

Wittgenstein on Magic, Metaphysics, and the History of Philosophy

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Abstract

This work challenges the assumption that Wittgenstein's comments about the word "philosophy" are always either normative or descriptive. In the introduction, I demonstrate that some apparent inconsistencies of Wittgenstein's programmatic remarks can only be resolved if we reject this distinction. Although the distinction is not central to any major interpretation of Wittgenstein's work, rejecting it will have significant implications regarding his relation to the history of philosophy. My central task is to demonstrate that Wittgenstein's view of the history of philosophy does not imply a strict distinction between the historical concept of philosophy and Wittgenstein's method. The core of my argument revolves around the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. In this text, Wittgenstein compares magic with metaphysics and then proceeds to attack Frazer's exceedingly critical analysis of primitive religions. I argue that Wittgenstein's later use of the word "metaphysic" indicates that his criticism of past philosophers is not radical enough to justify a strict distinction between his philosophical program and the history of philosophy. In order to confirm the conclusions I have drawn from Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysics," I studied two conversations Wittgenstein had about Heidegger. I read Wittgenstein's comments about Heidegger as a sign of the blurring distinction between his own program and more traditional conceptions of philosophy.

Introduction

0.1 Wittgenstein's remarks on the concept of "philosophy"

My focus in this essay will be on Wittgenstein's later remarks about the concept of philosophy. I challenge the assumption that Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophy are always either strictly descriptive or strictly normative. The rejection of this distinction leads to a more general discussion of Wittgenstein's relation to past philosophers, because the distinction is based on the common idea that Wittgenstein constructed his philosophical program in opposition to tradition. In this introduction, I argue that the distinction between normative and descriptive remarks makes Wittgenstein's program appear incoherent, in order to justify my challenge. I will only return to this problem in the concluding chapter because the argument presented mainly rests on the analysis of Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysics" and comments about the history of philosophy.

In the next subsection (0.2), I present what could justify the application of this distinction to Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks, and I give some preliminary reasons to question it. In order to justify the importance of challenging this seemingly benign assumption, I show, in the third subsection (0.3), that one must reject this assumption in order to answer some common objections against Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views. I show why Cora Diamond's solution to a naive objection against quietism leads to a rejection of the distinction between descriptive and normative metaphilosophical remarks. In the fourth subsection (0.4), I draw some implications that come from rejecting the distinction and I present what kind of relation to the history of philosophy is concordant with my rejection of the distinction. In the last subsection (0.5) I give an overview of my argument.

0.2 Two kinds of remarks on the nature of philosophy

Wittgenstein's remarks on the nature of philosophy are often obscure. He uses vague names and pronouns when he expresses his views on the concept of "philosophy." It is thus difficult to know if Wittgenstein is talking about himself, his contemporaries, or past philosophers when he speaks about "philosophy," "our investigations," and "philosophers." What is clearer is that some remarks challenge an ordinary understanding of the word 'philosophy':

And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place. (*PI* § 109)

If someone were to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them. (*PI* §128)

The work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections for a particular purpose. (*PI* §127)¹

Because Wittgenstein's descriptions of "philosophy" appear counterintuitive, one could assume that he was implicitly excluding past philosophers from most of his definitions. If we accept that Wittgenstein had two concepts of philosophy in mind (one that he had to describe and the other he wanted to construct), then we should be able to categorize Wittgenstein's use of the word "philosophy" in two distinct sets. One set would include the type of remarks we just mentioned and describe how Wittgenstein thinks philosophy should be done; while the other set would refer to philosophy as it has been done since its beginning. I will qualify the first set of remarks as "programmatic" (and sometimes "methodological" or "normative"), and the second set as

¹Amongst other similar passages we can refer to, in the *Philosophical Investigation* alone:: §§89-90,109-33,192-6,216,251-5, 309, 464, 593, 599.

“historical” (and sometimes “descriptive”). Here is a sample of remarks that could be categorized, with the three quoted above, in the set of notes about methodology:

The investigation is to draw your attention to facts you know quite as well as I, but which you have forgotten, or at least which are not in your field of vision. They will all be quite trivial facts. I won't say anything which anyone could dispute. Or if anyone does dispute it, I will let that point drop and pass on to say something else. (*LFM*, L-II)

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. The name “philosophy” might also be given to what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions. (*PI* § 126)

These remarks suggest that philosophers should limit themselves to trivial assertions. This is not something that past philosophers seem to have done, nor claimed as an important standard. One could assume that Wittgenstein was only talking about how philosophy should be done when he described philosophy in these terms. Texts that propose this kind of unusual principle for philosophers could be categorized as programmatic remarks.

The same kind of reasoning could be applied in the identification of historical remarks. Here is a sample of remarks that we would be prone to be distinguished from the other, because they seem to describe the history of philosophy:

(The philosopher exaggerates, shouts, as it were, in his helplessness, so long as he hasn't yet discovered the core of his confusion.) [...] (One of the greatest impediments for philosophy is the expectation of new, deep //unheard of// elucidations.) (*BT* §89)

One populates the world with ethereal essences, namely with things that one thinks one sees behind substantives. The science of these pseudo-beings might justly be called metaphysics. (*VW*, p.485)

(Philosophers are often like little children, who first scribble random lines on a piece of paper with their pencils, and now //then// ask an adult “What is that?”—Here's how this happened: now and

then the adult had drawn something for the child and said: “That’s a man”, “That’s a house”, etc.

And then the child draws lines too, and asks: now what’s that?) (*BT* §91)

In the case of the historical remarks, it is the negative depiction of philosophical activities that could justify their being distinguished from the methodological comments. Wittgenstein compares the philosopher with a child and qualifies his objects as ‘pseudo-beings.’ It seems that Wittgenstein would not describe his own work so negatively. If Wittgenstein is diminishing the value of a philosophical practice, we should thus infer that he was referring to other philosophers.

Although it might seem natural to divide the metaphilosophical remarks in this way, the distinction is problematic. There are two preliminary reasons why, this distinction might be rejected. First, the criteria we proposed to justify the distinction are based on two questionable assumptions. Regarding the programmatic remark, the assumption was that we should expect Wittgenstein’s conception of the history of philosophy to be commonsensical. Considering his counterintuitive views on other subjects, it is reasonable to think that these remarks might simply be unusual descriptions of past philosophical works. Regarding the historical remarks, the assumption was that Wittgenstein could not have had a negative view of his own work. This might be acceptable when speaking of the general results of Wittgenstein’s work, but it is possible that he talked about some of his own tendencies, inclinations, or initial motivations in a negative way. Considering that the later Wittgenstein was not sufficiently satisfied with his work to publish it, the assumption that he should talk about his work positively seems even more questionable. The second reason to challenge this distinction is that the very notion that Wittgenstein could have intentionally proposed paradoxical definitions of a word is inconsistent with his conception of philosophy. Wittgenstein thinks that a definition should respect the actual

use of the word. It is thus difficult to accept that he could have tried to confer a new meaning on the word “philosophy.”

The two reasons presented above are only preliminary justifications to challenge the distinction. The central reason for rejecting the distinction will come from the survey of Wittgenstein’s use of the word ‘metaphysics’ and will be presented in the following chapters of this thesis. At its core this thesis is an attempt to demonstrate that the distinction cannot be applied to Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophical remarks. Now that I have clarified the nature of the distinction, I can explain why it is an obstacle for the understanding of Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophical remarks.

0.3 The distinction and the value of Wittgenstein’s program

It is important to challenge the distinction because it is a core assumption behind the formulation of a common objection against Wittgenstein’s method. The fact that the rejection helps solve an interpretation problem is not intended as a definitive argument for my position. The argument presented here should be understood as an additional reason to challenge the distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks not as a knockdown argument against it. The argument I present here is also intended to help to link the central claim of this thesis with an important controversy in the literature about Wittgenstein metaphilosophy. I want to link my challenge of the distinction between normative and descriptive remarks with the controversy the use of Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophical remarks in the interpretation of the rest of his work. My challenge can help answer an objection often made by those that question the value of Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophical remarks.

