology.60 Wertheimer was the frontrunner. It was his 1912 experiments on phenomenal motion that served as an important starting point for the work of his two colleagues, Köhler and

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60 See Murray 1995 for a wealth of information about the Berlin School Gestaltists and others on memory, thinking, and problem-solving. Murray argues that Gestalt psychologists’ writings on memory should be reevaluated since many of these writings are “relevant to late twentieth-century memory theory” (Murray 1995, p. 52).
Koffka. In these experiments, Wertheimer showed that when subjects (Köhler and Koffka in this case) are exposed to two alternately flashing lights in rapid succession, then under certain conditions (at a rate of alternation where what is seen is “simple movement per se”)\(^6\) the subjects have an experience of pure phenomenal movement—“a movement without objects moved”.\(^6\) Wertheimer called this the “phi-phenomenon” in his 1912 write-up of the experiments. In this paper Wertheimer presented his results as a hypothesis and discussed his experimental results in rough form only. It was Koffka who drew out theoretical and critical conclusions from Wertheimer’s experiments in a thoroughgoing way.

As with Koffka, Wertheimer’s studies of stroboscopic movement served as inspiration and impetus for Köhler’s own work in experimental psychology. Köhler dedicated one of his most influential works, *GP*\(^6\), to Wertheimer. *GP* was first published in 1929 in English rather than in German in the hopes that it would be read more widely in America, where behaviorism was raging. The book includes discussions of major schools of psychology (introspectionism-behaviorism), specific topics in psychology (sensory perception, behavior, association, memory, and insight), and methodological remarks about psychology viewed as a science. One announced hope in *GP* is that the gestalt viewpoint is comprehensive, and Köhler cultivates it in a variety of domains both within *GP* itself and in other works. He published works on memory, association, insight, animal psychology (e.g. *The Mentality of Apes*\(^6\)), value and fact (e.g. *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*\(^6\)), and brain physiology (e.g. *Dynamics in Psychology*\(^6\)).\(^6\)

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\(^6\) Smith 1994, p. 262.
\(^6\) Citations of *Gestalt Psychology* take the following form: title, year of edition/page number. For example: *GP*1929/23.
\(^6\) Köhler 1917.
\(^6\) Köhler 1938.
\(^6\) Köhler 1940.
\(^6\) For a useful overview of misconceptions about Gestalt psychology generally and Köhler specifically see Kanizsa 1979.
I. Introspectionism-Behaviorism

In his Preface to the first edition of GP Köhler writes, “The first question a foreign psychologist has to answer in America is, of course: How do you like behaviorism?” (GP 1929/vii). In this work he attacks introspectionist and behaviorist viewpoints on perceptual experience. He outlines each view’s prior commitments and gleans methodological morals from the errors and assumptions he identifies. He also argues for a new account of perception, one that rejects the assumption that the traditional explanatory alternatives on offer in his day exhaust the range of possible theories of perception.

Köhler says he plans to discuss “certain other trends in contemporary psychology…in connection with gestalt psychology” (GP 1929/vii). He is referring to behaviorism and introspectionism. The disagreement between these viewpoints is twofold. They disagree about: (i) what should count as the true subject matter of the field of psychology, viewed as a science; and (ii) what methods of investigating the subject matter are informative and reliable.

Introspectionism takes consciousness to be the subject matter of psychology, and trained introspection to be the chosen method of investigation. As Köhler puts it, introspectionism uses the “observation of direct experience” as its preferred procedure whereas behaviorism rejects observation of direct experience and instead relies on the observation of behavior. The surprising result of Köhler’s evaluations of the introspectionism-behaviorism dichotomy is that these opposing viewpoints are hardly in conflict when it comes to their treatment of naïve, direct experience.

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68 Köhler’s first footnote: “It seems more cautious to talk about direct experience than about ‘consciousness.’ For some people consciousness is rather a function by or in which we become aware of ‘immediate experience.’ In my terminology, if someone has a ‘feeling of becoming aware,’ this is only one special case of direct experience” (GP 1929/8). Köhler omits this footnote in the second English edition (1947) of GP.
Before proceeding, a word about Köhler’s use of ‘direct’ in this context. ‘Direct’ is a commonly used but poorly understood term in perception studies. Köhler employs ‘direct experience’ as his preferred term for naïve, uncritical experience. ‘Direct experience’ designates “the world as I find it” (GP 1929/3). It is not a form of experience that is hidden beneath layers of meaning that must be stripped away through the analysis of a trained introspectionist. It is meant to stand in contrast to the introspectionist’s notion of “pure” experience, which (as I will explain below) excludes most of what we ordinarily call ‘experience’. Thus by characterizing naïve experience as direct, Köhler is not addressing a version of the classic question “Do we directly perceive the world?” And when he characterizes the introspectionist’s method as the observation of direct experience, he means that introspectionists take themselves to be observing and purifying their own direct, uncritical experience by stripping away all traces of acquired meaning to reach the “genuine” experience.

**Behaviorism**

*Observing one’s own direct experience.* Behaviorism, in Köhler’s understanding, grows out of dissatisfaction with introspectionism. He writes: “In no respect, the behaviorist holds, do we have the impression that there exists a real and progressive science of direct experience, clear in its methods and results” (GP 1929/9). The very concept of introspection is troublesome since it is annexed to the philosophical concept of mind or soul, which encourages an uncritical spiritualism (GP 1929/10). Furthermore, it is questionable whether observation of one’s own direct experience is possible at all since there is no point of observation external to the system under observation. It seems as if the object of observation can change or even cease all together once observation commences. For example, joy and sorrow “tend to disappear when the
selfsame person who has or had the sorrow and the joy must assume the attitude of introspection” (GP 1929/11-12).

Observing the direct experience of others. Even if introspection were a reliable method of finding out about one’s own direct experience, one can never have knowledge of another’s experience since only the person having the experience can observe it. So, under the guise of an epistemological purity regarding the possibility of knowledge of others’ direct experience, behaviorism dismisses all statements of direct experience in psychological investigation. According to the behaviorist “observation of my direct experience is a private affair of mine” (GP 1929/29), and the closest two subjects can come to sharing an “observation” of this kind is for one person to offer “a hint about what conditions are necessary in order to have the specific kind of direct experience” he is having (GP 1929/13). Granting that the worries about reliably observing one’s own direct experience are not insuperable, still one can never know whether the data of experience is the same across observers. Therefore direct experience cannot serve as a proper object of scientific investigation. The only possible object of scientific research is overt behavior, “the reaction of a living system” (GP 1929/17). The lack of agreement between the experience reports of trained introspectionists seems to support this line of reasoning.

Selective epistemological purity. Behaviorism holds that, as Köhler notes, experience is private. So there can be no shared observation in the realm of consciousness. But shared observation is the mark of science. Thus introspectionism is unscientific. Köhler responds to the behaviorist worry about the privacy of experience by pointing out that the privacy worry does not get a foothold in physics even though, in principle, physics is just as open to the worry as psychology. Köhler denies that in physics there is any such thing as a shared observation:
If another man observes the galvanometer, he observes something other than the galvanometer as a physical object, since the object of his observation is the result of certain organic processes, determined by the physical galvanometer. Again, the galvanometer I am observing is the final result of a different series of processes occurring in my physical organism. By no means do we ‘observe the same instrument’ then, though physically both series of processes are started by the same physical object. \( \text{(GP 1929/29)} \)

And yet scientists’ statements about their own observations tend to agree \( \text{(GP 1929/29)} \). Why should we accept the behaviorist’s disproportionate privacy worry if scientific investigation is not bothered by it in many cases?

The reality of the behaviorist’s position is that it embraces a choosy skepticism, according to Köhler. On the one hand it doubts the possibility of knowing minds other than one’s own but on the other hand it takes for granted the existence of an independent physical world. Köhler grants that skeptical doubt is beneficial for scientific inquiry but this attitude of doubt should be measured against the advantages of employing a naïve perspective: “Sciences which wish to carry on their researches and be productive often show a certain healthy disdain of such scruples. It might be better for psychology, too, if, after listening to a very wholesome critical lesson from behaviorism, it returns to undertaking productive work with some naïveté, using all possible means which yield results” \( \text{(GP 1929/32)} \).

Some naïveté is beneficial to science, especially in the face of behaviorism’s conservatism regarding both the methods and subject matter of a scientific psychology.

**Introspectionism**

*Introspectionism and the paring down of direct experience.* Introspectionism assumes a distinction between sensations and perceptions. Sensations are the unmediated data of sensory experience. Perceptions are psychological products, the results of projecting knowledge
acquired through experience onto the sensory field. They are mediated psychological states—sensations that have been imbued with “meaning”:

Meaning depends upon personal biography; it has a highly complicated origin and represents a somewhat accidental trait of our material. Therefore we must get rid of it and learn to approach actual sensations in such a way that their qualities and laws may be discovered in their pure form. This procedure is called “introspection”. (GP 1929/73)

Introspection is characterized here as the stripping away of personal and accidental influences on direct experience to get at the “pure” form of experience, one that is not dependent on or affected by what is specific to individual people.

The introspectionist only takes seriously the experiential reports of trained psychologists or skilled observers who are able to discern pure sensations from the meanings we associate with those pure sensations:

You cannot see a “book”, I am told, since this term involves some knowledge about a class of objects to which this specimen belongs, and about their use, etc., whereas in pure seeing such knowledge cannot enter. As psychologists our task is to separate all these “meanings” from the seen material as such, the manifold of simple sensations. (GP 1929/72)

Although the statements of experience given by the ordinary observer are “quite satisfactory…for the practical purposes of common life”, only the statements of trained observers are treated as correct. “Even the character of being an ‘object’, or ‘thing’, which I have tacitly attributed to the experiences I have called ‘book’ and ‘desk’, is improper in correct psychological description” (GP 1929/71) since the attribution of this “object” character to experience is not included in the introspectionist’s conception of genuine experience. A consequence of the introspectionist outlook is that objects only “exist for us” once sensory experience has been imbued with meaning (GP 1929/72).
Making the selection. Introspectionism separates the aspects of everyday experience which are “true”, “real”, “genuine” sensory experiences (i.e. “pure” sensations) from those aspects which are products of meaning. Köhler explores the criteria the introspectionist uses to identify pure sensations. The bulk of his exploration is devoted to describing how introspectionism explains away the perceptual constancy of color, size, form, and brightness. In all cases of constancy there are disparities between how things look to the untrained observer and how (according to the introspectionist) things should look given local stimulation of the sensory modalities (GP 1929/74-8). And in all these cases the objects of sight remain the same while “actual stimulation varies according to more or less accidental conditions (of distance, position, of illumination)” (GP 1929/80). For example, a circular plate viewed on an oblique plane appears circular even though the retinal image is elliptical. Köhler claims that the introspectionist takes constancy cases to be analogous to certain cases of illusions. Just as some illusions can vary from observer to observer and even be made to disappear when an observer practices viewing the illusions under special conditions of observation set up in the introspectionist’s laboratory, the constancies can be altered and even eliminated through training and special conditions of observation. Typically, the introspectionist’s procedure in the laboratory is to localize and isolate size, form, and brightness from their environmental contexts (GP 1929/82). Adopting the attitude of introspection shows that these alterable and eliminable experiences are not genuine sensory experiences but are instead products of learning (GP 1929/79).

Köhler on the introspectionist’s motives for making the selection. By separating the sensation from meaning that infiltrates the sensation, the introspectionist’s procedure enables an observer to have a “purified” sensory experience. Everyday uncritical experience is explained
away as largely a product of meaning. Köhler points out that this explanation in terms of meaning has not been scientifically demonstrated in all the cases introspectionism uses it, so it is best to regard it as a hypothesis rather than an established fact. The explanation by meaning is crucial to the introspectionist’s procedure of discarding so much of what we call experience in our daily lives. And yet this hypothesis remains unexamined because the experiences it applies to are quickly pushed aside as irrelevant. The introspectionist procedure is such that its key criterion for making the divide between genuine experience and meaning will not be examined—after all, the phenomena it applies to are exiled without further consideration or interest. Thus Köhler’s next step is to consider why introspectionism so readily explains away a vast array of our naïve, uncritical, direct experience. He argues that a “prior firm belief about the nature of sensory facts” (GP 1929/91) underlies the introspectionist’s procedure of isolating and purifying sensations.

“Genuine” experience. Introspectionism identifies genuine sensory experience with what experience should be, given the local stimulation that gives rise to it. If local retinal stimulation varies, then genuine sensory experience should vary in accordance with the changes in stimulation. Likewise, if there has been no change in the local stimulation, then there should be no change in the genuine visual experience. So local stimulation determines what counts as genuine sensory experience; there can be no changes in sensory experience without a change in stimulation. There is a one-one correlation between local stimulation and genuine sensory experience. Köhler calls this the constancy hypothesis. In GP, he characterizes it thus:

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69 Sensory facts are one type of psychological phenomena in a wide range. Pastore writes, “Psychological facts, in general, encompass a broad spectrum, ranging from sensory experience to ‘insight’. ‘Organized entities’ and ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ experiences are also facts in this spectrum” (1991, p. 342). Note that Köhler seems to use ‘sensory fact’ and ‘sensory experience’ interchangeably such that identifying sensory facts is tantamount to identifying genuine (aspects, parts) of sensory experience.

70 Interestingly, in the footnote in GP 1929/97 Köhler calls the hypothesis the constancy hypothesis, but in the footnote in GP 1947/95 he calls it the mosaic hypothesis.
“[T]rue sensations are independent of subjective attitude and depend only upon local 
stimulation as purely local experiences” (GP 1929/96-97, Köhler’s italics). Here is an example 
of how the introspectionist would apply the constancy hypothesis. In perceptual constancy 
cases, there is sameness of sensory experience even when stimulation changes. That is, these are 
cases where sensory experience is constant despite changes in stimulation. Because these 
phenomena are inconsistent with the constancy hypothesis, the introspectionist would not 
classify them as genuine sensory experience (GP 1929/92). Köhler argues that the 
introspectionist enters the investigation of sensory experience with this prior commitment about 
genuine sensory experience, and consequently biases the investigation from the start because 
what counts as a genuine sensory experience is fixed for them before they begin to observe (GP 
1929/100).

Direct experience as genuine experience. Köhler does not argue that the 
introspectionist’s pure sensations are unreal. He writes, “I do not feel justified in calling those 
artefacts unreal. When I apply the introspectionist’s methods I myself can get those special 
experiences which corroborate his findings” (GP 1929/87). Rather, he argues that the 
introspectionist’s reasons for giving these experiences such rare value do not hold more weight 
than the reasons he will offer for valuing ordinary experience. Köhler agrees that it is undeniable 
that everyday adult experience is infiltrated with meaning, but why would this make everyday 
experience any less important? (GP 1929/88). He suggests that how “real” experience is 
depends on its importance, practical significance, value, interest and on its being worthy of 
scientific investigation:

Is a certain amount of H₂O which I have before me no real chemical substance because I know 
that it has been formed by the oxidation of hydrogen? Would that hydrogen be a “true” chemical 
substance, but not the water? Is the water not worth the chemist’s investigation? I do not see
why an experience which contains acquired meaning should be less interesting and important for psychology than experiences not so composed. (GP 1929/88)

Thus, if anything, direct experience is more real than “the artefacts of sophisticated and sterile introspection” (GP 1929/87) according to Köhler because it is the kind of experience that pervades everyday life.

Another complaint Köhler makes is that although the introspectionist adamantly denies that changes of attitude can affect genuine sensory experience (GP 1929/98) the introspectionist’s purified experiences depend on the attitude of introspection for their existence (GP 1929/86). Introspecting to isolate pure sensations requires a change of attitude. Köhler wonders: Why is the dependence of “pure” experience on the attitude of introspection any less of a dependency?

The world of direct experience is the layperson’s world, the world that matters for ordinary life. A successful psychology is one which speaks to the “incalculably important” sensory facts of common experience, not one that privileges “pure” experiences which are achievable only in accordance with rare and artificial procedures carried out in the introspectionist’s laboratory (GP 1929/87):

As long as the introspectionist’s attitude prevails, however, psychology will never seriously study those experiences which form the matrix of our whole life. Instead, it will observe and discuss the properties of rare and unusual experiences which, though they are supposed to be continually present beneath our naïve experiences, seem to be so well hidden most of the time that their existence has nothing to do with life as we actually experience it. (GP 1929/86)

To distinguish the focus of his own view, Köhler says “towards it [naïve experience] all our interests are directed” (GP 1929/86). Thus, Köhler emphasizes that a successful psychology must keep to its roots in naïve experience as it climbs up to the stature of science, not only because naïve experience matters for everyday life but also because it is valuable for scientific
investigation. The irony is that introspectionism intends to give primacy to sensory experience and yet ends up discarding the bulk of it as irrelevant for their purposes: “Introspectionism has developed…a procedure in which the most interesting observations are continually exiled into the dust-cloud”\textsuperscript{71} (GP 1929/70). It appears to honor experience but ultimately selects a narrow, hidden region of experience and labels it “pure” or “genuine” experience—a kind of experience accessible only to trained observers and selected according to unexamined criteria, preconceptions, and assumptions.

Even if we accept the introspectionist’s assumption that the separation between sensation and perception is possible, it is still the case that separating pure experience from meaning is difficult. Almost all adult experience is infiltrated by meaning. The separation requires training, practice, and (sometimes) special conditions. The “pure” experience is supposed to be concealed beneath the more readily accessible common experience. Köhler points out that “pure” experience is mostly hidden even for the trained observer; once the psychologist leaves the introspection lab he returns to naïve, uncritical experience. Essentially, Köhler is questioning the legitimacy of the claim that this kind of hard-to-get-at, remote experience is somehow more real than the kind of experience that pervades everyday life. Uncritical, naïve experience is real according to Köhler. Why should we take this hidden experience, which only trained observers can isolate, to be the genuine experience and discard the rest? The introspectionist is motivated by a belief in the correspondence between local stimulation and sensory experience, but this belief is merely hypothetical. It is a poor criterion for identifying genuine sensory experience. Therefore, introspectionism cannot demand that genuine experience be consistent with it.

\textsuperscript{71} Here Köhler is alluding to a passage from William James’ “The Will to Believe”(1897), which he quotes in the opening of Chapter III of GP.
Köhler’s criticizes the introspectionist’s heavy reliance on the constancy hypothesis in the identification and explanation of genuine sensory experience. This brings out Köhler’s general complaint against introspectionism: It does not exhibit an openness to alternative explanatory routes. Introspectionism’s claim that genuine sensory experience is wholly determined by local stimulation is not the only explanation available, given the facts:

(1) Either “true” experience depends upon local stimulation exclusively, whereas the meaning which almost always adheres to it depends upon (is reproduced by) the properties of the environing field; (2) Or natural sensory experience itself is not determined locally; i.e., the properties of any one part of the [e.g. visual] field depend normally upon the conditions given in the whole [visual] field, or, at least, in a larger area of it. In both cases isolation, or the introduction of a homogeneous environment, would make local experience correspond better to local stimulation. (GP 1929/95)

Introspectionism takes the first option while Gestalt psychology takes the second. Köhler’s point is that both options are consistent with the procedure of isolating regions of a given sensory field, so introspectionism cannot claim the procedure supports their explanation to the exclusion of others. And because introspectionism does not regard itself as one among other options in the theoretical space, it does not have a well-considered answer to the question, “Why do you make the selection between real and unreal experience the way that you do?” It can offer little more than the constancy hypothesis as a reason, and this hypothesis is more an implicit assumption than an explicit principle confirmed by evidence.

Commonality between behaviorism and introspectionism. Despite the significant methodological points at which behaviorism and introspectionism diverge, Köhler holds that the two viewpoints are remarkably alike in their treatment of naïve experience:

If behaviorists should refuse to take account of this book because in it direct experience is employed and referred to without apology, introspectionists would not treat it any better, since my use of experience from their point of view, is not of the right sort. I have had to explain, then, not only how I could eat the forbidden fruit in spite of all commandments, but also why I took the common ware from the street and from the market-place instead of buying the
standardized and sterilized products which introspection would furnish from its cultivated orchard. (GP 1929/viii)

The behaviorist dismisses all statements of direct experience as unscientific while the introspectionist only takes the statements of trained psychologists, those capable of separating pure sensations from perceptions (i.e. the mere products of meaning), to be legitimate scientifically. So the difference between each viewpoint’s treatment of direct experience is merely a matter of degree. Behaviorism and introspectionism share the same tendency to denounce sensory experience as we understand it in ordinary, uncritical, pre-theoretical life. Fundamentally, both viewpoints are at fault for their pejorative attitude toward naïve experience:

I do not see, then, why introspectionism should be preferred to behaviorism, or vice versa. They are so much alike in their fundamental opinions and in their general attitudes, that all their wrangling seems like a family quarrel to the onlooker. And it is precisely among those themes, over which they do not quarrel, that we shall find the problems of gestalt psychology. (GP 1929/100-101)

The above passage makes it evident that Köhler takes Gestalt psychology to present a new outlook on basic categories employed in psychological investigation. This outlook challenges the accepted view of the nature of sensory experience.

II. Köhler on Sensory Organization

Now I present Köhler’s account of the nature of sensory organization. The overview of behaviorism-introspectionism in Section I highlights Köhler’s dissatisfaction with the (then) current treatment of direct experience in psychology. Direct experience is explained away and pushed aside not only by the likely culprit—behaviorism—but also by the supposed proponent of
direct experience, introspectionism. Due to the “conservatism” of both viewpoints, pervasive features of sensory experience are neglected in psychology:

Sometimes people are conservative and right at the same time. Still it seems highly improbable that in our very young science conservative opinions should be right, opinions which are opposed to almost all experience, and which have scarcely been examined, because they have been protected by the ‘meaning theory’.

Not only are introspectionism and behaviorism prematurely restrictive about our everyday experience, but also their adherence to meaning theory allows them to unreflectively discard all observations that would present a challenge to their conservative opinions. Thus these opinions are not critically examined.

Köhler describes the features both major schools neglect as the order or “organization” of the sensory field. It is one of the tasks of Gestalt psychology to bring into the fore these aspects of common experience that are taken for granted. Once these features are appreciated and carefully described, the problem of organization springs into view: How and when is the sensory field organized or structured into entities, given that retinal stimulation allows for an infinite number of possible orderings of the “mosaic” of stimuli? Is organization innate or learned?

Köhler’s characterization of sensory organization. Köhler introduces the gestalt view on sensory organization with a basic characterization of organization as an ordering of the sensory field: “In most visual fields the contents of certain areas “belong together”, so that we have circumscribed, or bounded, units before us, from which their surroundings are excluded” (GP 1929/149). A tree against the background of the sky, a red-breasted robin perched on a wire—these circumscribed units appear segregated in the visual field. In other words, the sensory field is grouped into figure and ground where a circumscribed unit is distinguishable from the ground.

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72 In my discussion of the barriers to appreciating sensory organization below I gloss Köhler’s use of ‘meaning’.
or background that surrounds it.\footnote{Köhler notes that Edgar Rubin was the first to make observations of this kind. See Rubin 1921, which Köhler cites in \textit{GP} 1929/198.} The area of the visual field that has been grouped into figure has as its characteristic feature the “substantiality of a ‘thing,’ whereas the environment [the ground] appears as comparatively ‘empty’ and ‘loose’” (\textit{GP} 1929/219). Other descriptions Köhler uses to characterize organization are: “gestalt”, “concrete individual and characteristic entity”, and “segregated whole” (\textit{GP} 1929/192).\footnote{Organization is not limited to visual experience; it occurs in all sensory experience, but the majority of Köhler’s arguments use visual and auditory examples.}

Köhler points out that the visual field can be organized into figure and ground not only in cases where there is a continuous whole but also in cases where separate parts form a unit, as in Figure 1\footnote{This figure appears as Figure 1 in \textit{GP} 1929/154.}, where we see two groups of three black patches.

This ordering of the sensory field tends to go unnoticed and underappreciated. How could such an important and prevalent aspect of experience get overlooked? Throughout \textit{GP} and in other works, Köhler cites various barriers to appreciating the phenomena of organization. One kind of barrier is general and natural—organization is so pervasive and basic a feature of sensory experience that we fail to find it remarkable. Köhler writes: “Most of the observations of Gestalt psychology are of this kind: They touch facts of such general occurrence in our everyday life, that we have difficulty in seeing anything remarkable in them” (Köhler, 1930, p. 73).
Köhler uses examples that involve grouping of separate parts to demonstrate more readily that the segregation of the visual field is flexible. Although we tend to group the patches into two groups of three patches, other groupings are possible (e.g. three pairs, six patches, etc.). This is easier to appreciate in cases of grouping separate parts into units than in cases involving continuous wholes (e.g. a pencil). As we will see below, Köhler wants us to appreciate that even in cases where the organization is more stable and seemingly less flexible (e.g. a pencil on a desk) the actual organization of the field is not the only possible one.

Because these characteristics of experience tend to go unnoticed Köhler’s primary objective—in the context of behaviorism’s total rejection of direct experience and introspectionism’s privileging of pure sensations—is to increase appreciation of these phenomena. “It is not our fault that, to a deplorable degree, the obvious has disappeared from learned psychology, so that we have to rediscover it” (GP 1929/350). The phenomena of organization should be carefully described and treated as part of the subject matter of psychological investigation (again). All in all Köhler seeks to make more perspicuous the character of organization itself and believes that a successful psychology is rooted in an appreciation of this character.

Köhler cites other barriers to appreciating his observations. These barriers are common pitfalls of his anticipated audience, i.e. the psychologists working in the empirism-nativism tradition. Köhler integrates a sustained attack on the empirism-nativism divide in his critical

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76 Wittgenstein writes in a similar spirit about his own line of investigation: “The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes.) The real foundations of his inquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him.—And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful” (PI §129). In Chapter Four, I discuss this methodological affinity between Wittgenstein and Köhler.

77 Köhler uses ‘empirism’ throughout GP 1929 though the index (to the 1929 Liveright edition) only has a listing for ‘empiricism’. Below I note that Köhler’s use of ‘empirism’ traces back to Helmholtz. ‘Empiricism’ and ‘empirism’ can be distinguished. Empiricism addresses questions about epistemological justification. Empirism addresses questions about the causal origins of thoughts or ideas. Please see the next footnote too.
discussions of introspectionism and behaviorism. He finds the dichotomy itself problematic. He also launches detailed and frequent attacks on empirism specifically.

Before describing Köhler’s complaints, a note about terminology is in order. For the most part Köhler assumes that his audience is familiar with the empirism-nativism controversy, but within his discussion of introspectionism in the second English edition of GP (1947) he added a clarificatory footnote that includes a brief definition of ‘empirist’: “a psychologist who tends to explain a maximum of mental facts by previous learning” (GP 1947/113n). ‘Empiricist’ “refers to a philosopher who claims that all knowledge grows from outside experience” (GP 1947/113n)78 In the first edition, the note does not occur. Köhler does not provide a definition of a nativist in either edition, but his characterizations of nativism throughout GP indicate that a nativist is a psychologist who explains mental facts in terms of inherited or innate physiological mechanisms. Regarding Köhler’s discussions of empirism specifically, note that in both editions Köhler often uses ‘empirism’, ‘empiristic conviction’, ‘empiristic explanation’, ‘empiristic thesis’ interchangeably with ‘meaning’, ‘meaning theory’, ‘general explanation by meaning’, although in the second edition he uses ‘empirism’ and related terms more frequently than ‘meaning’ and related terms. It seems that Köhler intentionally limits his use of ‘meaning’ and related terms in the second edition, opting to characterize the assumptions and prejudices he questions in terms of empirism. The opposite is true in the first edition, where references to ‘meaning’, ‘meaning theory’, etc. are plentiful. I argued in Chapter One that this is the edition that Wittgenstein most likely read.

