Subjectivity after Wittgenstein: Wittgenstein’s embodied and embedded subject and the debate about the death of man

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Wittgenstein and/as philosophy

2.1 Introduction

What exactly is the task of the philosopher and how can he or she most adequately fulfil this task? Many (if not all) philosophers have dwelled on these questions, in some (if not many) cases because they felt that philosophy thus far had not been able to live up to its task and must therefore be radically transformed or even be brought to a halt. Indeed, the twentieth century declaration of the death of man I discussed in the introductory chapter can be said to be part of a larger development, rejecting not just the Cartesian view on subjectivity but the entire philosophical tradition. In addition to the demise of the subject, the thinkers labelled “post-modern” envisioned the overcoming of metaphysics or the end of philosophy as well. And just as the later Wittgenstein is held co-responsible for the anti-Cartesian turn that the debate on subjectivity took, he is regarded by both admirers and adversaries as one of the most anti-philosophical of twentieth century thinkers.

Just as it is not without right that Wittgenstein is held co-responsible for the demise of the Cartesian Ego, it is not without ground that he is considered to be the antidote or antithesis to traditional philosophy. A host of remarks on the aim and nature of philosophy, scattered throughout his later work, support the view that Wittgenstein is the anti-philosopher par excellence. Take for instance this well-known entry from what is nowadays known as the Investigations’ “discourse on method” (to wit, the remarks running from § 89 up until § 133):

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1 See Baynes 1991 for a collection of essays (by Rorty, Lyotard, Derrida and Habermas, among others) representing and/or addressing this state of affairs.
2 Both Lyotard and Badiou, for instance, take Wittgenstein to be the anti-philosopher par excellence, but they value this entirely differently: whereas the former expresses a profound love for Wittgenstein’s refusal to have recourse to metaphysical entities (see Lyotard 1993b, p. 21), the latter dubs him the great modern sophist (see Badiou 1995, p. 116).
“When philosophers use a word—“knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “proposition”, “name”—and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?—What we do is to bring words back from their metapsychical to their everyday use.”

This one remark can be used to convey Wittgenstein’s entire meta- or anti-philosophy as it is often understood. Whereas philosophy concerns itself with the nature or essence of things, or so the reading typically goes, Wittgenstein will have nothing to do with this. In his view, questions about the nature of things solely arise when our actual use of language is being ignored or distorted, and as a result, philosophers occupy themselves with nothing less than “phantasm[s],” “chimeras” and “illusions.” Disappointing as this may sound, as the reading usually continues, philosophers should greet Wittgenstein’s discovery with enthusiasm, because it only means that the solution to their problems is in fact as simple as it is effective. If philosophers have merely lost sight of the role words like “object” and “being” play in our everyday lives, their problems can literally be dissolved by bringing these words “back from their metapsychical to their everyday use.” Once one after the other philosophical “piece of plain nonsense” is accordingly exposed, investigations into the nature of things ought to lose all appeal and urgency. Wittgenstein does not provide a theory to end all theories, but different “therapies” that should make all theory formation redundant.

According to the prevailing picture of him, in short, Wittgenstein takes philosophy to be a confused activity and his distinctive method is designed to remove this confusion at its roots. However, clear and consistent as this picture may seem, it possibly raises more questions than it answers about the exact aim and nature of Wittgenstein’s approach. Among Wittgenstein scholars, at any rate, these topics are hotly debated. While the non- or anti-philosophical character of Wittgenstein’s writings is generally not disputed, there is no consensus among his commentators as to what, for instance, his appeal to ordinary language is meant to achieve, what kind of nonsense he takes philosophical statements to express, and

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3 PI 116.
4 PI 108.
5 PI 94.
6 PI 96.
7 PI 116.
8 PI 119.
9 PI 133.
10 See e.g. Baker 2004, who explains that Wittgenstein does not present himself as the patron saint of ordinary language, and Cavell 1979 (see pp. 18-20), who points out that Wittgenstein’s appeal to it is accordingly never meant to silence others but always already opens the way for discussion and dissent. Especially Cavell’s reading sharply contrasts with the views of those who take Wittgenstein’s method to be inherently dogmatic and undemocratic, like Gellner 1963 (see pp. 59-65) and Popper 1971 (see p. 20).
the continuity between his earlier and his later work in this respect. The controversy sparked by the “New Wittgensteinians” is not the first and probably not the last to occupy Wittgenstein scholarship. For while it is clear that he has qualms about traditional theory formation, it is far from obvious what kind of philosophy is able to meet or ease his qualms – if they can be eased at all.

Yet even if most of the debate on Wittgenstein’s method adds up to a collective effort to understand the anti-philosophical nature of his approach, there are also interpreters trying to show that Wittgenstein in fact has a positive or substantive contribution to make to philosophy. According to these commentators, Wittgenstein may have had doubts about traditional philosophy, these did not bring him to conclude that one had better “[stop] doing philosophy” altogether. Indeed, that there are anti-philosophical as well as positively philosophical readings of Wittgenstein is reflected in the way his insights are applied to non-methodological discussions. In addition to those who turn to Wittgenstein with the aim of exposing the confusions of other thinkers, there are many scholars who take him to give a new and constructive answer to age-old philosophical questions. In spite of his anti-philosophical remarks, these thinkers consult Wittgenstein in an attempt to explain how political transformation can be brought about, or to understand the nature of normativity and of subjectivity, say, apparently deeming that the necessity to reflect on these matters outweigh the qualms one might have about such undertakings.

As I already explained in the introduction to this study, I am among the scholars using Wittgenstein positively or constructively, and in the this chapter, I hope to contribute the methodological debate by showing that his approach can indeed be explained in terms more congenial to philosophical theory. Or to be precise, while I hope to contribute to a debate in Wittgenstein scholarship, I will not proceed by arguing which interpretations are right and which ones are wrong, but rather by having another look at Wittgenstein’s discourse on method itself. For

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11 The “New Wittgensteinians” for instance part ways with other commentators in taking (austere) nonsense to be a term of philosophical appraisal, for the early as well as the later Wittgenstein; on their view, both TLP and PI achieve their therapeutic aim when the reader comes to recognize the very nonsensicality of philosophical statements – including Wittgenstein’s own. Crary & Reed 2000 brings together several interpreters (including Diamond and Conant) supporting this view, as well as a dissenting voice (namely Hacker’s), but the collection has given rise to much more dissent after its publication; Proops 2001 is just one example thereof.


13 PI 133. It should be noted that Wittgenstein’s formulation is in fact more modest than this way of quoting it suggests. He talks about the discovery that makes himself – not every philosopher – capable of quitting philosophy when he wants to – not once and for all. The questions he mentions as standing in need of (dis)solution, moreover, are those which bring philosophy into question – not necessarily inquiries about the nature of things. However, commentators do not always do justice to these subtleties when quoting or clarifying this remark; see e.g. Fogelin 1976, p. 127; Addis 2006, p. 77.