In its most naive expression, the objection is that the idea that philosophers must leave everything “at its place,” makes Wittgenstein’s philosophical program self-refuting. The paradox comes from the attempt to apply this metaphilosophical principle to Wittgenstein metaphilosophical remarks. Wittgenstein’s proposal that philosophy should not interfere with ordinary language (*PI* § 124) seems to interfere with the ordinary concept of philosophy. Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophical remarks thus appear to be contradictory. Cora Diamond² summarizes the kind of objection I am referring to:

[...] it is sometimes argued, against Wittgenstein, that, after all, philosophical discussion constitutes a language-game or group of language-games. So, it is asked, why does not leave such games alone? Why are *they* subject to criticism, if ‘what we do’ is supposed to be all right?³

She proposes a simple clarification:

The sense in which philosophy leaves everything as it is is this; philosophy does not put us in a position to justify or to criticize what we do by showing that it meets or fails to meet requirements we lay down in our philosophizing. If there are language-games we engage in because we think that playing them, or playing them in such-and-such ways, will enable some philosophical requirement to be met, we shall indeed no longer want to play such games, or to play them in those ways[... .]⁴

Diamond’s responds by clarifying the limits of Wittgenstein’s exhortation to ‘leaving everything at its place’. She explains that it is of course completely legitimate to criticize or justify some uses of language according to preexisting requirements. The limit set down by Wittgenstein only regards philosophers that claim to be setting new requirements or to justify and criticize on the basis of requirements that they themselves set down. Diamonds acknowledges that

² Diamond is arguing that Wittgenstein remained within the limits of what she calls a realistic spirit. Part of her argument implies that we can take Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophical remarks seriously. This defense of Wittgenstein’s program is not the focus of the paper we are citing here, but this thesis can be understood as an attempt to expend on here passing remark on Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophy.

³ Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995), 21-22.

⁴ Diamond, *Realistic Spirit*, 21-22.

Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy sets limits for the philosopher but she argues that, despite the claims of the critics, Wittgenstein respected these limits both in his metaphilosophical remarks and his actual philosophical work. For example Diamond shows that the private language argument which is often cited as a case where Wittgenstein appears to violate his own method can be read in a way that is concordant with her interpretation of the 'leave everything as it is' comment. Some have read Wittgenstein's private language as an attempt to set up new requirements for the application of the word 'language' on the basis of the discovery of a new feature of language. Both the idea of a discovery about the nature of language and the attempt to reform the use of language would directly conflict with Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views. Diamond argues that the remarks on the impossibility of a private language can be read in concordance with Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy if we take them as providing a description of the implicit rules behind the ordinary use of the word "language," rather than as claims about the nature of language⁵.

Diamond's main concern is to show that Wittgenstein's motto does not conflict with his actual philosophical work, but the kind of reading she provides for the private language argument can be applied as a solution to the apparent paradox in Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy. On Diamond's reading we would simply need to say that Wittgenstein's claims about philosophy are not setting forward new requirements for the practice of philosophy but describing the implicit rules of our use of the word philosophy. Diamond's response seems to be sufficient to answer the challenge posed by critics of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy but it implies that these remarks must be read as descriptions of the use of the word "philosophy." This means that Wittgenstein did not posit new requirement for philosopher in those remarks. This implication of her response is the motivation for my challenge of the distinction between normative and

⁵ Diamond, *Realistic Spirit*, 20.

descriptive metaphilosophical remarks. I read her interpretation as meaning that no aspects of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views can be strictly normative. This implication of Diamond's view will be made clearer if we try to apply her answer to a different version of the objection I just presented.

Diamond's clarification is sufficient to reject the most naïve expression of this objection, but since she did not try to apply here interpretation directly to Wittgenstein metaphilosophical remarks her respond cannot be applied to all the formulation of this kind of criticism. The argument I present in this thesis can serve as a reformulation as well as a complement to Diamond's clarification. This reformulation will help apply Diamond's response to versions of the argument against Wittgenstein's program that do not rely on a naïve interpretation on the recommendation to leave everything at its place.

Crispin Wright's description of the Wittgensteinian methodology in a discussion of Wittgenstein's influence on McDowell's *Mind and World* illustrates a more sophisticated form objection presented above:

McDowell seems to recognize no definite theoretical obligation in this direction. (Naturally not: philosophers aren't supposed to *construct* anything.) This makes his treatment, to this reader at least, almost wholly unsatisfying.⁶

This is not the main point of Wright's review of McDowell's book, but the comment is revealing of his position on Wittgenstein's methodological remarks and their influence on McDowell's work. It is also representative of a common objection against Wittgenstein's program. Wright highlights the psychological implausibility of sticking to a method that is limited to solving false problems. It seems implausible that Wittgenstein would have wanted to keep a quietist stance, because it would have meant he had to stay within the limits of a tradition he depicted so

⁶ Crispin Wright, "Review Article: Human Nature," *European Journal of Philosophy* (1996): 251.

negatively. Russell seems to have noticed this apparent consequence of Wittgenstein's later metaphilosophical views:

The later Wittgenstein [...] seems to have grown tired of serious thinking and to have invented a doctrine which would make such an activity unnecessary. I do not for one moment believe that the doctrine which has these lazy consequences is true. I realize, however, that I have an overpoweringly strong bias against it, for, if it is true, philosophy is, at best, a slight help to lexicographers, and at worst, an idle tea-table amusement.⁷

Russell never embraced Wittgenstein's later philosophy, so he had no problem taking him at his word regarding his program, even if it meant rejecting the rest of his work. Some commentators want to defend Wittgenstein's work, but they are then faced with a problem. They cannot accept, as Russell did, that Wittgenstein's philosophical endeavor is equally empty as his depiction of tradition. The common solution consists in rejecting quietism and arguing that it is actually not an important driving force behind Wittgenstein's work:

This should forewarn us that while we may find some of Wittgenstein's general remarks about philosophy to be insightful, we should be wary of taking that as a reason to think that we can safely acquiesce in his treatment of particular philosophical issues⁸.

Wittgenstein is widely regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of this [i.e. the twentieth] century and yet the central thrust of his work is emphatically rejected by the current philosophical community . . . The one area of Wittgenstein's work which is still in some measure accepted is the so-called private-language argument, which is treated as separable from Wittgenstein's implausible and perverse methodological claims.⁹

Some things in [Wittgenstein's] philosophy, however, I cannot see any reason for accepting: and one is the belief that philosophy, as such, must never criticize but only describe [. . .] I could not

⁷ Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2007), 216.

⁸ John Cook, "Did Wittgenstein Practice What He Preached?" *Philosophy* 81, no. 33(2006): 462.

⁹ Paul Johnston, *Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner* (London: Routledge, 1993), ix.

respect his work as I do if I regarded his arguments and insights as depending on the truth of that belief.¹⁰

The claim of these objectors is that quietism makes philosophy uninteresting rather than impossible. Rather than pointing to the apparently self-refuting nature of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy, as was the case for the naive form of the objection, these detractors point to something like the implausibility and dryness of Wittgenstein's vision of philosophy. If Wittgenstein's program is really a purely negative endeavor, then Wittgenstein's work is condemned to be equally empty as the tradition from which he inherits his problems. This is not logically impossible, but the problem seems as important as the one raised by the naive objection.

Diamond's response helped to show that the naive form of the objection rested on the faulty assumption that Wittgenstein's method did not share the same basic requirements as the rest of philosophy. The sophisticated version of the objection depends, in an indirect way, on the same assumption and on the idea that some of the metaphilosophical remarks are to be read as negative depiction of the history of philosophy. For the commentators cited earlier, Wittgenstein's method appears implausible because it claims nothing more than to solve the problems of tradition. This limitation is difficult to reconcile with some comments by Wittgenstein that seem to translate his aversion for past philosophers. Wittgenstein's purely descriptive method appears implausible because these commentators work on the assumption that Wittgenstein could not possibly see his work as being on a par with a tradition he so harshly criticizes.

I will at time try to show that this assumption is contradicted by explicit comments of Wittgenstein, but the main target of our argument remains the assumption that Wittgenstein's

¹⁰ Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), xi.

method is in some significant way distinct for a traditional conception of philosophy. The idea that some of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical comment refer exclusively to tradition, negatively or not, is the assumption I want to question here. It is possible to assess the level of distaste Wittgenstein has for tradition in various ways, but his quietist stance will always appear implausible as long as one assumes that Wittgenstein treats his methodology independently from his descriptions of tradition.

These critics and Diamond's response show that the distinction between the normative and descriptive aspects of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks is a common and significant assumption. Challenging this distinction is important because it can help to respond to a common argument against invoked to reject Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views, but this is not the only reason we should consider rejecting it. The distinction is also what justifies the attempts to reject Wittgenstein's program while defending his actual work at the same time. The commentators that have been quoted could dissociate Wittgenstein's actual work from his program because they saw his methodological restrictions as purely normative. If we accept that metaphilosophical remarks have descriptive components, it becomes difficult to completely dissociate them from the rest of Wittgenstein's philosophical analysis. I propose to abandon the distinction and read Wittgenstein's comments about the word philosophy expecting them to mix descriptive and normative components. Because the distinction I challenge is at the root of a serious objection against Wittgenstein's program, one could see my proposal as an attempt to defend the value of Wittgenstein normative views. However, the subsequent developments will show that the distinction is also an obstacle to the understanding of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views in general. Now that the importance of the distinction has been

presented, I will explain the implications of my challenge and how I intend to defend my position.

0.4 The consequences of our challenge for Wittgenstein's relation to tradition

The distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks is not in itself an explicit or major tenet of most interpretations of Wittgenstein's work,¹¹ but the rejection has an important, and potentially more controversial, consequence. Rejecting the distinction challenges a common view of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy. In order to clarify the nature of this consequence, I will contrast the view implied by my position with a common interpretation of Wittgenstein's view of the history of philosophy.