78 In Hatfield 1990 Hatfield describes the empirism-nativism opposition as concerned with “questions about the causal origin of a thought or idea (innate or learned)” (1990, p. 271). He notes that the original use of the terms stems from Helmholtz, who used the terms to indicate “opposing theories of the psychogenesis of spatial perception” (1990, p. 275). In Pastore 1971 Pastore describes the divide as two attempts to answer the question: “How could we see objects as we do?...Proponents of empiristic theory supposed that ‘we learn to see’ whereas proponents of nativistic theory proposed to explain the important features of perception in terms of innate physiological mechanisms” (1971, p. 11).
A major stumbling block for psychologists who study sensory experience is their unquestioning commitment to empirism, according to Köhler. He describes that commitment as a general and influential prejudice of thinking, as something that stands in the way of acknowledging organization as a fact of sensory experience: “If [William] James did not admit this organization of the field as a sensory fact, the reason for it was the enormous power of the theory of meaning,79 which has been an obdurate obstacle to our seeing important problems, more in this connection than elsewhere” (GP 1929/149). The explanation by meaning or meaning theory has “great force and cogency”; it even seems to correspond to a “natural tendency in human thinking” (GP 1929/83).

Before I present Köhler’s arguments against the empiristic explanation of sensory organization, I note some intersections between the empirism-nativism and introspectionism-behaviorism dichotomies. These two divides intersect at a number of points. Recall, for instance, that the introspectionist makes a selection of “pure sensations” from common sensory experience on the basis of a prior commitment about the nature of sensory experience—a commitment that ultimately traces back to the constancy hypothesis. Once the selection of genuine experience has been made with the (often implicit) guidance of the constancy hypothesis, all aspects of common experience that have been determined impure are then relegated to “the dust-cloud of exceptional observations” (GP 1929/70) (i.e. “exceptional” insofar as they do not support the constancy hypothesis). This dust-cloud is the collection of all aspects of common experience which are explained away as products of previous learning.80 So empirism goes hand in hand with the introspectionist’s commitment to the constancy hypothesis.

79 In the second English edition of GP (1947), Köhler changes his wording. He no longer uses “the enormous power of the theory of meaning”; instead, he uses “under the influence of the empiristic prejudice” (GP 1947/137).
80 In Köhler 1969 Köhler says the introspectionist treats these observations like disturbances to their preconceptions about what constitutes genuine experience.
hypothesis, a commitment which serves as a criterion for “genuine” experience and explains how it is that such a vast expanse of common experience is cast aside by the introspectionist.

**Against empiricism.** An important consequence of the empiristic explanation of sensory organization is that organization does not “belong” to sensory experience. Genuine sensory experience excludes those aspects of direct experience that involve organization since on this view organization is a product of acquired meaning. Köhler rejects this outcome. There are two sides to his criticism. Köhler argues that organization is not a product of acquired meaning. But even if we grant for the sake of argument that organization is a matter of acquired meaning, Köhler asks why we should privilege the aspects of direct experience introspectionists decide to single out as genuine. Their narrowing of direct experience excludes a significant portion of the naïve, untrained observer’s experience—notably, the organization of the visual field. He argues that a faithful description of genuine sensory experience includes reference to organization.

To clear the way for acceptance of gestalt features of sensory experience, a number of criticisms of empirism are interlaced in Köhler’s positive account of sensory organization. One of his main lines of argument against empirism runs as follows. If the empiristic claim (i.e. that organization is a matter of projecting acquired meaning into the sensory field) is correct, then entities would be segregated in the visual field only insofar as “they are recognized as definite known objects” (*GP* 1929/152). Köhler denies the consequent of the conditional. Unknown entities are segregated too in some instances:

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81 In Koffka 1935 Koffka characterizes the relation between the meaning theory/empirism and the constancy hypothesis as a vicious circle: “[the meaning theory] presupposes the constancy hypothesis, but also the latter the former. At the risk of appearing frivolous I will tell a joke which seems to me to give a perfect picture of the relation between the two hypotheses. A man and his small son are viewing with great interest an acrobat walking on the tight rope and balancing himself with a long pole. The boy suddenly turns to the father and asks: ‘Father, why doesn’t that man fall?’ The father replies: ‘Don’t you see that he is holding on to the pole?’ The boy accepts the authority of his parent, but after a while he bursts out with a new question: ‘Father, why doesn’t the pole fall?’ Whereupon the father replies: ‘But don’t you see that the man holds it!’” (1935, p. 86). Sometimes Köhler characterizes the explanation by meaning in terms of a vicious circle. See pp. 212-214; 223, for example.
Looking into a dark corner or walking through the mist in the evening, the reader will frequently have found before him an unknown something, detached from its environment as one whole, the use or meaning of which he did not discover until after a more detailed observation...The same argument may be restated in a more general form. Whenever we say to ourselves or others: Now, look here! What may that something there be, at the foot of that hill...?—we ask about the meaning or the use of that something, demonstrating by our very question that segregation is independent of knowledge and meaning. (GP 1929/152)

Thus, the empiristic explanation is incorrect. The existence of detached visual units in the visual field does not depend on the perceiver’s knowledge. The fact that it makes sense to pose the question “What may that something there be...?” shows that unknown entities are segregated in the visual field in some cases. Another argument Köhler makes against the empiristic explanation is that in some cases the “spontaneous” organization we experience is not a known organization. He gives this example:82

![Figure 2](image)

If acquired meaning determines which visual units we see when we view a figure, then we would expect to see a known unit. In this case, we would expect to see a figure 4. But the spontaneous organization we see is in accordance with Gestalt grouping principles, which are not determined by acquired meaning.83 After we are told that the figure contains a 4 we can come to experience a change in organization such that we can see the 4 (GP 1929/200).

Köhler points out that acknowledging organization as a pervasive feature of sensory experience is not enough to appreciate the problem of sensory organization as a problem for

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82 This figure appears as Figure 10 in GP 1929/200.
83 Debate about whether and which Gestalt grouping principles are innate or innate is ongoing. See Palmer 1999 for a recent discussion.
successful accounts of sensory experience. The empiristic line of thought fails to appreciate the problem because it banishes organization from the realm of genuine experience. Introspectionism relies heavily on the empiristic explanation, so even if introspectionists recognized organization as a problem, from their point of view the burden of explanation would not fall on introspectionism. That is, the introspectionist’s task is to analyze and isolate pure sensations, not explain the products of meaning. Another way to neglect the problem is to simply take organization for granted; we might fail to recognize that organization—although not the end product of intellectual processing—*is* the end product of perceptual processing. Köhler links this kind of failure to appreciate the problem of organization to what he terms the “experience-error”: [This error] occurs when we unintentionally attribute certain properties of sensory experience to the actual constellation of stimuli, properties which are so very common that we tend to apply them to whatever we are thinking about. This is the case primarily, wherever we have not yet learned to see the *problem* contained in those common properties of experience. (GP 1929/176-77)

Perceptual processing begins with retinal stimulation. The stimuli allow for an infinite number of possible organizations. We must first appreciate that the actual organization of the visual field is just one among many organizations that are possible for any given constellation of retinal stimuli. Once this fact is appreciated, then the task is to understand how and when the visual system settles on one actual organization among the array of possibilities. Stephen Palmer gives this vivid description of what experience without organization would be like: “Visual experience without any organization would be like watching a snowstorm of swirling, multicolored confetti resulting from the output of millions of unrelated retinal receptors” (Palmer 1999, p. 255).84

84 For other recent discussions of perceptual organization, including some that challenge and extend the Gestalt approach to the issue see, for example: Kimchi, Behrmann, and Olson 2003; Beck 1982; Kubovy 1981; Kanizsa 1979.
Unorganized visual experience is almost unimaginable. In “The Task of Gestalt Psychology” (1969), Köhler claims that nobody reports experience to be a mosaic of sensations, and no one has this type of experience naturally—it has to be induced through training and special conditions of observations. In everyday experience the conscious perceptual world is organized into entities. Somehow, beginning only with retinal stimulation that allows for a multitude of possible experiences, we arrive at one particular experience.

*Köhler’s explanation of organization.* Before moving on, a potentially confusing ambiguity should be noted here. Köhler uses ‘organization’ to signify the end product of certain kinds of perceptual processing, but he also uses the word to characterize the processing itself.85 The ambiguity stems from Köhler’s recommendation that we shift to a more inclusive, holistic, and dynamic conception of sensory experience and the mechanisms of that experience: “Instead of reacting to local stimuli by local and mutually independent events, the organism reacts to an actual constellation of stimuli by a total process which, as a functional whole, is its response to the whole situation” (GP 1929/106).

But how and when does organization of visual experience occur? Organization into segregated wholes is the result of dynamic, fluid, and yet orderly physiological processes according to Köhler. This explanation of organization is neither an empiristic nor a nativistic solution to the problem of organization (GP 1929/118, 123, 126). It is not an empiristic answer because for Köhler organization is a “sensory fact” or “optical reality” rather than the result of acquired arrangements. Köhler’s answer to the problem of perceptual organization is that organization is “original”, or “natural”—a primitive “sensory fact” that comes about through a

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85 For instance, Köhler sometimes describes organization as the end product of processing: “As for the existence of segregated wholes, i.e. organization” (GP 1929/203). But in this passage he seems to use ‘organization’ to characterize the processing itself: “‘Simple’, ‘complicated’, ‘regular’, ‘harmonious’, are words which may have a meaning when applied to an experience occupying a point in space and time, though in most cases they refer to products of organization” (GP 1929/191).
“characteristic achievement of the nervous system” (GP 1929/174). That is, Köhler stresses that organization is not “outside of” or extrinsic to sensory experience. It belongs to or is intrinsic to sensory experience. It is not a product built up from a foundation of sensations. Köhler’s own account of perceptual organization is sometimes described as nativistic. But ‘nativism’ is a misnomer if his aim to carve a new theoretical space outside the bounds of the empirism-nativism dichotomy is taken seriously. For Köhler, to deny empirism is not to take the other alternative—the nativistic explanation, which says that organization is determined by rigid, pre-established “inherited arrangements”. His view would not sit neatly in the nativist camp, at least not as he characterizes nativism because he denies that perceptual organization is due to “inherited arrangements”. And although these physiological processes are orderly, the order they exhibit is not wholly fixed. Organization is achieved by the activity of dynamic neural mechanisms, not rigid pre-established arrangements. Thus Köhler prefers to characterize the Gestalt account of sensory experience and the physiological processes that contribute to it as a “third possibility”.

In his criticisms of empiristic and nativistic explanations of sensory organization, Köhler is employing a methodological tactic he used earlier against the behaviorism-introspectionism divide: expose their common commitment, and then argue that the commitment is untenable. The key mistaken commitment of both empirism and nativism is machine theory. This physiological model explains order in terms of fixed “topographical arrangements” (GP 1929/121). Describing the machine theory, Köhler writes:

It is not the dynamics of nervous processes as such which they [neurologists] suppose tend toward coordinated function. Vitalists may have such a mystical idea! Rather, special anatomical topography is the only explanation of order; and by it the dynamics of process are compelled to produce orderly results. (GP 1929/114)
Köhler’s dynamic theory of the mechanisms of sensory organization aims to show that it is wrong-headed to think that anatomical topography is the only explanation of order. Köhler presents Gestalt psychology as providing an alternative explanation of the mechanisms of perception:

No reader of all the famous discussions between nativists and empirists can have a serious doubt that a nativistic explanation has always meant the assumption of a given anatomical basis for the actual fact in question. If such explanation did not seem to be acceptable, then only one other possibility was left open, that of learning. These authors never entertain the idea that some specific and orderly function might occur without being controlled either by special arrangements pre-established ad hoc or by arrangements acquired in learning. What may this third alternative be? (GP 1929/118)\(^{96}\)

Both empirism and nativism are implicitly committed to a mechanistic model of the brain. Köhler’s dynamical physiological theory is the third alternative since it calls into question the machine theory accepted by empirism and nativism. Retinal stimuli should not be construed as sets of independent, isolated bits. Instead, the dynamic relations between retinal stimuli must be taken into account to correctly describe the character of visual experience and to explain how “altogether different experiences” can correspond to a local stimulus when there has been a change in “surrounding stimulation” (GP 1929/107).

The more detailed account of the dynamics of physiological processes is a bit sketchy because neurology had not advanced enough to favor one or another model of brain structure. Köhler claims it is best to view his account of the physiological mechanisms of organization more as a working hypothesis than a full-fledged theory (GP 1929/142). The foundation of his proposal is psychophysical isomorphism—psychological facts mirror physiological facts. Dynamic events (between constellations of stimuli) in the sensory field mirror dynamic events in the nervous system. This principle is introduced by way of particular examples and then

\(^{96}\) See also GP 1929/126.
generalized. For instance, seeing a point between two other points is a case of experiencing the “real concrete order” of the experience itself. This experienced order depends on physiological processes in the perceiver. Köhler argues that the experienced order corresponds to a feature of the physiological processes which underlie it. He writes:

One point is seen between the others...[I]n the underlying processes there must be something functional which corresponds to that [experienced] ‘between’…[T]he experienced ‘between’ is accompanied by a functional ‘between’ in the concrete dynamic context of concurrent physiological events. (GP 1929/64)

Generalizing from particular cases like the one described in the above quote, Köhler formulates a principle that applies to all spatial and temporal order in experience: “Experienced order in space [and time] is a true representation of a corresponding order in the underlying dynamical context of physiological processes” (GP 1929/64, 65). The explanation moves from description of the character of direct experience to an account of brain structure. Given that experience is the way it is, the underlying physiological processes are hypothesized to have a character isomorphic with the character of the experience. The gist of Köhler’s psychophysical isomorphism is that understanding the character of experience aids understanding of the character of the brain.

Structure, order, organization in sensory experience mirrors the structure, order, organization of the brain. A noteworthy consequence of this view is that by studying the character of experience we gain insight into the character of the brain processes that underlie experience, according to Köhler.

By calling into question the physiological model both empirism and nativism take for granted, Köhler challenges the empirism-nativism dichotomy itself. He might have agreed with Austin, who, concerning the terms ‘sense-data’ and ‘material thing’, wrote that “what is spurious is not one term of the pair but the antithesis itself” (Austin 1962, p. 4). Köhler writes in a similar
spirit when he shows how the empirism-nativism dichotomy runs roughshod over alternative routes of explanation. Empirism and nativism are not the only two possible explanations of sensory organization.

So far I have been focusing mainly on how organization of the visual field takes place. Recall that another part of the task of explaining organization is to determine when—in the perceptual processing and in the development of the organism—organization occurs. Köhler’s working hypothesis is that organization is an early and primitive process:

Upon the present time there has been a tendency to regard the remarkable properties of wholes…as the achievement of ‘higher’ processes. From the viewpoint of gestalt theory sensory organization is as natural and primitive a fact as any other side of sensory dynamics. (GP 1929/216)

In order to learn that sometimes white is black and vice versa, an individual needs time and much experience, largely because he has to learn it so thoroughly that finally the products of learning will be ‘projected’ into his field of vision as definite nuances of brightness instead of the ‘true’ ones. We should expect then that young or primitive subjects would not show ‘constancy of brightness’ to any considerable degree. But...they were found to possess approximately as good a ‘constancy of brightness’ as I do. (GP 1929/104-5)

In both passages Köhler emphasizes that sensory phenomena, which empiristic explanations typically explain in terms of learning and acquired meaning (i.e. sensory organization and color constancy) are “natural” and “primitive”. Here it is important to note that Köhler is referring to “original” organization. He and the other Berlin School Gestaltists acknowledged the role of learning and past experience in perception, including subsequent organization. William Epstein argues that this acknowledgement does not sit well with the Gestaltists’ claim that organization is a primitive, natural, sensory fact:

Wertheimer, Köhler, and Koffka always accepted that when an organization has been achieved in the past on the basis of the primary principles of grouping, this previously achieved organization can influence current perceptual organization. The admission of Gestalt theory of a
role for past experience or learning in perception is a necessary concession to the facts of the matter. Nevertheless, it seems to be a troublesome admission inasmuch as the admission is not accompanied by a special formulation of the learning process that would reconcile perceptual learning with the general Gestalt theory of perception. (Epstein 1989 in Schwartz 2004, p. 251)

Perhaps Epstein is right that Köhler & co. did not adequately develop their views on learning in perception to a degree that would enable them to reconcile the concession that past experience influences perception with their general theory of perception. Nonetheless the literature on the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation portrays Köhler as conveniently ignoring the role of past experience in his account of perception. There is not a single mention of Köhler’s acknowledgement that past experience influences perceptual organization in the literature I reviewed in Chapter One, even though a central theme in discussions of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation is the role that ‘meaning’, interpretation, thought, conception, or concepts play in sensory experience.

*Change of organization and visual reality.* Köhler repeatedly asks us to observe that the actual organization of the visual field is just one among a host of possible organizations available, given the constellation of stimuli. This observation opens up questions about how to properly describe and explain changes in organization of the visual field. Köhler claims that experiencing a change in organization is a matter of experiencing one “concrete, real form” then another (*GP* 1929/195). For example, I may look at a map of the Mediterranean and fail to see Italy because the peninsula does not have concrete real form in my visual field. I could instead “see some ‘funny’ figures (corresponding to the Adriatic and so forth) which are new to me but nevertheless ‘have a concrete form’” (*GP* 1929/196). The Mediterranean can “have form” while Italy is formless or vice versa. Köhler claims that retinal stimulation does not determine which of these two forms are experienced: “With exactly the same constellation of stimuli we have two
different forms” (GP 1929/197-98). Retinal stimulation does not fully determine the actual organization of the visual field or the properties of segregated wholes (GP 1929/202-3).

Another feature of organized wholes is that although one and the same constellation of retinal stimuli allows for multiplicity of organization, multiple concrete real forms cannot “co-exist” in the visual field simultaneously:

So long as we really have the first one, i.e., as existing in vision, the other will be absorbed in the general surroundings, which optically have no real form at the time. When the second form becomes a visual reality, the first disappears. (GP 1929/198)

When I tell the reader that the number 4 is before him in the field, he will undoubtedly find it; but if he is not influenced by theoretical prejudices, he will confess that the form of the 4 did not exist as a visual reality at first and that, if it began to exist later on, that meant a transformation of visual reality. (GP 1929/200)

In his general characterization of organization Köhler uses the terms ‘sensory fact’, ‘optical reality’, ‘visual reality’, ‘visual existence’ to emphasize that organization is a “typical fact in [visual] experience” (GP 1929/126). But Köhler is especially emphatic about the reality of organization in the context of discussing changes in organization. In the above two passages he describes change of organization as a matter of the coming into and going out of existence of real forms. When a change of organization occurs the first form is destroyed by the coming into being of the new form. Köhler does not make explicit his motivations for emphasizing the reality of organization in the visual field. Perhaps he is defending his point that organization is sensorial rather than intellectual. It is not an outside influence (e.g. memory association, inference, interpretation, or judgment) imposed on sensory experience. Organization is a part of

87 There are parallel remarks in Köhler 1930 that show Köhler’s emphasis on the reality of organization: “How ‘real’ it [the phenomenon of group formation] is one feels when trying to form other groups…Most people will never get this other grouping as clear, stable, and optically real as the former one” (1930, p. 143). Also: “at a given time some concrete forms are simply there in vision, not less than colors and brightnesses” (1930, p. 150).
the visual experience itself and must be included in a faithful description of that experience. Also, Köhler’s examples in the above passages support arguments he gave against the possibility of “unnoticed sensations” in an early paper that criticizes the constancy hypothesis. Some thinkers committed to the constancy hypothesis would say that Köhler’s cases of changes in organization are not changes in visual experience, strictly speaking. They would hold fast to the constancy hypothesis and claim that there are unnoticed sensations that are present yet dormant in the experiences. A single experience is a conglomeration of sensations. Some of these sensations are dormant while others are at the forefront of awareness. Through acts of attention the perceiver becomes aware of the unnoticed sensations that were nonetheless ‘there’ all along. Dormant sensations are invoked to explain the shift that takes place without having to say that the change is a change in experience. By describing the shift as a matter of one concrete real form disappearing and another coming into being in the visual field, Köhler is denying that the experience of a change in organization is a matter of attending to previously unnoticed but somehow existent sensations.

All in all Köhler’s far-reaching motivation for emphasizing the experiential reality of organization is to loosen the conservatism that enforces a rigid correlation between retinal stimuli and experience. Köhler challenges two key conceptions. First, there is the idea that retinal stimuli are isolated bits that are independent of one another for their character. Köhler argues that it is more fruitful for psychology to view retinal stimuli as forming constellations, where the relations between the stimuli contribute to their character. Second, Köhler questions the idea that sensations are genuine parts of the sensory field of everyday experience. He argues

\[88\text{ Köhler 1913 in Henle 1971.}\]

\[89\text{ Here is a nice encapsulation of this viewpoint: “Sensory experience, which depends upon the constellation of stimuli in a larger area, and therefore does not correspond to merely local, inflexible units of process, may be influenced by ’processes of attitude’ as well” (GP 1929/126).}\]
that sensations are theoretical entities, constructions of a misguided analysis, not genuine parts of the sensory field: “[S]ensations of introspective analysis are parts existing only in construction and theory” (GP 1929/183). Segregated, organized wholes are the genuine parts of the sensory field. These two lines of attack show how Köhler can be seen as part of a movement to resist reductionism and include holistic vocabulary in psychology. He challenged his contemporaries and colleagues “to try to explain, rather than explain away, what trained and naive observers actually report, letting the theoretical chips fall where they may” (Ash 1995, p. 137).

Above I focus on Köhler’s talk of sensory organization as an experiential reality in order to elaborate his claim that changes in organization are sensory changes. But given Köhler’s rejection of the constancy hypothesis an important question to ask is: What, according to Köhler, causes the organization of the sensory field to change? In GP, the question comes up when Köhler responds to the worry that Gestalt psychology discourages scientific analysis with its privileging of wholes over parts. Köhler denies the charge. He takes segregated wholes to be genuine parts of the visual field (GP 1929/183). The identification of these organized wholes as parts of the visual field is a kind of analysis insofar as analysis involves identifying parts. Another kind of analysis for Köhler involves “attitude”, and this is where change of organization enters into the discussion. Adopting an analytical attitude toward the visual field can cause changes in the organization that “would prevail without our interference” (GP 1929/184):

I may passively accept what I find before me as the sensory field…I may, however, adopt a special attitude with regard to the field, selecting some of its members and more or less

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90 There is a tension between Köhler’s claim here and what he says at GP 1929/87. On p. 87 he says that he is not denying that sensations are real, but on p. 183 he argues that segregated wholes are the genuine parts of the sensory field whereas sensations are mere theoretical constructions. I think the tension is only apparent. At the first argumentative juncture Köhler wants to establish that the introspectionist does not motivate his privileging “pure” sensations as somehow more real than everyday experience. On p. 183 he is arguing that isolating pure sensations through trained introspective analysis is artificial. Köhler holds that trained specialists can have experiences introspectionists would call pure sensation, but he denies that these experiences are the real ones and that a genuine part of the sensory field must be arrived at through such an artificial procedure, a procedure far removed from our daily lives.
suppressing the rest. In many cases a change of organization will be the consequence of such an attitude, and hence ‘analysis’ of this sort involves a real transformation of sensory facts in gestalt psychology. (GP 1929/183)

Köhler is aware that talk of adopting an “attitude” invites the charge that changes in organization are intellectual rather than sensorial. He insists that it is not the attitude “as an experience” that is responsible for the change in organization. Changes in organization are changes in sensory facts brought about by underlying physiological processes (GP 1929/124n.). They are changes in the experience, but the cause of this experiential change is not itself an experience: “From the viewpoint of gestalt psychology a change of attitude involves a definite physiological stress exerted upon a sensory field by processes originating in other parts of the nervous system, and to some degree the organization of the field may yield to it” (GP 1929/184).

Köhler notes other ways changes of organization come about. Some changes happen spontaneously and without any outside influence. For instance, Figure 3 shifts between three narrow sections against a more prominent background and three wide sections against a less prominent background.

Köhler says that we are more likely to see the three narrow sectors first, but if we look at the center of it, the second pattern can be seen. He describes the shift in experience this way: “In the

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91 Figure 3 is Köhler’s Figure 8 in GP 1929/185.
new shape those lines, which belonged together in the first pattern as contours of one arm, belong to separate arms and vice versa. The organization has changed” (GP 1929/186). Whether the change is brought about through outside influence (analysis, change of attitude, etc.) or spontaneously, Köhler describes all changes in organization as transitions in sensory facts which correspond to changes in physiological processes in the nervous system (GP 1929/185).

Conclusion

Fundamentally, Köhler’s discussions of introspection-behaviorism and empirism-nativism aim to expose a pejorative attitude about naïve experience. Köhler describes the rampant conservatism of these views and argues that a conservative approach to psychological investigation is undesirable and unfruitful for many reasons. Such an attitude amounts to ignoring or discrediting the bulk of ordinary experience of the world, fails to appreciate the biological value of organization of the sensory field, and misconstrues the relation between scientific observation and direct experience by failing to recognize that scientific observation not only depends on naïve experience for its beginnings but also derives its significance from its ability to describe and explain this experience.

Köhler, like the other Berlin School Gestaltists, sees the Gestalt approach to investigating sensory experience (and other psychological facts) as carving a new theoretical space between empirism-nativism on the one hand and behaviorism-introspectionism on the other. By employing a holistic vocabulary in his descriptions of the visual field and explanations of the underlying processes that are isomorphic with the visual field, Köhler attempts to demonstrate that it is more fruitful for psychology to treat the dynamicity, fluidity, flexibility, and
interconnectedness of the visual field and underlying processes as part of the subject matter of a scientific psychology rather than attempting to explain away these features.
Chapter Three: Key Insights in Wittgenstein’s Discussions of Seeing and Seeing Aspects

Introduction

Wittgenstein’s remarks in his 1940s discussions of seeing and seeing aspects can serve as a foundation for appreciating his engagement with Köhler’s views on visual experience. The aim of this chapter is to provide a careful overview of those remarks. The overview is divided into two main parts. The first part examines the intimate connection between seeing and describing what is seen. Through a detailed study of a stretch of remarks in RPP I concerning the question “What’s really seen?” and PI II.xi’s “two uses of ‘see’” example, I elucidate three of Wittgenstein’s insights about seeing and describing what is seen: (i) that the philosophical question “What’s really seen?” can be dissolved by reformulating it as a question about what we call ‘seeing’; (ii) that what we call ‘seeing’ partly depends on what we call a ‘representation of what is seen’ and (iii) that the concepts ‘what is seen’ and ‘representation of what is seen’ are elastic concepts, in that the boundaries of these concepts extend and flex, expand and contract. Appreciating that, for Wittgenstein, seeing and describing what is seen are intimately linked is important for understanding his strategies for assessing Köhler’s views on visual organization. (We will see in the next chapter that Wittgenstein’s main strategy for tackling Köhler’s conceptual difficulty is to investigate our practices of describing what we see in aspect-seeing contexts.)

Note that Wittgenstein is comfortable interchanging ‘description’ and ‘representation’ in his discussions of what is seen. Pictures, verbal reports, imitations, and models can all be counted descriptions of what is seen. I will use ‘description’ and ‘representation’ interchangeably as well.
The second part of this chapter turns to the question: What is the place of the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ among the concepts of experience? The place of this concept is especially difficult to locate because of its complicated interrelations with other psychological concepts. I explore five of Wittgenstein’s examples of seeing aspects in order to map some of the interrelations between the concepts ‘noticing an aspect’, ‘seeing’, and ‘thinking’. This exploration reveals that the place of the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ is an in-between place; with respect to ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’, it is between ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’. Next I elucidate what it means to say that a concept’s place is an in-between place, that it is a concept that does not fit neatly on either side of the relevant divide. The interrelations between these psychological concepts are complicated, and some of the transitions between cases of seeing, seeing an aspect, and thinking are gradual and subtle. Thus, “between ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’” does not have a unified meaning across all cases of seeing aspects; the kinds and degrees of similarities and differences between the concepts ‘noticing an aspect’, ‘seeing’, and ‘thinking’ vary from case to case. To get at these insights, I introduce a metaphor: ‘[N]oticing an aspect’ is on a conceptual continuum between ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’, where the poles of this continuum (‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’) are shifting poles. To develop this metaphor, I also make use of one of the distinctions Wittgenstein only occasionally employs in his attempts to find a road through the similarities and differences between kinds of aspects: the distinction between “optical” and “conceptual” aspects. Finally, I bring out two consequences of the claim that ‘noticing an aspect’ is an in-between concept that are particularly important for our Chapter Four examination of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation. First, to the question “Is seeing an aspect seeing, or is it

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93 ‘Thinking’ (Denken) may be misleading if it is construed narrowly. Wittgenstein, in my view, is not settled on how to characterize the conceptual contrast he alludes to with ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’. Sometimes he uses ‘conceiving’ (Auffassen), ‘interpreting’ (Deutung), ‘meaning’ (Bedeutung) and ‘understanding’ (Verstehen) in place of ‘thinking’. It might be helpful to think of the issue in terms of a broad contrast between ‘sensory’ and ‘non-sensory’ or ‘visual’ and ‘non-visual’, in the case of seeing.
thinking?” we cannot give unqualified yes or no answers without compromising the character of aspect-seeing experiences. What we call ‘seeing an aspect’ resembles both what we call ‘seeing’ and what we call ‘thinking’. A second, closely related consequence is that we have conceptual grounds for both of these conceptual comparisons (as well as others) which are not recognizable if we cast the issue in terms of a sharp seeing—thinking divide.