14 Bennett & Hacker 2003 is a good example of this kind of application of Wittgenstein.

15 See e.g. Norval 2007, Rietveld 2008, Overgaard 2007, to give just some recent examples.
I do not only think that it is not always informative to rehearse the readings that have already been give and keep on employing the terms in which a debate has so far been phrased – by re-reading his methodological remarks, I precisely hope to show that the contradiction or friction present in the debate about Wittgenstein’s method and in Wittgenstein scholarship at large, replicates a friction present in Wittgenstein’s own writings. I will argue that he identifies a risk or tension rather than a mistake inherent in theory formation, but that he incorporates this tension into the way himself contributes to philosophical theory. And this effectively means that, pace those who take Wittgenstein to be the antidote or antithesis to philosophy, he should be said to participate in, rather than oppose, time-honoured philosophical discussions.

The defence I will offer for this reading consists of three parts. By means of a close reading of (mainly though not exclusively) §§ 89-133 of the Investigations, I will first of all show that Wittgenstein does not categorically reject investigations into the nature or essence of things but rather engages in a debate on how to conceive of such undertakings. This exploration will take up the larger part of this chapter. I will then discuss the notion of grammatical investigations because the fact that Wittgenstein studies grammar or concepts rather than what these concepts stand for, may seem to undermine the suggestion that he wants to explore the nature of things no less than traditional philosophers. Last of all I will bring my interpretation of the discourse on method in connection with Wittgenstein's actual practice. I will argue that his numerous remarks on matters such as mind and meaning do not form an un- or anti-philosophical bulk of questions and observations, but precisely aim to convey the complex nature of these phenomena. For on my reading, Wittgenstein only objects to inquiries into the nature of things in so far as philosophers overlook that most matters do not have a pure and precise essence, and his distinctive approach to philosophical topics reflects this very insight.

### 2.2 Wittgenstein and philosophy

Whether one agrees or disagrees with such a reading, that Wittgenstein would oppose all philosophical enquiry can be supported by reference to plenty of remarks. Most notable in this respect, and thus a main focal point in the debate on Wittgenstein’s method, is a fairly long and uninterrupted sequence of meta-philosophical statements running from § 89 up until § 133 in the Philosophical Investigations. The aim of the current section is to show that this methodological manifesto, in spite of the anti-philosophical entries it contains, does not reject philosophy as inherently confused but already participates in a thoroughly philosophical discussion. As I hope to demonstrate, in other words, Wittgenstein...
can be considered to be a philosopher among philosophers, even in his most anti-
philosophical of moods.

Let me start by pointing out that the dynamic Wittgenstein’s discourse on
method displays is not a purely negative one. Wittgenstein, that is, does not
commence by setting himself apart from philosophy.\textsuperscript{16} He frequently uses the
pronouns “we” and “our” - not only to refer to his own particular way of doing
philosophy, but also to denote philosophical practices in general. To be sure, in
passages like § 116, quoted above, Wittgenstein clearly draws a contrast between
himself and (other) philosophers; here, the “we” is even put in italics to emphasize
the distinction between the way philosophers talk about essences and the way he
deals with them.\textsuperscript{17} However, in the passages leading up to the ones in which “we”
and “our” are employed in this more exclusive manner,\textsuperscript{18} Wittgenstein’s use of
these pronouns indicates that he thoroughly identifies with the trials and
tribulations of other philosophers. He talks about the problems being investigated
in philosophy,\textsuperscript{19} as well as about the mistakes that can be made in this process,\textsuperscript{20}
not as “theirs” but as “ours”.

Judging by this particular choice of words, Wittgenstein nowhere dissociates
himself from philosophy as such. He appears to use the plural pronoun in an
exclusive manner mainly to contrast his method with that of others; when he uses
“us” and “we” in an inclusive manner, he demonstrates that he actually shares the
concerns of other philosophers. This suggests that §§ 89-133 pertain to method in
the most straightforward sense of the word: they recommend a certain procedure
as a more suitable means for reaching the same or a similar goal. This is further
supported by the fact that Wittgenstein does not unequivocally dismiss
philosophy’s interest in essences. He may in the course of his manifest express his
disapproval of certain approaches to the nature of things, he nevertheless
immediately gives the impression of being just as interested in these matters as
other thinkers are.\textsuperscript{21} Initially he also uses the term “essence” to characterize this

\textsuperscript{16} It should be noted that the first part of PI 89-133 differs from the last part in this respect; I will
pay attention to these more negative remarks shortly. However, the remarks in which Wittgenstein
is truly and explicitly negative about philosophy as such do not seem to make up the majority of
his manifesto. As Mulhall 2004 points out, the parapraphs from PI 108b onwards are not only
uncharacteristically dogmatic but also stem from an earlier period than the remarks preceding
them, and need therefore not be taken to be Wittgenstein’s last word on method.

\textsuperscript{17} In a similar way these pronouns are used in e.g. PI 122 (...the form of account we give...), PI
130 (Our clear and simple...) and PI 132 (...we shall constantly...).

\textsuperscript{18} Roughly those from PI 109 onwards.

\textsuperscript{19} This seems to be the case in e.g. PI 89 (...we had to hunt...), PI 92 (...our problem...) and PI
108 (...our whole examination...). In a lot of cases it is actually unclear whether the plural
pronoun is used in- or exclusively; in PI 129 (...most important for us...) and PI 130 (...we want
to...), for instance, the “us” and “we” may just as well include (all) other philosophers.

\textsuperscript{20} There are plenty of examples for this application of the plural pronoun; see e.g. PI 101 (We
want to say...), PI 103 (...on our nose...) and PI 105 (...we become dissatisfied...).

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. Glendinning 1998, p. 83; Mulhall 2004, p. 76.
interest, but he goes on to question whether looking for essences will actually satisfy the philosopher’s desire to understand what, say, mind or meaning is.

The methodological discussion quite appropriately starts with a question about the special status of philosophy (or logic, in the equivalent Wittgenstein uses here): “In what sense is logic something sublime?” Philosophy after all appears to be superior to or more basic than the other sciences, dealing not with mere “facts of nature” but with the “basis, or essence, of everything empirical.” As his appraisal of certain conceptions of the ideal or sublime24 indicates, Wittgenstein does not endorse the characterization of philosophy as a sublime activity. Not, however, because he takes it to occupy itself with the same questions as the sciences; quoting Augustine on (the elusiveness of) the nature of time, he precisely stresses the peculiarity of philosophical inquiry. His reason for not wanting to call philosophy sublime is accordingly neither its aiming to understand the nature of things per se. It is rather the tendency of some philosophers to think of the nature of things as something of “the purest crystal,” immune to “empirical cloudiness,”25 that makes Wittgenstein think logic is far from sublime.