Framing the challenge of the distinction between normative and descriptive remarks, in the context of the debate on the value of Wittgenstein's program, also helped specify the kind of distinction I think we should reject. The interpretations of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy rejected are only those that entail the kind of objection presented in the previous subsection. The idea that Wittgenstein's method did not share the same basic requirement as traditional philosophy is what made Wittgenstein's program implausible for the commentators that have been quoted. Consequently, I will also reject the views of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy that imply that Wittgenstein's body of work was developed in opposition to previous philosophical traditions. The major consequence of challenging the distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks will, thus, be to reduce the gap between Wittgenstein's method and the traditional concept of philosophy.

¹¹ Although I think this distinction is applicable in most interpretations, commentators usually do not express it explicitly. There is at least one commentator who explicitly distinguishes between Wittgenstein's methods and the history of philosophy. In a terminology close to the one I have used to explain the distinction, Paul Horwich defines Wittgenstein's therapeutic method by opposing it to what he calls T-philosophy (the 'T' stands for traditional and theoretical). Paul Horwich, *Wittgenstein's Metaphilosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012): 19-25.

Wittgenstein's early works can help illustrate the kind of relation with the history of philosophy I argue is absent in his later works. It is possible to understand the consequence of my proposal as rejecting the idea that the criticism Wittgenstein formulates against metaphysics in the *Tractatus* could be applied to his treatment of the history of philosophy after the 1930's. This formulation is problematic because it implies that there is a clear understanding of the nature of Wittgenstein's view of metaphysics in the *Tractatus*. This is obviously not the case. Fortunately, I only need to illustrate the consequence of my thesis. My strategy here will to contrast Wittgenstein's later views by comparing it to a position that implies a strict distinction between normative and descriptive aspects of metaphilosophy. Such a position happens to be a particular interpretation of Wittgenstein's early relation with metaphysics, but my argument does not rest on the validity of the particular interpretation I use.¹² When I mention the *Tractatus* as a way to contrast Wittgenstein's later views, I will actually be referring to the kind of reading illustrated in this comment by Carnap:

The most decisive development in my view of metaphysics occurred later, in the Vienna period, chiefly under the influence of Wittgenstein. I came to hold the view that many theses of traditional metaphysics are not only useless, but even devoid of cognitive content . . . Even the apparent

¹²The question of the value of this particular interpretation (i.e. Carnap's) can be bracketed because I focus on the second Wittgenstein. The only impact my thesis could have on an interpretation of the *Tractatus* would regard the question of the continuity between this early book and Wittgenstein's later work. This is an important debate in the field but I do not intend to contribute to it within the limits of this essay. I however think one of the advantages of my view regarding Wittgenstein's relation to tradition is that it will fit neatly with recent interpretations of the *Tractatus*. These interpretations put the emphasis on the continuity between the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's later work. This view is often associated with an interpretation that undermines the idea according to which the *Tractatus* is clearly an anti-metaphysical book (Cf. Conant or Cook). Because my interpretation of the later Wittgenstein is concordant with these interpretations of the *Tractatus*, it would seem to support the continuity between the early and later Wittgenstein. My view, however, does not commit me to any side of the argument. Either the *Tractatus* is not as hostile towards tradition as the early readers thought it was and the first and second Wittgenstein are more similar than it is usually thought or the early readers where right on this specific point and Wittgenstein's big 'turn' can be further explained. Although I personally favor the so-called resolute reading of the *Tractatus*, my reading of the second Wittgenstein can be made compatible with an irresolute reading at the cost of accepting the idea of an important shift in Wittgenstein's view of tradition. If we accept that *Tractatus* is not hostile to tradition, then my interpretation would be favored in the eye of a dogmatic Mono-Wittgensteinian, but I do not think the charge of 'poly-Wittgensteinianism' (As Conant calls his opponents in his unpublished essay *Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism*) is sufficient to reject any reading of Wittgenstein.

questions to which these sentences allegedly give either an affirmative or a negative answer, e.g., the question —is the external world real?— are not genuine questions but pseudo-questions. The view that these sentences and questions are non-cognitive was based on Wittgenstein's principle of verifiability.¹³

Carnap's interpretation puts Wittgenstein in a specific kind of opposition with metaphysics. It is the kind of opposition that implies the distinction commentators seem to expect in the later Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical comments when they formulate the kind of criticism previously mentioned. According to Carnap, Wittgenstein did not only correct his predecessors' errors but also he justified the elimination of the discipline they practiced. According to such an interpretation, in the *Tractatus* the word 'metaphysics' denoted something that needed to be abandoned. This interpretation implies the existence of a substantial difference between the object of criticism and the standpoint from which it is criticized. This is the level of discontinuity I deny exist between the later Wittgenstein and his predecessor. This kind of discontinuity is implied by the distinction between normative and descriptive philosophical remarks. By rejecting the distinction, we are lead to affirm that, although Wittgenstein might have thought past philosophers were overly optimist in trying to completely eliminate the metaphysical problems (a fault he might have committed in the *Tractatus*), he also accepted that they were not entirely deluded in recognizing their existence and not totally inept at exploring them. If we want to abandon the distinction, we will have to argue that Wittgenstein's later investigations did not differ in nature with the tradition and that his program although different in many ways no longer needs to be defined in opposition to it.

¹³ Rudolf Carnap, "Carnap's Intellectual Autobiography," in *The Library of Living Philosophers Volume XI: The Philosophy of Rudolph Carnap*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (La Salle: Open Court, 1963), 45.

0.5 Methodology

The proposal to abandon the dichotomy between programmatic and historical remarks gives us what could be counted as a methodological advantage. It will enable us to treat the problem of the nature of philosophy in relative isolation from the rest of Wittgenstein's work. The debate on Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks has been focused on the question of the application of the programmatic remarks in Wittgenstein's later works. Apart from the objection presented previously, a common claim is that Wittgenstein's methodological proposals are nothing more than *obiter dicta* because they are actually never applied.¹⁴ They are, therefore, irrelevant for the study of Wittgenstein's philosophical views. I will not be involved in the debate on the importance of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical view for the exegesis of the rest of his work.¹⁵ I do not contest the value of this question, but it is important to note that it rests on the idea that Wittgenstein's methodological remarks transcend, in some way, the rest of his philosophical work. Both sides of the debate treat Wittgenstein's views of philosophy as if they were of a different kind than his other philosophical inquiries. Commentators that reject these views because they are not applied miss the fact that they are themselves examples of Wittgenstein's philosophical analysis. Commentators that use these remarks as a key for the exegesis of Wittgenstein's work often imply that they could be read as mere proclamations that are not limited by the same constraints as ordinary philosophical analysis. That is what is implied by the assumption that they can be read as more than mere descriptions of the actual use of the

¹⁴ Cook, "Did Wittgenstein Practice What He Preached?" 445-462; Crispin Wright, "Study Note on Wittgenstein on the Nature of Philosophy and Its Proper Method," in *Rails to Infinity: Essays on Themes from Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ In his introduction to *Wittgenstein's Investigations 1-133 a Guide and Interpretation* Andrew Lugg describes a similar debate between commentators whom see Wittgenstein as making philosophical claims and those whom read him as trying to 'put a break on philosophical speculation.' It is important to distinguish these issues from the problem I will focus on. I am not asking whether or not Wittgenstein applied his method or if this method really demanded that the philosopher abstain from making philosophical claims. I rather ask if Wittgenstein thought his quietist stance really created a break from the traditional way of doing philosophy, because if he did, I think his program is incoherent.

word “philosophy.” This is not the way Wittgenstein claimed the problem should be treated. In fact, he explicitly rejected this way of seeing metaphilosophical problems:

One might think: if philosophy speaks of the use of the word “philosophy”, there must be a second-order philosophy. But that’s not the way it is; it is, rather, like the case of orthography, which deals with the word “orthography” among others without then being second-order. (*PI* § 121)

According to this text, apart from the strange property of being self-referential, this philosophical problem is not really different from any others. The rejection of the strict boundary between Wittgenstein’s methodological claims and his description of the history of philosophy leads to a reading that seems to be closer to Wittgenstein’s suggestion. Blending the two sides of the metaphilosophical investigations helps to highlight the fact that the normative questions are, just like the historical ones, part of the philosophical game. The methodological remarks are not transcendent directives. They are the result of a philosophical inquiry. The consequence of this view is that the problem can be treated as piecemeal. The investigation into the nature of philosophy will be subject to the same limitations as other philosophical inquiries. Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophical remarks are not statements that can either be applied or not, rather, they are the result of a philosophical investigation that can be evaluated as any other. I will, thus, approach Wittgenstein’s analysis of the concept of philosophy as any of his philosophical investigations, that is, as a relatively ordinary philosophical problem. There is no reason to think that Wittgenstein saw these remarks as a kind of preliminary of foundational investigation. This means I will focus on Wittgenstein’s explicit remarks on the nature of philosophy, rather than on his philosophical practices. Assessing if there is a tension between the two is important, but, in this essay, I will focus on the value and coherence of Wittgenstein’s remarks on philosophy and not on the consistency of their application. I will try to confirm that Wittgenstein’s

metaphilosophical inquiries actually respected the method he advocated, but this is only a further attempt to investigate the coherence of his views on the subject and not an attempt to show that he applied his method consistently. I will concentrate on Wittgenstein's explicit responses to the problem of the nature of philosophy and on his actual use of the word 'philosophy' and "metaphysics." This approach has the obvious advantage of relieving us from the enormous task of giving a complete account of Wittgenstein's work and from the temptation to treat his work as if it was meant to be an architectonic system.