I. Seeing and Describing What Is Seen

Two Different Concepts of ‘What Is Perceived’

At RPP I §1066 and thereabouts, everyday, “naïve” language is singled out for scrutiny. A description is given: “I see that the child wants to touch the dog but doesn’t dare”. Someone asks: “How can I see that?” This opens a kind of dialog between Wittgenstein and four other “voices” in the series of paragraphs that follow RPP I §1066. Two of these voices are, later, named by Wittgenstein: the purist and the naïf. The other two I will call the experimental psychologist and the pessimist. The purist and the pessimist both challenge the naïf form of expression but in different ways. The purist stumbles over the naïve description; he wonders whether it makes sense to say that the child’s fearfulness or its facial expression is seen, but the motivation for his hesitating to grant the naïf form of expression is not obvious. The pessimist

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94 Wittgenstein does not say that the two concepts of ‘what is perceived’ that he examines are the only ones. It seems that he would allow that there are other actual and possible concepts of ‘what is perceived’. In the remainder of this section I will use ‘what is seen’ and ‘what is perceived’ interchangeably since all of the cases of perceiving that Wittgenstein considers here are cases of seeing.

95 I am grateful to Ian Hacking for encouraging me to trace the origins of Wittgenstein’s RPP I §1066 example. The example originates with J.B. Watson. Köhler cites Watson’s 1925 experiments on reactions children have to animals. See Köhler GP 1929/252 and Watson 1926. Wittgenstein’s example is analogous to examples Watson gives (and Köhler cites). Watson is exploring conditioned emotional responses. Köhler cites Watson’s experiments while discussing how we perceive (as opposed to infer) the emotions of others. Both Wittgenstein and Köhler hold that we can see the emotions of others.

96 At RPP I §§1069, 1101-02.
doubts that the descriptive power of language can capture the fine detail of human experience.\textsuperscript{97} Everyday descriptions of visual experience, for instance, are crude and incomplete, according to the pessimist. My fourth figure, the experimental psychologist, broadly represents Wittgenstein’s Köhler. Köhler promotes a theory of perception that coincides with naïve language insofar as Köhler holds that the glance of the eye, the fearfulness of the behavior, the expression of a face, can be seen. I will not discuss Wittgenstein’s interaction with all four voices in detail. Instead, I will save discussion of the experimental psychologist (i.e. Köhler) for the fourth chapter. I do not discuss the pessimist’s concerns because doing so would take the investigation in another, quite different direction. My mention of the pessimist is thus confined to a footnote in Part I. And as we will see, the voice of the naïf serves more as a point of reference than as a considered position on what is seen and describing what is seen. So my primary focus here is uncovering what is behind the purist’s hesitating to unqualifiedly grant the naïf form of expression. When the purist asks questions like “Do I really see…” Wittgenstein responds by dissolving such questions into questions about what we call ‘seeing’. And what we call ‘seeing’ goes hand in hand with what we call a ‘representation of what is seen’.

I begin by depicting the purist. One facet of this characterization considers two viewpoints “external” to \textit{RPP I}: Bertrand Russell’s, as presented in \textit{The Problems of Philosophy} (1912)\textsuperscript{98} and the solipsist’s, as presented in Wittgenstein’s \textit{Blue Book} (1958). The other facet turns directly to Wittgenstein’s remarks about the purist, as given within the relevant stretch of paragraphs in \textit{RPP I}: §§1066-1102. The outcome of this twofold characterization is that the purist’s concern is neither Russell’s nor the solipsist’s. However, the purist and the solipsist are interestingly alike in some respects. According to Wittgenstein, the purist “only wants to draw

\textsuperscript{97} See \textit{RPP I} §1079.
attention to a division between concepts” (RPP I §1102); he is not contradicting the naïf form of expression when he wonders whether the fearfulness in the child’s behavior can really be seen. That is, the purist wants to draw attention to an already existing division between our concepts, not introduce a new division that contradicts the naïf form of expression.

With this characterization of the purist’s agenda in place, I examine the division between two different concepts of ‘what is seen’ that the purist wants us to acknowledge. Wittgenstein holds that we can appreciate differences in what is seen by appreciating our diverse use of ‘see’ and the variety of all that we call a ‘description of what is seen’. So his strategy for addressing the purist’s worry about what is seen is to investigate similarities and differences between cases of seeing and between descriptions of what is seen in these cases. To illustrate Wittgenstein’s treatment of the purist’s worry (i.e. that a difference between concepts is masked by the naïf form of expression) I report some of these investigations. The outcome is that our everyday use of ‘see’ is not tied to a single concept of ‘what is seen’. Nor is it tied to a single concept of ‘representation of what is seen’.

Pinpointing the Purist’s Concern: The Purist vs. the Naïf? To locate the purist’s worry about what is seen, Wittgenstein occasionally notes the viewpoint of the naïf. As I said above, the naïf’s is one voice in this dialogical setting. The naïf represents an everyday language-user and perceiver. His is not the voice of a philosopher who has contemplated the question “What’s really seen?”, entertained solipsism, idealism, and realism for example, and then decided to adopt a naïve realist account of the objects of visual perception. Rather, his is the voice of someone for whom the philosophical and theoretical versions of the question “Do I really see…?” do not arise.99 Wittgenstein writes:

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99 Obviously, we can imagine everyday circumstances in which the question “Did you really see…?” or “What did you really see?” come up.
Does anyone that speaks of it [i.e. a case of seeing like the one the purist scrutinizes] ever doubt that it is [a visual phenomenon] (except when he is doing philosophy or psychology)? Don’t we ask a man about it and tell him of it, like any other visual phenomenon? Do we talk of it more hesitantly, with the suspicion that what we say may have no clear sense? Certainly not. But there are differences in it all the same. (RPP I §379)

The naïf has no philosophical or theoretical agenda; his voice does not embody a position on the question “What’s really seen?” Wittgenstein writes:

For ‘naïve language’, that’s to say out naïf, normal, way of expressing ourselves, does not contain any theory of seeing – it shows you, not any theory, but only a concept of seeing. (RPP I §1101)

The naïf’s descriptions of what he sees are descriptions of uncritical experience. Thus, it would be misleading to pit the naïf against the purist, as if they are debating a philosophical question. Instead, the naïf’s viewpoint is fruitfully regarded as an initial target for the purist’s scrutiny and an ongoing point of reference throughout Wittgenstein’s explorations.

*Pinpointing the Purist’s Concern: The Purist’s Question vs. Russell’s.* The purist’s question, “Is the fearfulness *really* seen?”, can be thought of as a specific instance of the general question “What’s *really* seen?”, and I will treat it that way in subsequent discussion.

Wittgenstein wants to make more conspicuous what motivates the posing of the question. What is it that makes the purist stumble over the naïve form of language, which includes descriptions such as “I see that the child wants to touch the dog, but doesn’t dare”? What is he trying to achieve by flagging this use of ‘see’? Is the purist’s hesitation a rejection of the description given at RPP I §1066? Is he claiming that the use of such a description is an error, that it would be more correct for the speaker to use some word other than ‘see’? It is not obvious what the purist is up to, and it seems that the purist himself is not aware of the source of his discontent. To locate the root of the worry, Wittgenstein contrasts two ways of understanding why the purist
stumbles over the everyday description of what is seen given at RPP I §1066: the purist is saying that the naïf’s use of ‘see’ is incorrect with respect to some theory of seeing or the purist wants to call attention to a division between concepts of ‘what is seen’.

Wittgenstein puts aside the first way of understanding the purist’s motive. He separates the purist’s question from the question “Is it right to say ‘I see his sly wink’?” (RPP I §1069). The purist is not concerned with whether the everyday uses of ‘see’ conform to some philosophical or scientific theory of perception. He is not a theorist bent on establishing that the everyday uses of ‘see’ in question fail to conform to what he takes to be the correct theory of seeing. By contrast, Russell’s question “What’s really seen?” is informed by a philosophical theory of seeing. In the remainder of this subsection, using Bertrand Russell’s sense-data theory in The Problems of Philosophy as an object of comparison, I argue that the purist’s question is not motivated by a philosophical or scientific theory of seeing. In the next subsection I show that the purist is concerned with a division between concepts of what is seen.

To get a grip on Wittgenstein’s interest in questions concerning what is really seen, contrast Russell’s in The Problems of Philosophy. While discussing the appearance-reality distinction, the problem of other minds, and skepticism about the existence of the external world, Russell argues that only private sense data are really seen, not the physical objects in the public domain:

We are all in the habit of judging as to the “real” shapes of things, and we do this so unreflectingly that we come to think we actually see the real shapes…But the “real” shape is not what we see; it is something inferred from what we see. And what we see is constantly changing in shape as we move about the room; so that here again the senses seem not to give us the truth about the table itself, but only about the appearance of the table…The real table, if there is one, is not immediately known to us at all, but must be an inference from what is immediately known…Let us give the name of “sense-data” to the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colors, sounds, smells, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on. We shall
give the name “sensation” to the experience of being immediately aware of these things. (Russell 1998, pp.15-18)

According to Russell, we only (directly?) see sense-data, not physical objects, and we take these appearances to be signs of “some ‘reality’ behind” (Russell 1998, p. 24). We infer physical objects from our acquaintance with sense-data.

In contrast, Wittgenstein’s examples concerning seeing and the like at RPP I §§1066-1102 are not directed at the question whether we really see physical objects. Whether we see the glance of the eye or the sadness, fearfulness, or joy in facial expressions or behavior is more within his range of interest. Another point of contrast is that Wittgenstein does not identify himself as the one who poses the question. Someone else poses the question (the purist), and Wittgenstein stops to consider what motivates the worry. The investigative context in which the question is posed differs too; the purist poses the question while scrutinizing a description taken from everyday language, not while motivating external world skepticism.

Pinpointing the Purist’s Concern: The Purist vs. the Solipsist. Above I argued that the purist’s concerns should be distinguished from Russell’s epistemological worries. Now I will argue that the purist’s concerns should be distinguished from those of Wittgenstein’s Blue Book solipsist, although there are some interesting affinities between the two. Before comparing them, I should say more about how Wittgenstein characterizes the purist’s concern in RPP I.

One of his lines of response to the purist’s worry is intertwined with his attempts to pinpoint the purist’s concern. To say that the fearfulness of the behavior is seen “is not to deny the difference between the two concepts of what is perceived” (RPP I §1068). That is,

100 Although in his 1958 memoir Malcolm recalls the question of whether physical objects are really seen coming up in Wittgenstein’s 1946 lectures on philosophical psychology: “There is a philosophical question as to what one really sees. Does one really see depth, or physical objects, or sadness, or a face, etc.? There is a temptation to say that all of this is ‘interpretation’, ‘hypothesis’, etc. and that what one really sees is a flat surface of colored patches” (1958, p. 49).
Wittgenstein reminds the purist: One can say that the fearfulness in the behavior is seen and appreciate differences between the two concepts of what is seen. This is the response to an implied worry, which Wittgenstein appears to assign to the purist: To say that the fearfulness in the behavior is seen is tantamount to ignoring a difference between concepts. The tone of Wittgenstein’s response is both cautionary and reassuring. He portrays the purist as someone in danger of a kind of excess in his viewpoint—not as someone who has already given in to excess.

Finally at RPP I §1102 Wittgenstein explicitly announces the purist’s agenda: “So what was the purist trying to do? Does he want to say it’s more correct to use a different word here instead of ‘seeing’? I believe he only wants to draw attention to a division between concepts”. Thus, Wittgenstein recommends the second way of understanding why the purist stumbles over the everyday description of what is seen: The purist wants to call attention to a division between concepts of what is seen.

To appreciate Wittgenstein’s diagnosis of the purist, compare his portrayal of “the philosopher” in The Blue Book:

A philosopher is not a man out of his senses, a man who doesn’t see what everybody sees; nor on the other hand is his disagreement with common sense that of the scientist disagreeing with the coarse views of the man in the street. That is, his disagreement is not founded on a more subtle knowledge of fact. We therefore have to look round for the source of his puzzlement. And we find that there is puzzlement and mental discomfort, not only when our curiosity about certain facts is not satisfied or when we can’t find a law of nature fitting in with all our experience, but also when a notation dissatisfies us—perhaps because of various associations which it calls up. Our ordinary language, which of all possible notations is the one which pervades all our life, holds our mind rigidly in one position, as it were, and in this position sometimes it feels cramped, having a desire for other positions as well. Thus we sometimes wish for a notation which stresses a difference more strongly, makes it more obvious, than ordinary language does.

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101 This move (i.e. Wittgenstein’s effort to distinguish the purist’s call to acknowledge an already existing division in concepts from a rejection of the use of ‘see’ in the relevant description) is, I think, echoed in a remark by Anscombe in Anscombe 1965: “To call such a use ‘new’ simply means that some difference between it and what is being called the old use strikes us as important. There is indeed an important difference; though it is wrong to regard the uses which it marks as, so to speak, deviant, for our concepts of sensation are built up by our having all these uses” (Noë and Thompson 2002, p. 66).

102 Cf. RPP I §1062.
or one which in a particular case uses more closely similar forms of expression than our ordinary language. Our mental cramp is loosened when we are shown the notations which fulfill these needs. These needs can be of the greatest variety. (BB, p. 59)

In the above passage Wittgenstein speaks of the wish (or need) for a new notation. We may have such a wish when we want to stress a difference more strongly or make a similarity more apparent than our already existing notation does. Wittgenstein hints that these wishes can be fulfilled. He also suggests that he can show us notations that fulfill these wishes.

Although he offers a general characterization of philosophers at this juncture in BB, it comes out later that Wittgenstein’s narrower focus is on the metaphysician and narrowest on the solipsist. The solipsist wants to create for himself a new, private notation, one that reflects that only his experience is real. Wittgenstein says that the solipsist is unaware of the source of his discontent. Further, the solipsist does not grasp the consequences of his wish to create a new notation:

[H]e is not aware that he is objecting to a convention. He sees a way of dividing the country different from the one used on the ordinary map. He feels tempted, say, to use the name ‘Devonshire’ not for the county with its conventional boundary, but for a region differently bounded. He could express this by saying: ‘Isn’t it absurd to make this a country, to draw the boundaries here?’ But what he says is: ‘The real Devonshire is this’. We could answer: ‘What you want is only a new notation, and by a new notation no facts of geography are changed.’ (BB, p. 57)

The solipsist thinks that he is bringing a metaphysical insight to our attention when he says “Only my pain is real”, but what he is really doing is objecting to a convention, according to Wittgenstein.

Like the solipsist, the purist is at a loss to understand his own puzzlement. But unlike the solipsist, the purist does not take himself to be doing something private with his words, such as
expressing an unrecognized metaphysical insight. The purist’s dissatisfaction is milder—he only wants to draw attention to an already existing division in our everyday concepts, one that he wishes were more obvious in everyday descriptions of what is seen. For instance, he does not claim that it is incorrect to say a glance is seen or recommend that we change our notation so that ‘see’ is no longer used in connection with glances.

Both the purist and the solipsist are dissatisfied with some aspect of everyday language. They are at nearly opposite extremes of dissatisfaction though. I would venture to say that Wittgenstein catches the purist at an “earlier” stage of worry. The purist wants an already existing difference between concepts of ‘what is seen’ to be recognized and appreciated whereas the solipsist wants to introduce a new, private notation. Of course, whether or not the solipsist can create such a notation is a separate question. Wittgenstein maintains that the wish for a private notation cannot be met if ‘private’ means that others are logically excluded from ever coming to understand the notation.¹⁰³

Let me sum up the results of the twofold characterization of the purist that I offer above. I distinguished the purist’s inquiry from Russell’s by contrasting two ways of understanding the question “What’s really seen?” On one reading, it is a question about our everyday language. On the other, it is a question about how to restrict the concept ‘seeing’ so that it conforms to a theory of seeing. I argued that the first reading captures the purist concern. Still, the purist’s concern required further specification because the solipsist is also concerned about everyday language. Both are dissatisfied with ordinary language, but the purist’s dissatisfaction is milder. His is the kind of conceptual difficulty anyone could have; it results from fixing one’s attention

¹⁰³ Here I allude to an insight from Wittgenstein’s arguments against the possibility of a private language in the first part of PI.
on some conceptual tie-ups to the exclusion of others. The solipsist’s dissatisfaction is more drastic. It prompts him to try to create a private notation. Wittgenstein wants to show how the purist’s dissatisfaction can be dissolved by getting him to shift his attention to the already existing division between concepts of ‘what is seen’ while, at the same time, appreciating that our concepts allow for the use of ‘see’ in the contexts the purist is worried about. The solipsist’s dissatisfaction cannot be dissolved this way or any other way. The solipsist’s wish for a private notation cannot be fulfilled at all.

Wittgenstein’s Response. Wittgenstein does not give a yes-or-no answer to the question “Is the fearfulness of the behavior really seen?” Instead, his answer is more of an attempt to dissolve the purist’s worry. His strategy is to direct attention to the variety of ways we describe what we see in order to determine whether our concepts include or (at least) can make room for the uses of ‘see’ that spark the purist’s worry (e.g. “I see the fearfulness…”). Through articulating similarities and differences between various cases of seeing and describing what is seen, Wittgenstein shows the conceptual grounds for our inclination to speak of seeing and the purist’s hesitation to speak of seeing in some cases. Although talk of differences between two concepts of ‘what is seen’ prevails in these investigations, Wittgenstein also cites similarities between them. Attention to similarities is a way to address the purist’s inclination to qualify or restrict the everyday use of ‘see’ in the relevant cases and a way to provide grounds for the inclination to use ‘see’ in cases where philosophers and other theorists deny that we see. In the remainder of this section, I examine three variations on the purist’s theme “What’s really seen?”

This is not to say that it is an innocuous conceptual difficulty. To foreshadow Chapter Four a bit, Wittgenstein characterizes Köhler in a similar way. Köhler privileges some comparisons to the exclusion of others. And this has serious consequences both for Köhler’s project and more generally.

Cf. RPP II §444.
I do so to illustrate how Wittgenstein alleviates the purist’s concern through consideration of different uses of ‘see’ and ‘description of what is seen’.

One approach to the purist’s concern is given at *RPP* I §1066. Wittgenstein reformulates the question “How can I see that?” (i.e. that the child wants to touch the dog but doesn’t dare) in terms of a question about *descriptions* of what is seen. He asks whether “this description of what is seen” is “on the same level as” a description of moving shapes and colors. That we can mimic one who wants to touch something but does not dare could count both for and against saying that the two descriptions are on the same level. We might say the two descriptions are on the same level since it is behavior, bodily movement that is imitated. On the other hand, Wittgenstein says that to give a “characteristic imitation” of the behavior, the imitation must be embedded in a wider context, a context of both fear and longing. The imitation would include movements of reaching toward the dog but then retracting. The description of the child’s fearful behavior gets its meaning not only from the child’s movements and other behavior, but also from the spatial and temporal surroundings of this description.\(^{106}\) Two “moves” stand out in Wittgenstein’s response to the purist at *RPP* I §1066. First, it is helpful to reformulate the question “How can I see that?” as a question about descriptions of what is seen. Second, Wittgenstein asks whether the two descriptions under consideration are “on a level”. His answer is largely negative, but he points out differences and similarities between them.

At *RPP* I §1068 Wittgenstein confronts another formulation of the purist’s concern: “But now am I to say that I really ‘see’ the fearfulness in this behavior – or that I really ‘see’ the facial expression?”\(^{107}\) This articulation of the question is especially misleading because it casts the concern in terms of a search for substantives (the fearfulness, the expression). Unlike the

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\(^{106}\) Cf. *PG*, p. 177.

\(^{107}\) Cf. *RPP* I §866. See *PI* §339 and *BB*, pp. 26, 169 for more on the idea that a misleading formulation of a philosophical question bars us from answering it.
formulation given at *RPP* I §1066, this one encourages metaphysical inquiry rather than reflection on our practices of describing what we see. Further, the question contains no example of what the purist *would* readily admit is seen. By contrast, the *RPP* I §1066 formulation gives us an object of comparison (i.e. a description of moving shapes and colors). Another reason this second formulation is especially misleading is that it suggests that there is some pure concept of ‘seeing’ that we can employ to locate and discard would-be cases of seeing that are not really cases of seeing. On this line of reasoning because the cases under scrutiny do not fit the prescribed concept, they are not *really* cases of seeing. In response to the purist’s question at *RPP* I §1068, Wittgenstein asks the purist, “Why not?” That is, why not say that we see the fearfulness or the facial expression? This response honors the everyday use of ‘see’ because it begins from a willingness to grant the everyday use. Again Wittgenstein explores possible sources of the purist’s hesitation to grant this everyday use of ‘see’. And once more he brings the focus back to *descriptions* of what is seen. This time he investigates how ‘good representation’ is used differently in connection with different objects of sight. For instance, the picture of a face that reproduces the *facial features* very accurately may not be the same kind of picture that gets the *facial expression* right. A picture could be a good representation of the facial features without being a good representation of the facial expression, and vice versa. By noting these differences Wittgenstein is not arguing that we should deny that these objects of sight are really seen. Nor is he privileging one case over another. He has shown why one might deny that these objects of sight are really seen. That is, he explores how the purist’s hesitation could get started (i.e. by reflecting on differences in our everyday concepts of ‘what is seen’ and ‘representation of what is seen’).
The final approach to the purist’s concern that I examine appears at *RPP* I §1070. Here Wittgenstein addresses the statement: “We surely can’t ‘see’ the expression, the shy behavior, *in the same sense* as we see movement, shapes and colors”. He asks, “What is there in this?” As with the *RPP* I §1066 formulation, this formulation of the purist’s concern is less misleading than the one given at *RPP* I §1068.\(^{108}\) It starts from an appreciation both that our concept of ‘seeing’ includes such uses of ‘see’, and that the phrase ‘in the same sense’ invites conceptual comparisons. Wittgenstein compares seeing a dog’s movement and seeing its joy. We say we see both the dog’s movement and its joy (*RPP* I §1070). That we do not qualify ‘see’ in the latter case counts in favor of saying that we see the movement and the joy in the same sense of ‘see’. Along similar lines, we might want to say that we see the joy and the movement in the same sense because one cannot see either one of these objects of sight with closed eyes! On the other hand, there are imaginable situations where we might restrict ‘see’ such that someone is said to see “all there is to see” even if he did not recognize the dog’s joy (*RPP* I §1070).

Wittgenstein notes that we might opt for this more restrictive use of ‘see’ if the ideal description of what is seen in this situation is an exact reproduction. In such a context, if someone sees the dog and is able to produce an exact drawing of it but does not recognize its joyful expression, we could say he saw all there is to see.

Overall Wittgenstein dissolves the purist’s concern by reformulating the question ‘What’s really seen?’ into a question about similarities and differences between uses of ‘see’ and ‘description of what is seen’ in various contexts. The three variants of Wittgenstein’s response to the purist are at once a vindication of the purist’s worry that unqualified use of ‘see’ across different contexts masks important differences and a demonstration that our practices of describing what we see reveal our grounds for using ‘see’ across these different contexts. The

\(^{108}\) Cf. *PI* II.xi, pp. 203, 204; *RPP* I §981; *RPP* II §444; *LW* I §§638, 642.
lesson for the purist is that acknowledging the similarities between cases of seeing need not be tantamount to denying their differences. Next I discuss the PI distinction between two uses of ‘see’. This discussion reinforces the idea that we can investigate what we call ‘seeing’ by investigating what we call a ‘description of what is seen’. Yet it also teases out an insight that is merely alluded to in Wittgenstein’s responses to the purist; namely, that our concepts of ‘what is seen’ and ‘representation of what is seen’ are elastic.

Two Uses of ‘See’

The PI discussion of aspect perception opens with two uses of the word ‘see’:

Two uses of the word “see”.
The one: “What do you see there?” – I see this” (and then a description, a drawing, a copy).
The other: “I see a likeness between these two faces” –let the man I tell this to be seeing the faces as clearly as I do myself.
The importance of this is the difference of category between the two ‘objects’ of sight.

The one man might make an accurate drawing of the two faces, and the other notice in the drawing the likeness which the former did not see. (PI II.xi, p. 193)

The philosophical themes highlighted by these two uses parallel the themes at the center of the purist’s concern in RPP I. But Wittgenstein’s approach in PI is quite different. Neither use of ‘see’ is held up for scrutiny within the immediate context unlike in RPP I, where the purist hesitates to grant our everyday use of ‘see’. From the brief descriptions given, there is no indication that anyone does or does not find either of the uses puzzling or problematic.

Wittgenstein’s announced interest in describing the two uses of ‘see’ is to note a difference of category between the two “objects” of sight. The descriptions are more a lure to compare and contrast the two uses on one’s own rather than Wittgenstein’s account of how such an

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109 As with the RPP I discussion of two concepts of ‘what is perceived’ Wittgenstein does not say that the two uses cited here in PI are the only two uses of ‘see’.
investigation would go. Below I accept the invitation to characterize the two uses beyond the descriptions Wittgenstein provides. I begin by examining three variants of the *PI* passage. Doing so will provide some insight about the kind of contrast Wittgenstein points to by citing these two uses of ‘see’. The three variants are:

Two uses of the report “I see…”—In one language-game the observer reports what he sees from his vantage point.—In the other, the same objects are scrutinized by several people; one of them says: “I see a similarity between them”.

In the first language-game the report might have been, for example, “I see two people who resemble each other as father and son”. This description is *far less complete* than one given, for example, by an exact drawing. But someone could give this *more complete* description and yet not notice the similarity (emphasis added).

And someone else could see this drawing and discover the resemblance in it. (*LW* I §180)

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Two uses of the word “*see*”. The one: “I see *this*”—and allude to a description, or point to a picture or a copy. With this I might tell someone else: over there, where you haven’t been able to see it, there is such-and-such. An example of the other use: “I see a likeness between these two faces [Ähnlichkeit in diesen beiden Gesichtern].” Let the man I tell this to be seeing the faces as clearly as I do.

The one man might make an accurate picture of the faces, and the other notice in the drawing their likeness, which the former did not see. (*LW* I §§431-32)

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Two uses of the statement “I see…”. One language-game: “What do you see there?” – “I see…”, and then a description of what was seen follows, either in words, or through a drawing, or a model, or gestures, etc. – Another language-game: We look at two faces and I say to someone: “I see a similarity in them.”

In the first language-game the description could have gone something like this: “I see two faces which are as like as father and son.” This can be called a far less complete description than the one that uses a drawing. But someone could give this more complete description and still not notice that similarity. Another might see the drawing of the first one and discover the family resemblance in it; and in the same way he might see a similarity between their facial expressions. (*RPP* II §556)

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*Note that here and at RPP* II §556 instead of “uses of ‘see’” Wittgenstein writes “uses of the report [or statement] (Bericht) ‘I see…’”.