This is already hinted at in § 89, where Wittgenstein claims that in order to understand the “essence of everything empirical” we don’t have to “hunt out new facts,” for what philosophy tries to understand “is already in plain view.” What we seek in philosophizing is consequently something we “need to remind ourselves” of.26 According to Wittgenstein, it seems, looking into the nature of things is far from objectionable as long as one realizes that “nothing out of the ordinary is involved”27 in such an exploration.

In § 92 Wittgenstein is more explicit about the sense in which he shares philosophy’s occupation with essences. One could say, he states, that “we too in these investigations are trying to understand the essence of [e.g.] language,” namely its essence in terms of “its function, its structure.”28 But that is not always how philosophers understand their subject, “[for] they see in the essence, not something that already lies open to view and that becomes surveivable by a rearrangement, but something that lies beneath the surface.”29 If philosophy could solely concern itself

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22 PI 89.
23 Ibidem.
24 This lengthy discussion runs roughly from PI 93 - 108; I will shortly look into it in more detail.
25 PI 97.
26 PI 89. Notice the use of the plural pronoun again, and also notice that the conception of essence put forward by Wittgenstein here (he uses the term “essence” himself), resurfaces in some of the anti-philosophical remarks to follow; see e.g. PI 109 (...what we have always known...), PI 126 (...everything lies open to view...) and PI 127 (...assembling reminders...). I will come back to this below.
27 PI 94.
28 PI 92.
29 Ibidem. Here, Wittgenstein does draw a contrast between “us” and “them”; the contrast is however one between different conceptions of essence rather than between philosophy and anti-philosophical therapy. This remark incidentally foreshadows some of the later ones as well, see e.g. PI 109 (...but by arranging...) and PI 122 (...perspicuous representation...).
with essences in this purified sense of the word, Wittgenstein would be the last to call his investigations philosophical. As he himself suggests, however, there also is a different way of conceiving of the nature of things.

In § 108 - where the question about the special character of logic also crops up again - Wittgenstein contrasts two possible perspectives (his former and his current perspective, to be exact) on the nature of language in more detail: “We see that what we call [“language”] has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is a family of structures more or less related to one another.”30 Wittgenstein distinguishes language understood as one uniform and neatly formalizable whole from language understood as a more complicated cluster of relationships. This unmistakably echoes the observations made earlier in the Investigations about language as a family resemblance phenomenon.31 It is these observations, I think, that form the key to understanding Wittgenstein’s take on the nature of things, as well as his take on the proper philosophical practice.

Having argued for 64 paragraphs that language is not a uniform phenomenon but is actually used in highly diverse ways, Wittgenstein gives the floor to an interlocutor who voices the concern that, as an attempt to understand what language is, this completely misses the point. You keep giving examples of different uses of language, he or she objects, but nowhere explain “what the essence of [language] is,” or “what is common to all these activities,” whereas that used to be “the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself the most headache.”32 The interlocutor also contrasts Wittgenstein’s current outlook with his former one. She feels that whereas the Tractatus tried to capture the nature or essence of language, though it may not have done so satisfactorily, the Investigations does not even begin to touch upon this issue and still owes an explicit account of what language essentially is if it is to contribute to our understanding of this phenomenon.

Wittgenstein responds that the interlocutor is right in observing that his present approach differs from his earlier one, but wrong in assuming that this is a difference between probing the nature of language and simply evading the problem. Indeed, the Investigations does not “[produce] something common to all that we call language,”33 but not because it does not attempt to enhance our insight into the workings of language. It is rather the interlocutor who does not foster or even hampers our understanding of language when she uses “nature” and “essence” interchangeably - when she equates “the nature of language” with “what is common to all these activities.” For a phenomenon need not have such a core trait at all.

30 PI 108.
31 See PI 65-74; the discussion can however be said to run from PI 65 right up to PI 89 – where the methodological discussion is usually taken to start.
32 PI 65.
33 Ibidem.
To illustrate his point, Wittgenstein urges the interlocutor to look at the different things we call games. If you do not assume beforehand that these proceedings “must [have] something in common,” he claims, you will see that “card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on” do not share one fundamental characteristic but are connected through “similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.”\(^{34}\) The activities we call games do not belong together because they have some one thing in common, it is rather because of “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing”\(^{35}\) that we call them by the same name. Wittgenstein proposes to term the similarities that bind phenomena such as games together “family resemblances,” and to think of the different games as “[forming] a family.”\(^{36}\) For like the members of a family, each game resembles the other games in one or more respects, but resembles every other game in a different way each time.

Something similar holds for the different kinds of numbers, Wittgenstein continues. We count a certain class among the numbers when its members resemble other things we denote with that term; through this relationship, they also become connected to kinds of numbers they may resemble in less obvious ways. This means that the family of numbers not only has many faces, but that its size and its borders, membership not being dependent on one particular pregiven trait, are not absolutely fixed: “[We] extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.”\(^{37}\)

Hence, Wittgenstein wants his interlocutor to see that in dealing with numbers or in dealing with language - in dealing with probably all the topics a philosopher could be interested in – one is not dealing with clearly circumscribable and homogeneous entities. The different kinds of numbers and the various uses of language rather form families of phenomena that share both similarities and differences and cannot always be clearly demarcated from other such groups.\(^{38}\) This relational, heterogeneous and ambiguous nature has to be reflected in the way they are approached. To capture the nature of numbers or language means to sketch the structures or patterns that the things we call by these names collectively make up. It means to introduce different members of these families and to describe the different relationships between them, without wanting to set up an impenetrable wall between these families and other clans or clusters.\(^{39}\) To insist that there must be one characteristic that makes all language use into language use and nothing else, is at best to fail to understand what language is – it is at worst to

\(^{34}\) PI 66.
\(^{35}\) Ibidem.
\(^{36}\) PI 67.
\(^{37}\) Ibidem.
\(^{38}\) See PI 68, PI 69.
\(^{39}\) See PI 71, PI 88.
completely distort our perspective on this phenomenon. Paradoxical as it may sound, in other words, if one seeks to know the nature of a thing, one should not try to find its essence.

This is, on my reading, the debate that is played out between Wittgenstein and his interlocutor. He is not accusing her of mistakenly asking what language is, but is exposing and contrasting their views on what it is one asks for when one wants to know such a thing. Wittgenstein wants the interlocutor to see that she is dissatisfied with the *Investigations* because she has different ideas about what an account of the nature of language should look like; ideas that are informed by different ideas about what this nature could be in the first place. But since the nature of a phenomenon like language does not come in the form of a pure and precise essence, the answer to a philosophical question cannot take the form of pure and precise theory. The degree of exactness that is required for an explanation after all depends on what one wants to describe or achieve by means of it. “If I tell someone “Stand roughly here” – may this explanation not work perfectly? And cannot every other one fail too?” In the case of numbers and language, Wittgenstein suggests, an inexact explanation is actually the most viable or precise one, precisely because of their multifarious nature.

“These considerations,” as Wittgenstein himself indicates, “bring us [back] to the problem: In what sense is logic something sublime?”