My argumentation will mainly consist in a survey of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical comments. My goal in studying these remarks is not to construct a cohesive and systematic view of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy, but to show that his disparate comments on the word "philosophy" do not imply a strict distinction between normative and descriptive aspects of metaphilosophy. In fact I will often argue that Wittgenstein's reluctance to define the word "philosophy" prevents him from drawing the kind of distinction I am arguing against. Since I am not concerned with the question of Wittgenstein's actual application of these remarks I will sometimes overlook the immediate context of these remarks. These oversights are justified by the fact that Wittgenstein chose himself to assemble a large number of these remarks in an independent chapter of the *Big Typescript*. This choice by Wittgenstein is concordant with the view of metaphilosophy highlighted in § 121 of the *Philosophical Investigation* and justifies our choice to survey Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks independently from their context of application.

Our survey of Wittgenstein's views on the nature of philosophy is divided in six chapters. In the first chapter, I present a text that supports my view of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy. I point out two assumptions behind my interpretations of the text as a support for

my view. In the three following chapters I justify these assumptions and support my reading of the text. These chapters will focus on Wittgenstein's later use of the concept of "metaphysics." In chapter two, I compare Wittgenstein's early use of the word "metaphysics" with the way he uses the word in the text presented in the first chapter. In chapter three, I compare the early use of the word "metaphysics" with Wittgenstein's use of the word in later texts. I argue that the later use of the word is closer to the text presented in the first chapter and, thus, support my view of Wittgenstein's relation to tradition. In the fourth, chapter I highlight three ways Wittgenstein's uses the word metaphysics. The goal of this commentary is to demonstrate that Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysic" is not indicative of an opposition between a traditional and a wittgensteinian concept of philosophy. This is intended as evidence for my thesis, but it will also serve as a way to specify the general features of Wittgenstein's new relation with tradition. In the fifth chapter, I will consolidate the view presented in my study of the text presented in the first chapter through a commentary of some of Wittgenstein's comments about Heidegger. I argue that Wittgenstein displays a surprising amount of generosity especially considering Heidegger's place as the paradigmatic representative of the traditional approach to philosophy. The concluding chapter will return to the problematic distinction presented in the introduction and show how my view of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy can help us to build a better account of his philosophical method. I will show that Wittgenstein sometimes, though rarely, choses to exemplify his attitude regarding metaphysical problems by referring to tradition. I will use some texts about Augustine to show that Wittgenstein attributes even the most unorthodox aspects of his methodology to the influence of traditional philosophers. The main point will be that Wittgenstein defines his program keeping a significant relation with the traditional concept of philosophy.

Chapter One: the analogy between metaphysic and magic

There is at least one piece of evidence supporting the idea that Wittgenstein did not construct his philosophical program against the traditional concept of philosophy. The piece of evidence is a short text where Wittgenstein draws an analogy between magic and metaphysic. Because this text will serve as a continuing theme in our analysis of Wittgenstein's later views on the history of philosophy, it will be referred to it as the *Analogy* for short. In this first chapter I briefly present the context of the *Analogy* (1.1) and introduce two postulates behind the way I interpret it. The first postulate is that the *Analogy* is representative of Wittgenstein's latter views (1.2). The second is that the word "metaphysics," as it is use in the *Analogy*, can be understood as referring to the history of philosophy (1.3). In this chapter I will only explain why these postulates must be justified if we want to use the *Analogy* to support our analysis of Wittgenstein in relation to tradition. In chapters two, three, and four, I will mainly focus on the justification of the aforementioned postulates and on the defense of my interpretation of the *Analogy*. In the fifth chapter I will apply my reading of the *Analogy* to Wittgenstein's comments about Heidegger.

1.1 The Analogy

The *Analogy* is a later addition to a group of remarks Wittgenstein made about Sir James George Frazer. In the early 1930's, Wittgenstein asked Maurice O'Connor Drury to read excerpts from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.¹⁶ Wittgenstein would listen to Drury and interrupt him from time to time in order to comment on Frazer's claims. Wittgenstein collected a first set of remarks in 1931 (MS 110) and return to the text in 1936, this time focusing on Frazer's view on the

¹⁶ Rush Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Personal Recollections* (Totowa, N.J: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), 119.

Beltane festival (MS 143).¹⁷ Parts of these notes have since been published as the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. It seems that Wittgenstein intended to use the following note along with a selection from his remarks on Frazer as a prologue for some future publication:

I now believe that it would be right to begin my book with remarks about metaphysics as a kind of magic. But in doing this I must not make a case for magic nor I make fun of it. The depth of magic should be preserved. Indeed, here the elimination of magic has itself the character of magic. For back then, when I began talking about the 'world' (and not about this tree or table), what else did I want but to keep something higher spellbound in my words?¹⁸

This later addition to the *Remarks on Frazer* is the text that will serve as preliminary evidence for the idea that Wittgenstein did not develop his methodological views in opposition to the history of philosophy. The fact that Wittgenstein included an analogy between magic and metaphysic as the introduction for a group of remarks that defend magic suggests that the word "metaphysics" might not carry the pejorative connotation sometimes appear to have in Wittgenstein's early work. Even taken independently from the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, the text implies a number of things that challenge the common view of Wittgenstein's relation with tradition. If we take the analogy between magic and metaphysic seriously and apply what Wittgenstein says about magic to metaphysic,¹⁹ we can derive important implications regarding Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy. Wittgenstein first says that one should not "make fun" of magic and metaphysics. This statement needs to be clarified, but it clearly proscribes a specific kind of criticism of metaphysics. The fourth sentence goes even further, implying that the elimination of metaphysic is impossible. Finally, Wittgenstein suggests that his early attacks against metaphysics were examples of the paradoxical result of his attempts

¹⁷ Brian R. Clack, *Wittgenstein, Frazer, and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 12.

¹⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough," in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951* (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), 116 (I will cite this edition of the *Remarks on Frazer* using "RFGB." as an abbreviation).

¹⁹ The link between the concepts of "metaphysic" and "tradition" will be studied thoroughly in the following chapters.

to eliminate metaphysics. At this point, I have only suggested that we consider Wittgenstein's attitude towards magic in our interpretation of his relation to the history of philosophy. The nature of the attitude he advocates is still vague, but my goal is not to positively define Wittgenstein's attitude towards metaphysics and magic but to cast some doubt on the idea that Wittgenstein's program is opposed to a traditional conception of philosophy. In order to do that I do not need to show that Wittgenstein proposed an apology of magic and metaphysics but only that he rejected the kind of dismissive attitude some think he adopted towards metaphysics in his early work.

It is important to exclude what would be an oversimplifying interpretation of both Wittgenstein's *Analogy* and of what I am arguing. I said that I disagreed with the implicit consensus regarding the pejorative connotation of Wittgenstein's remarks on the history of philosophy. This, however, does not imply that Wittgenstein should be seen as promoting the traditional way of doing philosophy. Wittgenstein is explicit enough in the second sentence of the *Analogy*: "I must not make a case for magic." Applied to his relation with metaphysics, this claim means that Wittgenstein is not making "a case for" metaphysics either. I will not argue that Wittgenstein's relation to tradition is straightforwardly positive. Wittgenstein simply intends to discuss metaphysics without making "fun of it." This implies that he cannot eliminate it but not that he must defend it. I stress the fact that he is not ridiculing metaphysics, because the impression that he did is far more persistent than the opposite. I will not read the text as if it showed that Wittgenstein held a positive and consistent attitude toward tradition. Rather, I want to argue that finding the right attitude was a significant problem for Wittgenstein and that the answers he gave do not indicate that he saw his program in a straightforward opposition to

tradition. I will mainly take the *Analogy* as the expression of Wittgenstein's intricate preoccupations regarding the attitude he should have regarding the history of philosophy.

The brief interpretation of the *Analogy* provided seems to support the idea that Wittgenstein did not construct his philosophical program in opposition to the history of philosophy, but it rests on two important postulates I will have to justify in the rest of this essay.