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First use of ‘see’. To aid comparison, I reproduce each variant’s description of the first use of ‘see’ side-by-side:

I say “I see this” and then give a description, a drawing, or point to a picture or a copy. (\textit{PI} II.xi, p. 193; \textit{LW} I §431)

I say “I see…”, and then a description of what was seen follows, either in words, or through a drawing, or a model, or gestures, etc; for example “I see two faces which are as like as father and son.” (\textit{RPP} II §556)

I say “I see two people who resemble each other as father and son.” (\textit{LW} I §180)

The variants indicate that the first use of ‘see’ involves a difference in vantage point between the two men—one man asks what the other sees \textbf{there}. Notice too that the sample description given in \textit{PI} contains a demonstrative: “I see this”. The variants show that Wittgenstein also considered “I see two people…” and “I see two faces” examples of the first use of ‘see’.

Second use of ‘see’. Again, for easy comparison, I reproduce each variant’s description of the second use of ‘see’ side-by-side:

I say “I see a likeness between these two faces.” (\textit{PI} II.xi, p. 193; \textit{LW} I §431)

I say “I see a similarity between them” while scrutinizing multiple objects. (\textit{LW} I §180)

I say “I see a similarity in them” while looking at two faces. (\textit{RPP} II §556)

The second use of ‘see’ involves two men looking at the same objects (e.g. two faces). One man sees the likeness and gives the verbal description “I see a likeness…”. The other man does not see the likeness, although he can make an accurate drawing of the faces such that someone else could view his drawing and see the likeness between the two faces.

\textsuperscript{111} Though in some cases of seeing aspects we might point to a part of a picture and give the instruction “Look there!”
The importance of the two uses of ‘see’. Wittgenstein claims that the importance of the two uses of ‘see’ is a difference of category\footnote{In his 1940s writings Wittgenstein usually talks of category differences between \textit{concepts} (e.g. \textit{RPP} II §7: “It isn’t true that thinking is a kind of speaking, as I once said. The concept ‘thinking’ is \textit{categorically} different from the concept ‘speaking’.\”), \textit{expressions} (e.g. \textit{BB}, pp. 66-67: “There are two different cases in the use of the word ‘I’ (or ‘my’).”), and \textit{experiences} (e.g. \textit{RPP} II §154: “Hope can be called an emotion. That is, it can be placed in the same category as fear, anger, joy. It is related to belief, which is \textit{not} an emotion. There is no bodily expression typical of belief.”). Category differences are also discussed at many junctures in \textit{LPP}: p. 73 discusses the possibility of describing innervation as an active feeling, where ‘feeling’ is usually a matter of something just happening to me; p. 80 discusses the claim that the question “Are you sure it’s Professor Moore?” makes sense if I see but not if imagining is in question; p. 100 examines the idea that the experience of seeing an aspect shares a ‘categorical similarity’ with sensation insofar as seeing an aspect has duration; p. 300 notes two differences between intending and knowing that are categorical: you can ask questions about beginning and ending in the case of intending while these questions are not posed in cases of knowing; what it means for an intending to end or begin is different than what it means for knowing. In the case of intending, we say you changed your intention. In the case of knowing, forgetting is an end to knowing; p. 307 discusses the idea that a category difference is not something we get at through introspection although we are tempted to appeal to introspection in cases where we notice a category difference but cannot say what it consists in (Cf. \textit{Z} §86/\textit{RPP} I §793 in this connection too). Finally, a few pages later in \textit{PI} (p. 196) Wittgenstein claims that a visual impression and a drawing are not “of the same category”. Going on his use of ‘category’/’categorical’ in other places, although at \textit{PI}, p.193 he phrases the point in terms of a category difference between \textit{objects}. Wittgenstein employs talk of categories as a means to emphasize the importance of the differences between the two uses of ‘see’. ‘Categorical’ is an intensifier. Ian Hacking brought it to my attention that Gilbert Ryle has a 1938 paper on categories, which predates the publication of Ryle’s \textit{The Concept of Mind} (1949). Perhaps Wittgenstein was familiar with Ryle’s earlier paper.} between the two objects of sight. And as I said earlier, the brief descriptions of the two uses serve more as an invitation than as an account of those uses. Now that the contrast between the two uses is a bit clearer, consider the two objects of sight we are being asked to compare. They are: \textit{faces} and the \textit{likeness}\footnote{Two of the variants of \textit{PI} p. 193, \textit{LW} I §180 and \textit{RPP} II §556 hint at Wittgenstein’s interest in resemblance between people. In the second part of this chapter I discuss different sorts of likenesses between faces. For more on this theme see \textit{LW} I §§155f where Wittgenstein contrasts being interested in a likeness without concern for whose face it is versus being interested in the likeness between \textit{these} two faces in particular.} between them.

Before discussing differences, I will note some similarities between the two examples. In both cases, there are two people, one who sees and one who does not. Both uses involve a verbal description.\footnote{The first use—“I see \textit{this}.”—is not, strictly speaking, a description without verbal or pictorial supplementation to indicate what ‘this’ picks out.} To see both the two faces and the likeness between them, the perceiver’s eyes must be open. In both cases we can supply a context of use that gives sense to the command “Open your eyes!”
How do faces and likenesses differ as objects of sight? Here are some differences. First, we can see two faces without seeing a likeness between them. But in order to see a likeness between the two faces we must see the faces—if a likeness is seen, the faces that show the resemblance have also been seen. Second, what “unable to see” or “able to see” means in each case differs. In the first case, one person is unable to see the two faces because of his physical vantage point. In the second case, both men see the faces clearly, so we cannot appeal to a difference in vantage point to explain one person’s inability to see the likeness. To get someone to see a likeness we would not say “Come over here.” or “Look, over there!” If two men have the same vantage point but only one sees the two faces before them, we could say that the man who does not see the faces has defective sight or even that he is blind. It would be odd to say that someone’s sight is defective if he does not see a likeness between two faces, though perhaps there are cases where the similarity would be so striking that the second use comes closer to the first one. For instance, if someone looks at a pair of twins that have quite similar facial features and yet fails to see the resemblance we might be more willing to say that that person’s sight is defective. Third, in relation to the second use of ‘see’, there is a mismatch between being able to produce a drawing that enables someone else to see the likeness and actually seeing the likeness. The man who does not see the likeness between the two faces can produce a drawing that would allow someone else to see the likeness. It is harder to imagine a case where someone draws an accurate picture of a face but does not see the face himself. So a likeness is an object of sight we can miss even if our eyes are open and we draw a picture that depicts the likeness well enough to allow someone else to see it. Fourth, in the first case a pictorial representation or a verbal description might serve to describe what is seen. Wittgenstein’s observations about the second use suggest that a pictorial representation of the likeness is less reliable insofar as the drawing is
supposed to represent what the person drawing the picture sees. If we are interested in determining whether someone sees the likeness between two faces, a verbal description which makes reference to the likeness is a better guide (at least in this particular case of the second use of ‘see’ described by Wittgenstein). A closely related fifth point of contrast is that what counts as a “complete” description in each case differs. At RPP II §556 Wittgenstein says that if we compare the verbal description “I see two faces which are as like as father and son” and an exact drawing of the two faces in terms of completeness, the drawing is the more complete description. Yet with the second use of ‘see’, someone can make this drawing but not see the likeness. So again, if what we are interested in finding out is whether a person sees the likeness, the verbal description “I see a likeness…” serves better than the exact drawing because the exact drawing does not tell us whether the one who draws it sees the likeness or not.\textsuperscript{115}

Summary of Part I

I have elucidated Wittgenstein’s views on the interrelations between seeing and describing what is seen. His claims about these interrelations cluster around three themes: the elasticity of our concepts of ‘what is seen’ and ‘representation of what is seen’, the dissolution of the question “What’s \textit{really} seen?”, and the intimate connections between seeing and describing what is seen.

\textsuperscript{115} The pessimist might find a foothold here. Not only could the pessimist argue that all the rich detail of experience is left out of our means of reporting them (e.g. pictorial representations, verbal descriptions, imitations, 3-D models), but also it looks like in some cases—such as the second use of ‘see’ cited by Wittgenstein—the more complete description (i.e. an exact drawing) can fail to tell us even roughly whether someone has had the experience in question.
To take the first theme, both the *RPP I* discussion of the purist’s concern and *PI*’s two uses of ‘see’ reflect Wittgenstein’s insight that both the concept of ‘a representation of what is seen’ and the concept of ‘what is seen’ are *elastic*. Wittgenstein writes:

The concept of a representation of what is seen, like that of a copy,\(^{116}\) is very elastic [dehnbar], and so together with it is the concept of what is seen. The two are intimately connected. (Which is not to say that they are alike.). (*PI* II.xi, p. 198)

In the above remark Wittgenstein speaks of the elasticity of a concept. This metaphor characterizes the concept’s boundaries. He observes that the boundaries of our concepts of ‘what is seen’ and ‘a representation of what is seen’ can expand or contract, depending on how ‘see’, ‘description of what is seen’ and other related words or concepts are used from context to context. The particular examples Wittgenstein explores in response to the purist’s concern and his sketch of two uses of ‘see’ in *PI* illustrate the elasticity of these concepts. To recall an earlier example, if someone sees a dog’s movements but does not notice the joyfulness in the movements, we can say either that he saw all there was to see or that he did not. What we say depends on what we call a description of what is seen in this context. If the ideal description of what is seen in this case is an exact copy, then if someone produces a description that captures the dog’s movements, we could say that he saw all there was to see. This would be a more restrictive use of ‘see’; the boundaries of our concepts ‘what is seen’ and ‘representation of what is seen’ are more contracted than they would be had we said that someone who sees a dog’s movement but does not recognize it as joyful does not see all there is to see. In the latter case, the boundaries of our concepts ‘what is seen’ and ‘representation of what is seen’ would be more expansive, allowing that the joyfulness in the dog’s movements is an object of sight. Likewise, an accurate representation of this object of sight may not be an exact reproduction of the dog’s

\(^{116}\) I save discussion of the elasticity of our concept ‘copy’ for Chapter Four.
movements. To depict the joy, we might exaggerate some of the dog’s movements and downplay others in our representation of what is seen. With respect to the dog’s movements, we could say that depiction is less accurate. Yet, a depiction that is less accurate in this respect may be more helpful for getting someone else to see the dog’s joy than an exact reproduction of the dog’s movements, for example.

Second, Wittgenstein sympathizes with the purist’s call to acknowledge a division between concepts because there is a common tendency to fail to keep in mind the variety of our concepts of ‘what is seen’ and ‘description of what is seen’. We may be tempted to treat one use as a prototype or ideal to the exclusion of other uses that fall short of this prototype, unaware that we are doing so. The temptation to impose an ideal on the everyday uses of ‘see’ is manifest in the question “Do I really see her sadness?” Wittgenstein shows the purist (and thus the reader) that the way out of his puzzlement about what is really seen is through an investigation of what we call ‘seeing’.

Third, Wittgenstein emphasizes the intimate connection between seeing and describing what we see. He maintains that we can investigate what is seen by investigating our uses of ‘see’. A key facet of investigating the enormous variety of uses of ‘see’ is investigating the variety of what we call a ‘representation of what is seen’. Wittgenstein writes:

[L]ook at all that can be meant by "description of what is seen".--But this just is what is called description of what is seen. There is not one genuine proper case of such description--the rest being just vague, something which awaits clarification, or which must just be swept aside as rubbish. (PI II.xi. p. 200)

\[117\] Cf. *RPP* I §1074; *PI* §§88f; *LW* I §830; *LW* II p. 48.
II. The Place of the Concept of ‘Noticing an Aspect’

The concept ‘noticing an aspect’ and closely related concepts such as ‘change of aspect’, ‘dawning of an aspect’ and ‘continuous perception of an aspect’ pick out a vast, motley collection of phenomena. There are many different kinds of aspects and many ways of experiencing them (LW I §§583, 588). The sheer volume and variety of examples Wittgenstein introduces in PI II.xi and beyond help us to appreciate that “[t]here are here hugely many interrelated phenomena and possible concepts” (PI II.xi, p. 199). By showcasing the wealth of examples linked to the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ Wittgenstein says he is not “aiming at some kind of completeness, some classification of psychological concepts” (PI II.xi, p. 206). To mark the fine distinctions and tremendous variety here, a classification is not needed (LW I §728). Besides, it is doubtful that such a classification of our everyday psychological concepts is possible. Instead, Wittgenstein’s stated interest is to find the place of or room for the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ among the concepts of experience. He writes:

We are interested in the concept [‘noticing an aspect’] and its place among the concepts of experience. (PI II.xi, p. 193)

Through occasional reminders, like the one at PI II.xi, p. 199 mentioned in the above paragraph, Wittgenstein emphasizes that to locate a concept’s place is not to rigidly classify it.

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118 I will use ‘noticing an aspect’ ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘seeing as’ interchangeably unless otherwise noted. However it should be said that there are cases of noticing or seeing aspects that are not as readily described by using the ‘See…as…’ locution. For example, in the case of seeing a likeness between two faces. A final note in this connection: Wittgenstein does not say that seeing aspects always falls under one or the other of the uses given here. Yet cases of seeing aspects examined by Wittgenstein are characteristically more like the second use of ‘see’ given at PI II.xi, p. 193, but depending on the particular case, an aspect may be importantly like the first use of ‘see’.

119 See also RPP II §454. Cf. RPP I §316; LW I §§588, 697.

120 See PI II.xi, p. 200.

121 Wittgenstein’s Stellung and Platz have been variously translated as ‘place’ and ‘room’. See RPP I §§1026-7; PI II.xi, pp. 200-1.

122 Borrowing a description from Hacking, ‘we’ refers to ‘Wittgenstein as philosophical psychologist’ and those who sympathize with this approach. See Hacking 2002.
Rather than rigidifying conceptual boundaries, Wittgenstein attempts to highlight the ways in which the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ resists neat classification. His investigations show that ‘noticing an aspect’ straddles conceptual boundaries between it and other psychological concepts (e.g. ‘seeing’, ‘imagining’, ‘sensing’, ‘thinking’, ‘understanding’, ‘interpreting’, and ‘doing’), and thus it may look as if there is no room (*Platz*) for this concept among the concepts of experience. By examining its application in an array of cases, Wittgenstein shows us that there is room for the concept ‘noticing an aspect’, that it has a place, albeit not a rigidly fixed place. One way to embark on an attempt to place ‘noticing an aspect’ is to ask: “Is it [noticing an aspect] seeing, or isn’t it?” Wittgenstein’s response is that there is no unqualified yes or no answer to the question (*PI* II.xi, p. 203). Another, more limiting way, to pose a “placing” question is to specify the second disjunct of “Is it seeing or isn’t it?” For instance, we can ask: “Is noticing an aspect seeing, or is it thinking?” (*RPP* II §544). This is the formulation of the question that I will focus on below since it is one that informs Wittgenstein’s take on Köhler’s theory of sensory organization. As we will see, Wittgenstein’s response to this question parallels his response to the question “Is it seeing or isn’t it?”

This latter half of the chapter goes a little way towards mapping the in-between place of the concept ‘noticing an aspect’. I will explore some of the interrelations between ‘noticing an aspect’ and two other psychological concepts, ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’. The mapping attempts to heed Wittgenstein’s warning that “[h]ere we must be careful not to think in traditional

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123 Cf. *LW* I §122, where Wittgenstein notes the uselessness of trying to pigeon-hole diverse psychological concepts.
124 For more on “no room” see *RPP* I §§1026-27.
125 And there are other ways to cast the question, thereby giving a different shape to the conceptual inquiry. See *RPP* II §§546-47.
psychological categories. Such as simply dividing experience into seeing and thinking; or doing anything like that” (LW I §542).  

My brief investigation touches on four insights. One idea is that (to use a metaphor) ‘noticing an aspect’ is on a conceptual continuum between ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’. Another is that the poles of this continuum (‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’) are not fixed; that is, the concepts ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’ are flexible concepts—perhaps not as flexible or flexible in the same sense as the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ but flexible nonetheless. Another is that there is an inclination to say that noticing an aspect must be either seeing or thinking, but as the above two points suggest, Wittgenstein rejects this would-be exclusive disjunction. In the investigation of examples that follows below, I show that Wittgenstein holds that to the questions “Is noticing an aspect seeing?” and “Is noticing an aspect thinking?” both “Yes.” and “No.” answers can be justified by appeal to the application of our concepts ‘seeing’, ‘thinking’, and ‘noticing an aspect’. Finally, a general, far-reaching methodological lesson of this study is that given the tendency to favor one comparison between these concepts to the exclusion of others, and the tendency to oversimplify conceptual relationships, we should be careful to remember their extreme variability. Appreciating the interrelations between ‘noticing an aspect’ and other psychological concepts, Wittgenstein hopes, will “enable the reader to shift for himself when he encounters conceptual difficulties (begrifflichen Unklarheiten)” (PI II.xi, p. 206).

The ability to shift for ourselves is especially crucial when we seek to command a clear view of our psychological concepts. We gain this ability by mastering the “kinships and

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126 There is a difficult interpretive issue here, one that I will only flag. The issue is that Wittgenstein sometimes talks as if he counts the concept ‘thinking’ among the concepts of experience, as he does here. But sometimes he talks as if the concept ‘thinking’ should be set off from concepts of experience; see RPP I §1030, RPP II §257 and PI II.xi p. 204, for example.

127 For more instances of Wittgenstein’s talk of the flexibility of our linguistic tools, see LW I §§340, 878; LW II p. 24.

128 In Chapter Four I examine more closely the idea of justifying our preferred forms of expression.
differences of the concepts. As someone [a talented musician] is master of the transition from any key to any other one, modulates from one to the other” (RPP I §1054). Wittgenstein encourages the reader to shift by putting examples first. That is, in many of these cases he does not present such-and-such claim then insert an example for illustrative purposes. He does not regularly employ “For example…” as a concrete follow-up to ground an abstract claim. The example’s role, in his investigations here, is above all to entice the reader to elaborate and challenge the examples given and to introduce examples of his own. In this way, he broadens the reader’s “philosophical diet” (PI §593). Wittgenstein will make observations of his own in connection with the examples he provides. These observations might even be stated first and then followed by a particular instance of the observation. But enabling the reader to shift for himself ultimately depends on the reader’s making observations and generating examples. “Anything your reader can do for himself leave to him” (Culture and Value, 129 p. 77).

**Seeing, Thinking, and In Between**

Even though we are given the warning to avoid “dividing experience into seeing and thinking” (LW I §542), Wittgenstein devotes many remarks to investigating relations between our concepts of ‘seeing’, ‘seeing as’, and ‘thinking’. One motivation for this focus is that getting caught in conceptual tangles in this region of language is especially easy. There is powerful tendency to lay “stress on some analogies at the expense of others” (RPP I §879).

Specific to the concepts relevant to describing aspect perception, there is a tendency to stress some comparisons between the concepts ‘seeing’, ‘seeing as’, and ‘thinking’ while ignoring others. We favor a comparison between the concepts ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing as’ but ignore comparisons between ‘seeing as’ and ‘thinking’ or we favor a comparison between the

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129 CV for short.
130 See RPP I §1038, for example. Cf. LPP p. 100; RPP I §§879, 1024.
concepts ‘seeing as’ and ‘thinking’ but ignore comparisons between ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing as’. Both kinds of one-sided comparison have their dangers. Here are a few. Enforcing the first kind of comparison encourages the view that seeing as is seeing. The second kind makes it easier to claim that seeing as is thinking and to oversimplify seeing (i.e. to treat it as a matter of passive reception of information from the external environment, as a kind of “drinking in with one’s eyes”). Wittgenstein’s explorations uncover the ties and breaks between ‘noticing an aspect’ and the concepts ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’ that tend to get ignored by those who favor certain comparisons to the exclusion of others (*PI* II.xi, pp. 203, 209). This tendency to favor a particular comparison is reflected in the examples Wittgenstein’s interlocutors fixate on and in their exclusion of other examples that would challenge the favored comparison. Just when an interlocutor fixes on one connection between concepts, Wittgenstein introduces an example that encourages fresh conceptual connections, or he invites the reader to generate his own examples. Often these fresh comparisons show us that “‘here’ is no more complicated than ‘there’” (*RPP* I §1000)—that ‘noticing an aspect’ is no more complicated than ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’.

As we will see in the next chapter, stressing an analogy at the expense of others I have turns out to be the crux of Wittgenstein’s negative assessment of Köhler’s views on the reality of sensory organization. I leave the details for Chapter Four, however. In mentioning the general outlines of the conceptual difficulties Wittgenstein associates with ‘noticing an aspect’, I only mean to explain why Wittgenstein may have been especially motivated to teach us how to “shift

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131 See *RPP* II §388.
133 See *RPP* II §§59-61 for an example of Wittgenstein inviting the reader to consider new tie-ups as a way of loosening the grip of our favorite tie-ups. Wittgenstein’s use of this technique in connection with seeing aspects has been called ‘ambivalent’ (See Glock 1996, p. 38). Calling it ambivalent sheds no light on his motivation for the technique. Instead it suggests that Wittgenstein is indecisive or that he dances on the edge of contradiction.
134 See also *RPP* I §§966, 1074; *PI* II.xi, p. 212/*RPP* II §472.
for ourselves” when we encounter the difficulties that arise in connection with ‘noticing an aspect’.

The kinds and degrees of similarity and difference between the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ and other psychological concepts vary from case to case, and thus many kinds of conceptual comparisons are possible. With respect to similarities and differences between ‘noticing an aspect’, ‘seeing’, and ‘thinking’ in particular, I think it is useful to keep in mind a metaphor: Seeing an aspect is on a continuum between seeing and thinking. In some cases, seeing an aspect will be closer to seeing, and in some cases it will be closer to thinking. But it is important to appreciate that the poles of this continuum are themselves flexible. The concept ‘seeing’ is tangled (PI II.xi, p. 200), and the concept ‘thinking’ is widely ramified (RPP II §§216, 218, 220). So what “closer to thinking” and “closer to seeing” mean will vary from case to case as well.

The In-Between Place of the Concept ‘Noticing an Aspect’: Optical and Conceptual Aspects

When discussing the interrelations between ‘noticing an aspect’, ‘seeing’, and ‘thinking’, Wittgenstein sometimes speaks of optical or purely optical versus conceptual aspects (RPP I §§970, 1017; RPP II §§496, 509-10; LW I §§582-83, 699). He does not provide an account of the distinction. At first blush, one might think that the terms alone (‘optical’ and ‘conceptual’) suggest that the distinction is a cut and dried one between what is seen (optical aspects) and what is thought (conceptual aspects). However, the contrast Wittgenstein is after is not the contrast between aspects which are entirely devoid of conceptual links and those which have such links. Rather, the contrast is between aspects that depend on conceptual links (conceptual aspects) and those that do not (optical aspects). I say “not so readily” because the distinction is not one that
can be sharply drawn. This contrast can be drawn only by examples, and in each case it is only loosely drawn. My aim in illustrating that there are different ways of drawing the distinction is to further develop the continuum metaphor I invoke as a characterization of the relations between ‘seeing’, ‘thinking’, and ‘noticing an aspect’.

In a moment I will explore five of Wittgenstein’s aspect-seeing cases to illustrate how the optical-conceptual distinction can be drawn on a case-by-case basis. But first I will give a rough, twofold explanation of what I mean by an aspect depending on conceptual links. First, some aspects cannot be perceived unless a conceptual connection (begriffliche Verbindung) is made. Making conceptual links is a prerequisite for having the aspect experience. Only if the perceiver knows or is interested in such-and-such and “mobilizes”¹³⁵ that knowledge or interest in his experience, or makes this comparison (e.g. the duck-rabbit figure and a duck), can he have the relevant aspect experience. Likewise, the kind of command, instruction, or guidance which we appeal to in order to facilitate the perception of an aspect varies in accordance with optical and conceptual aspects. Conceptual aspects are introduced by giving a command that makes the conceptual link required to perceive the aspect. For example, one might say “See this figure as a duck” while pointing to the duck-rabbit drawing. The one giving the command invites the perceiver to make a conceptual link between the presented figure and a duck. Some aspects can be “summoned up by thoughts” (RPP I §1036) while others are evoked by eye movements (RPP I §997). In some cases of seeing aspects, the conceptual explanation (begriffliche Erklärung)¹³⁶ can be replaced with “Have your gaze shift in such and such a way” (RPP I §989). Wittgenstein says that when this replacement is possible we can say that the aspect seen is “purely optical”.

Second, some aspect experiences cannot be expressed or described without a conceptual

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¹³⁵ I borrow the expression ‘mobilize’ from McFee 1999.
¹³⁶ Here I import talk of a ‘conceptual explanation’ from LW I §582.
explanation. Here, ‘conceptual explanation’ seems to designate descriptions of what is seen that involve more than reference to color and shape. Wittgenstein is not denying that descriptions that refer to color and shape are, in some sense, conceptual. In these cases (conceptual aspect cases) we need to “make use of analogies from other domains” (RPP I §989) to express the seeing of an aspect, while in other cases (optical aspect cases) the experience can be expressed by reference to color and shape alone or by pointing to a part of the picture (LW I §700). In many instances of perceiving aspects a conceptual description that goes beyond reference to color and shape can be given, but only in some cases do we care about the conceptual description. For instance, we tend to care about how we describe human facial expressions. We speak of the aptness of these descriptions.

This reading of Wittgenstein’s appeal to an optical-conceptual distinction highlights his interest in what sorts of abilities, background knowledge, and interests are prerequisites for having a given aspect experience, and in how we express and describe these experiences. Understanding what it means to say that there are prerequisites for aspect experiences brings into view important differences between the applications of the concepts ‘seeing as’ and ‘seeing’. Moreover, recognizing that in many cases of describing and expressing aspect experiences we go beyond reference to color and shape—what some may call ‘purely visual’ concepts—helps us appreciate that a description of what is seen can include analogies from other domains without losing its status as a description of what is seen. That aspects, to a greater or lesser extent, depend on conceptual links does not undermine our use of ‘see’ in aspect-seeing contexts. These realizations are critical if we are to understand what it means to say that the place of the concept ‘noticing an aspect’ is between ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’ (RPP II §462), that ‘noticing an aspect’ is
on a continuum with ‘seeing’ and ‘thinking’, and that none of these concepts have a rigidly fixed place.

Let us explore the various ways Wittgenstein’s optical-conceptual distinction can be drawn by considering some of his examples of seeing aspects:

1. Seeing a likeness between two faces and saying: “I see a likeness between two faces.”

2. Viewing the duck-rabbit figure\textsuperscript{137} and saying: “Now I see it as a rabbit!”

3. Seeing the solution to a puzzle-picture and saying: “Before it was a tangle of lines, now it’s a face.”

4. Viewing the double-cross\textsuperscript{138}

5. Seeing a textbook illustration as a glass cube and saying: “I see the figure as a glass cube.” (\textit{PI II.xi}, p. 193)\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137} Another version of the duck-rabbit figure appears at \textit{PI}, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{138} The double-cross appears at \textit{PI}, p. 207.
\textsuperscript{139} At \textit{RPP I} §§91 and especially \textit{RPP II} §492 it is a live issue whether aspect-seeing experiences of the schematic cube can be as specific as seeing the figure as a wire frame, glass box, lidless box, etc. At \textit{PI II.xi}, p. 208 Wittgenstein says that we can set a limit on what would be acceptable to say.
The first example can be made more specific in a variety of ways: suddenly seeing a likeness between this face and another one that is not in front of me; seeing a likeness between these two faces I have before me; seeing a likeness between facial expressions; seeing a likeness between these facial shapes, wherever they may occur. For each variant of the first example, “finding out what someone sees” will differ. What we would say and do to get someone to see the likeness will vary. For instance, the drawing that serves to describe what is seen in one case may not serve as well (or at all) in another case. In one case a picture may serve better than words, but in another words serve better.\textsuperscript{140} Which words we use to describe or express the experience will be more or less distant from talk of color and shape. We may find it easier to describe one kind of likeness (e.g. facial expression) than to describe another (e.g. facial shape). Typically, describing two faces that are similar in expression will require appeal to more sophisticated concepts than those that are similar in shape. For example, we may look at two people and say “They both have a look of dread!” but be unable to describe this aspect (the expression of dread) through talk of color and shape or by pointing to parts of the faces in question. The expression of a face is in the play of features (\textit{RPP II}§256).\textsuperscript{141} And yet, the more conceptually sophisticated description might be easier for us to produce. Wittgenstein is fond of saying that it is generally easier for us to describe the expressions of faces than it is to describe faces ‘geometrically’.\textsuperscript{142} When we want to describe our experience of seeing a facial expression, sometimes imitating a facial expression is easier than producing a drawing or verbal description.