After indicating in passages such as § 89 and § 92 that he shares philosophy’s concern with the nature or essence of things in the sense expounded in §§ 65–67, Wittgenstein extensively discusses the sense in which he does not think philosophy deals with essences - which is also the sense in which he does not think philosophy is something sublime. These passages (roughly §§ 93–108) elaborate on the earlier dispute with the interlocutor; again, Wittgenstein’s comments are informed by his view on the nature of things as “something that already lies open to view and that becomes surveyable by a rearrangement.” He finds philosophical endeavours objectionable if and to the extent in which they deviate from this very insight.

In §§ 93-108, too, the reasoning in or behind the *Tractatus* is given as an example of the way philosophy can go awry, and here, too, this is considered to have its roots in a notion of exactness, or in a notion of the nature of things as something superbly exact. In the eyes of those who adhere to this notion, something vague or indefinite cannot be of interest to philosophy. “An indefinite sense,” they would for instance say, “[would] really not be a sense at all,” just as “[an] enclosure with a whole in it is as good as none.” Philosophy seeks to know

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40 See PI 88, PI 105.
41 PI 89.
42 PI 92.
43 PI 99; see also PI 68-71; in PI 100 the comparison with games also crops up again.
the nature of things, and its nature qua essence must be “prior to all experience,” “no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it.”

Hence, traditional thinkers “want to say that there can’t be any vagueness in logic.” This, however, is the moment or movement where a philosopher - in so far as she can be said to be engaged in an erroneous activity - makes a fundamental mistake. “For the crystalline purity of logic was [not] a result of investigation: it was a requirement.” It is not a given that the nature of things takes the form of pure and sublime essences, and if it does, that should arise out of examination rather than be assumed beforehand. Wittgenstein extrapolates the advice given to the interlocutor in § 66, not to take for granted that all games must have one clear thing in common, to the recommendation that philosophers had better take off the “pair of glasses” that this general conception of the nature of things can be said to form.

His advice is not exactly gratuitous, for assuming that the nature of things must be “pure and clear-cut” is not exactly innocent. It makes one overlook that certain phenomena belong together because of a network of similarities rather than because of one common trait, sending one “in pursuit of chimeras.” That is to say, in discussing something shared by all instances of a phenomenon, one may think “that one is tracing the outline of the thing’’s nature’’ whereas “one is merely tracing round the frame through which [one looks] at it.” Yet even if those held captive by the picture of nature-as-essence are aware of the multifaceted nature of the things we call “numbers” or “language”, they “become dissatisfied with what [is] ordinarily called” by that name. To Wittgenstein, such disappointment is completely understandable. For in so far as philosophers expect to see some crystalline core beneath or behind all language use, they are in fact blocking the path to understanding what language is: “We have got on slippery ice where there is no friction, so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk.”

Yet if philosophers fail to achieve what they set out to do precisely because they are looking for simple and sublime essences, there is a way out of the

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46 PI 97.
47 PI 101.
48 PI 107.
49 It should be noted that the discussion in PI 66 is about there not being an essence in the sense of one shared thing, whereas the discussion in PI 93-108 is rather about the nature of things not being simple and sublime. This can however be said to merely be a difference in focus; the discussions centre on two aspects of one and the same conception that neglects the relational, hence heterogeneous (as opposed to uniform) and vague (as opposed to clear-cut), nature of things.
50 PI 103.
51 PI 105.
52 PI 94.
53 PI 114.
54 PI 105; see also PI 88.
55 PI 107.
predicament. We want to know the nature of things, i.e. “[we] want to walk,” hence, as Wittgenstein puts it, “we need friction” or, in other words, we must look for nothing above or beyond the messy and fuzzy phenomena as we encounter them in everyday life. “The preconceived idea of crystalline purity” that, instead of being the result of investigation, guides our explorations in all directions except for the one we want to head, “can only be removed by turning our whole examination round,” Wittgenstein claims. We need to see that if our “real need” is to understand the “the spatial and temporal phenomenon of [e.g.] language,” we should not be telling stories about “some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm.” Instead, we should be sketching the family of structures that our actual uses of language collectively make up.

In the last part of his methodological manifesto (running roughly from § 109 until § 133) Wittgenstein explains how the revolution that philosophy requires can be brought about. It is this part of the discourse on method that contains his most anti-philosophical of remarks. This section however follows upon the section that discusses the sense in which philosophy does not deal with essences. Wittgenstein’s negative remarks can be said to be informed by these insights, and can therefore also be read as rejecting only a specific take on the philosophical practice rather than philosophy per se. Moreover, some of the most eye-catching claims about the form philosophy should not take, draw on a contrast with the scientific practice rather than the traditional philosophical one. They can accordingly be taken to explore the peculiarity of philosophical investigations rather than devising their demise.

The difference between philosophical and scientific practice needs to be explored some more as Wittgenstein’s continuous emphasizing that philosophy deals with nothing over and above the empirical should not bring one to conclude that the philosopher conducts the same investigations as the scientist. It should be clear that philosophical “considerations could not be scientific ones.” Science, namely, is concerned with “causal connexions,” as Wittgenstein explained earlier. The scientist starts off from ordinary phenomena but goes on to look for the laws

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56 Ibidem.
57 PI 108.
58 Ibidem.
59 See in particular PI 118 and PI 119, though e.g. PI 109, PI 116 and PI 133 are often taken to categorically dismiss all constructive philosophy as well. PI 118 and PI 119 are perhaps difficult to align with my more positive reading, but again, cf. Mulhall 2004, pointing out that the dogmatic tone of these entries set them apart from the rest of the discourse on method.
60 See most notably PI 109 and PI 126.
61 This was already touched upon in PI 89. Notice, by the way, that Wittgenstein is already putting his methodological ideas into practice here. Capturing the nature of philosophy itself namely also involves describing the diverse activities that make up this practice, as well as indicating the similarities and differences with other practices - like the scientific one. Perhaps this is what Wittgenstein means when he claims that there is no “second-order philosophy” (PI 121).
62 PI 109.
63 PI 89.
or processes behind them, for elements that may not appear at the everyday empirical level but shape this level nonetheless. The philosopher, by contrast, seeks to sketch the relations of similarity and difference within and across families of spatio-temporal phenomena. His or her interest is in the family resemblances between different everyday phenomena, not in the connections between an everyday phenomenon and its causes.

Hence, Wittgenstein declares, “we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation and description alone must take its place.” For unlike the scientist, the philosopher refrains from digging underneath the surface or beneath the ground. She merely gives an account of the structures she finds on the everyday empirical level.

What is, in other words, peculiar to philosophical as opposed to scientific inquiry, is that the philosopher does not proceed “by giving new information” about the laws or processes behind ordinary phenomena, “but by arranging what we have always known.” To the extent that traditional philosophers feel that they, too, must look for things behind or beyond the messy and fuzzy phenomena of everyday life, this characteristic distinguishes the Wittgensteinian approach as much from the scientific as from the traditional philosophical one. For if our real need is to understand the nature of, say, language, and if this nature takes the form of family resemblances between the different things we call by that name, we should no more look for the essences that bind the everyday phenomena than for the processes that cause them. Contrary to both the scientist’s and the traditional philosopher’s (misconceived) concern, “what is hidden [is] of no interest to us.”