1.2 Can the *Analogy* be taken seriously?

The first postulate is that the *Analogy* is representative of Wittgenstein's views. This might seem like a fair assumption, but it is actually a questionable one because Wittgenstein marked the text of the *Analogy* with the letter "S" for "schlecht" (i.e. bad). The text does not appear in most editions of the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*.²⁰ Because the text seems so dissonant with what we expect of Wittgenstein regarding metaphysics, it might seem acceptable to dismiss it as an aberration. This would explain why the remark was marked as "bad" and spare us of the need to reconcile its content with the rest of Wittgenstein's work. However, one should not assume that Wittgenstein saw the remark as bad, because he changed his mind on the subject matter. The "S" mark is common in Wittgenstein's manuscript could simply indicate a wording issue. Wittgenstein's "S" note is not sufficient to reject the substance of his comment. The apparent incongruity of Wittgenstein's comment with other remarks on the same subject is not a

²⁰ The *Analogy*, which will play an important role in the way I will structure my text, has rarely been studied. Even commentaries focusing on the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* tend to neglect the passage. The most extensive commentary on the text can be found in CLACK, R. Brian. *Wittgenstein, Frazer, and Religion*, New York, N.Y: St. Martin's Press, 1999. The seventh chapter of Clack's book is almost entirely dedicated to the *Analogy*. Clack's interpretation focuses on Wittgenstein's view of religion. Because his purpose is different than ours Clack's interpretation of the *Analogy* is different but not incompatible with ours. Clack also sees the *Analogy* as generally favorable depiction of metaphysics, but he does not focus, as we will, on the implication it might have for Wittgenstein's philosophical method. Clack reads the *Analogy* as a comparison between metaphysics and religion and we read it as an attempt to compare the challenges of the anthropologist with the problems faced by the philosopher when confronting his predecessor. These interpretations are not incompatible and Clack even seems to read the text as we do at some points (c.f. Brian R. Clack, "D.Z. Phillips, Wittgenstein and Religion" *Religious Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): 116.)

sufficient reason to reject it either. If we, as readers, assume that any difficult or contradictory part of a work can be disqualified, we risk overlooking a more cohesive and superior interpretation of the said work. In order to reach the best interpretation, we have to consider the possibility that the remark can be reconciled with the rest of Wittgenstein's work.

In order to assess whether or not the *Analogy* actually expresses Wittgenstein's philosophical view of tradition, we will have to find an interpretation that fits the letter of the *Analogy*, my understanding of his relation to the history of philosophy, and the views expressed in the rest of Wittgenstein's work. In chapter two, I give a sketch of my interpretation by comparing Wittgenstein's early use of the word metaphysics with the *Analogy*. In chapters three and four, I will present some of Wittgenstein's texts about the concepts of "metaphysics" and "philosophy" in order to show that these concepts are used in a way that is consistent with my interpretation of the *Analogy*.²¹ The presence of later texts that are consistent with the *Analogy* should help support the value of the *Analogy* as key for the interpretation of Wittgenstein's later work.

1.3 The *Analogy* and Wittgenstein's view of the history of philosophy

My central contention, however, is not limited to the interpretation of the *Analogy* or its place in Wittgenstein's later work. My ultimate goal is to question the distinction between Wittgenstein's program and tradition. I think that the *Analogy* can tell us something about Wittgenstein's views on the history of philosophy. The *Analogy* speaks kindly of something

²¹ I will also show how Wittgenstein's analysis of magic in the *Remarks on Frazer* parallels his reflections on the nature of philosophy and metaphysics in other texts. Because the *Analogy* serves as a kind of prologue for the *Remarks on Frazer*, I will explore the relation of the *Analogy* with the remarks they introduce. I want to show that the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* can be read as an effort by Wittgenstein to reconsider his early criticism of metaphysics. This aspect of the analysis is significant for my argument because the implications I draw depend on the fact that the *Analogy* is the opening of a book that defends magic.

called “metaphysics” but, as tempting as it might seem, we cannot simply assume that Wittgenstein is taking about the history of philosophy. This is why we will have to justify a second postulate and show that the *Analogy* can tell us something about the existence of a distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks.

This means we will have to survey when and how Wittgenstein uses the word “metaphysics.” My argument hinges on the idea that the word “metaphysics” in the *Analogy* refers to the history of philosophy. In order to support this second postulate, I will have to find a use of the word metaphysics (or of another comparable concept) that refers to past philosophers without being pejorative. In the fourth chapter, I will present an overview of the ways Wittgenstein uses the word “metaphysics” in other contexts in order to find a use that is relevant for the study of Wittgenstein’s relation to the history of philosophy.

Chapter two:

The concept of Metaphysics in the *Tractatus* and in the *Analogy*

The object of chapters two through four will be to show that Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysics" in the *Analogy*, and in his later work, is not compatible with a strict distinction between his metaphilosophical view and a traditional conception of philosophy. In this chapter, I will contrast the way the word "metaphysics" is used in the *Analogy* with the pejorative use of the same word in the *Tractatus*. I argue that the negative attitude Wittgenstein is supposed to have held towards metaphysics in the *Tractatus* is the kind of attitude he is rejecting in the *Analogy*. I will contrast the use of the word "metaphysics" in the *Tractatus*, which is compatible with a strict distinction between Wittgenstein's method and tradition, with the less pejorative use of the same word in the *Analogy*. Readings of the *Tractatus* that put the emphasis on Wittgenstein's animosity towards metaphysics²² will thus serve to contrast the use of the word metaphysics we find in the *Analogy*. In this chapter, I focus on the *Analogy*, but I will show in the third and fourth chapters that my conclusions apply to the rest of Wittgenstein's later work.

2.1 The word metaphysics in the *Tractatus*

In the introduction, I cited Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus* as an example of the kind of opposition to the history of philosophy I reject in my reading of Wittgenstein's later work.

²² The *Tractatus* is open to interpretation and this kind of reading is in no way definitive. The reading of the *Tractatus* I present below eludes a number of important ambiguities in Wittgenstein's early view of metaphysics, but my goal is not to present a subtle reading of the *Tractatus*. My goal is rather to set a background for the study of Wittgenstein's later use of the word "metaphysic" and to show why it is relevant for the interpretation of his relation to the history of philosophy. I use the *Tractatus* to illustrate how the word "metaphysics" should be used if we accepted the view of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy I am arguing against. I could have used any view that implied a strict distinction between descriptive and normative metaphilosophical considerations. I will try to reconcile Carnap's view with parts of the *Tractatus* because this reading seems to have informed some of the assumptions behind the position I am arguing against.

Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus* can also help to illustrate how a word like "metaphysics" should be used when the distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical considerations is made. Carnap's interpretation of the *Tractatus*, suggests that the concept of "metaphysics" is purely descriptive whereas the word "philosophy" is mainly used to refer to Wittgenstein's normative views. This is exactly the kind of strict conceptual distinction I deny in Wittgenstein's later work. If we accept that Wittgenstein's early philosophical method was constructed in opposition to something called "metaphysics," we should expect to see the word "metaphysics" used in three specific ways.

The word "metaphysics" should first be defined in an unequivocal manner. If Wittgenstein's early project was really an attack against metaphysics, then the word "metaphysics" should be defined in a way that makes it clearly distinguishable from Wittgenstein's own work. This definition should also be correlated with a specific historical narrative. If, as Carnap puts it, Wittgenstein was the first to recognize that "traditional metaphysics are not only useless, but even devoid of cognitive content,"²³ then Wittgenstein should have presented his method as an important turning point in the history philosophy,²⁴ and the word "metaphysics" should refer to the state of philosophy before the *Tractatus*. Finally, whatever Wittgenstein called "metaphysics" should be something that he had or, at least, could overcome. That is to say the word "metaphysics" should be used as a pejorative and refer to something that can be eliminated.

Although the idea that the *Tractatus*' main purpose was the destruction of metaphysics is disputable, it seems that Wittgenstein's early use of the word "metaphysics" can be reconciled

²³Rudolf Carnap, "Carnap's Intellectual Autobiography," in *The Library of Living Philosophers Volume XI: The Philosophy of Rudolph Carnap*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (La Salle: Open Court, 1963), 45.

²⁴ This division is not necessarily purely chronological. Metaphysicians could still exist after Wittgenstein's critique. We should, however, expect a historical narrative that generally corresponds with this distinction.

with the traits presented above. These traits imply that a strict distinction between Wittgenstein's early method and traditional philosophy can be made. This is important, because I will eventually show that it is not possible to make his later use of the word fit these traits.

Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysical" in proposition 6.53 of the *Tractatus* confirms that the concept of "metaphysic" has a strict definition. Explaining the nature of his philosophical method, Wittgenstein describes his role as a philosopher in these terms:

To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. (*T* 6.53)

This use of the adjective "metaphysical" implies a clear and well defined distinction between Wittgenstein's concepts of "philosophy" and "metaphysics." Wittgenstein's philosophical method is defined by the identification of meaningless propositions. These propositions are qualified by the word "metaphysical." Because the job of the philosopher is limited to the identification of these propositions, the nature of "metaphysics" must be clearly defined for Wittgenstein's method to be applied. Wittgenstein provides a criterion to identify metaphysical propositions. The criterion is the presence of some meaningless signs. The two other uses of the word "metaphysics" in the *Tractatus* (5.633 & 5.641) fit this definition because they both refer to the "metaphysical subject" which is itself, according to Wittgenstein, not part of the world and, hence, not a meaningful sing. This definition of metaphysics is itself the product of the rigorous definition of meaning to which much of the *Tractatus* is dedicated.