\textsuperscript{140} Cf. \textit{LW I}§377.
\textsuperscript{141} Cf. \textit{LW I}§§766f.
\textsuperscript{142} I am not happy with word choice here. I intend ‘sophisticated’ to stand in contrast to Wittgenstein’s use of ‘primitive’ in this context. That is, he sometimes describes optical aspects as more primitive or fundamental and says this has to do with the description of optical aspects. Please see my discussion of the double-cross figure below for more on describing optical aspects.
\textsuperscript{143} Cf. \textit{RPP I}§§247, 287, 919; \textit{RPP II}§570.
And sometimes to express the aspect we will not be able to supplement the imitation of the facial expression with a verbal description or picture—only imitation will do so (RPP I §§920, 1072).

Now take the second example listed above. Consider what ‘conceptual’ means here with respect to possible prerequisites for seeing the aspects in question. In order to see the duck and rabbit aspects of the figure, one must be “conversant with the shapes” of the two animals (PI II.xi, p. 207). Someone unfamiliar with the shape of a rabbit could not see the duck-rabbit figure as a rabbit. The same condition holds for seeing the duck aspect. In both the case of seeing a likeness between facial expressions and seeing the duck (or rabbit) aspect, a verbal description of what is seen will involve concepts that may not be considered ‘purely visual’. The descriptions “I see a likeness between these two faces” and “Now I see it as a rabbit!” both go beyond reference to color and shape. If someone shifts from seeing the figure as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit, the lines of the figure that formed the duck bill now form the ears of the rabbit. That is, the duck and rabbit aspects are distinguished by using ‘duck’, ‘rabbit’, ‘bill’, ‘ears’ in the verbal descriptions and cannot be distinguished by reference to color and shape alone. Returning to the first example, someone could produce a drawing of the two faces that accurately represents the facial features, relying on shape alone, but not see the likeness. A point of contrast between the first and second examples is that while the duck and rabbit aspects exclude one another, seeing one kind of likeness need not exclude seeing another kind; in fact, the two likenesses might enhance one another, making it easier to see one kind of likeness if the other is seen. For instance, if two faces are similar in both shape and expression, seeing the

144 See PI II.xi, p. 209 and LW I §§736f for some discussion of ‘purely visual’ and ‘purely acoustical’ concepts. Here I take for granted that there is some worthwhile distinction between purely visual concepts and other concepts used to describe what we see. I think though that Wittgenstein finds talk of purely visual concepts largely misleading (just as he finds talk of “what is really seen” or “genuine experience” misleading), and he is inclined to say that concepts such as ‘timid’, ‘hesitant’, ‘plaintive’, ‘fearful’ are visual concepts even if his investigations take seriously the opposite inclination (to deny that these concepts are visual and acoustical concepts).
similarity between the mouths may bring into view the similarity in each person’s inquisitive expression. The points of comparison and contrast between these two examples illustrate some of the different ways aspect experiences can depend on conceptual explanations for their description.

Unlike the first and second examples, the third involves an experiential shift from seeing something practically meaningless (a tangle of lines) to seeing a human face, and yet this experience is similar to the duck-rabbit case since both require a kind of knowledge (i.e. familiarity with the shape of a face, a duck, a rabbit). The meaningless maze of lines “organize” into a well-known form—a human face. We call this hidden object the solution to the puzzle-picture. At Z §197 Wittgenstein lists sixteen(!) different reasons one might have for calling the hidden object the solution to the puzzle-picture. For example, we can call the human face a solution “[b]ecause it represents a kind of object that I am very familiar with; for it gives me an instantaneous impression of familiarity, I instantly have all sorts of associations in connexion with it; I know what it is called; I know I have often seen it; I know what it is used for etc”. This example illustrates ways seeing the solution to the puzzle-picture can involve conceptual links. The fourth example is closer to the purely optical side of the aspect spectrum, especially if the aspects we are interested in are what Wittgenstein calls the “aspects A” (i.e. a black cross on white ground or a white cross on black ground). We can find out whether someone sees a black cross on white ground or a white cross on black ground by asking the perceiver to point to different parts of the double-cross figure. A child who could not yet talk could express the aspects A (LW I §700) by pointing to different parts of the figure and thus, in a sense, the expression of the aspects A are primitive by comparison with verbal descriptions that deploy a host of concepts (RPP I §1046f). This, Wittgenstein suggests, gives us reason for saying that

145 PI II.xi, p. 207.
these two aspects of the double-cross are optical. However the double-cross has other aspects. For instance, one could offer the following description of what is seen in connection with the double-cross figure: “It’s a little white windmill with four sails”, and we might even speak of this description as the ‘right’ description or be reluctant to accept substitute descriptions. But we may also find this kind of description irrelevant (RPP II §509). Once more Wittgenstein points out that there is a difference between this kind of conceptual description of what is seen and, say, a description of the similarity between two facial expressions. In the latter case, we tend to care whether the description is apt whereas in the case of descriptions of the double-cross that go beyond mention of the aspects A, we do not tend to question the aptness of the descriptions. So another way to distinguish ‘purely optical’ aspects is in terms of whether we care about conceptual descriptions of a given aspect.

Finally, in the case of seeing according to an interpretation, Wittgenstein offers yet another way we can understand ‘conceptual’. Here the experience in question cannot be described at all without appeal to an interpretation. The description, “I see the figure as a glass cube”, illustrates one way the conceptual can be dominant in an aspect because the experience “can only be expressed through a conceptual explanation” (LW I §582). It includes in the description of the visual experience “concepts which do not belong to the description of the figure itself” (RPP I §1030). Another way this example is ‘conceptual’ is that to understand the order “See…as…”, a conceptual connection must first be made (RPP II §510). We would not instruct someone how to see the figure as a glass cube by giving the command: “Have your gaze shift in such and such a way.”
Summary of Part II

The above investigation explores some different ways of understanding what it means to say that ‘noticing an aspect’ and the concepts we use to describe and express seeing aspects are sometimes *between* language games (*PI* II.xi, p. 188).\(^{146}\) Taken together with a lesson from Part I—that the delineation of the boundaries of our concept ‘what is seen’ depends on how we delineate the boundaries of our concept ‘representation of what is seen’—we can better appreciate Wittgenstein’s answer to the question “Is ‘noticing an aspect’ ‘seeing’, or is it ‘thinking’?” ‘Noticing an aspect’ is “a concept that lies between that of seeing and thinking, that is, which bears a resemblance to both” (*RPP* II §462). It follows from the in-between place of ‘noticing an aspect’ that we can cite conceptual comparisons that speak in favor of including aspect experiences within the boundaries of the concept ‘seeing’ and ones that speak against such an inclusion (*RPP* II §390; *LW* I §637). But also, as the investigation of the optical-conceptual aspect distinction illustrates, the statements, “The concept ‘noticing an aspect’ is closer to ‘thinking’” and “The concept ‘noticing an aspect’ is closer to ‘seeing’” derive their meanings from the language-games in which they are embedded.

These insights shed light on Wittgenstein’s seemingly paradoxical answer to the question “Is it seeing, or isn’t it?”

It is seeing, *insofar as*…

It is seeing, only *insofar as*…

(That seems to me to be the solution.) (*RPP* II §390)

Wittgenstein’s answer is only paradoxical if we insist that ‘noticing an aspect’ must without “residue” fall on one or the other side of the seeing—not seeing divide. It is paradoxical only if we insist that a concept’s place must be a rigidly fixed place or that an in-between concept is no

\(^{146}\) Cf. *LW* I §761.
concept at all (PI §71). Wittgenstein might even recommend a reformulation of the question that hints at its multifarious character: *In what sense* is it seeing? *In what sense* isn’t it seeing?\(^{147}\)

\(^{147}\) Cf. *PI* II.xi, p. 204.
Chapter Four: The Wittgenstein-Köhler Relation

Introduction

In this chapter I examine Wittgenstein’s engagement with Köhler’s views on the nature and description of visual experience. My aim is to give a detailed characterization of Wittgenstein on Köhler’s understanding of the nature and description of this experience, one that shows that Wittgenstein was both critical of and sympathetic with Köhler’s methodological aims and substantive views. The characterization is not intended to serve as a critical assessment of Wittgenstein’s portrayal of Köhler. That is, I do not actively discuss the accuracy of Wittgenstein’s interpretations or the strength of his criticisms.

The chapter has three parts. The first part examines Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler in greater detail than other commentaries on the subject. I argue that Wittgenstein’s root criticism of Köhler is that he privileges an analogy between seeing organization and seeing color and shape—or in Wittgenstein’s more general formulation of the analogy—between seeing aspects and seeing. To build a case for this rendering of Wittgenstein’s dissatisfaction with Köhler I examine Wittgenstein’s distillations of Köhler’s viewpoint and show how Wittgenstein reads these distillations as expressions of the tendency to emphasize an analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing. Wittgenstein holds that the grammar of our psychological concepts grounds this emphasis. At the same time, the analogy is misleading in Köhler’s case because he emphasizes it to the extent of neglecting important differences between seeing aspects and seeing. As this last point suggests, the fundamental drawback of favoring any analogy is that

\[\text{To characterize Wittgenstein’s main criticism, I will use ‘privilege’, ‘favor’, ‘emphasize’, and ‘stress’ interchangeably.}\]

\[\text{Please see Appendix A on Wittgenstein’s use of ‘grammar’ for a warning about the peculiarity of his usage.}\]
doing so can make it difficult to appreciate other possible comparisons. For Wittgenstein, such one-sidedness is a form of intellectual prejudice. Specific to Köhler, the prejudice blocks consideration of important differences between seeing organization and seeing color or shape. Likewise, Köhler’s account does not acknowledge important tie-ups between the concepts ‘seeing an aspect’, ‘interpreting’, and ‘imagining’. In the light of Wittgenstein’s idea that Köhler’s favoritism is a form of intellectual prejudice, the second part of the chapter explores some consequences of Wittgenstein’s critique for Köhler’s methodological and substantive aims as set out in GP. I also consider how being under the grip of an analogy between seeing and seeing aspects is a form of intellectual prejudice that prevents Köhler from meeting his goal to depict faithfully our visual experiences. In the third and final part of the chapter I argue that despite Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler, and significant differences between the two thinkers’ interests, aims, and methods, they are like-minded in some important respects. They share methodological commitments in that they both expose false dichotomies and envision themselves as carving out a new intellectual space. With respect to their joint goal to portray aptly our pre-theoretical point of view, both thinkers envision their contribution in terms of teaching us how to notice what is right before our eyes.

I. Wittgenstein against Köhler

Introduction

In this first part of the chapter I present Wittgenstein’s critical assessment of Köhler. I begin with his characterization of Köhler. According to Wittgenstein, Köhler’s theoretical pronouncements express an inclination to stress an analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing. This analogy is the focus of Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler. For Wittgenstein, an analogy
per se is not necessarily misleading. Further, on its own, that the tendency to stress an analogy need not be misleading. But favoring an analogy becomes misleading when it blinds us to other analogies and to the differences between what we take to be analogous. On Wittgenstein’s reading, this is Köhler’s conceptual difficulty. Köhler emphasizes an analogy between seeing and seeing aspects to the exclusion of their differences and at the expense of other analogies. Thus, he neglects other possible comparisons, both those that challenge the analogy he favors and those that reveal similarities between seeing an aspect and interpreting or imagining. Wittgenstein devotes some attention to tracing out the philosophical errors adherence to Köhler’s picture can encourage. I trace out one such philosophical error: positing a private picture as a way to capture the experience of a change of aspect. Wittgenstein’s main response to Köhler’s conceptual difficulty is to bring into view a fact so general and pervasive that we miss it: Other conceptual comparisons are possible. These comparisons show that we have grammatical grounds for the inclination to say seeing an aspect is seeing and for the inclination to say that seeing an aspect is not seeing. We also have grounds for the inclination to say that seeing an aspect is interpreting or that it is imagining. I end my examination of Wittgenstein’s negative assessment of Köhler with a preliminary interpretation of Wittgenstein’s claim that we “see a meaning” when we see an aspect (RPP I §869). I call RPP I §869 “Wittgenstein’s Culminating Remark”. It is my view that this remark is a dramatic formulation of an idea Wittgenstein reiterates often in his evaluations of Köhler; namely, that seeing an aspect is an experience which essentially involves conception, interpretation, or meaning, both for the having and the expression of the experience. The upshot I glean from Wittgenstein’s dramatic formulation of this idea is that the essential involvement of non-sensory elements in aspect-seeing experience does not require us to deny that it is genuine visual experience.
Characterizing Köhler

In Wittgenstein’s discussions of aspect perception, especially in *RPP* I, Köhler appears as an interlocutor. The following statements (most of which are in Köhler’s “voice” although Köhler usually remains unnamed) are Wittgenstein’s encapsulations of Köhler’s views on seeing organization and how it relates to seeing color and shape:

“After all, I see the aspect, the organization, just as much as I see shapes and colors.” (*RPP* I §964)

“When you get away from your physiological prejudices [*physiologischen Vorurteilen*], you’ll find nothing in the fact that the glance of the eye can be seen.” (*RPP* I §1101)

‘Object’ and ‘ground’ – Köhler wants to say – are visual concepts, like red and round. The description of what is *seen* includes mentioning what is object and what is ground no less than color and shape. And the description is just as incomplete when it isn’t said what is object and what is ground, as it is when color and shape are not given. I see the one as immediately as the other – one wants to say. (*RPP* I §1023)

Obviously (to any unprejudiced person [*Unvoreingenommenen*]) the shape, the color, the organization, the expression, are properties of the subjectively seen, of the immediate object of sight. (*RPP* I §1107)

I see two different visual objects [*Gesichtsobjekte*], you say, which merely have something in common with one another. (*RPP* I §879)

"Surely I see something *different* when I see the sphere floating from when I merely see it lying there." (*PI* II.xi, p. 201)

These statements reveal what Wittgenstein gleans from Köhler’s theory of sensory organization:

(a) Organization and expression are “just as much” seen, seen as “immediately” as, color and shape.

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150 Cf. Z §223.
(a) illustrates that, according to Wittgenstein, Köhler stresses an analogy between organization and expression on the one hand and color and shape on the other. It is a defensive statement—something said in a context where the possibility has been raised that organization is not seen. The use of ‘immediately’ here is confusing if it is associated with “the given”. Köhler’s view is that retinal stimulation alone does not determine organization of the visual field. Organization is partly determined by physiological processes in the brain. It is a characteristic achievement of the nervous system, according to Köhler. In this way, even “original” organization could be called constructive, but the constructing is not by way of projecting meaning into the visual field. Epstein is helpful on this point. While contrasting Marr’s constructivist account of perception with the Gestalt account, Epstein writes: “After all in a nontrivial sense Gestalt theory is a constructivist theory – the perceptual world is a construction of dynamic global brain processes; perception is not a direct response to stimulation” (Epstein 1989, p. 257). (Köhler, however, does acknowledge that after original organization, subsequent organization can involve the projection of meaning into the visual field.)

(b) What stands in the way of appreciating (a) is a kind of prejudice; (a) is obvious to any unprejudiced person.\footnote{What I say here under (b) overlaps with points I make about Köhler in Chapter Two. Note the repetition of the lengthy quote from GP 1929/200, especially. I repeat it here because I amplify a different idea from the quote; namely, that Köhler cites prejudice as a barrier to appreciating that organization is seen as immediately as color or shape.}

Köhler claims that we see circumscribed units (organized entities, segregated wholes, Gestalten). He holds that an unreflective commitment to empirism or to the explanation by meaning stands in the way of appreciating this “object” character of experience. He characterizes this commitment as an influential prejudice that may have its roots in a natural tendency in human thinking.
Köhler uses a visual demonstration to persuade his readers that only prejudice stands in the way of granting the “results” of the demonstration. He presents this figure:

![Figure 6](image)

and argues that when we are presented with the drawing, the first organization we see is not the figure 4. Instead, we see two meaningless circumscribed units intersected by a line. The 4 is the circumscribed unit we would expect to see if the empiristic explanation were correct because 4 is a familiar figure. That we do not see 4 unless told that there is a 4 in the visual field demonstrates that original organization of the field is not determined by past experience. Physiological processes, operating in accordance with grouping principles, determine what organized entities we see. And in this case, a figure 4 is not the first, “spontaneous” organization we see. We can come to see a figure 4 after being told there is a 4, but we do not see it automatically. Prejudice blocks appreciation of the visual demonstration. Köhler writes, “When I tell the reader that the number 4 is before him in the field, he will undoubtedly find it; but if he is not influenced by theoretical prejudices, he will confess that the form of the 4 did not exist as a visual reality at first and that, if it began to exist later on, that meant a transformation of visual reality” (GP 1929/200).

152 In defense of the “phenomenological” methods of the Berlin School Gestaltists, Palmer (1999) notes that the perceptual phenomena featured in such demonstrations are often so powerful that no experiments are needed. Recalling a remark by the psychologist Irvin Rock, Palmer writes that such demonstrations “can actually be viewed as ongoing experiments with an indefinitely large number of subjects—which you are now one—virtually all of whom ‘show the effect’” (Palmer 1999, p. 258).

153 Figure 6 also appears in Chapter Two. I reproduce it here to aid visual demonstration of Köhler’s observations.
(c) ‘Object’ and ‘ground’ are visual concepts “like” red and round; a complete description of what is seen includes reference to object and ground “no less than” color and shape.

This rendering of Köhler is more difficult to trace back to his own claims in GP because (at least in this context) he does not evaluate descriptions of what is seen in terms of their “completeness”. By contrast, two prominent themes in Wittgenstein’s discussions of these and other cases of aspect-seeing are outgrowths of his reflections on descriptions of what is seen: the bounds of the concept ‘description of what is seen’ and the idea that the concept ‘complete description of what one sees’ is misleading (RPP I §984). So I treat (c) as Wittgenstein’s attempt to draw out the implications of Köhler’s views for his own concerns about our concepts ‘description of what is seen’ and ‘complete description of what is seen’. (c) suggests that a description of what is seen must only contain visual concepts,154 Thus the interlocutor (Köhler) tries to make a case for the claim that reference to object and ground is essential to a complete description of what is seen because ‘object’ and ‘ground’ are visual concepts. That is, ‘figure’ and ‘ground’ are not concepts drawn from “other domains”, to use Wittgenstein’s phrase.

(d) The experience of a change of organization (one variety of aspect-shift experiences, according to Wittgenstein) involves a change in the object of sight; “I see two different visual objects.”

In some cases of seeing, we may fail to recognize something as the same thing in different contexts because that something is ambiguous or because the pictorial and non-pictorial surroundings of the picture differ in each context. For example, if I see the duck-rabbit, one time in a picture surrounded by rabbits, and another time in a picture surrounded by ducks, I may fail

154 See PI II.xi, p. 209 and LW I §736 for some discussion of the temptation to say that truly visual concepts are those that have “purely visual reference”.
to notice that the duck-rabbit is the same in both pictures (PI II.xi, p. 195). In such a case, one might be inclined to say that there are two different objects of sight. Köhler talks this way in his descriptions of the experience of a change in organization. He remarks that a change of organization is a change in visual reality, the coming into and going out of “existence” of visual units or circumscribed wholes, each with its own distinct concrete, real form.

In the passage below Wittgenstein distinguishes between proving that there are different objects of sight and giving a ground for saying that there are two different objects of sight:

When one fails to recognize the Mediterranean on the map with a different coloring, that does not show that there is really a different visual object [visueller Gegenstand] before one. (Köhler's example.) At most that might give a plausible ground for a particular way of expressing oneself. For it is not the same to say "That shows that here there are two ways of seeing"--and "Under these circumstances it would be better to speak of 'two different objects of sight' [Gesichtsobjekten]." (RPP I §1035)

Wittgenstein argues that the Mediterranean map example (one of Köhler’s) does not demonstrate that there really are two different objects of sight. Instead, this “fact of experience” gives us a plausible ground for a preferred way of expressing ourselves (i.e. “I see two different objects of sight”). As this example suggests, what concerns Wittgenstein is that the claims that figure in Köhler’s theory express an inclination to favor a comparison between seeing aspects and seeing color and shape. His tendency to stress this analogy reveals itself in his way of describing aspect-seeing experiences. Köhler is, for instance, inclined to say that there is a new visual object when a change of aspect occurs.

By making pronouncements like the ones that open this section (“Characterizing Köhler”), according to Wittgenstein, “you are only laying stress on some analogies at the

155 See also PI II.xi, p. 195 for several more examples of how recognition is affected by what “surrounds” the object of sight.
expense of others” (RPP I §879).156 Such utterances show “you are inclined to make a certain comparison – viz. to seeing color and shape” (LPP, p. 100). In the passages I cite, Wittgenstein treats the tendency or inclination to say such-and-such as an indication of which analogies resonate with the speaker.157 To get clearer about the relation between preferred forms of linguistic expression and preferred analogies of thought, next I discuss Wittgenstein’s reflections on analogy.

Wittgenstein on Analogy

So far I have argued that Wittgenstein characterizes Köhler’s theoretical claims as expressions of a tendency to stress an analogy between seeing and seeing aspects. I have also introduced Wittgenstein’s root criticism: Köhler stresses this analogy at the expense of other comparisons. Before examining Wittgenstein’s two lines of response to Köhler’s conceptual difficulty, I want to emphasize what it is that Wittgenstein finds problematic about Köhler’s appeal to an analogy. In what way is favoring an analogy a conceptual confusion? A threefold distinction will make the problem more apparent. Distinguish: (i) an analogy; (ii) the tendency to stress an analogy; and (iii) the tendency to stress an analogy to the detriment of differences and at the expense of other analogies. For Wittgenstein, the analogy itself need not be misleading. Analogies are often helpful. Likewise, the tendency to stress an analogy is not necessarily harmful. However, no sharp line can be drawn between when an analogy is misleading or helpful, according to Wittgenstein. He writes:

When we say that by our method we try to counteract the misleading effect of certain analogies, it is important that you should understand that the idea of an analogy being misleading is nothing sharply defined…The use of expressions constructed on analogical patterns stresses analogies

156 Cf. LPP, p. 330.
157 Cf. RPP I §§1024, 1038.
between cases often far apart. And by doing this these expressions may be extremely useful. It is, in most cases, impossible to show an exact point where an analogy begins to mislead us.” (BB, p. 28)

In the above quote, Wittgenstein speaks of a notation stressing a point of view, and he speculates about why someone prefers one expression over another: “Which form he prefers, and whether he has a preference at all, often depends on general, deeply rooted, tendencies of his thinking” (BB, pp. 29-30). Tendencies of thinking manifest in what we say and in what we are inclined to say. The ways we express ourselves, the forms of expression we choose, reflect our tendencies of thought, including which analogies dominate our thinking.

Recognizing that we are using an analogy may be a challenge, given that they have deep roots in our thinking. Even if we come to recognize that we are using an analogy, it is often difficult to determine when and in what ways the analogy misleads. We may not be aware that we are privileging an analogy, let alone that we are privileging it at the expense of other ones. Wittgenstein points out that we can be “impressed by an analogy to the detriment of all differences” (RPP I §1038). This idea is important for grasping the nature of his criticism of Köhler. Being impressed by an analogy at the expense of other analogies (RPP I §879) and to the detriment of all differences is an instance of being misled by an analogy. I argue that Wittgenstein ascribes this particular kind of conceptual difficulty to Köhler.

Characterizing Köhler this way has wide intellectual significance. As the BB quote above brings out, it can be difficult to recognize when an analogy biases our way of thinking and blinds us to other possible analogies. In such a case we may come to feel that there is no alternative to the analogy we favor.

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158 For a recent discussion of Wittgenstein on analogy in BB and its kinships with Nietzsche on analogy, see Sluga’s “Family Resemblance” in Kober 2006.
Wittgenstein’s Two Lines of Response to Köhler’s Conceptual Difficulty

Next I discuss Wittgenstein’s two lines of response to Köhler’s privileging an analogy. Wittgenstein’s first line of response is that an analogy is an emphasis in our thinking that needs to be justified. He argues that introspection, appeal to the obviousness of the analogy one favors, and physiological explanation cannot justify the tendency to favor an analogy. A tendency to favor an analogy is justified by grammar. To bring this out, I briefly indicate some of the conceptual tie-ups between ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing an aspect’ that grammatically justify comparing seeing and seeing an aspect. Wittgenstein’s second line of response to Köhler’s privileging of an analogy between seeing and seeing aspects is that there are alternative comparisons which are justified by grammar. I examine two types of alternative comparisons, disanalogies between seeing an aspect and seeing and analogies between seeing an aspect and interpreting and imagining. Köhler neglects these comparisons, according to Wittgenstein.

First Line of Response: The tendency to stress an analogy needs grammatical justification.

Wittgenstein holds that an emphasis on an analogy “needs to be grammatically justified [grammatisch gerechtfertigt]” (RPP I §879). What is it to grammatically justify an emphasis on an analogy? What would such a justification look like? Before considering what Wittgenstein means, I will review Wittgenstein’s reasons for rejecting alternative sources of justification for stressing an analogy.

First, appealing to the obviousness of his pronouncements is not helpful. In the characterization of Köhler that opens this chapter, I noted that Köhler takes his viewpoint to be obvious to any unprejudiced person. He thinks that by pointing out that his view is obvious he has provided some proof for it. This elucidation of Köhler’s appeal to the obviousness of his
pronouncements sheds some light on Wittgenstein’s complaint about Köhler’s appeal: That people find these pronouncements obvious only shows that they are inclined to find Köhler’s picture apt (RPP I §1108). The claim that people agree that the observations are obvious amounts to a psychological statement about the people who agree. Thus, appealing to the obviousness of one’s picture is no substitute for a conceptual investigation [begriffliche Untersuchung] (RPP I §1108). A conceptual investigation can provide grounds for the inclination to say the experience of seeing an aspect is seeing, but it also provides grounds for denying what Köhler takes to be so obvious. That is, it also provides ground for the inclination to say it is not seeing.