Yet there is a way, Wittgenstein admits, in which what is hidden is in fact of vital importance to philosophy. For the interrelations we seek to understand can also be said to be hidden, not in the sense of lying beneath or behind ordinary phenomena, but in the sense of being too familiar to even be observed: “One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one’s eyes.” Our very familiarity with and “entanglement in” the structures that numbers or language form, makes it difficult (but perhaps also creates the need) to grasp the nature of these things. Even when the interrelations get noticed, this very familiarity makes

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64 PI 109; see also PI 124, PI 126.
65 See PI 92.
66 PI 109.
67 PI 126.
68 PI 129.
69 PI 125.
70 This raises the question to what extent Wittgenstein think that the philosopher should step back from or even rise above everyday practices in order to get a “bird's eye view” (PR 52) of them. I doubt whether the latter is, in its literal sense, possible, and whether it is desirable even if it were possible, given that the philosophy Wittgenstein rejects is precisely the kind that is out of touch with the everyday. His aim rather seems to be to create a sort of clarity from within, though this can still be said to require an ability to (partly) step back from what one is always already immersed
the philosopher feel dissatisfied\textsuperscript{71} with what she finds. Not realizing that the fuzzy family resemblances between everyday phenomena are philosophy’s final destination, “we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.”\textsuperscript{72}

To get a clear perspective on all too familiar relations between all too familiar phenomena is, by contrast, exactly what Wittgenstein’s investigations can be taken to aim at.\textsuperscript{73} The passages in which he indicates, not the path that philosophers should avoid, but the path that they had better take, suggest that his method is designed to capture nothing more and nothing less than the nature of things in this sense of the word.

While an account like the one desired by the interlocutor of § 65 inevitably violates the vagueness and multifacetedness of matters such as mind and meaning, Wittgenstein aims to keep their relational character intact. “To this end,” he states, “we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook.”\textsuperscript{74} Philosophy Wittgenstein-style commits itself not only to look for what is common to numbers or language, but also to make the differences between the members of these families appear, as well as to explore the permeable border between these families and other groups. Wittgenstein’s (in)famous language games are means to precisely this end. They are set up, he explains, “as objects of comparison which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities.”\textsuperscript{75}

Language games thus form a worthy alternative to the “pre-conceived idea” of

\textsuperscript{71} See PI 88, PI 105.

\textsuperscript{72} PI 129.

\textsuperscript{73} I have all along been referring to “traditional philosophy” as if there was such a thing as one approach that has been followed by all philosophers without exception. Let me remark at this point that this use of words is to some extent purely rhetorical. Though many traditional philosophers may share certain convictions, both with regard to method and with regard to content, in one combination or other, it also seems characteristic of philosophy that no two philosophical texts are alike. Let me moreover add that, like there is no one “traditional” approach, alternatives to it have been presented by other thinkers as well. As I already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Wittgenstein can be said to be part of a larger development, rejecting not just the Cartesian take on the nature of man but the entire philosophical tradition. Comparisons have accordingly been made between Wittgenstein and Heidegger (see e.g. Gier 1981; Rorty 1991), and between Wittgenstein and Derrida (see e.g. Garver & Lee 1994; Glendinning 1998, pp. 76-92), among others. (Yet needless to say, to the extent that such comparisons (like Rorty’s, most notably) are intended to show or informed by the idea that Wittgenstein embodies the antidote or antithesis to philosophy, I disagree with the reading of Wittgenstein on which they are based.)

\textsuperscript{74} PI 132.

\textsuperscript{75} PI 130.
crystalline purity “to which reality must correspond”\textsuperscript{76} and that only makes for philosophical frustration.

But the concept that is most central to his approach, as Wittgenstein himself proclaims, is that of a “perspicuous representation.”\textsuperscript{77} That this type of representation, of which the defining characteristic is that it “produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions’,” is of “fundamental significance”\textsuperscript{78} to him, should from the perspective I am developing not come as a surprise. For as I have argued, it is Wittgenstein’s objective to understand the nature of things, which he takes to be most adequately captured by describing the (all too familiar yet not always transparent) relations of similarity and difference, both between the different members of a family of phenomena, and between interrelated families as a whole. If someone can from this perspective ever be said to grasp the nature of a thing, it would be when she succeeds in seeing such connections perspicuously.

At this point, however, a question as difficult as important arises. For if the nature of things comes in the form of family resemblance relations, how can someone ever provide a perspicuous representation of these connections? Given that the phenomena in which philosophers take an interest form open-ended clusters of heterogeneous structures, it seems downright impossible to capture their nature, let alone in a perspicuous way. § 122, not offering any details about the form a perspicuous representation should take, is of no avail in solving this puzzle. In fact, the sole (or the sole explicit) example Wittgenstein gives of a perspicuous representation is the colour octahedron discussed in \textit{Philosophical Remarks}.\textsuperscript{79} In a superbly lucid way, this diagram conveys the ways in which we take the different colours to be interrelated. Yet it remains to be seen whether such a neat diagram can be given to capture the nature of all phenomena a philosopher could be interested in. Indeed, Wittgenstein himself never provided a perspicuous representation of this specific type of the various psychological phenomena, nor of the numerous uses of language: two equally multifaceted subjects that have been of equally great importance to him throughout his life.

Yet that Wittgenstein never gave such a schematic account of two of his most central concerns does not mean that their relational nature cannot be captured perspicuously. The colour octahedron may be a very conspicuous type of perspicuous representation, such a diagram need not always be possible or even desirable. What kind of representation is most adequate after all depends on what one wants to achieve by means of it. When it comes to portraying the nature of things, as Wittgenstein puts it in one of his remarks on the human psyche, “[t]he

\textsuperscript{76} PI 131.
\textsuperscript{77} PI 122.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{79} See PR 51, PR 278.
greatest difficulty [is] to find a way of representing vagueness.” The difficulty lies, to be more precise, in combining perspicuity with indefiniteness; in giving a lucid and instructive description of matters that are by their very nature messy and fuzzy, sacrificing neither the informativeness of the account nor the vagueness of the phenomena. So how did Wittgenstein manage to solve this difficulty – if he managed to solve it at all?

2.3 Grammatical investigations

Yet before I can go on to answer this question, I have to deal with an important objection that may have been on the reader’s mind from the very beginning and that seems to render any attempt at answering it entirely besides the point. For the question just posed presupposes, like entire the discussion so far, that Wittgenstein expected to be able to investigate something like the nature of things themselves. It could be objected that, although he uses a word like “essence” every now and then, one of his main accomplishments was to have demonstrated the sheer naïveté of such expectations. Did Wittgenstein not argue again and again that the only access we have to the world is through language and that, moreover, our language games do not serve to mirror some essential structure of reality? As far as the nature of things is concerned, he maintained that metaphysical statements seemingly depicting the world as it is, simply reflect the way we divide it up by means of our grammar.