The historical narrative implied by Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus* can also be derived from the text presented above. Wittgenstein's definition of "philosophy" implicitly gives a central historical role to the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein defines philosophy as the practice of

identifying meaningless propositions (*T* 6.53). The very possibility of doing philosophy *à la* Wittgenstein thus rests on the understanding of the nature of meaning. The definition of meaning is, of course, a problem the *Tractatus* is supposed to have solved. Because philosophers had no proper definition of meaning before the *Tractatus*, it was impossible for them to practice what is, according to proposition 6.53, philosophy's defining activity. According to the definition provided in proposition 6.53, every philosophical endeavor that came before Wittgenstein's definition of meaning was, in fact, either scientific or metaphysical. Because it is possible to derive this kind of historical narrative from the definitions of "metaphysics" and "philosophy" in the *Tractatus*, we can conclude that the distinction between descriptive and normative considerations is compatible with Wittgenstein's early metaphilosophical reflections. Taking the term "metaphysical" as referring to the history of philosophy allows one to read every use of the word 'metaphysic' as exclusively descriptive, which I will argue is no longer possible after the 1930s.

With Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus* one should also expect the word "metaphysic" to be defined as something that can and needs to be overcome. The title of Carnap's article, "The Elimination of Metaphysics," is a good expression of what he thought were the historical consequences of Wittgenstein's views for metaphysics. The words "elimination" and "overcoming" are a little ambiguous. Obviously Carnap's proposal was not to outlaw the practice of metaphysic. The article does not read as an actual plan of action but, rather, a report. As the word "elimination" suggests, Carnap's project is more than a simple critique. The goal is not to reform metaphysics or to limit its pretensions. Carnap's paper is an "elimination of metaphysic" in the sense that it is supposed to have definitively destroyed the value of this kind of inquiry.

Carnap's final description of the nature of metaphysics illustrates the result of what he calls the elimination of metaphysics:

Metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability. Instead they have a strong inclination to work within the medium of the theoretical, to connect concepts and thoughts. [...] the metaphysician confuses the two and produces a structure which achieves nothing for knowledge and something inadequate for the expression of attitude.²⁵

Carnap's conclusion is not that metaphysics has been done badly but that it is, in the light of a correct understanding of meaning, an impossible task. Metaphysics is defined by its position between expression and knowledge. This position makes it impossible for metaphysicians to do either correctly. This is the sense in which metaphysics has been eliminated. As we saw, Carnap thought his view was concordant with the core of the *Tractatus*.

The previous paragraph highlighted a view of Wittgenstein's place in the history of philosophy that suggests his project could, indeed, be characterized as an elimination of metaphysics. The preface of the *Tractatus* indicates that Wittgenstein thought metaphysics could and had indeed been eliminated:

The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood [...] I have written here makes no claim to novelty in detail [...] On the other hand the *truth* of the thoughts communicated here seems to me unassailable and definitive. I am, therefore, of the opinion that the problems have in essentials been finally solved. (*T. Foreword*)

Although Wittgenstein does not use the word metaphysics in this quote, it seems safe to assume that the so-called misunderstanding at the root of the philosophical problems corresponds to the concept of metaphysics described in 6.53. If Wittgenstein can claim to have solved the essential

²⁵Carnap, "Elimination of Metaphysics," 80.

problems of metaphysics, it seems reasonable to conclude that he had overcome the discipline, at least in the sense of making any further inquiry on the subject useless.

If Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy implied a distinction between normative and descriptive considerations, then his later use of the term "metaphysics" should serve the same basic function it did in the *Tractatus*, or we should be able to identify a concept that serves a similar function. I do not think this is the case in the later works in general, but I will first show why it is not in the *Analogy*.

2.2 Defining metaphysic

Wittgenstein provides a definition of the word "metaphysic" in the *Tractatus*. The presence of such a definition is one of the preconditions for us to affirm that Wittgenstein did construct his early method in opposition to a more traditional conception of philosophy. We now need to see if we can attribute any strict definition to the word "metaphysics" as it is used in the *Analogy*. We cannot expect to find a straightforward answer to this question in the *Analogy*. It is unlikely that such a short text would contain a strict definition of the terms it employs. We can, however, find some clues indicating that such a definition is not necessary.

The first clue is that metaphysic is being compared with magic. In the *Remarks on Frazer*, Wittgenstein does not provide a necessary and sufficient definition of the word "magic." This is not an omission on his part but, rather, an important part of his response to Frazer. Part of Wittgenstein's strategy is to blur some of the distinction Frazer makes between common Western practices and primitive rites. Because the *Analogy* was supposed to introduce the *Remarks on Frazer*, we should not be surprised if Wittgenstein used the words "magic" and "metaphysics" rather loosely.

Even in the limits of the *Analogy*, there is an indication that Wittgenstein was not really concerned by the definition of metaphysics. When comparing magic and metaphysic, Wittgenstein uses the word “magic” in at least two²⁶ different ways. The second thing Wittgenstein says about magic in the *Analogy* is that it is something that needs to be protected from ridicule and criticism:

I must not make a case for magic nor I make fun of it. The depth of magic should be preserved.

(*RFGB*, p.116)

At this point, we know nothing about Wittgenstein’s concept of magic, except that it is something which should be preserved in some way. The intent of the *Analogy*, if it were limited to these sentences, would be to show that there is something in magic and metaphysic that is worth preserving. The following use of the word “magic” seems to contradict this general intent:

Indeed, here the elimination of magic has itself the character of magic. (*RFGB*, p.116)

If the first occurrence of the word “magic” referred to something that needed to be preserved, then the second occurrence refers to the undesirable outcome of the attempt to eliminate magic. The word “metaphysic” is compared to magic as something that should not be ridiculed, but the word is also used to characterize something undesirable. The dual use of the word “magic” suggests that “metaphysics” itself could also be used in multiple ways. The word “metaphysics” being used both as a pejorative and to refer to something that needs to be defended, it would be surprising to find a single definition for the word “metaphysics.” This argument is no way conclusive. It would be possible to reconcile the two uses of the word “magic” with an unequivocal definition of the term. The second occurrence of the word “magic” does not necessarily imply a second meaning. Using the word “magic” two times might simply be a way

²⁶ I will highlight a third one later on.

for Wittgenstein to highlight the paradox resulting from an attempt to eliminate magic. The “magic” that results from the criticism of “magic” might be the same kind of magic. The passage would, thus, only be a statement about the self-refuting nature of an attempt to eliminate magic. Because Wittgenstein does not provide a definition for either of these terms, nothing in the *Analogy* seems to favor one interpretation over the other. I will later demonstrate that the interpretation that assumes a plurality of meaning for the word “metaphysics” is, in fact, more consistent with the way the word is used by the later Wittgenstein (*infra*, 3.1).

2.3 *The historical narrative in the analogy*

The word “metaphysics,” as used in the *Tractatus*, also implied a significant gap between the nature of Wittgenstein’s method and whatever past philosophers were doing. This idea is, in a way, the corollary of the existence of a strict definition of “metaphysics” because the first thing against which metaphysic was defined in the *Tractatus* was Wittgenstein’s philosophical method. The vagueness of Wittgenstein’s use of the word “metaphysics” should already let us suspect that what he calls metaphysics in the *Analogy* cannot as easily be distinguished from his philosophical method. The rest of the *Analogy* vindicates this suspicion. In the last sentence, Wittgenstein identifies the *Tractatus* (his early work) as the example of a failed attempt to eliminate metaphysics. This implies that the results of Wittgenstein’s early attempt to eliminate metaphysics can be qualified as being metaphysical. The adjective “metaphysical” used in the *Analogy* therefore applies to the *Tractatus*. As we will see, this is not the only case of Wittgenstein using the word “metaphysics” to qualify his early work. What is important is that the word “metaphysics” can refer to Wittgenstein’s early criticisms of traditional philosophy. It is, thus, unlikely that the term can be used to divide two periods in the history of philosophy.

2.4 The elimination of metaphysic in the *Analogy*

Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus* implied a necessarily pejorative understanding of the word "metaphysics." This pejorative use of the word was implied by the idea that "metaphysics" should and could be eliminated. My central contention is that Wittgenstein's program is not developed in opposition to tradition. If Wittgenstein's later use of the concept of "metaphysics" is as pejorative as the concept implied by Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus*, my central contention can be dismissed out of hand. In the following subsection, I will explain why most of the later uses of the word "metaphysics" are not pejorative. All I need to do at this point is to show that in the *Analogy* the word is not used as a straight forward pejorative.