Second, Wittgenstein denies that we can justify our use of ‘see’ in these contexts by determining via introspection that one is seeing (as opposed to thinking, for instance). Introspection can only lead to a psychological statement about the one who introspects (RPP I §212).¹⁵⁹ The introspector tells us about his particular experiences. Also, there are doubts about the nature of introspection. What is being introspected? And are introspective reports reliable? How does the introspector test for the ‘presence’ of a psychological state? How does he use introspection to recognize that organization is seen just as color is seen? (RPP I §1023). Finally, how do the subject and the observer test that they understand one another in the giving, receiving, and following of a command to introspect in such-and-such a way? (RPP I §794). Overall, Wittgenstein argues that an introspective report is not a form of evidence that can establish whether organization is seen; it is neither here nor there with respect to determining whether there are grounds for using ‘see’ in aspect-seeing contexts (RPP I §8).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ See also RPP II §44.
¹⁶⁰ For a recent discussion of introspection as a form of evidence in psychology, see Hatfield 2005b. Hatfield argues that on some understandings of ‘introspection’, introspective reports can be treated as evidence.
Third, physiological considerations are not helpful. According to Wittgenstein, physiological hypotheses cannot help with conceptual issues because they do not inform our everyday psychological concepts. Our concept ‘seeing’ does not contain any theory about the mechanisms of seeing. There are physiological hypotheses that favor the tendency to say "I see two different visual objects." This form of expression illustrates that we wish to stress the analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing color and shape. Thus, such hypotheses can be said to favor the analogy we emphasize when we talk this way. Wittgenstein, however, maintains that we must be careful not to be distracted from the conceptual problem by this alignment between our preferred forms of expression and physiological hypotheses. Physiological hypotheses are no help when it comes to grounding a tendency to say such-and-such. Wittgenstein writes:

If one thinks of the currents on the retina (or the like) one would like to say: "So the aspect is just as much 'seen' as are the shape and colour." But then how can such an hypothesis have helped us to form this conviction? Well, it favours the tendency to say here that we were seeing two different structures [Gebilde]. But if this tendency can be given a ground, its ground must be somewhere else. (RPP I §1024)

Physiological consideration here is merely confusing. Because it distracts us from the logical, conceptual problem. (RPP I §1038)\textsuperscript{161}

Wittgenstein holds that treating conceptual problems with physiological explanations is to mismatch problem (conceptual) and method (experimental). Physiological explanations clear up questions about the causes of a given phenomenon. And while this can be helpful insofar as it brings the conceptual difficult into sharper focus, physiological investigation cannot serve as a method for solving conceptual difficulties:

It [physiological explanation] has only cleared up a question we weren't interested in, and we are left with the fact that we use that expression, that picture, or want to use it, when the normal occasion for its use is lacking. (LW I §77)

\textsuperscript{161} Cf. PI II.xi, pp. 203, 212; LW I §777. In Remarks on Colour Wittgenstein explicitly refers to Gestalt psychology in connection with the search for causal and physiological explanations. See §§39, 221, 229, for instance.
Our everyday concepts are formed in the absence of theorizing about the physiological underpinnings of seeing. So Wittgenstein maintains that our psychological concepts hang out of reach of physiological explanations (\textit{PI II.xi, p. 212}). And contrary to Köhler, discovering harmonies between physiological mechanisms and our uncritical, naïve conception of experience is not a vindication of the everyday concepts that inform our naïve conception of experience.\footnote{Here I allude to Wittgenstein’s criticisms of psychophysical parallelism. For an interpretation of Wittgenstein that traces his criticisms back to Köhler, see Hark 1995.}

While Wittgenstein does not attribute the claim that the retinal image determines what is seen to Köhler, he does suggest that Köhler believes he must answer to this claim with physiological considerations of his own. Wittgenstein is critical of these physiological considerations insofar as they distract Köhler from the logical problem, the problem that contributes to Köhler’s conceptual difficulty.

I have argued that Wittgenstein rejects appealing to the obviousness of a claim, introspective reports, and physiological explanation as sources of justification for the tendency to emphasize an analogy. Wittgenstein maintains that the emphasis on an analogy needs to be grammatically justified. Next I elucidate Wittgenstein’s view that Köhler’s inclination to stress an analogy needs a conceptual or grammatical justification.\footnote{I will use ‘conceptual justification’ and ‘grammatical justification’ interchangeably.}

The investigation of conceptual interrelations is a cornerstone of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. On his view, philosophical problems are conceptual problems (\textit{PI II.xi, p. 203}).\footnote{Wittgenstein characterizes his later conception of philosophy this way in many places in his writings. For other instances of this characterization in his writings on aspect perception see also \textit{PI II.xi, pp. 193, 201.}}

This is not to say that scientific investigation is worthless. Rather, science cannot replace conceptual investigation because it cannot aid us with problems that arise in connection with our everyday concepts, concepts that are formed and modified in contexts where scientific
investigation is not our purpose. Through conceptual investigation we create a mapping of the interrelations between our concepts, and these mappings can (among other things) help us appreciate to what extent and in what ways, an analogy is helpful or misleading. Wittgenstein holds that laying stress on an analogy is grammatically justified through investigation of the relevant concepts. Let me clarify.

Earlier I noted that Wittgenstein treats the inclination to say such-and-such as an indication of which analogies resonate with the speaker. The link between the inclination to say such-and-such and the tendency to favor a particular analogy is important for understanding why investigating the interrelations between concepts can show us the grammatical justification for emphasizing an analogy. Wittgenstein’s discussions of the need to justify a way of speaking or an “inclination to say” are intertwined with his discussions of the need to justify a tendency to favor an analogy. By looking at Köhler’s preferred forms of expression Wittgenstein identifies what Köhler is inclined to say, and this reveals which analogy he privileges. For example, Wittgenstein observes that Köhler prefers to talk in terms of seeing two different visual objects in the case of a change in organization. That is, Köhler is inclined to use ‘see’ and ‘visual object’. These inclinations show that Köhler favors an analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing.

The following observations are a small sampling of some of Wittgenstein’s responses to Köhler’s conceptual difficulty. I include them to show how a grammatical justification of the inclination to say ‘see’ in aspect-seeing contexts might go. (My main task in Part I of this chapter

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165 Cf. RPP I §§1024, 1038.
166 In this connection see RPP I §1038, for example. There Wittgenstein links the overwhelming inclination to say such-and-such with the problem (Köhler’s) of being impressed by an analogy to the detriment of differences. See also LW I §179, where Wittgenstein links the question of whether he can say such-and-such to the inclination to say such-and-such. Finally, see RPP I §349, where Wittgenstein ponders what the relations are between an inclination to think such-and-such, an inclination to say such-and-such, and expressing oneself in such-and-such a way. He wonders whether an inclination to think develops from expressing oneself in a certain way or vice versa.
is to present the comparisons that temper Köhler’s emphasis on similarities between seeing an aspect and seeing.) Again, because the inclinations to say ‘see’ and to talk in terms of different objects of sight reflect the tendency to favor an analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing, a grammatical justification for the inclination to say such-and-such is a grammatical justification for the tendency to favor such-and-such an analogy.

First, that we even want to say ‘see’ in connection with aspects counts against denying that we see aspects (*RPP* II §462). Extrapolating a bit, I think Wittgenstein is suggesting that although the inclination to say ‘see’ does not provide grammatical justification for the analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing, the inclination can provide impetus to investigate the interrelations between ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing an aspect’ rather than dismiss the use of ‘see’ in aspect-seeing contexts.

Second, we express aspect-shift experiences by giving new descriptions of what we see.

"Surely I see something different when I see the sphere floating from when I merely see it lying there."--This really means: This expression is justified ([gerechtfertigt])!—(For taken literally it ["I see something different"] is no more than a repetition [of two descriptions “I see the sphere floating” and “I merely see the sphere lying there”].) (*PI* II.xi, p. 201)

"And is it really a different impression?"—In order to answer this I should like to ask myself whether there is really something different there in me. But how can I find out?—I describe what I am seeing differently. (*PI* II.xi, p. 202)

Both of the above two quotes direct the interlocutor’s attention to the close connection between seeing and describing what is seen. In the first passage, Wittgenstein takes the interlocutor’s (Köhler’s) statement and characterizes it as the expression of an inclination to say that the experiential change is a matter of seeing something different. Wittgenstein’s treats the expression of the inclination as redundant because the fact that the interlocutor gives different

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167 Cf. *RPP* II §370.
descriptions of what is seen as his experience changes already gives us some reason to say that he sees differently. The second passage addresses the temptation to construe the visual impression as an inner object that can be looked at and examined for changes. Wittgenstein responds that we find out whether there has been a change in what is seen by examining our descriptions of what is seen. If we describe what is seen differently, this gives us reason for saying that there has been a change in our visual experience.

Third, the tendency to favor an analogy between seeing and seeing an aspect is also justified by locating similarities between the use of ‘see’ in aspect-seeing contexts and (ordinary) contexts of seeing. There is a tie-up between the use of ‘see’ in cases of seeing aspects and ‘see’ in cases of seeing colors. Reports of seeing aspects like “I am seeing this figure as an F” can be as little verified or verified in the same sense as “I am seeing bright red” (PI II.xi, p. 212).168 Wittgenstein writes, “This is the kind of similarity we must look for, in order to justify the use of the word ‘see’ in that context” (RPP I §8).

Fourth, experiences of seeing and seeing aspects both have “genuine duration.” Descriptions of what is seen that take the form “Before…now…” ground a similarity between the concept of ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘seeing’ because ‘before’ and ‘now’ indicate genuine duration, and genuine duration is a characteristic of experiential states such as seeing.169

168 See also RPP II §547.
169 For discussions of ‘genuine duration’ and ‘duration’, see RPP I §§836, 882 (especially, in connection with seeing aspects), 887, 948, 973; RPP II §§50, 51, 63, 144, 148, 178, 257, 499, 722; PI II.xi, p. 191.
Second Line of Response: Köhler fails to appreciate that there are other grammatically justified comparisons.

An important lesson of Wittgenstein’s investigations of psychological concepts is that a tremendous variety of comparisons is possible and our expressions of these comparisons are justified by our grammar. He makes this point in his discussions of seeing aspects:

“[O]ther people may be inclined to make a different comparison.” (*LPP*, p. 100)

"But this isn't seeing!"--"But this is seeing!"--It must be possible to give both remarks a conceptual justification [*begrifflich rechtfertigen*]. (*PI* II.xi, p. 203)

But this is seeing! *In what sense* is it seeing? (*PI* II.xi, p. 203)

"Is it a *genuine* visual experience [*Seherlebnis*]?” The question is: in what sense is it one? (*PI* II.xi, p. 204)

Several ideas are expressed in the above quotes. Most importantly, Wittgenstein emphasizes that other comparisons are possible. By appreciating other comparisons we learn to “shift for ourselves” (an idea I emphasized in Chapter Three), which in turn helps us avoid rigid thinking. Another idea is that other people may be inclined to make comparisons other than the ones we make, and these comparisons can be given a conceptual justification, as well. Baker notes that Wittgenstein urges us to acknowledge other possible comparisons “for the purpose of breaking the grip of specific prejudices” (Baker 2004, p. 217). In this way, to appreciate other comparisons is to cultivate intellectual virtue.

Conceptual difficulties can take many different forms. The methods Wittgenstein employs to dissolve them vary accordingly. I have been arguing that, according to Wittgenstein, Köhler’s main conceptual difficulty is that he is stresses an analogy between seeing organization and seeing color and shape to the “detriment of all differences” between them (*RPP* I §1038). A major danger of favoring a comparison is that doing so can stymie the realization that other
grammatically justified comparisons are possible. The relevant divide in connection with Köhler is that it is possible to provide a conceptual justification for both the inclination to say, “This is seeing!” and the inclination to say, “This isn’t seeing!” To clarify, this is not the claim that there are different examples of experiencing aspects, and in some cases “It’s seeing!” is justified and in others “It isn’t seeing!” is justified. Rather, Wittgenstein claims that the character of aspect-seeing is such that both expressions can be justified in one and the same case.

In what follows I examine some of the comparisons that reveal differences between seeing and seeing aspects. Not appreciating these differences is a first step to the philosophical dead end of positing a private picture in order to capture a change in aspect. Next I survey conceptual comparisons that grammatically justify saying “This isn’t seeing!” Put positively, these comparisons serve to grammatically justify saying “This is interpreting!” or “This is imagining!”, depending on the case at hand. I argue that all these conceptual comparisons are ones Köhler does not attend to in his descriptions of visual experience. As we will see in Part II of this chapter, Köhler’s failure to take these comparisons into account has consequences for his expressed aims. The spirit of Wittgenstein’s responses to Köhler is in keeping with Wittgensteinian morals that we can glean from his family resemblance metaphor. That is, there is no one feature or set of features on either side of the “This is seeing!”-“This isn’t seeing!” line that determines once and for all and for every particular case whether an experience of seeing an aspect is seeing or is not seeing. Whether we are inclined to say it is seeing or it is not seeing will partly depend on what analogies we favor, on what conceptual comparisons resonate with us, and on what language-game we are speaking in. Also, a take-home message from Chapter Three is detectable in Wittgenstein’s responses to Köhler — “Yes” and “No” answers are not
helpful in cases where the interrelations between concepts are extremely complicated. What then are these other possible comparisons that Köhler overlooks?

One place Wittgenstein’s strategy for addressing Köhler’s conceptual difficulty comes out is when Wittgenstein asks: If someone says that organization is seen ‘just as much’ as color and shape, what is meant (i.e. what are his words ‘doing’, what information does he give us)? Wittgenstein writes:

The question “What do you see?” gets for [an] answer a variety of kinds of description. – If now someone says “After all, I see the aspect, the organization, just as much as I see shapes and colors” – what is that supposed to mean? That one includes all that in ‘seeing’? Or that there is the greatest similarity? – And what can I say to the matter? I can point out similarities and differences. (RPP I §964)

This quote brings out that Wittgenstein’s strategy for addressing Köhler’s difficulty is to point out similarities and differences between seeing aspects and seeing. He accomplishes this by pointing out similarities and differences between the concepts ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘seeing’.

Earlier I presented a small sampling of observations about our uses of ‘see’ and our concept ‘description of what is seen’ that grammatically justify the inclination to say ‘see’ in aspectseeing contexts. In what follows, I examine concept-based comparisons that shift away from the analogy between seeing and seeing an aspect and toward analogies between seeing an aspect and interpreting or imagining.

Wittgenstein highlights two types of comparisons that Köhler’s way of looking at things hinders him from acknowledging: comparisons that point to differences between ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘seeing’ and comparisons that show similarities between ‘seeing an aspect’ and other concepts such as ‘interpreting’ and ‘imagining’. There are, of course, other comparisons besides these. Wittgenstein initiates an investigation into the comparisons I investigate here, specifically
as a response to the kind of conceptual difficulty that besets Köhler. Drawing attention to these comparisons is supposed to be helpful for this difficulty. To reiterate an earlier point, the analogy that is the source of Köhler’s conceptual difficulty may not be misleading in another context. Likewise, the alternative comparisons Wittgenstein introduces to help Köhler “shift” may not be helpful in another context.

**First Kind of Comparison Köhler Misses: those that point to differences between seeing aspects and seeing color and shape**

I opened this chapter with Wittgenstein’s characterization of Köhler as favoring an analogy between organization and color and shape. We see organization just as we see color and shape. Another way Wittgenstein articulates Köhler’s idea is by saying that organization (of the visual impression) is “on a par” or “on a level” with color and shape (LW I §512; PI II.xi, p. 196; LPP, pp. 229, 331). Wittgenstein notes differences between descriptions of what is seen in aspect-seeing contexts and in other contexts of seeing. Our descriptive practices differ in each case. Wittgenstein argues that the differences he observes “wreck” the comparison Köhler privileges. That is, they provide grounds for saying that organization is not on a par with color and shape, that organization is not seen just as color and shape are seen. The first comparison I discuss below brings out that different standards of pictorial representation are at work in contexts of seeing aspects and contexts of seeing. I build a case for this interpretation by tracing the misleading line of thought recorded at PI II.xi, p. 196. Köhler’s favored analogy coupled with a misplaced ideal of representation of what is seen lead to a dead end in thinking about how to represent pictorially the experience of a change of aspect. That is, if we hold onto the “exact copy” as the ideal of description and insist on the analogy between seeing an aspect and seeing, then we might be tempted to posit a private picture to capture the change in our experience.
Wittgenstein explores two ways to avoid this dead end. First, he argues that it is not clear that talk of exactness is useful in the context of representing our experience pictorially. An exact copy of a visual experience may not be a good representation of the experience. Another way Wittgenstein tries to loosen the knot in our thinking and avoid the dead end is by pointing out that the concept ‘copy’ is elastic. In some contexts, especially when seeing an aspect is in question, it is helpful to include the way of copying in our understanding of what constitutes a copy, not just the product of the activity of copying. The second comparison that points to differences between seeing an aspect and seeing concerns non-pictorial descriptions of what is seen. Wittgenstein makes points that parallel his discussion of pictorial representation of aspect-seeing experiences. He argues that a difference between seeing aspects and seeing is that appeal to an interpretation is often essential in verbal reports of aspect-seeing experiences. While interpretation can be involved in a verbal report of seeing color or shape, such an appeal is not essential to the expression of these experiences.

**Disanalogy One: pictorial representations of aspect-seeing experiences vs. those of seeing experiences**

One way in which seeing an aspect and seeing color or shape are dissimilar is that we employ different standards of pictorial representation in aspect-seeing cases from the ones we employ in cases of seeing color or shape. Wittgenstein examines a case of seeing where a picture that captures changes in color and shape seen does not capture changes in organization seen.

The failure to notice this significant point of disanalogy between organization and color and shape coupled with adherence to a false ideal of description is the starting point for a misleading train of thought about what is seen and describing what is seen. Wittgenstein investigates this train of thought, beginning with a short exchange with his interlocutor:
I suddenly see the solution of a puzzle-picture. Before, there were branches there; now there is a human shape (menschliche Gestalt). My visual impression (Gesichtseindruck) has changed and now I recognize that it has not only shape and color but also a quite particular ‘organization’.—My visual impression has changed;—what was it like before and what is it like now?—If I represent it by means of an exact copy—and isn’t that a good representation of it?—no change is shown. (PI II.xi, p. 196)

“Before…now…” is an expression indicating a change. In this case, the interlocutor reports a change in his experience (i.e. “I suddenly see the solution of a puzzle-picture. Before…now…”). This is puzzling though since there is no corresponding change in the puzzle-picture he views. He attempts to explain the change in his experience by talk of a change in the organization of his visual impression. But if the he tries to capture the change in his experience by drawing an exact copy (genaue Kopie) of it no change in the experience shows up in this pictorial representation.

What now? How can the interlocutor account for the change in his experience? At this point Wittgenstein warns the interlocutor that positing an inner representation of his experience to capture the change in organization will not address the problem: “And above all do not say ‘After all my visual impression isn’t the drawing’ it is this—which I can’t shew to anyone.’” (PI II.xi, p. 196).

Wittgenstein argues that an inner object is nothing but a “queerly shifting construction”. That it can alter without an alteration in the outer picture (i.e. the puzzle-picture) shows that this inner “object” is a chimerical object. Thus, Wittgenstein holds that it is incoherent to take the “outer” picture as a model for the visual impression. Ultimately, the interlocutor is left without a satisfying pictorial representation of the change in his experience. Wittgenstein writes:

If you put the ‘organization’ of a visual impression on a level with colours and shapes, you are proceeding from the idea of the visual impression as an inner object. Of course this makes this object into a chimera; a queerly shifting construction. For the similarity to a picture is now impaired. (PI II.xi, p. 196)
The interlocutor reaches a stopping point in his thinking. The puzzle-picture falls equally under the concept ‘meaningless mass of lines’ and ‘picture of a human shape’. But his visual experience is not simultaneously two experiences, one characterized by ‘meaningless mass of lines’ and the other characterized by ‘picture of a human shape’. There are two distinct experiences but only one puzzle-picture that is the object of the experience. If he copies the puzzle-picture exactly, no change in his visual experience is shown. So he tries to posit a new, private object of his experience that does register the change he underwent from not seeing the solution to seeing the solution of the puzzle-picture: the visual impression. His felt need to posit an inner picture is fueled by the assumption that if the exact copy cannot represent the change in his experience, then no outer picture can. After all, what representation is more ideal than an exact copy? Is it not most accurate and most complete? Is that not just what ‘exact’ means? If an exact copy cannot do the work, then what outer picture can? Wittgenstein responds to the interlocutor’s stalemate by challenging his adherence to this ideal of description. He writes:

And now look at all that can be meant by “description of what is seen”.—But this is just what is called a description of what is seen. There is not one genuine (eigentlichen) proper case of such a description— the rest being just vague, something which awaits clarification, or which must just be swept aside as rubbish. (PI II.xi, p. 200)

The above remark illustrates Wittgenstein’s view that what we call a ‘description of what is seen’ is a “great variety of thing” (RPP I §981). Given that there is such variety, we should not insist that the exact copy is a good representation of what is seen in every case of seeing. When it comes to describing our aspect-seeing experiences, such as suddenly seeing the solution to a puzzle-picture, an exact copy does not capture the aspect. So Wittgenstein’s response to the
interlocutor’s despair concerning outer pictures is to introduce alternatives to the idea that the exact copy is an ideal description in aspect-seeing cases.

Wittgenstein investigates two ways to avoid the interlocutor’s dead end. Both turn on considering the “representing role” of the exact copy in aspect experiences. First, he considers whether an exact copy is a good representation of visual experience in cases of seeing aspects. Wittgenstein argues that an exact copy without further supplementation does not capture the aspect seen and is thus not a good representation of aspects. Second, Wittgenstein explores the idea that our concept ‘copy’ is elastic. In some contexts where the way of copying is included in our concept ‘copy’, the copy can serve as a description of an aspect-seeing experience.

I begin elucidating those two ways by examining Wittgenstein’s challenge to the idea that an exact copy is a good representation:

If I represent it by means of an exact copy—and isn’t that a good representation of it?—no change is shown. (*PI* II.xi, p. 196)

Usually the above question is read rhetorically. On a non-rhetorical reading, Wittgenstein is not covertly suggesting that the exact copy is a good representation of the visual impression. Although the interlocutor is tempted to do so, a visual impression need not be construed as an inner object. I think Wittgenstein uses ‘visual impression’ loosely here to get at the idea that the visual experience has changed. He is sincerely asking whether we should say that the exact copy is a good representation of the visual impression (i.e. the visual experience). Wittgenstein and his interlocutor both deny that the exact copy is a good representation in this instance. The trouble is that the interlocutor is then tempted to posit an inner picture, something he thinks is the

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170 See *RPP* II §382.
171 In the following places Wittgenstein seems comfortable inquiring about descriptions of a visual impression and how such a description relates to descriptions of objects: *RPP* I §§3, 1083, 1085, and 1092; *RPP* II §554. I think this shows that he is not always using ‘visual impression’ to designate a private mental object.
most promising candidate for a good representation of the change in his experience. By contrast, Wittgenstein’s next step is to consider how we find out which aspect someone sees and how this differs from finding out what is seen in contexts where an exact copy is a good representation of what we see. There are ways to describe the aspects we see, but these ways diverge significantly from how we describe changes in color and shape seen.

**When the “useless specification” is essential.** Let us consider how our practices of describing what we see differ in aspect-seeing contexts. Some cases of seeing, such as seeing the aspects of the ambiguous schematic cube figure, challenge the idea that an exact copy is a good representation of what is seen:

If I know that the schematic cube has various aspects and I want to find out what someone else sees, I can get him to make a model of what he sees, in addition to a copy or point to such a model; even though he has no idea of my purpose in demanding two accounts. (*PI* II.xi, p.196)

The idea here is that since the schematic cube has various aspects a question can arise about which aspect another person sees. Imagine that someone does not undergo any change of aspect when viewing the schematic cube figure; he only sees one of the various aspects of the figure. To find out what he sees when he views an object with multiple aspects, we might ask him to give “two accounts” of what he sees. He need not have any idea why we are demanding this “dual demonstration”, although in fact we need it in order to determine which aspect of the figure he sees. From an onlooker’s perspective, the model is a further specification of what the perceiver sees even though he may think that pointing to a model in addition to making a copy is superfluous. In the example the perceiver is unaware that the cube figure has multiple aspects, or at least he has not experienced a change in aspect. This explains why pointing to a model seems superfluous from his point of view. The example illustrates how what is taken as a satisfying

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172 This phrase occurs in a variant of *LW I* §501. See the footnote for the remark on p. 66 of *LW I.*
description of what is seen from one perspective, may not be satisfactory from another perspective. An exact copy of the cube figure may not be enough to determine what another person sees when he sees an aspect; the schematic cube figure is ambiguous between the two aspects. If the perceiver does experience a change in aspect, then the model becomes an essential supplement to the copy of the figure from the perceiver’s perspective as well. In such a case, what is taken to be a “useless specification” elsewhere becomes the “only possible expression of our experience” (PI II.xi, p. 196).

New copy versus ways of copying. Another important point about how our practices of describing what we see differ in aspect-seeing contexts concerns the concept ‘copy’. In the above few paragraphs it was taken for granted that in the case of an experience of a change of aspect, a copy of the figure would have to be the same both before and after the change of aspect. After all, there is no change in the figure being viewed by the perceiver who experiences an aspect shift. Wittgenstein holds, though, that there is room for talk of a new copy in some cases where the viewed figure does not change if the way of copying is taken into account in our application of ‘copy’. For example, the way one copies the puzzle-picture before seeing the solution may differ from the way one copies it after the solution is seen. ‘Way of copying’ designates details such as where one starts in the copying and which lines are taken together. Invoking a music metaphor, Wittgenstein sometimes calls these details the “phrasing that goes on in making the drawing” (RPP I §1023). And the kinds of mistakes one makes while copying can show the aspect too. For example, when I copy the puzzle-picture the kinds of

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173 Here there is a tie-up with Wittgenstein’s example of the man who can make an accurate drawing of the two faces which allows another man to see the likeness yet he himself is unable to see the likeness between them; in both cases there is a sense in which the representation of what is seen does not describe what each man sees, and in this way the representation fails to capture their particular visual experiences.

174 See also RPP I §1114; LW I §441. Cf. RPP II §368.

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mistakes I make in the first copy will differ from the kinds I make in the copy I produce after I see the solution (RPP II §361).

‘Copy’: an elastic concept. The interlocutor might still be unsatisfied. Suppose he grants that the way someone copies can show the aspect. He still might deny that this gives us reason to say that the aspect is really seen. He might think that “[i]f something else is seen, the copy must be different” (RPP II §376). This line of reasoning assumes that a way of copying is not a change in the copy.

Wittgenstein’s response is to illustrate the elasticity of our concept of ‘copy’. His aim is to undermine the idea that what we call ‘copy’ must be a perfectly exact, unambiguous, pictorial replica of what is seen. Suppose someone experiences a change of aspect when viewing the double-cross figure. If he wanted to use pictures to capture the change in experience, reproducing the double-cross figure both before and after the shift will not capture the change. But he could describe the experience of a change in aspect by saying “I see the figure now in this way (and then a figure follows), now in this way (and a different figure follows).” Wittgenstein tentatively suggests that each of these two figures could be called a kind of copy of the double-cross figure (RPP II §§379-80). Of course, this kind of copy might need to be supplemented by a conceptual explanation (begrifflichen Erklärung):

[If I see the figure of a cross \[\uparrow\] now as a cross lying down, now as standing up, now as a diagonal cross set up askew – what are the corresponding copies? A cross lying down is one which was laid on its side but should stand up. So the copy will be something shaped like a cross, and about which we know which it is – lying down or standing up. (RPP II §381)

175 The editors of RPP II note that this figure does not appear in the typescript from which RPP II is drawn. They copied it from the manuscript from which the typescript was drawn.
In the case cited above, the cross figure is supplemented by ‘cross lying down’ or ‘diagonal cross set up askew’. A copy of the figure together with one of these conceptual explanations expresses the aspect seen. So this kind of copy differs from a copy that can serve as a representation of what is seen without any conceptual explanation. Here there is an overlap between describing aspects and describing a painting. As the cross case illustrates, we often invoke conceptual explanations to express the aspects we see. Likewise, paintings can be (and usually are) described by describing events (Vorgänge). Wittgenstein says that one would not understand the painting if the only description one could offer is the distribution of color on its surface, no matter how “exact” this form of description was (RPP II §385).

There is also a tie-up between capturing aspects and capturing movement in pictures.176

Wittgenstein writes:

Imagine a painting of a descent from the cross, for instance. What would that be to us, if we didn’t know which movements were captured here? The picture shows us these movements and yet it does not. (The picture of the calvary-attack, when the viewer doesn’t know that the horses don’t stop in those positions.) (RPP II §382)

In both the case of capturing an aspect and in the case of capturing movement pictorially, there is a sense in which a copy of the picture would not be a copy without knowledge of what the picture or figure tries to capture. Given the elasticity of ‘copy’, especially in connection with aspect-seeing cases, we may have to decide what to call ‘copy’ on a case by case basis. We are often able to do so by considering what further specifications of the pictorial representation are necessary for our purposes in a particular instance. Still, in some cases we may have no idea how to decide:

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176 See also LPP, p. 104, where the change of aspect in the puzzle-picture is described in terms of a movement, despite that there is not even an illusion of movement in this case.
Imagine looking at flowing water. The picture presented by the surface keeps on changing. Lights and darks everywhere appear and disappear. What would I call an 'exact description' of this visual picture? There's nothing I would call that. If someone says it can't be described, one can reply: You don't know what it would be right to call a description. For you would not acknowledge the most exact photograph as an exact representation of your experience. There is no such thing as exactness in this language-game. (As, that is, there is no knight in draughts.) *(RPP I §1080)*

We may not have an established way of describing some kinds of perceptual experience. Wittgenstein says that in the above case talk of exactness is out of place.

