An aim of this book is to show how confusions about the way words function creates a mythology that holds us captive. This has a corrosive effect not only for people who seek help but also for the society that embraces the mythology. By focusing on our actual use of signs we seek to undermine the tyranny of the belief that inner mental processes cause our thoughts and behaviour. This leads to the belief that words like ‘think’, ‘believe’, ‘desire’, ‘intend’, ‘feel’, refer to states, objects, processes, in the inner world of the mind or brain, which cause behaviour. We are led to think that exploration and discoveries about the unconscious or the brain will lead to the relief of mental conflict.

This picture arises because of our restrictive understanding of language; it fails to pay attention to the many different ways we use words and the relevance of the context in which they are used. We are misled into trains of thought and analogies that seem to ground various ‘musts’. Religion and the thought of ‘primitive’ people were dismissed because psychoanalysis had little understanding of the difference and importance of the distinction between the expressive use of language and language as a system of fixed rules in which it makes sense to say something ‘is so.’ Another example is Winnicott’s famous statement ‘[h]ate is expressed by the existence of the end of the hour’ (1958, p. 69) and Bion’s claim ‘[w]hen two personalities meet, an emotional storm is created’ (1979, p .247). Do they mean that they are giving the psychoanalytic definition of hate and emotional storms? Or are they describing empirical phenomena, in which case we need evidence for these extraordinary statements.
‘To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life’ (PI, para. 19).

There are many forms of life that we cannot imagine.

‘The main source of superstition results from belief in the causal nexus’ (TLP, para. 5.1361).

Superstitious belief in causes leads us to believe that there is something that is the cause of some phenomena. Causes however, have no end – there are causes of causes until we get to a mythical first cause.

This picture of the cause leads us to believe that there are hidden objects and processes in the unconscious, or the brain, that cause all our thoughts, feelings, and actions. This picture leads to grossly misrepresenting the place of the first person present indicative and questioning its authority. It encourages the temptation to look outside language for the causes of our confusions rather than attending to what only we have access, our use of language. The result is the notion that we are purely passive creatures, depending on experts on the brain or the unconscious to tell us the source of our actions and troubles. This notion has a great attraction both for the experts and for many people. No wonder that these superstitious notions have led to the enormous increase of ‘mental illness’ that is seen in societies that embrace such a notion.

Instead of looking for causes, making hypotheses, theories, and explanations we, through reflective awareness of differences in the way we use words, seek to understand how we come to give meaning to psychological concepts. Instead of searching for the reference of psychological words or trying to analyse language by looking away from it for an explanation, we look directly at how words are used by us.

Philosophy just puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain. For whatever may be hidden is of no interest to us. (PI, para. 126)

Philosophy does not consist of propositions conveying expert knowledge of parts of the world that are hidden from us, such as the brain, the worlds of chemistry, physics, biology, and astronomy. All these require special training, tools, and methods of investigation.