That Wittgenstein dubbed his explorations “grammatical” should therefore be taken quite literally: they clarify the use of our words but, given that the rules that govern this use do not stand in a justificatory relation to reality, ultimately leave the things themselves untouched.

This line of argument seems to find support in the discourse on method itself. Wittgenstein for instance states that his investigations are “grammatical” precisely for not being directed “towards phenomena” but for concerning only “the kind of statement that we make about phenomena.” However, to conclude from such remarks that the slogan “Essence is expressed by grammar” effectively imprisons us within our linguistic structures, means working with a concept of grammar that I think is ultimately not Wittgenstein’s. His claim that grammatical rules are neither true nor false does not yet imply that grammar tells us nothing about the world but only something about our conceptualization of it. That would perhaps follow on the added assumption that language and world are two separate entities entering only in a one-sided relationship, with language standing over and against the world.

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80 LWi 347.
82 PI 90.
83 PI 371.
and imposing its reign without the world having any say. Yet that is not an assumption Wittgenstein seems to make.

In fact, it is exactly what he appears to deny further on in the manifesto. In response to an interlocutor protesting that his remarks have the wrong focus, as their point should not be words but what these words refer to, Wittgenstein explains that this only holds if one takes word and meaning to be opposing entities: “you think of the meaning as a thing of the same kind as the word, though also different from the word. Here the word, there the meaning. The money, and the cow that you can buy with it. But,” he continues, “contrast: money, and its use.”

In other words, don’t take language as standing over and against the world, but as always already practically engaging us with the things around us. From that perspective, attention to words does not imply a disregard of the world - on the contrary.

In other remarks, Wittgenstein points to a further reason why the relationship between world and language is not one of one-way traffic between two discrete items: in some cases, he explains, “the formation of our concepts can be explained by facts of nature.” Yet if the world has a say in the way our grammar takes shape, the same question about the focal point of Wittgenstein’s writings crops up, for should he in that case not direct his attention to “that in nature which is the basis of grammar” instead of to language itself? Again, Wittgenstein responds that his focus on words does not signify a lack of interest in facts of nature – on the contrary. He only denies that he is interested in these facts as the irreversible causes of our grammatical structures. That is to say, that the world has some influence one the formation of our concepts does not mean that it dictates exactly what our concepts should be. It merely means that the way we conceptualize the world is not entirely up to us; we cannot “choose” our concepts “at pleasure.”

I take such remarks to indicate that Wittgenstein did not conceive of language as a simple mirror image of reality, but neither took it to one-sidedly impose its structures on the world. The grammar-world relation as it is depicted in his later writings is not one between two separate poles, one active and one passive; the picture painted is rather thoroughly dynamic and interactive. Not only is Wittgenstein’s repeated use of terms like “language game” and “practice” “meant to bring into prominence that the speaking of language is part of an activity,” thus directly submerging us in our surroundings, he also suggests that grammar is a product of history. In his view, that is, homo sapiens did not enter the worldly stage

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84 PI 120.
85 Interestingly, a similar point is made in the remark that directly precedes the “Essence is expressed by grammar” slogan: “But that does not mean that I want to talk only about words.” (PI 370)
86 PI II § xii 230a; see also PI p. 56, RPPi 46-49, RPPi 78.
87 Ibidem.
88 Ibidem.
89 PI 23.
with a fixed and rigid set of linguistic rules, but humans have developed, and will continue to develop, their language in a practical engagement with the world around them. Or as he put it in *On Certainty*, the remarks that perhaps most clearly stress the dynamic character of our conceptual configurations: “Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.”

That our concepts or certainties can strictly speaking not be said to be true or false (and that emphatically stating that one knows that, say, “This is a hand” does not suffice to defeat the sceptic, as *On Certainty* explains) does not mean that statements like “Humans have a mind” and “Humans have a body” have no substantive role to play in philosophy. The point of a philosopher’s investigating such “facts” need not be to prove that they are the case; one could also say that it is philosophy’s goal to come to grips or come to terms with our concept of, say, mind in the first place. When it comes to possible goals, the choice the philosopher faces is after all not necessarily that between either taking stock of linguistic facts, or proving grammatical classifications to be objectively justified. And given Wittgenstein’s view on the grammar-world relationship, trying to get a firmer grasp on our concepts can be said to be a way of coming to grips with the world as well. To insist that this is not the case is to adhere to a dichotomy he was trying to move away from. What is more, from this perspective, Wittgenstein’s deeming philosophy such a precarious undertaking becomes all the more understandable. For if our concepts simultaneously shape and reflect the world around us, so to speak, it is not exactly immaterial how philosophers conceptualize things.

### 2.4 Wittgenstein as philosophy

Let me recapitulate the observations I made before embarking on this grammatical excursus. In his discourse on method Wittgenstein proves to be just as interested in the nature of things as other thinkers are, yet while they traditionally equate the nature with the essence of things, he takes it to come in the form of family resemblances. In contrast to the traditional approach, Wittgenstein’s method is accordingly designed to leave the complicated nature of things intact by rendering the relevant resemblances perspicuous. Ironically, however, the methodological remarks provide no clear recipe for how to proceed and do not explain how the

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90 OC 475. It should be noted that commentators stressing the autonomy of grammar often revert to PG: an older collection of remarks of which several ended up in the final version of PI – albeit not those about language being autonomous. To be sure, interpreters like Baker and Hacker also mention the general facts of (human) nature influencing the formation of concepts over time (cf. Baker & Hacker 1985, pp. 285, p. 318, pp. 333-334), but they nonetheless insist that a remark like “Grammar is not accountable to any reality” (PG 133) most adequately expresses Wittgenstein’s ideas on the language-world relation. I prefer to trace the development of Wittgenstein’s ideas all the way up to the later writings, which offer a more nuanced perspective on this relation and consequently tone down (if not disqualify) the older remarks about the autonomy of language. (As for the anti-philosophical statements that OC also contains, I will discuss them in chapter 5.)
families of structures *in casu* can be presented in a (more or less) perspicuous way. In this section I will try and fill in this gap by complementing my reading of the methodological manifesto with an analysis of the way Wittgenstein himself deals with multifaceted phenomena such as mind and meaning. The aim of the current section is thus to demonstrate how Wittgenstein’s ideas about the nature of things are reflected in his distinctive style, the apparent disorder thereof not preventing it from being positively insightful.

The various collections of remarks Wittgenstein left behind – including those he thoroughly edited himself\(^{91}\) - may at first sight strike one as utterly unsystematic bulks of observations, questions and examples. Wittgenstein’s observations do not always follow each other in a logical way, many of the questions posed subsequently remain unanswered, and the examples given are often purely fictional ones - the difference with proper philosophical accounts could hardly be bigger. Indeed, Wittgenstein appears to be more interested in specifying how the essence of language, for instance, should *not* described, than in giving a description thereof himself. The remarks in which he confronts the views of specific thinkers (like Augustine and Frege) may not form the majority of his writings, his investigations seem largely aimed at showing some very common ideas about language and meaning - that all words function as labels for objects, to name just one - to be misconceived.