The hesitation to grant that our everyday representations of visual experience are really representations of what is seen is testimony to the longing for a single, universally applicable ideal of description. We might think that such an ideal would allow us to determine whether a description of our experiences is complete and exact. And yet we do not have a clear idea of what would constitute such an ideal. When we look at our practices of describing our experiences, no single, universal ideal is found.

"Inexact" is really a reproach, and "exact" is praise. And that is to say that what is inexact attains its goal less perfectly than what is more exact. Thus the point here is what we call "the goal". Am I inexact when I do not give our distance from the sun to the nearest foot, or tell a joiner the width of a table to the nearest thousandth of an inch?

No single ideal of exactness has been laid down; we do not know what we should be supposed to imagine under this head--unless you yourself lay down what is to be so called. But you will find it difficult to hit upon such a convention; at least any that satisfies you. *(PI §88)*

In connection with aspect perception Wittgenstein’s above remarks are especially poignant. He suggests that the meaning of ‘exact’ is established relative to our goals and interests. What we would call a ‘complete’, ‘exact’, or ‘accurate’ description of what is seen in aspect-seeing cases

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177 Cf. *RPP I* §§953-54.

178 Compare: "What I am opposed to is the concept of some ideal exactitude given us *a priori*, as it were. At different times we have different ideals of exactitude; and none of them is supreme. *(CV, p. 45)* and *BB*, p. 181 on the misleading search for the ‘real’ and ‘complete’ description of experience.

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varies in accordance our goals and interests too. If I make a portrait of someone’s face with the aim to depict his worried expression, I might darken the lines around his eyes. Doing so might be called inaccurate from one perspective but an improvement on accuracy from another. Caricature drawings are dramatic instances of this observation. A caricature often captures facial character more accurately than a drawing that is meant to replicate facial lines.

In summary, earlier I noted that Köhler is not explicitly interested in questions about the completeness of descriptions in this context, and so it would be misleading to attribute the interlocutor’s train of thought to him. Yet, tracing out the interlocutor’s line of thought in *PI* II.xi, p. 196 illustrates one way Köhler’s analogy can be dangerous, even if it does not represent Köhler’s own difficulty. The analogy becomes misleading when combined with a certain ideal of description (i.e. the exact copy). The coupling of the analogy and the ideal can commit us to other analogies, which can, in turn, mislead us. For instance, the interlocutor tries to posit a private picture to remedy the exact copy’s failure to register the change in his experience. The success of this move relies on another analogy, this time between a physical object and a visual impression: The visual impression is just like a picture only inner and private. Wittgenstein complains, “And now each bad analogy gets explained by another bad one, so that in the end only weariness releases us from these ineptitudes” (*RPP* I §292). Much in the spirit of his responses (in *PI* Part I) to the interlocutor’s temptation to posit private objects, Wittgenstein argues that it is incoherent to claim that the inner picture is just like an object only private. The inner picture is a queerly shifting construction by comparison with physical objects. I have argued that Wittgenstein is offering a way out of this stalemate. He shows us that we need not accept that an exact copy is the universal ideal of pictorial representation. He describes another use of ‘copy’ that would allow the interlocutor to meet the demand for a copy yet also capture his
experience. Wittgenstein also claims that our concept ‘copy’ is elastic. So what counts as a copy varies from case to case, especially when the cases under consideration are instances of aspect-seeing.

**Disanalogy Two: interpretation is essential to the description of many of the aspects we see but not to the description of color and shapes we see.**

The next comparison that I discuss is related to insights garnered in Chapter Three. There, by way of examples, I explored Wittgenstein’s view that conceptual explanation is involved in the expression of many aspect experiences. Conceptual explanations go beyond mention of color and shape. That is, they make use of concepts other than those of color and shape. Wittgenstein’s interest in descriptions of visual experience that go beyond mention of color and shape is developed in another way in his discussions of the role of interpretation in the expression of aspect experiences. Wittgenstein holds that in many cases the primary expression of an aspect experience is an interpretation. Interpretation does not play this essential role in reports of seeing color, for example. Thus, seeing an aspect and seeing color are dissimilar in this way.

Before proceeding to my elucidation of the role of interpretation in the expression of aspect experiences, I note an important terminological difficulty. In his discussions of seeing aspects, Wittgenstein examines the grounds for the inclination to deny that aspect-seeing is really seeing (e.g. “It isn’t seeing!”) and those for the inclination to affirm that aspect-seeing is seeing (e.g. “It’s seeing!”). He often characterizes the two inclinations as in opposition (even though he himself rejects the idea that thinking disjunctively is helpful). While he consistently uses ‘seeing’ to represent one side of the opposition, he uses different terms to describe what opposes seeing, as in the following: a change in aspect is seeing or it is thinking (Denken); either it is
seeing or it is interpreting (Deutung); either it is seeing or it is conceiving (Auffassen); either it is seeing or it is understanding (Verstehen); either it is seeing or it is meaning (Bedeutung). In my elucidation of Wittgenstein’s remarks, I do not investigate each of these oppositions separately. I do not think Wittgenstein settles on a single way to express “It isn’t seeing!” positively (e.g. “It’s interpreting!” or “It’s imagining!”). I move freely between talk of thinking, interpreting, conceiving, and meaning. A broader construal of the seeing-not seeing opposition is whether a change in aspect is a visual and sensory change or a non-visual and intellectual change. I think this construal strikes closer to the heart of Wittgenstein’s Köhler-inspired remarks on seeing aspects. That being said, in some cases, like the ones I explore below, Wittgenstein does employ a narrower construal of the opposition. He characterizes it as one between seeing and interpreting. To keep consistent with his usage, I will employ ‘interpreting’, ‘interpretation’, ‘interpret’.

How do we tell that interpretation is involved in our descriptions of aspect experiences? Use of the “See…as…” locution in descriptions of what is seen signals that interpretation is involved. The locution makes clear that the one giving the description appreciates that there is an ambiguity or that the perceptual situation is somehow “unstable” (RPP II §540). Also, saying “It could be this too” followed by a new interpretation can bring about the dawning of a new aspect (LW I §430).\(^{179}\) For example, while viewing the young girl-old woman ambiguous figure,\(^{180}\) I could bring about the dawning of the old woman aspect by saying to myself “It could be this too: an old woman.” And one might, in some cases, think of the interpretation in order to

\(^{179}\) See also PI II.xi, p. 206; RPP II §§535-37. These additional marks link furnishing a new interpretation with play-acting. That play acting can bring about the dawning of an aspect shows one way seeing an aspect is akin to imagining in some cases.

\(^{180}\) For an illustration of the figure and brief description of its origins see [http://mathworld.wolfram.com/YoungGirl-OldWomanIllusion.html](http://mathworld.wolfram.com/YoungGirl-OldWomanIllusion.html)
hold constant the experience of the particular aspect in question (*RPP* I §1020). These are some ways that we tell that seeing an aspect involves interpretation.

Wittgenstein goes further in forging a link between seeing an aspect and interpretation. The main thrust of his discussion of the role of interpretation in verbal reports of aspect-seeing experiences is that an interpretation is the primary expression of the experience (*RPP* I §20, *LPP*, pp. 102, 332). For example, at *RPP* I §1 Wittgenstein presents this figure:

![Figure 7](image)

The figure can be seen as an F or as a mirror-image of an F. If I see the mirror-image aspect, I express my experience by saying “I see it *as* a mirror-image of an F.”

The claim that the descriptions of many aspect experiences rely on interpretation is another way of saying that they draw on other domains and include concepts other than those of color or shape. Does reliance on interpretation render these descriptions of experience somehow *indirect*?[^181] In a move that echoes Part I of *PI*,[^182] Wittgenstein claims that ‘indirect’ only makes sense in a context where its contrast (‘direct’) makes sense. He holds that it would not make sense to say that the interpretation-laden expression of an aspect experience is indirect because a more direct description is not available. By contrast, I could opt to say “Her shirt is the color of a storm-threatened sky”, but the color I characterize by comparison with the sky (gray-blue) can be described without invoking other-than-color concepts in my description. Thus, in this instance

[^181]: This is another place the temptation to posit a private object gets a foothold. See *RPP* I §3.
[^182]: See *PI* §398; Cf. *PI* §§293, 378 and *BB*, p. 46.
it makes sense to call my original description indirect. In the case of seeing aspects according to an interpretation, appeal to an interpretation is essential.

Despite these considerations, it might strike us as puzzling that interpretation could be required to describe a visual experience:

The puzzle is that ‘seeing as’ is described on the paradigm of interpretation, and that the description seems to be essential. \((LPP, p. 102)\)

The real puzzle is: the words that one used to describe an interpretation are also used to describe a visual reality: “It hangs from there” and “You can see it as something that hangs from there or stands there. \((LPP, p. 331)\)

We may be tempted to deny that this can be so. We might say aspects are not really seen— they are the products of interpreting what is seen. Accordingly, a change of aspect is a change in the interpretation. Wittgenstein warns that although it looks like such a move would solve the problem simply by denying that seeing can have these features, the conceptual difficulty is left untouched. The flipside of the difficulty outlives the proposed solution; namely, we would have to ask how it is that conceiving can have features we associate with seeing \((RPP II §388)\).

To sum up my discussion of two disanalogies between the concepts ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing an aspect’ that Köhler misses, Wittgenstein holds that an interpretation serves as the primary expression of the visual experience, in many cases of aspect-seeing. This reliance on interpretation comes out in the case of pictorial representations of aspect experiences too, not just in verbal descriptions. For instance, the way I copy a figure (e.g. which lines I take together and what kinds of mistakes I make in the copying) is taken into account when I use a copy to convey an aspect I see.\(^{183}\) By contrast, descriptions of colors seen do not rely essentially on

\(^{183}\) In this connection, compare \(RPP II §370)\.
interpretation. Thus, seeing and seeing an aspect differ with respect to how we describe and represent our visual experiences.

Before continuing my discussion of comparisons Köhler does not consider, I note Wittgenstein’s response to a reaction some readers might have at this juncture. That interpretation is essential to the description of a visual experience may seem puzzling. One might wonder why we would bother calling it a visual experience anymore if this is the case. Why not say that seeing an aspect does not fall under the concepts ‘seeing’ and ‘visual experience’? Why not say that a change of aspect is a non-visual, intellectual change?

Wittgenstein claims that the conceptual difficulty we have in this instance is not dissolved by calling these cases of conceiving. In fact, if we call aspect-seeing ‘conceiving’ we just reveal the flipside of the conceptual difficulty because now we have to give an account of conceiving that draws on features we associate with seeing (RPP I §388). Wittgenstein’s response demonstrates that acknowledging differences between seeing and seeing aspects is not tantamount to denying that we have conceptual grounds to call seeing an aspect ‘seeing’. Some concept-based comparisons justify talk of seeing, and some justify talk of not seeing. Recall that earlier I said that the seeing-not seeing opposition can be specified as an opposition between two “positives” rather than as one between a positive (seeing) and a negative (not seeing). In what follows I consider two positive specifications of the seeing-not seeing opposition: seeing-interpreting and seeing-imagining and argue that Wittgenstein maintains that the inclinations to say “It’s interpreting!” or “It’s imagining” in some aspect-seeing contexts can be justified grammatically.

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184 Notice the parallel with Wittgenstein’s response to the purist’s hesitation to grant our everyday descriptions of what is seen. Wittgenstein reminds the purist that acknowledging similarities between two concepts of ‘what is perceived’ is not tantamount to denying the differences between them. The similarities do not cancel the differences, and the differences do not cancel the similarities.
Second Kind of Comparison Köhler Misses: those that show similarities between seeing an aspect and interpreting and imagining

Now I will consider comparisons involving similarities between the concepts ‘seeing an aspect’ on the one hand and ‘interpreting’ or ‘imagining’ on the other. Köhler’s agenda is to make a case for the sensory reality of organization. On his picture, a change in organization is a sensory change, like a change in color seen. He neglects the following comparisons in his discussions of the experience of a change in organization, perhaps because he thinks that acknowledging similarities between seeing an aspect and interpreting or imagining would negate the claim that organization is a sensory reality.

Analogy One: interpreting and seeing…as…

Appreciating that interpretation is essential to the description of aspect experiences encourages the misleading idea that a change of aspect is interpreting rather than seeing, (LW I §179). Another consideration that fuels the idea that seeing an aspect is interpreting instead of seeing, is that the lines of the drawing one sees do not appear to have changed position. That is, can there have been a change in seeing if the optical picture (Gesichtsbild) need not appear to have changed (RPP I §169)? Wittgenstein holds that both of these considerations provide grounds for the inclination to say it is not seeing, it is interpreting. But these inclinations can “coexist” with the inclination to say that it is seeing because there are grounds for both ways of speaking. So it would misrepresent the interrelations between ‘seeing an aspect’, ‘seeing’, and interpreting’ to identify seeing an aspect with interpreting (just as it would misrepresent these interrelations to identify seeing an aspect with seeing). One comparison does not exclude the other, although we might privilege one and downplay another. Further, Wittgenstein notes that
there are points of contrast between seeing an aspect and interpreting that make it misleading to say a change of aspect is an act of interpreting:

Do I really see something different each time, or do I only interpret what I see in a different way? I am inclined to say the former. But why?—To interpret is to think, to do something; seeing is a state.

Now it is easy to recognize cases in which we are interpreting. When we interpret we form hypotheses, which may prove false. (PI II.xi, p. 212)

According to Wittgenstein’s use of ‘interpret’ here, when we interpret we consider “What might that be?”; and we form a hypothesis that is assessable as true or false. If someone says “I see it as a triangle that has toppled over”, it would not make any sense to set out to prove the person wrong. The statement is a description of the experience, even if, in a sense, the description is an interpretation. The interpretation functions as a description of experience here. As mentioned earlier, seeing an aspect has genuine duration. Seeing an aspect is a state (RPP II §43); it is an experience that we undergo. Interpreting is not something we undergo. It is a form of thinking, and thinking is something we do. ¹⁸⁵

We have learned that Wittgenstein grants that the description of many aspect-seeing experiences involves appeal to an interpretation. He also grants that, in an important sense, what is seen is unchanged when there is a change in aspect. The understanding that what is seen is, in some sense, the same, pervades the experience itself. That is part of what renders these changes in visual experience remarkable. Yet Wittgenstein resists concluding that these tie-ups tip the scale fully in favor of saying that a change of aspect is an act of interpreting. He resists identity claims between seeing an aspect and interpreting, just as he resists identity claims between seeing an aspect and seeing. We have grounds for calling it a visual experience, even if there are tie-ups between the concepts ‘interpreting’ and ‘seeing an aspect’. This ongoing theme (that the

¹⁸⁵ Cf. RPP I §1; RPP II §546.
Concept ‘seeing an aspect’ is an in-between concept) comes out in our next conceptual comparison as well.

Analogy Two: imagining and seeing...as...

Even if we emphasize the ties between ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘interpreting’, and downplay their differences, the idea that to see an aspect is to interpret what is seen is misleading because it ignores tie-ups between ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘imagining’ or ‘imagining’, tie-ups that ‘interpreting’ and ‘imagining’ do not share. So both Köhler and his meaning theory opponents misrepresent the experiential character of seeing an aspect in this regard. In what follows I discuss two similarities between ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘imagining’ or ‘imagining’.

First, in both cases we may not care whether the image we form or the aspect we see “corresponds to” or “matches” with anything in reality. Wittgenstein makes two parallel points, both concerning teaching the application of our concepts to children. We cannot interchange “What is that?” and “What do you see?” in aspect-seeing contexts as we can in cases of seeing objects and identifying them correctly. The other parallel point is that ambiguous figures cannot serve as the first, only, or paradigmatic sample for teaching proper application of the concept ‘picture’.

Sometimes when we imagine we entertain a possibility or form an image without regard for whether the product of our imagining corresponds to anything actual. Likewise, when someone sees the duck-rabbit figure as a duck and understands that the duck-rabbit figure is ambiguous, there is no interest in establishing whether the aspect is “objective”. And in the

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186 For an interesting recent discussion of Wittgenstein’s remarks on images, imagination, imaging, and aspect perception see McGinn 2004. McGinn, inspired by Sartre and Wittgenstein’s writings on imagination, argues that “imagination pervades our mental life, obeys its own distinctive principles, and merits much more attention” (back cover). See also Hacking 2005 for a review of McGinn.

187 There is another interpretive issue lurking here. Vorstellen is translated sometimes as ‘imaging’ (i.e. what we do when we form an image) and sometimes as ‘imagining’, which has a broader meaning in English.
context of teaching someone the concept ‘seeing an aspect’, “What do you see?” will not be interchangeable with “What is that?”, as it would be in an ordinary context of seeing, where there is no ambiguity in what we see (RPP I §412). To teach a child how to apply the concept ‘picture-duck’, one would not employ the duck-rabbit figure as the first, only, or paradigmatic sample because the ambiguous figure might also be used for teaching ‘picture-rabbit’ (RPP I §899).

The second similarity is that both seeing an aspect and imagining are subject to the will in similar respects and degrees. The overlap between ‘seeing an aspect’ with ‘imagining’ that Wittgenstein emphasizes most is that both can be said to be subject to the will:

Seeing an aspect and imagining are subject to the will. There is such an order as "Imagine this", and also: "Now see the figure like this"; but not: "Now see this leaf green". (PI II.xi, p. 213)

We can try to see an aspect, and we can try to form an image. In both cases we can fail or succeed. In contrast, we do not try to see a leaf green or an apple red. Although we can be ordered to see an aspect or imagine something, what follows from each kind of command differs. To try to see an aspect, I may look more attentively at one part of a puzzle-picture rather than another, in an effort to see the solution. Someone helping me to see an aspect could offer another command “Look here, not there”. Or I may rotate the duck-rabbit figure and tilt my head to try to change from seeing the duck-aspect to seeing the rabbit-aspect. By contrast, to try to form an image of a character or landscape described in a novel, I may stop reading and close my eyes or turn out the lights and put my head down on my desk. The flipside of the idea that an aspect and image are, in some respects, under our voluntary control, is that, just as we may form

188 Cf. RPP I §977; RPP II §§336-37.
189 See also LW I §§463f.
an image we do not want to form, we can see an aspect we do not want to see. A change of aspect can occur even if we resist the change (LW I §612).

Once more we find Wittgenstein introducing considerations that justify a comparison between concepts Köhler neglects. In one of the few places where Wittgenstein directly addresses the adequacy of Köhler’s characterization of seeing an aspect, he criticizes Köhler for ignoring the sense in which seeing an aspect is subject to the will:

What Köhler does not deal with is the fact that one may look at [the double-cross] in this way or that, that the aspect is, at least to a certain degree, subject to the will. (RPP I §971)

By virtue of this overlap with looking, seeing an aspect and seeing can both be said to be subject to the will (LW I §453). The same does not hold for imagining. “Look!” is not a command that works well in a context of forming an image, for example.

Wittgenstein’s Culminating Remark

Wittgenstein makes an intriguing and obscure direct statement against Köhler:

It is—contrary to Köhler—precisely a meaning (Bedeutung) that I see. (RPP I §869)\(^{190}\)

Wittgenstein’s statement suggests that Köhler denies that we see meaning. So first we must ask, what in Köhler’s GP gives Wittgenstein the impression that he would deny that we see meaning? Perhaps it is Köhler’s polemic against meaning theory. He argues that the organization of the

\(^{190}\) What is the meaning of ‘meaning’ in this context? Wittgenstein italicizes the word. Does he do so for emphasis or to indicate hesitation? What is the scope of the claim? Is Wittgenstein making a remark about the concept ‘seeing’ or the concept ‘seeing as’, or both? Are some applications of either or both of these concepts being singled out, or is Wittgenstein characterizing them more generally? Is the remark a self-contained or part of a sustained discussion in RPP I or in Wittgenstein’s other writings? These questions go to show that there are formidable interpretive hurdles lurking here.
visual field is not the product of an intellectual process such as the projection of acquired knowledge into the visual field. If this polemic is the source of the impression, then the statement that Köhler denies that we see meaning needs qualification because his main idea is that ‘original’ organization is free from the influence of meaning. He acknowledges the influence of past experience on subsequent organization. The influence of meaning touches nearly all adult experience, even if he does not explicitly say that meaning is seen. Epstein and Hatfield (1994) argue that it is Köhler’s view that we perceive meaning, value, and emotion. They rely more on *The Place of Value in a World of Facts* and “Value and Fact” rather than *GP* to make their case. Overall, the compatibility between Köhler’s admission that adult experience is imbued with meaning and his claim that organization is a sensory reality is not worked out in the portions of *GP* (the first six chapters) that appear to form the basis for Wittgenstein’s reflections here. In the final four chapters of *GP* Köhler discusses the influence of meaning on our perceptions of other people as well as our environments (e.g. the weather). Wittgenstein is keenly interested in these ideas, but his debt to Köhler manifests more apparently in his discussions of the problem of other minds and the mind-body relation. These topics deserve separate treatment.

Thus, in my view, *RPP* I §869 is best interpreted as having a fairly specific target: Köhler’s treatment of the experience of a change of aspect. Recall that earlier in this chapter I present some of the tie-ups between ‘seeing as’ and ‘interpreting’. A crucial tie-up, one that generates hesitation about calling an aspect change an *experiential* change, is that the expression of a change in conceptual aspect is an interpretation. For instance, when I see the duck-aspect of Jastrow’s duck-rabbit figure I say “I see it *as* a duck”. If we situate *RPP* I §869 in this context of discussion, Wittgenstein appears to be suggesting that admitting the essential role of
interpretation in the report of aspect experiences is not to deny that a change in aspect is a change
in experience. A visual experience can rely on interpretation for its expression without having to
be classified as something other than “genuine” visual experience. For Köhler, changes in
sensory reality are changes in direct experience. Köhler’s way of arguing for the sensory reality
of organization reveals that he thinks of changes in sensory reality as purely optical changes that
are partly determined by retinal stimulation and partly determined by the constructive
physiological processes of organization in the nervous system. Köhler’s more generous notion
of what counts as sensory reality is an improvement on the restrictive constancy hypothesis, but
it does not go far enough. Wittgenstein’s remark that we see a meaning hints at an even more
generous conception of sensory reality. Interpretation is essential to the expression of many
aspect-shift experiences, and in these cases we can say that we see a meaning. This captures the
idea that the experience of a change of aspect straddles conceptual boundaries between
psychological concepts associated with sensory change and those associated with non-sensory
change. There is some textual support for this reading. LPP lends some support, though as we
know, these notes are not to be taken as authoritative reports on Wittgenstein’s ideas:

In saying perception has an expression which is the expression of an interpretation, we seem to
be saying that we are seeing the meaning. Gestalt psychologists say we are seeing, not meaning.
(LPP, p. 231)

And at LW I §179 Wittgenstein considers the connection between the concern that an experience
cannot have as its expression an interpretation and the inclination to say we see an interpretation:

"Is it thinking? Is it seeing?"--Doesn’t this really amount to "Is it interpreting? Is it seeing?" And
interpreting is a kind of thinking; and often it brings about a sudden change of aspect.
Can I say that seeing aspects is related to interpreting?--My inclination was indeed to say
"It is as if I saw an interpretation". Well, the expression of this seeing is related to the expression
of interpreting. (LW I §179)
Talk of seeing a meaning seems paradoxical from the standpoint of those who grant a sharp distinction between sensory change and non-sensory change. Wittgenstein’s remarks cited above bring out that the experience of a change of aspect is an experience where a hard and fast distinction between sensory and non-sensory change cannot be drawn. That is, it is unhelpful to say that a change of aspect is either a change in visual experience or it is a change in how we conceptualize, interpret, impose meaning on, understanding, or think of what we see. Wittgenstein’s remarks throw doubt on the idea that this sensory-non-sensory dichotomy captures the character of aspect-shift experiences. Some of these experiences are at once an experiential change and a change in how we conceptualize or interpret what we see, such that we may be inclined to say that we see a meaning, interpretation, or conception. Köhler’s insistence that organization is sensory is motivated by the dichotomy Wittgenstein is overthrowing in remarks like RPP I §869; namely, the dichotomy that either seeing an aspect is seeing or it is a matter of meaning. RPP I §869 distills Wittgenstein’s impression that Köhler’s attack on the restrictive boundaries of the introspectionist’s concept ‘experience’ does not go far enough to restore our pre-theoretical, naïve picture of the character of such an experience.

Strangely, only a few Wittgenstein commentators who have written about the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation explicitly discuss RPP I §869. All these commentators let the abovementioned interpretive issues sail by soundlessly. Cook thinks the remark lends support to his interpretation of Wittgenstein as a behaviorist and a phenomenalist in his later years. He connects RPP I §869 with Wittgenstein’s 1930s remarks about the world of sense-data versus the

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191 Recall too a remark cited in Chapter Three: “Here we must be careful not to think in traditional psychological categories. Such as simply dividing experience into seeing and thinking; or doing anything like that” (RPP I §542).
192 The exception is that Cook 1994. He suggests that Wittgenstein use of ‘meaning’ parallels Köhler’s use (1994, p. 144).
world of physical objects. He argues that *RPP* I §869 is “a way of reiterating [Wittgenstein’s] earlier thought that the world of physical objects is in some sense a product of our language” (Cook 1994, p. 144). To say something useful about Cook’s interpretation of *RPP* I §869 requires addressing the failings of his overall interpretation of Wittgenstein’s later thought. It is outside the scope of this study to undertake this task. Another commentator who refers to *RPP* I §869 is McFee. McFee casually refers to the remark while arguing that Wittgenstein holds that (even) ordinary seeing is concept-laden (McFee 1999, p. 273). This interpretation of the remark may preserve some of the spirit of Wittgenstein’s discussions of seeing and seeing aspects, but it does not shed light on how the remark is supposed to be a criticism of Köhler on the relation between seeing and meaning. Schulte’s discussion is more helpful, in this respect. Schulte thinks that at *RPP* I §869 Wittgenstein is taking issue with, what he calls, Köhler’s two-step view of perception: “[O]ne first recognizes objects or groups of objects as gestalts (and thus sees them as visual objects, for example) and then, in a second step, gives them a meaning” (Schulte 1993, p. 82). Schulte’s interpretation is fairly plausible, insofar as it brings out that Wittgenstein is recommending a more generous conception of what is seen. However this general remark needs elaboration to show how it connects with the details of Köhler’s view of experience. Furthermore, it is not clear that Köhler’s idea that meaning “follows the lines” traced out by the original organization of the visual field implies that perception of meaningful objects is a two-step process always or even sometimes. Schulte does not build a case for this interpretation of Köhler’s thoughts on how meaning tends to enter the circumscribed units that result from original organization, which makes it difficult to fruitfully assess his interpretation in any detail.

Thus, *RPP* I §869 is best read as the dramatic culmination of Wittgenstein’s responses to Köhler’s conceptual difficulty. Köhler’s discussions of the sensory reality of organization and
changes in organization keep the divide between seeing and meaning in place. Wittgenstein collapses the divide insofar as he holds that the inclination to say “I see a meaning” or “I see an interpretation” is grammatically justified by the interplay between our concepts ‘seeing’, ‘interpreting’, ‘meaning’, ‘conceiving’, and ‘seeing an aspect’ in aspect-seeing contexts. The inclination to characterize aspect-seeing as seeing a meaning or as seeing an interpretation reflects the wish to emphasize analogies between seeing an aspect and interpreting, meaning, etc. This emphasis can be given a grammatical justification.