Because the *Analogy* compares metaphysics with magic, it is possible to establish if Wittgenstein uses "metaphysics" as a pejorative by assessing the value he gives to magic. The word magic usually carries a negative undertone, especially when it is used as a way to qualify an intellectual endeavor. In the context of the *Analogy*, however, nothing indicates that magic is to be frowned upon. An overview of the 20 or so pages that follow the *Analogy* (i.e. *The Remarks on Frazer's golden bough*) proves that Wittgenstein's intent was not to belittle metaphysics. The *Analogy* is the introduction for a text that resembles more an apology for magic than a criticism.²⁷ Wittgenstein responds to Frazer's attempts to ridicule the practices and beliefs of primitives. Most of the remarks highlight the weakness of Frazer's analysis of magic. Wittgenstein's main objection against Frazer's criticisms of magic is that they assume the stupidity of people who believe and practice magic. Wittgenstein defends the virtues of a neutral description of magic over Frazer's explanations because he believes any explanation of magic is

²⁷ The general accounts I give of the views expressed by Wittgenstein in the *Remarks on Frazer* are largely based on Bouveresse commentary. C.f. Jacques Bouveresse, "Wittgenstein Critique de Frazer," in, *Essais I* (Agone, 2000). In this short text, Bouveresse unpacks in a systematic way the argument behind Wittgenstein's criticism of Frazer and draws a number of conclusions regarding Wittgenstein's anthropological views.

bound to be deprecatory. Wittgenstein's neutral attitude towards magic is evident even if we only refer to the *Analogy*. If we take the comparison set forward in the first sentence seriously, and apply what Wittgenstein says about magic to metaphysics, it seems not only that Wittgenstein had no intention to depreciate metaphysics when he compared it with magic but also that he might have felt compelled to defend it against unjust offensives comparable to Frazer's attacks. In that context the word "metaphysics" refers to something that should be described neutrally. In the rest of this essay, one of my main goals will be to show that this use of the word "metaphysics" is representative of Wittgenstein's relation to tradition after the 1930s. What should already be clear is that, since the project Wittgenstein sets up in the *Analogy* involves the neutral description of metaphysics, the word "metaphysics," whatever it now means, cannot be exclusively pejorative.

According to Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus*, "metaphysics" was not only a pejorative term, it was also something that could and needed to be eliminated. If the word is not pejorative in the *Analogy* it will most probably be incompatible with the kind of project Carnap saw in the *Tractatus*. There is a more explicit indication that this is not the kind of project Wittgenstein had in mind. If we translate the statement "the elimination of magic as itself the character of magic" and apply it to "metaphysics," we find a view that directly conflicts with Carnap's interpretation of the *Tractatus*. If any attempt to eliminate metaphysics is itself metaphysical in nature, then the word "metaphysics" cannot designate something that Wittgenstein's method is bound to eliminate.

Chapter three:

The concept of metaphysics in Wittgenstein's later works

I have shown that the *Analogy* is inconsistent with a philosophical program designed to oppose “metaphysics.” This was a first step in the analysis of Wittgenstein's later relation to tradition. The demonstration is in no way complete because it was limited to the study of the concept of metaphysics in a single text. I still need to confirm that the content of the *Analogy* is representative of Wittgenstein's later work. I also need to further explain the significance of the word “metaphysics” for our study of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy. At the end of this chapter, we should be able to confirm that the *Analogy* accurately represented Wittgenstein's later use of the word metaphysics. The remaining task will be to show why the use of the word “metaphysics” is significant for the analysis of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy.

3.1 Definitions of metaphysics in Wittgenstein's later works

In the *Analogy* the word “metaphysics” did not seem to rest on an unambiguous definition. This feature is consistent with Wittgenstein's analyses of magic in the *Remarks on Frazer* as well as with his use of the word “metaphysics” after the 1930s. In the fourth chapter, I will study Wittgenstein's diverse uses of the word “metaphysics.” Before I describe these uses in detail, however, it will be useful to comment on a more general level about the significance of Wittgenstein's ambiguous use of the word metaphysics. I want to show that the presence of such a polysemy in Wittgenstein's later works is not a blunder. I want to demonstrate that this polysemy is, in itself, indicative of the fading distinction between Wittgenstein's own work and tradition.

In order to appreciate the significance of the absence of a strict definition for the word “metaphysics,” it is important to understand the role played by the ambiguity of the concept of “magic” in Wittgenstein’s argument in the *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough*. Wittgenstein introduces the idea of “family resemblance” in response to Frazer’s attempt to define the nature of primitive rituals. The concept of “family resemblance” is often introduced as a way to circumnavigate questions about the essence of concepts (*PI* §65, the method is also applied to other philosophical problems e.g. *PI* §75). In the *Remarks on Frazer*, the idea of “family resemblance” is introduced with the method of perspicuous representation to undermine Frazer’s attempt to distinguish primitive rites and beliefs from their modern equivalents (e.g. *RFGB*, p.137):

Besides these similarities, what seems to me to be most striking is the dissimilarity of these rites. It is multiplicity of faces with common features which continually emerges here and there. And one would like to draw lines connecting these common ingredients. But then one part of our account would still be missing, namely, that which brings this picture into connection with our own feelings and thoughts. This part gives the account of its depth. (*RFGB*, p.143)

Wittgenstein’s analysis of rites resembles his description of the concept “game” (*PI* §65-72). In the *Investigations* the discussion on the concept of “game” led to the idea that the unity of concepts did not always depend on the presence of a set of shared characteristics but could be explained by a discontinuous network of resemblances. In the paragraph quoted above, the idea of family resemblance is presented as a way to account for what Wittgenstein calls the depth of “magic” and to provide an alternative to Frazer discourse about the historical origin of magic:

The historical explanation, the explanation as a hypothesis of development, is only *one* way of assembling the data –of their synopsis. It is just as possible to see the data in their relation to one another and to embrace them in a general picture

without putting it in the form of a hypothesis about temporal development.

(*RFGB*, p.131)

Frazer defines magic in a way that makes the phenomenon appear completely foreign to Western sensibilities. He then tries to retrace the historical origins of these strange practices. Wittgenstein's strategy is to blur the strict distinction Frazer is trying to set up and to show that his historical hypotheses are superfluous. The ambiguity of the words "magic" and "metaphysics" we have highlighted in the *Analogy* is not fortuitous. The lack of a definition is, the result of an investigation, at least for the word "magic." If the comparison between magic and metaphysics is really representative of Wittgenstein's later relation to tradition, his later accounts of the concepts of "philosophy" and "metaphysics" should refer to family resemblances rather than necessary and sufficient definitions.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Wittgenstein's later remarks on the nature of philosophy are not systematic and do not provide a necessary and sufficient definition of the word. Rather than a continued discussion on the nature of philosophy, what we find are scattered notes presenting what appears to be unrelated features of the concept of philosophy:

Work on philosophy is—as work in architecture frequently is—actually more of a //a kind of// work on oneself. On one's own conception. On the way one sees things. (And what one demands of them.) (*BT* § 86)

The investigation is to draw your attention to facts you know quite as well as I, but which you have forgotten, or at least which are not in your field of vision. They will all be quite trivial facts. I won't say anything which anyone could dispute. Or if anyone does dispute it, I will let that point drop and pass on to say something else. (*LFM*, L-II)

The assertive and terse tone of these remarks may give the impression that Wittgenstein tried to give a definitive definition of the word "philosophy"; however, the two quotations provided exemplify why Wittgenstein was probably not trying to give perfectly rigorous definitions.

Depending on the context, Wittgenstein mentions two completely different activities to describe the nature of philosophical investigations. The first text seems to point at something like an introspective exercise and the second calls for a strategic enumeration of trivial facts. If Wittgenstein was trying to provide a necessary and sufficient definition, he would probably mention the many elements of descriptions he provides throughout his later works in a single text. Even if these two ‘definitions’ are not contradictory, they are different enough to suggest that Wittgenstein had, in either case, the intention of constructing a single and coherent concept of philosophy.

Wittgenstein seems at least as loose with the use of the word “metaphysics.” The way Wittgenstein uses the word indicates that he did not see the need to trace any sharp boundaries with the concept of philosophy. Wittgenstein cannot use the definition of “metaphysics” he gave in the *Tractatus* because he rejected the theory of meaning upon which this early definition of was based. Nothing indicates that Wittgenstein tried to reestablish this distinction on a new ground. In fact the word “metaphysics” seems to be used as a loose synonym for “philosophy”:

[...]This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness [...] (BB, p.18)

[...] Certainly we shouldn't pity him if we didn't believe that he had pains; but is this a philosophical, a metaphysical belief?