However, these characteristics need not be taken to consolidate Wittgenstein’s reputation as one of the most anti-philosophical of thinkers. That Wittgenstein’s writings abound with questions rather than assertions, first of all, does not mean that he only questions (sic) the endeavours of other philosophers. It should be noted that many of the questions he poses are outright rhetorical and do not allow for any other answer than the one Wittgenstein apparently has in mind. That he often opts for the interrogative rather than the assertive form does not imply that Wittgenstein is not working towards genuine philosophical insights.

That the observations Wittgenstein makes do not always follow each other in a clear and distinct order does not disqualify him as a positively philosophical thinker either. Indeed, this characteristic can be said to be informed by the insight that many phenomena do not have a pure and precise essence and do not take the form of a clearly circumscribable object. This after all implies that who wants to grasp what the mind or the inner is, for instance, is advised to give an overview of the many different things we take to be inner. Wittgenstein accordingly goes through lengths to describe cases of thinking, hoping, feeling sad, having pain, pretending to have pain, and so on. Far from lacking any rationale, the remarks on these diverse phenomena can be said to bring the relations of family resemblance between them to light.

\(^{91}\) Though PI was only published after Wittgenstein’s death, he was preparing it (or at least the first part of it) for publication himself, and, as is perhaps less well-known, also continuously revised other manuscripts and typescripts.
The fact that many of the cases Wittgenstein describes are imaginary ones - a fact that distinguishes him from the scientist as well as from the traditional philosopher – similarly does not contradict the suggestion that he wants to investigate the nature of things in the form of all-too familiar relations between all-too familiar phenomena. While these fictional cases are no longer of an everyday empirical nature, they do not concern the phantasms Wittgenstein thinks traditional philosophers are occupied with either. They can rather be said to inspect the boundaries of our concepts. That is to say, by means of fictional examples Wittgenstein investigates when it would still and when it would no longer make sense to talk of rule following, say. These examples thus do not lead him away from the everyday phenomena philosophers (should) try to understand, but allow him to get a firmer grasp of the heart as well as the periphery of matters that are elusive precisely for being mundane.

Something similar holds for the fact that many of Wittgenstein’s remarks indicate how not to conceive of normativity and subjectivity, among other things. For not only can a proper grasp of how the nature of a thing should not be described, foster understanding of what it does entail - if many phenomena lack a pure and precise essence and may share characteristics with other phenomena, without being indistinguishable from them, the philosopher is well advised to explore the similarities and differences between the topics that concern them and these other matters: between psychological phenomena and bodily processes, say, or between normative and mechanical proceedings. So when Wittgenstein argues that the mental is connected yet cannot be reduced to the behavioural, or that the bindingness of a rule may seem but is in fact not a mechanical matter, he is not or not only freeing other philosophers from confusion. He can also be said to gain a better understanding of the complex nature of these phenomena and of their connection to (seemingly or partly) related matters.

However, even if Wittgenstein’s writings are thus not as un- or anti-philosophical as they might appear to be, the question I raised at the end of the second section is thereby not yet answered. Appropriate as it may be that Wittgenstein does not present his ideas in the form of a pure and precise theory, given his conception of the nature of things, his writings still not seem to make for much clarity and perspicuity. They may reflect the multifacetedness of matters such as mind and meaning, that is, but how can a patchwork of observations, questions and examples maintain the crucial balance between indefiniteness and perspicuity, rather than merely replicating the complex nature of the phenomena Wittgenstein investigates? To repeat my earlier question: How does do Wittgenstein’s remarks succeed in giving an instructive description of matters that are essentially multifaceted, sacrificing neither the complexity of these phenomena nor the informativeness of the account?
With regard to the apparent lack of lucidity, it should first of all be noted that, in line with my reading of the methodological remarks, a collage of observations about the different things we do and do not take to be inner, say, is already highly informative. Such an “album” composed of numerous “sketches of landscapes” by its very composition teaches us a valuable lesson about the multifaceted phenomenon we call “mind”. Yet Wittgenstein - in contradiction, perhaps, to some remarks in the discourse on method - does not always rest content with describing specific cases. Once in a while he seems to summarize his findings and to make claims of a more general nature. Take for instance his “plan for the treatment of psychological concepts” laid out in § 63 of the second volume of the Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, and the “continuation of the classification of psychological concepts” given in § 148 of that same collection.

In these passages, Wittgenstein makes a very general claim about the way we talk about other minds and the way we relate to our own mind (this being a matter of observation and expression, respectively); discusses specific subclasses of the psychological (sensations and emotions, among others); mentions characteristics all members of certain classes share (sensations, for instance, all have genuine duration); identifies characteristics that make for divisions within these subclasses (there are, for example, both directed and undirected emotions); and demarcates subclasses as a whole from each other (like emotions from sensations).

In these paragraphs, then, Wittgenstein is not tacitly showing but rather openly describing the relations of similarity and difference that characterize specific psychological phenomena, as well as some of the family resemblances that constitute the domain of the mental as a whole. In addition, he succinctly conveys an asymmetry (namely that between the first and the third person) that is to be located at the heart of the psychological. In other words, Wittgenstein can be said to achieve a balance between perspicuity and multifacetedness in these passages. He is after all making several structures pertaining to the psyche explicit and presenting them in a (more or less) surveyable way.

That is not to say that these two combined passages independently and entirely capture the nature of mind in all its multifariousness. While Wittgenstein does not refrain from making general claims in § 63 and § 148, he does not claim to have offered a complete classification of the psychological either. Given that family resemblance concepts like “mind” are heterogeneous as well as open-ended, this is neither a matter of modesty nor of inadequacy. Perspicuity does not and cannot require completeness when the object that is rendered perspicuous is not a clearly circumscribable one.

Most importantly, however, these passages do not serve to articulate Wittgenstein’s take on the mental all by themselves: they seem to refer back to and anticipate other remarks about the human psyche. Wittgenstein’s claiming in § 148, for instance, that behaviour is only expressive of a specific mental state if its

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92 PI p. vii.
external circumstances are taken into account, has to be supplemented with the remarks pointing out that the psychological is not a purely behavioural matter.\footnote{See e.g. PI 307, RPPi 286, RPPi 287.} To give another example, his § 63 claim about psychological verbs in the first and the third person recapitulates the observations about the difference between statements like “I am in pain” and “He is in pain”, and thereby indicates why the inner is not (in all senses) something private, as other remarks investigate.\footnote{See e.g. PI 246, PI II § xi 222a-c, RPPi 570.}

This effectively means that there is another way in which passages such as § 63 en § 148 can be said to combine vagueness with perspicuity. They may not do so by portraying each and every family resemblance relation pertaining to the topic under investigation in one fell swoop, but they do create some order in what can still appear to be a chaos by connecting groups of remarks with each other, by highlighting certain trains of thoughts and by summing up the most important insights in which these result. By themselves these passages may not convey the multifariousness of a matter like mind in all respects, but that is made up for by the fact that they refer to other remarks that collectively cover more parts of this terrain in more detail. These other remarks, in turn, may by themselves lack the kind of perspicuity Wittgenstein claims to be aiming at, but that is made up for by the fact that they are reshuffled and recapitulated in the plan for the treatment of psychological concepts and its continuation.