II. Consequences of Köhler’s Favoritism for His Expressed Aims

Introduction

I shall now consider two consequences of what I have called Köhler’s favoritism. First, by privileging an analogy between ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing an aspect’ to the exclusion of differences between them Köhler is guilty of intellectual prejudice. He selectively attends to similarities between seeing organization and seeing color at the expense of acknowledging other possible comparisons. His failure to consider these alternatives seems motivated by his theoretical commitment to establish that organization of the visual field is a sensory fact. If Köhler had attended to alternative comparisons, he might have avoided the other pitfall I discuss here. Namely, Köhler falls short of his aim to provide a faithful depiction of the character of the visual experiences that figure in his theory. More specifically, he mischaracterizes the experience of a change of aspect by overstretching the uses of ‘figure’, ‘ground’, ‘taking together’, ‘belonging together’, and ‘organization’, and by downplaying the sense in which what is seen remains unchanged before and after the change in aspect.
Consequence One: Köhler’s prejudicial thinking

The first consequence of Köhler’s favoritism is that despite his commitment to exposing others’ prejudices, he is guilty of a kind of intellectual prejudice. *GP* is a statement of the Berlin School’s approach to perception and an introduction to Köhler’s own theory of sensory organization. Köhler hopes to be one of the initiators of a new productive era in psychology. The idea that the Gestalt approach is a *revolutionary* movement is just as much a part of Köhler’s self-image as it is a reaction of those who embrace the approach as a new way of looking at issues in perceptual psychology and beyond. The call for psychology to reevaluate its understanding of fundamental notions like ‘experience’ can be felt in his polemical attacks on the two major schools of psychology of his time: behaviorism and introspectionism. Köhler argues that behaviorism employs a selective skepticism (*GP* 1929/32-33) to suit its theoretical interests. The skepticism is selective because it dismisses direct experience but does not apply its skeptical attitude to the existence of the physical world, which is at least as dubitable as direct experience. Introspectionism pares direct experience down to something unrecognizable by anyone except trained observers in special conditions of observation. In their paring down and purifying of experience, introspectionists go so far as to eliminate the “object” character (organization) of sensory experience because this character does not fit their preconceived expectations of what counts as experience. All we are left with by the introspectionist’s “artificial procedure” is a rare and hidden something, which they call genuine experience. Köhler’s ultimate target is broad. He accuses all schools of psychology that relegate direct experience to the realm of “irregular phenomena” of dangerous conservatism that stymies scientific progress. This attitude toward direct experience is a consequence of unreflective biases concerning what is real, true, and valuable. Köhler regularly employs value-laden expressions such as ‘partial’, ‘prefer’,
‘conviction’, ‘creed’, ‘presupposition’, ‘preestablished truth’, and ‘opinion’ to characterize this attitude as prejudging and prejudice. And while physiology is supposed to be a “helpful servant” to psychological investigation, Köhler unmasks it as the “foreign judge” that fixes all possible and acceptable observations ahead of observation (GP 1929/100). This is even the case for introspectionism, the supposed friend of direct experience (GP 1929/97).

To elucidate the idea that Köhler’s privileging of one analogy over other possible analogies is a form of intellectual prejudice, I must first rehearse some facets of my earlier discussion of Wittgenstein’s view on analogies. Earlier I mentioned that there is no sharp line between a useful and misleading analogy, and it can be difficult to tell at what point or in what way an analogy misleads. Further, the inclination to favor an analogy can be helpful. Wittgenstein expresses sympathy with inclinations to use a word outside its “home” and the feeling that one mode of expression better captures the character of an experience:

Suppose someone were to tell me: “It was as if my visual impression suddenly organized itself into this face and its surroundings.” I would understand him. I would comprehend why he was expressing himself this way. That is, I too would be inclined to use this image (Bild). (LW I §597)\(^\text{193}\)

(The above remark is especially interesting for us. Wittgenstein is alluding to his understanding of how Köhler might describe the experience of suddenly seeing the solution to a puzzle-picture, the central example in PI II.xi, p.196.)

A related theme in Wittgenstein’s writings on inclinations and tendencies to favor an analogy or particular mode of expression is his discussion of the usefulness of what we might call linguistic instinct. In the passage below, he elaborates on how the instinct that there is a certain kinship can encourage a prejudice-free investigation into the details of the analogy.

\(^{193}\) See also RPP I §§534-36; LW I §§462-63.
Wittgenstein advises us to look and see for ourselves how the instinct that there is an analogy plays out in conceptual investigation of similarities and differences between the terms of the analogy. When we look we should report all that we see, not make a selection:

No one will deny that studying the nature of the rules of games must be useful for the study of grammatical rules, since it is beyond doubt there is some sort of similarity between them. The right thing is to let the certain instinct that there is a kinship lead one to look at the rules of games without any preconceived judgment or prejudice about the analogy between games and grammar. And here again one should simply report what one sees and not be afraid that one is undermining a significant and correct intuition, or, on the other hand, wasting one's time with something superfluous. (PG, p. 187)

If we are partial to an analogy between $x$ and $y$, we may willfully neglect differences between them because we worry that accepting the differences would threaten our analogy. But according to Wittgenstein, an instinctive feeling that there is an analogy between $x$ and $y$ can serve to reassure us when we encounter differences between them. It also helps us to see the importance of filling out the analogy through conceptual investigation of similarities and tie-ups that ground it. As I argued earlier, acknowledging other possible comparisons is an important intellectual virtue, according to Wittgenstein.

Köhler says that his claims about the sensory reality of organization are obvious to any unprejudiced person. He takes his position to be in harmony with the everyday way of looking at things. Only empiristic or theoretical prejudice stand in the way of accepting these sensory facts once they are pointed out. The problem is that although he is confident that there is an analogy between seeing aspects and seeing he does not feel at liberty to acknowledge the important differences between them. For example, in his defense of the sensory reality of organization he avoids giving examples of figures that we are inclined to say are imbued with meaning and admiringly observes that Wertheimer employed the same strategy. As a starting point in the
investigation, this might be acceptable. But he hopes to generalize his findings to other cases of seeing organization other than in schematic drawings. So some discussion of more complicated cases of seeing organization would be welcome. Nor has his assuredness encouraged detailed investigation of the similarities and tie-ups between seeing organization and seeing color that manifest in our everyday descriptions of visual experience. It is surprising that more of Köhler’s discussion is not devoted to other possible comparisons given his warning that the empiristic prejudice has enormous power as it prevents us from seeing and appreciating problems (GP 1929/149).

To sum up the first consequence of Köhler’s favoritism, privileging an analogy to the detriment of differences is a kind of intellectual prejudice that encourages a blinkered way of looking at things and thwarts open-minded inquiry. It prevents Köhler from recognizing the depth and extent of the conceptual interrelations between ‘seeing as’ and other psychological concepts. Thus, despite his commitment to rid psychology of various forms of prejudice, his own account of visual experience bears some marks of intellectual prejudice.

Consequence Two: Köhler’s mischaracterization of the experience of a change of aspect

The second consequence of Köhler’s favoritism is that he falls short of his own goal to give a faithful depiction of visual experience. In Chapter Two I emphasize Köhler’s aim to provide a faithful depiction of direct experience. In GP he argues that naïve experience is the necessary starting point for any science. Further, scientists are misguided to think that explaining away, analyzing, or eliminating direct experience from the subject matter of

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194 At LW I §463 Wittgenstein hints that we should not stop short of conceptual investigation. The next move after having identified the wish or inclination to express ourselves in a particular way is to investigate the conceptual grounds for the inclination: “So far it has only been a mode of expression; but just how similar are these concepts?".
psychology is an advance toward understanding what is “real”, “true”, or “valuable”. In the following passage, Koffka expresses similar sentiments:

In reality experimenting and observing must go hand in hand. A good description of a phenomenon may by itself rule out a number of theories and indicate definite features which a true theory must possess. We [the Gestaltists] call this kind of observation “phenomenology”, a word which has several other meanings which must not be confused with ours. For us phenomenology means as naïve and full a description of direct experience as possible. (Koffka 1935, p. 73)

In what follows, I specify two ways Köhler’s descriptions of visual experience do not meet his aim of giving a faithful depiction of such experience. Both ways concern the characterization of an experience of a change in aspect.

The first way Köhler mischaracterizes the experience of a change in aspect is that he overstretching the uses of ‘organization’, ‘object’, and ‘ground’ in descriptions of aspect-shift experiences. Wittgenstein challenges the idea that Köhler’s use of ‘organization’, ‘belonging together’, ‘object’, and ‘ground’ can be universally helpful in capturing the character of experiences of a change in aspect (RPP I §1113). There are other kinds of aspects besides aspects of organization (PI II.xi, p. 208). The descriptions we use to express these experience vary accordingly. Sometimes talk of organization does not capture the character of the aspect-seeing experience. For example, saying parts of a picture belong together now when previously they did not in order to describe a shift from seeing a triangle figure as standing to seeing it as toppled over does not do justice to the character of the experience (PI II.xi, p. 201). It completely misses the aspects.

Köhler (at least in GP 1929) is reluctant to use ‘phenomenology’ and ‘phenomenological method’ to describe his methodological commitments, perhaps to distance himself from Husserl’s use of the terms. Instead he opts for talk of qualitative description of direct experience. It is an interesting question whether or to what extent Husserl’s phenomenology, Köhler’s qualitative description, and introspection overlap.
Second, Köhler emphasizes an aspect change experience’s character of change to the point that he downplays its character of sameness. Before elaborating this idea, I must first clarify my claim that, according to Wittgenstein, an aspect change experience has both a character of sameness and a character of change.

Given Wittgenstein’s commitment to teach the reader techniques for quieting the “craving for generality” or the “contemptuous attitude towards the particular case”\(^\text{196}\) he tends to be keen on emphasizing conceptual differences between ‘seeing aspects’, ‘seeing’, and ‘thinking’. Yet occasionally he does try to trace a continuous line through the hugely many phenomena and possible concepts associated with aspects. Some of his investigations are attempts to “find some road thru all the phenomena of ‘aspects’” (\textit{LPP}, p. 105).

One common feature of seeing aspects is that in striking, sudden, and surprising experiences of a change of aspect\(^\text{197}\) the perceiver’s expression of the experience has a paradoxical character:

What is incomprehensible is that \textit{nothing}, and yet \textit{everything}, has changed, after all. That is the only way to put it. Surely \textit{this} way is wrong: It has not changed in \textit{one} respect, but it has in another. There would be nothing strange about that. But “Nothing has changed” means:

Although I have no right to change my report about what I saw, since I see the same things now as before – still, I am incomprehensibly compelled to report completely different things, one after the other. (\textit{RPP II} §474)

The expression of the dawning of an aspect is: “Now it’s \textit{this} — now it’s \textit{that}.” The expression of noticing the rabbit in the tangle of lines is: “There is a rabbit here.” We have not noticed something and now we do; there’s nothing paradoxical about this. We don’t want to say that the old has vanished — that there’s something new there, though it’s entirely old. (\textit{LW I} §520)\(^\text{198}\)

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\(^{196}\) For discussion of these tendencies of thought, see \textit{BB}, pp.17f.

\(^{197}\) It is important to appreciate that I am not claiming that all aspect-seeing experiences are so striking. Wittgenstein discusses cases of seeing aspects that do not seem to involve paradoxical expressions of those experiences. For example, there does not seem to be an air of paradox associated with cases of \textit{continuous} aspect perception. Also, some changes in aspect may come about gradually; they are akin to changes in our way of looking at things rather than sudden shifts.

\(^{198}\) Notice that the second experience described here (seeing a rabbit in a tangle of lines) seems more like the experience of seeing a likeness between two faces described in the opening example on p. 193 of \textit{PI} II.xi.
At LW I §520 especially, Wittgenstein contrasts experiential transitions such as coming to notice something that was previously unnoticed (“We have not noticed something and now we do”) with transitions in experience that we are inclined to express paradoxically (“Now it’s this—now it’s that”). In the latter case (when we experience a change of aspect) we want to say that there is something new though it is entirely old, or that nothing and everything has changed. An experience of a change of aspect has both a character of sameness and one of change. We experience the object of sight as the same yet different. The “two-sided” character of a change of aspect comes out in the way we express the experience. As Wittgenstein puts it, “[t]he 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 II.xi, p. 196). In other words, such expressions of aspect change experiences are irreducibly paradoxical. It is an essential mark of the experience that the perceiver expresses it in paradoxical terms. “I describe the alteration like a perception; quite as if the object had altered before my eyes” (PI II.xi, p. 195).

By contrast, Köhler’s descriptions of a change of organization focus on the experience’s character of change. In Chapter Two, we saw that Köhler’s description of a change in organization reflects his commitment to the claims that organization is a sensory reality, and that retinal stimulation does not fully determine sensory reality. He characterizes the experience of a change in organization as a “transformation of visual reality” without a corresponding change in retinal stimulation. This characterization reflects his argument that a change in organization is a change in sensory reality. To emphasize that a change in organization is a change in sensory

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199 In Mulhall’s book on Wittgenstein’s discussion of seeing aspects in 1990, he illuminates this feature of the experience of a change in aspect.
reality, he talks of the coming into and going out of existence of “concrete, real forms”\textsuperscript{200} despite having exactly the same “constellation of stimuli”:

So long as we \textit{really} have the first one, i.e., as existing in vision, the other will be absorbed in the general surroundings, which optically have no real form at the time. When the second form becomes a visual reality, the first disappears. (GP 1929/198)

Köhler’s description of the experience of a change in organization does not bring out that the experience of a change of aspect also involves a character of sameness in the visual experience. In the change of aspect, the character of change and that of sameness mark one and the same experience. This is part of what makes the experience impressive and surprising and distinguishes it from more mundane experiential changes such as coming to notice what previously went unnoticed. Köhler only focuses on the aspect change experience’s character of change. He downplays the other “side” of the experience, and so he does not capture one of its characteristic features.

\section*{III. Wittgenstein’s Sympathy with Köhler}

I conclude this study of the Wittgenstein-Köhler relation on a positive note. Despite their differences, and despite Wittgenstein’s criticisms of Köhler, Wittgenstein most likely had sympathy with Köhler’s methodological aims, his attitude toward the naïve picture of experience, and his mission to “rediscover the obvious”. These sympathies emerge at a high level of abstraction.

\textsuperscript{200} Sometimes Wittgenstein formulates the paradoxical expression in terms of form (Form). For example at \textit{RPP} II §39: Anyone who failed to perceive the change of aspect would not be inclined to say, “Now it looks completely different!”, or “It seem as if the picture had changed, and yet it hasn’t!”, or “The form has remained the same, and yet something has changed, something which I should like to call the conception (\textit{Auffassung}), and which is seen!” –
First, Wittgenstein would have sympathized with Köhler’s push to expose false dichotomies and to carve out a new intellectual space for a third possibility (the *Gestalt* approach) which constitutes a new way of looking at things. Köhler exposes false dichotomies by identifying the unfounded and misleading commitments of both sides of the dichotomy. Recall that he identifies the constancy hypothesis as the fundamental commitment of behaviorism and introspectionism. And he identifies machine theory as the fundamental commitment of nativism and empirism. Wittgenstein wants to identify underlying commitments, tendencies of thought, and blinkered thinking, too. He speaks of the importance of recognizing third possibilities and warns that shaping an inquiry around “Either…or…” statements can screen problems and their solutions from view.²⁰¹ He works to identify pre-theoretical conceptions and theories that shape the entire form of our inquiries. He also challenges the behaviorism-introspectionism opposition, exposing its misplaced use of the outer (physical) as a model for the inner (mental).

Second, both Wittgenstein and Köhler give precedence to the naïve point of view. Köhler speaks of everyday experience, the other everyday uses of words. *GP* opens with a call for scientists to return to “the naïve picture” because it is the necessary starting point of science (*GP* 1929/3). Köhler says that uncritical experience forms the “matrix of our whole life” (*GP* 1929/86). Science should, at least in some respects, approach inquiry with naïve willingness to accept the “facts” of experience rather than relegate them to the realm of the unscientific (behaviorism) or analyze them away (introspectionism).

Wittgenstein alludes to a return to the naïve when he writes that “what we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (*PI* §116). It is philosophy’s job to

²⁰¹ See *PI* §352; *CV*, p. 30, for instance.
state what everyone admits (at least when they are not doing philosophy!) \((PI \S 352)\). As \(PI \S 116\) indicates, Wittgenstein separates the everyday from theoretical uses of words. Köhler is less committed to the separateness of the naïve viewpoint and the scientific one. As we saw, he characterizes naïve experience as, in many instances, complementary to his theories. Further, Köhler characterizes the layperson as a naïve realist. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, does not think that “naïf language”, for example our everyday concept of ‘seeing’, arises out of, is responsive to, or contains any theories \((RPP \I \S 1101)\). In Chapter Three I argued that the viewpoint of Wittgenstein’s naïf is not informed by any theory, and so the naïf is no more a realist than a solipsist.

Both thinkers portray the theoretician as requiring courage to face the facts of the everyday. We get images of the everyday as ragged, rough, chaotic, or indeterminate by comparison with the ideals of the learned theoreticians. Theoreticians pursue crystalline purity and order. Köhler writes:

But there is a real difference between preferring to be at rest upon preestablished ground or preferring adventure and intellectual curiosity which take you full-sail into the open sea of experience. If you choose the latter, perplexity will be your usual feeling, and a glimpse of clear-shaped coasts a rare reward on some Sunday of research. \((GP \ 1929/101)\)

In a similar spirit Wittgenstein notes that from the standpoint of the theoretician’s ideals, the everyday is unsafe, like standing on boggy ground \((BB, p. 45)\). Although Wittgenstein searches for conceptual clarity, he distances his search for clarity from searches that treat clarity as an ideal to which reality must conform.\(^{203}\) Likewise, Köhler notes the deep need of humankind for clearness. Sometimes this manifests as an ideal of clarity in scientific inquiry that can mislead us if we are not watchful \((GP \ 1929/368)\). All in all, both Wittgenstein and Köhler think it is

\(^{202}\) Cf. \(RPP \I \S 257\).

\(^{203}\) See \(PI \S 107; BB, p. 43\), for example.
important to recognize and resist the theoretician’s impulse to step in and purify, distill, clean-up, or streamline matters, uncritical experience in the one case and everyday language in the other.

Both Wittgenstein and Köhler hold that there are pervasive features of human experience that escape our notice. A goal of a description, for both Köhler and Wittgenstein, is to help us notice these unnoticed features. Wittgenstein says that by doing so he is reminding us of what we already know or showing us what we would all admit. Köhler says that by doing so he is helping us rediscover the obvious.

Both thinkers muse about what contributes to our failure to notice what is always before us. In the passages cited below, Köhler and Wittgenstein come close to making the same points about natural barriers to noticing what is right in front of us:

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something--because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him.--And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. (PI §129)

[In physics] it is often difficult to discover the most important facts because they are hidden…It seems to me that in psychology the greatest obstacle is quite the opposite. Often we do not observe the most important psychological facts precisely because they are too commonplace, because their presence at every moment of our lives blinds us to them. (Köhler 1971, p. 148)

Most of the observations of Gestalt psychology are of this kind: They touch on facts of such general occurrence in our everyday life, that we have difficult in seeing anything remarkable in them. (Köhler 1929 in Henle 1971, p. 146)

Aside from these “natural” barriers there are also theoretical barriers to seeing pervasive features of experience. The theoretical barriers hold us back from accepting what we notice, and tempt us to banish unwanted findings to the Jamesian dust-cloud of exceptional observations. Theoreticians make the obvious disappear. Köhler writes:
It is not our fault that, to a deplorable degree, the obvious has disappeared from learned psychology, so that we have to rediscover it. (GP 1929/350)

In their activity of describing, Wittgenstein and Köhler both introduce more “primitive” examples early on. Wittgenstein introduces imaginary scenarios that depict language-games more primitive than ours. These aid the description of our own language-games by serving as objects of comparison. Where examples of primitive language-games occur in PI is important too. For instance, the “Five Red Apples” and “Block! Pillar! Slab!” language-games occur within the first five remarks in PI. Through investigating them we learn some techniques of conceptual investigation. Working through the earlier examples is a kind of training for the especially difficult task of getting a clear view of the psychological concepts under investigation in the middle and late portions of the first part of PI.204

Köhler’s examples also form a progression. For instance, Köhler’s visual demonstrations of gestalt grouping phenomena use highly schematic figures and arrangements of meaningless lines and dots rather than more sophisticated pictorial representations. Following in the footsteps of Wertheimer, he hopes to block the temptation to give a hasty explanation of the phenomena in terms of the meaning theory (GP 1929/157). And he thinks that introducing the more primitive examples first allows his audience to see the problem of perceptual organization as a problem.205 For example, ambiguous figures make more apparent the phenomena of organization because their organizations are unstable.

Of course, Wittgenstein and Köhler would disagree on the movements we make between the naïve and theoretical viewpoints. Although Wittgenstein grants that for a particular purpose we can draw rigid boundaries between our concepts, his concern is to describe the interrelations

204 Cf. BB, p. 44 in this connection.
205 Köhler 1930 is more explicit about this than GP. See p. 144 of Köhler 1930, for example.
between our everyday concepts, thus demonstrating how they are as complicated and various as human life. He is interested in arranging (and teaching us how to arrange for ourselves) what is already known, and in doing so in new, useful ways that free us from the conceptual difficulties we encounter. There is a movement to bring words back from their metaphysical use to the everyday. For Köhler, a faithful depiction of human experience is the inescapable starting point for all scientific inquiry. The theorist eventually may have to introduce concepts that are foreign to the layperson, but to understand what it is scientific psychology hopes to explain, a careful description of direct experience is necessary. The description of direct experience determines the subject matter of psychology. Even when scientific psychology “advances” beyond qualitative description to quantitative measurement, the resulting theory should never be remote from uncritical experience. Scientists should check their theories against the everyday; this comparison is necessary in order to keep a theory from tending toward remoteness and sterility.

In this way, Köhler recommends a periodic return to the naïve.
Appendix A: Wittgenstein’s Use of ‘Grammar’

Without a preexisting understanding of Wittgenstein’s conception of ‘grammar’, the reader, upon learning that Wittgenstein tackles conceptual difficulty through grammatical investigation, may be perplexed. What could Wittgenstein mean by ‘grammar’ such that an investigation of grammar could free us from conceptual entanglements? Could he have meant what is ordinarily meant by ‘grammar’?

In his “Wittgenstein’s Lectures in 1930-33” G.E. Moore reports that Wittgenstein’s use of ‘grammar’ and ‘rule of grammar’ puzzled him. He wondered whether Wittgenstein was using ‘rule of grammar’ in the ordinary sense of the expression. Wittgenstein “insisted at that time that he was using the expression in its ordinary sense” (Philosophical Occasions, p. 69). In a paper Moore wrote while attending the lectures, he gave reasons for thinking that Wittgenstein was not using ‘rule of grammar’ in the ordinary sense. Later on in the term Wittgenstein described grammar as “any explanation of the use of language” and told lecture attendees that “[they] should be using his “jargon” if [they] said that whether a sentence made sense or not depended on “whether or not it was constructed according to the rules of grammar” (PO, p. 69). Moore speculates that these two characterizations—characterizations which he gave after he insisted that he was using “rule of grammar” in the ordinary sense—suggest that Wittgenstein became doubtful that he was using the expression according to everyday usage.

206 PO for short.
Let us have a look at the dictionary entries for ‘grammar’ to see for ourselves. The Oxford English Dictionary’s primary entry contains an “old-fashioned” definition of grammar (in bold):

a. That department of the study of a language which deals with its inflexional forms or other means of indicating the relations of words in the sentence, and with the rules for employing these in accordance with established usage; usually including also the department which deals with the phonetic system of the language and the principles of its representation in writing. Often preceded by an adj. designating the language referred to, as in Latin, English, French grammar.

As above defined, grammar is a body of statements of fact—a ‘science’; but a large portion of it may be viewed as consisting of rules for practice, and so as forming an ‘art’. The old-fashioned definition of grammar as ‘the art of speaking and writing a language correctly’ is from the modern point of view in one respect too narrow, because it applies only to a portion of this branch of study; in another respect, it is too wide, and was so even from the older point of view, because many questions of ‘correctness’ in language were recognized as outside the province of grammar: e.g. the use of a word in a wrong sense, or a bad pronunciation or spelling, would not have been called a grammatical mistake. At the same time, it was and is customary, on grounds of convenience, for books professedly treating of grammar to include more or less information on points not strictly belonging to the subject.

Until a not very distant date, Grammar was divided by Eng. writers (following the precedent of Latin grammarians) into Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody, to which Orthoëpy was added by some authors. All these terms (except Syntax) were used more or less inaccurately (see the several words). The division now usual is that into Phonology, treating of the sounds used in the language, Accidence, of the inflexional forms or equivalent combinations, and Syntax, of the structure of sentences; the branch of grammar dealing with the functions of the alphabetic letters is usually treated along with the phonology;

If we examine a handful of the occurrences of ‘grammar’ and ‘grammatical rule’ in Wittgenstein’s published writings, it seems that, for the most part, the notion of grammar at work in Wittgenstein’s writings would not be recognized as a proper part of the “province of grammar” as characterized in the OED entry above:

The use of a word in language is its meaning. Grammar describes the use of words in language. So it has somewhat the same relation to the language as the description of a game, the rules of a game, have to the game. (PG p.60)

I want to say the place of a word in grammar is its meaning. (PG, p. 59)

Grammatical rules determine meaning (constitute it). (PG, p. 184)

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207 OED for short.
Grammar consists of conventions. An example of such conventions would be one saying “the word ‘red’ means this color. (PG, p. 190)

We said that it was a way of examining the grammar (the use) of the word “to know”, to ask ourselves what, in the particular case we are examining, we should call “getting to know”. (BB, p. 24)

In the use of words one might distinguish ‘surface grammar’ from ‘depth grammar’. What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence, the part of its use—one might say—that can be taken in by the ear.—And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word “to mean”, with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about. (PI §664)

The passages bring out several aspects of Wittgenstein’s conception of ‘grammar’. He seems to say that as a general guide the use of a word is its meaning, and a word’s grammatical rules constitute or determine its meaning or use. In the BB passage he treats ‘grammar’ and ‘use’ as interchangeable expressions. Yet he sometimes characterizes grammar as the description of the use of words in language without clearly distinguishing grammar as determining use from grammar as the description of use. In any case, neither one of these characterizations (grammar as constitutive of meaning or grammar as the description of meaning/use) is included in the OED definition.

Some of Wittgenstein’s uses of ‘grammar’ hint at connections with the OED definition. For instance, in the last passage quoted above Wittgenstein draws a distinction between the ‘surface grammar’ and ‘depth grammar’ of an expression. He implies that in order to “know our way about” in our language, we must investigate the depth grammar (i.e. use in Wittgenstein’s rich sense of ‘use’) of expressions. Surface grammar can be misleading if identical surface form is taken as an indication that the two expressions also have identical uses. For example, ‘a chair’ and ‘a pain’ have identical surface form, but they are used differently—we learn their use and
teach their use in quite different ways. One can ostensively define the word ‘chair’ by pointing to particular chairs. ‘Pain’, by contrast, is not ostensively defined; one does not inwardly “point” to a private inner object. Similarly, at the level of sentences, “This book is lighter than that book” and “White is lighter than black” have identical surface form even though the first sentence is used as an empirical proposition and the second sentence is used as a grammatical rule. Insofar as Wittgenstein’s distinction between surface and depth grammar can be likened to the distinction between syntax and semantics, I think there is interpretive room to claim that Wittgenstein’s use of “surface grammar” would be in line with the OED definition, which tells us that syntax is one branch of grammar. Another place to look for connections between Wittgenstein and the schoolhouse grammarian would be in BB, where he discusses transitive and intransitive uses of expressions.208

With these few remarks I make about the relation between Wittgenstein’s term of art ‘grammar’ and our dictionary meaning of ‘grammar’ I only hope to alert readers that Wittgenstein’s use of ‘grammar’ does not sit well with the notion represented by the OED entry on ‘grammar’. A deeper (and more interesting) investigation of Wittgenstein’s term of art requires a lot more detective work, including tracing out the importance of the notion ‘grammar’ in the cultural and intellectual context of turn of the century Vienna, Wittgenstein’s Vienna.

208 Cf. BB pp. 22, 158-59, for example.
Appendix B: Copyright Release

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1997, c. 24, s. 18.

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