The vital balance between multifariousness and perspicuity can accordingly be located, not or not only at the level of these particular passages, but also or even more so in the interaction between Wittgenstein’s synoptic remarks and a host of more specific ones. Now if the remarks I just discussed were the only ones entering into this kind of dynamic, Wittgenstein’s oeuvre would still not offer much perspicuity. However, his writings contains many more passages that are perhaps less obviously perspicuous but can be taken to be of a surveying nature as well. The way I read such remarks, they partake in a similar interaction with their surroundings as § 63 and § 148.

§ 43 of the Investigations, for instance, in which Wittgenstein famously claims that “For a \textit{large} class of cases […] the meaning of a word is its use in language,”\footnote{PI 43.} can be said to proceed from the many passages in which the flaws of the Augustinian picture are exposed to sketch the contours of an alternative conception. It brings together the main message of the numerous thought experiments showing Augustine’s conception of meaning to be deficient, and simultaneously makes explicit what the Investigations’ various enumerations of actual language use are pointing to.
§ 154 of the same book, stating that “In the sense in which there are processes […] which are characteristic of understanding, understanding is not a mental process.”\(^\text{96}\) can be said to finally and decisively reject the suggestion made in § 138 to the effect that understanding meaning equals seeing something (a picture or formula, say) before one’s inner eye. However, in so far as § 154 might give one the impression that Wittgenstein denies (linguistic) normativity, it has to be complemented with the subsequent discussion in which it is argued that what accounts for the bindingness of a rule is the existence of an institution or practice, culminating in § 202: “And hence also ‘obeying a rule’ is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule.”\(^\text{97}\)

Wittgenstein’s discussion of aspect perception, to give one last example, seems to find a finishing point or turning point in the claim that what we “perceive in the dawning of an aspect is not a property of the object, but an internal relation between it and other objects.”\(^\text{98}\) Explaining that in perceiving an aspect, we can indeed be said to see something, yet cannot be said to see something of a purely visual nature, this claim puts the preceding and following remarks describing the senses in which aspect perception both is and is not a matter of thinking, and both is and is not a matter of seeing, in a more perspicuous light.

In my view, Wittgenstein’s writings can be understood as containing many perspicuous representations in the sense just described. Some more obviously perspicuous and some more wide-ranging than others, the remarks of a synoptic nature, in interaction with the remarks they synopsize, all illuminate certain parts of the landscape we cover with words like “mind” and “meaning”. Though it might go too far to say that Wittgenstein’s remarks on the philosophy of psychology, for instance, collectively make for one overarching Darstellung of the human psyche, they can nonetheless be said to collectively convey the relations of similarity and difference that are part and parcel of the domain of the mental. This may mean that the tension between the perspicuity Wittgenstein claims to be aiming at (in the previously discussed PI § 122), and the multifariousness that characterizes the nature of the things he investigates, is in the end not entirely reconciled.\(^\text{99}\) On my reading, however, this belongs to the very essence of the Wittgensteinian approach. While Wittgenstein aspires to make matters like subjectivity and normativity more perspicuous, he does not strive for clarity at the cost of their very – multifaceted - nature.

\(^{96}\text{PI 154.}\)
\(^{97}\text{PI 202.}\)
\(^{98}\text{PI II § xi 212.}\)
\(^{99}\text{Cf. Mulhall 2004, claiming that, according to Wittgenstein, complete clarity can indeed be attained – with regard to individual, particular problems (see p. 82); and cf. Glendinning 1998, arguing that, in Wittgenstein’s book, a certain looseness or inexactness can never be escaped (see p. 92).}\)
2.5 Concluding remarks

Hence, even if Wittgenstein is part of a larger twentieth century development, challenging not just the Cartesian take on the nature of the subject but the traditional approach to philosophy as such, and even if his writings contain some vehemently anti-philosophical statements, he need not be considered to form the antidote or antithesis to philosophy. In contrast to the picture that prevails of him, as I hope to have shown, Wittgenstein can be said to fully - albeit cautiously - engage in time-honoured philosophical discussions, rather merely trying to oppose or undermine these debates.

For as I argued by means of a close reading of his discourse on method, an excursus on the concept of grammar, and an interpretation of his actual practice, Wittgenstein identifies a tension rather than a mistake inherent in philosophical theory formation. He demonstrates that a thinker always has to balance philosophy’s striving or “craving for generality”\(^{100}\) with the heterogeneity that is of the essence of the phenomena it describes. And while this tension explains why and how philosophical theory can go awry – namely, when it focuses on generality and univocality at the cost of all particularity and ambiguity - it does not bring Wittgenstein to conclude that all investigations into the nature of things must be brought to an end. Placing the particular in a larger framework and inscribing the general with particularities at one and the same time, he can be read as accommodating this seeming conflict precisely by leaving it intact.

The tension present in Wittgenstein’s writings and reflected in Wittgenstein scholarship at large, to which I pointed at the beginning of this chapter, accordingly need not be considered to be problematic and something to be overcome or explained away. There is both a negative or suspicious and a positive or constructive side to Wittgenstein’s method – even though I think that the negative should ultimately be said to stand in the service of the positive, and that it is precisely this combination that makes Wittgenstein into a full-blown philosopher (and a very interesting one at that). To be sure, Wittgenstein is very much aware of the dangers that come with devising philosophical theories, and part of his contribution to the subjectivity debate, for instance, precisely consists in explaining where and why Cartesianism breaks down. However, to therefore insist that he cannot be considered to be a philosopher in any traditional sense of the word means to ignore an equally - if not more - important strand in his thinking.

In the chapters to follow, at any rate, I will discuss Wittgenstein’s arguments against the theories proposed by Descartes, Frazer and Moore, among others, but will first and foremost try to make his constructive contribution to debates about subjectivity and religiosity, among other things, explicit. This also means that to the extent Wittgenstein combines vagueness with perspicuity and generality with particularity, I will concentrate on his more general or wide-ranging insights. In so

\(^{100}\) BB 17-18.
far as the explorations to follow might accordingly strike one as not exactly being in the spirit of Wittgenstein, I ask one to keep the preceding exposition in mind. For on my reading, Wittgenstein’s awareness of the dangers of philosophy’s craving for generality did not prevent him from contributing to traditional philosophical inquiries. Quite the contrary.