(BB p.48 see also *PI* §116 & *Z* §458)

This loose use of the concepts of “philosophy” and “metaphysics” might seem as a short coming, perhaps caused by the incomplete nature of Wittgenstein’s later works; however, the importance of the question makes such an interpretation implausible. The sheer number of remarks on the nature of philosophy indicates that this was an important problem for Wittgenstein. If he was willing to provide a strict definition of “philosophy,” he would probably at least try to provide a

consistent and exhaustive definition. This disinterest in the strict definition of the concepts of philosophy and metaphysics can be explained.

Both the need and the means to draw a distinction between metaphysics and philosophy disappear because of Wittgenstein's changing views on the nature of meaning. The definition of the word "metaphysics" in the *Tractatus* was based on a strict understanding of the nature of meaning. The philosopher's defining activity rested on the capacity to distinguish meaningful terms from nonsensical ones. The tractarian definition of meaning is one of the first things Wittgenstein puts in question after his return to philosophy. The definition of non-sense upon which the concept of metaphysics was based is also undermined:

And this can be expressed as follows: I use the name "N" without a fixed meaning. (But that impairs its use as little as the use of a table is impaired by the fact that it stands on four legs instead of three and so sometimes wobbles.)

Should it be said that I'm using a word whose meaning I don't know, and so am talking nonsense?

-Say what you please, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing how things are. (*PI* §79)

In the *Investigations*, the tractarian theory of meaning is challenged and no alternative definition is put forward. Without a strict definition of meaning, the tractarian definition of metaphysics is empty. In the context of the *Investigations*, the lack of a strict definition is not problematic. The discovery of the possibility to account for the unity of concepts such as "language," "game," and "philosophy" by referring to family resemblances makes it possible for Wittgenstein to talk about "metaphysics" without actually defining it. In fact, any attempt to force a definition by way of a necessary and sufficient criterion is now seen as a potentially misleading endeavor.

What Wittgenstein said about his misled expectations regarding the concept of language in the *Tractatus* can indeed be applied to his analysis of the concepts of "philosophy" and "metaphysics":

It is interesting to compare the diversity of the tools of language and of the ways they are used, the diversity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (This includes the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.) (*PI* §23)

This explains why Wittgenstein's later use of the word "metaphysics" is diverse and why the equivocal use of the word in the *Analogy* is not problematic. This property of the concept of metaphysics also indicates that the later use of the word cannot be concordant with its use in the *Tractatus*. This feature alone is sufficient to cast considerable doubt on the idea that Wittgenstein defined his philosophical program against metaphysics. If metaphysics cannot be strictly defined, then how could Wittgenstein's whole program be defined in opposition to it? If Wittgenstein's goal was to propose a better method for philosophers, then one would expect him to use a different term to distinguish what past philosopher did from his project. We have shown that this is not how he uses the word "metaphysic." Wittgenstein also uses the word "philosophy" in an ambiguous way. This suggests that it is unlikely that a different word could take the place of the word "metaphysics" in the *Tractatus*. The absence of a clear terminology distinguishing Wittgenstein's project from past philosophy is not a knockdown argument against the existence of a distinction between normative and programmatic metaphilosophical remarks, but it is a fact that appears more probable if such a distinction is not actually applied.

3.2 The historical narrative in Wittgenstein's later work

The second feature of the tractatian concept of metaphysics was its place in a specific historical narrative. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein's work was distinguished from the work of past philosophers in a definite way. The word "metaphysics" could be interpreted as a label for every philosophical work that preceded the *Tractatus*. Because the word "metaphysics" is not strictly defined for the later Wittgenstein, the concept will not play the same role it did in the

Tractatus. The word “metaphysics” is not exclusively used to refer to tradition, and nothing indicates that Wittgenstein used a different label to reestablish a strict of distinction between his work and the work of past philosophers. In fact, Wittgenstein seems to see the goal of finding a clear distinction between his work and tradition as a false or unimportant problem:

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. No sharp boundary can be drawn round the cases in which we should say that a man was misled by an analogy. The use of expressions constructed on analogical patterns stresses analogies 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. Every particular notation stresses some particular point of view. If, e.g., we call our investigations "philosophy", this title, on the one hand, seems appropriate, on the other hand it certainly has misled people. (*One might say that the subject we are dealing with is one of the heirs of the subject which used to be called "philosophy".*) (My italics, BB, p.28)

In this excerpt, Wittgenstein explains that equating what he is doing with the work of past philosophers would be misleading. This way of distancing himself from other philosophers seems to fit the historical narrative associated with the concept of metaphysics in the *Tractatus*; however, the sentence in parenthesis suggests that Wittgenstein’s use of the word “philosophy” bears some resemblance to the traditional one. This might be a feeble admission, but it is a significant one. Wittgenstein is not using the link between his work and tradition as a clear example of a misleading analogy, but as a problematic case where the analogy can be useful and misleading at the same time. The fact that Wittgenstein accept that his use of the word philosophy differs from the traditional understanding of what philosophy is not a defeater for the position that there is no a clear distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical comments for Wittgenstein. All we need to show is that the distinction between Wittgenstein’s

concept of philosophy and the historical use of the word is not clear enough to be defined. The fact that Wittgenstein can use the word “philosophy” as a borderline case of a misleading analogy shows that the distinction between his own work and the history of philosophy is less definite than it was in the *Tractatus*. This text and our short comment do not settle this central issue. The goal here was simply to show that Wittgenstein did not think that the existence of such a distinction was obvious.

The two first features of the concept of “metaphysics” displayed in the *Analogy* seem to be concordant with Wittgenstein’s use of the word in his later work. I have not yet established that the last feature was also representative of Wittgenstein’s later works. In the *Analogy*, the word “metaphysics” referred to something that could not be eliminated, but we also saw that the word could be used in multiple ways. Because the word “metaphysics” is used in multiple ways, we have to study the different uses of the word to see if any of them refers to something that could be eliminated.

Chapter four: Three uses of “metaphysics” in Wittgenstein’s later works

Two tasks still need to be accomplished to complete our study of Wittgenstein’s use of the word “metaphysics.” First, we need to complete the comparison of Wittgenstein’s early and later use of the word “metaphysics” that was started in chapter three. This means showing that, as in the *Analogy*, the word “metaphysics” is not always used as a pejorative. The end goal is still to demonstrate that Wittgenstein’s use of the word “metaphysics” no-longer implies a distinction between traditional philosophy and his own work. Our second task is to clarify the importance of the *Analogy* for the study of Wittgenstein’s views on the history of philosophy.

In order to accomplish the first task, I will have to show that the pejorative uses of the word “metaphysics” do not exclusively refer to past philosophers. The second task requires that we find an interpretation of the *Analogy* for which the word “metaphysics” could conceivably refer to the history of philosophy. Both tasks require a survey of the different uses of the word metaphysics implied in the *Analogy* and present in Wittgenstein’s later work; so, we will explore the two tasks at the same time.

4.1 *The pejorative use of the word metaphysic*

The last two sentences of the *Analogy* suggest that the word “metaphysics” could, as the word “magic” sometime does, have a pejorative connotation:

Indeed, here the elimination of magic has itself the character of magic. For back then, when I began talking about the ‘world’ (and not about this tree or table), what else did I want but to keep something higher spellbound in my words? (*RFGB*, p.116)

The second occurrence of the word “magic” in the quote above carries a negative connotation because it qualifies the reason why one should not try to eliminate magic. Even if the general

tone of *Analogy* supports a neutral attitude towards metaphysics, this use of the word “magic” could mean that the word “metaphysics” also carries some negative undertone. The very last sentence of the *Analogy* suggests that the comparison with magic also reveals something negative about metaphysics. Wittgenstein mentions his yearning for “something higher spellbound” as a problematic aspect of his early work. The word “spellbound” evokes the magical realm²⁸ and its use seems pejorative. This use of a magical lexicon to describe metaphysics is not uncommon in Wittgenstein’s work. Wittgenstein often portrays philosophical mistakes using a religious or magical vocabulary. This kind of use concurs with what we saw in the *Analogy*, but it also indicates that the adjective “metaphysical” can be pejorative, which appears to conflict with the main claim of this essay. The conflict is not direct because my thesis is focused on Wittgenstein’s relation to the history of philosophy and not on his use of the word “metaphysics.” We have already established that the word “metaphysics” did not always refer to the history of philosophy after the 1930s. Now that we know that the word “metaphysics” is sometimes used in a negative way, it is necessary to see if any of these pejorative uses refers to the history of philosophy.

In order to understand the pejorative uses of the word “metaphysics” it will be useful to turn to the pejorative use of the word “magic” we have found in the *Analogy*. In the *Analogy*, it is the “elimination of magic” that is qualified by the pejorative use of the word “magical.” We should be able to understand in what context the word “metaphysics” is used as a pejorative if we understand why the elimination of magic can be called “magical.” In the beginning of his *Remarks on Frazer*, Wittgenstein explains his problem with the way Frazer understands magic. The way Wittgenstein constructs his criticism confirms that the expression “elimination of magic” can be applied to Frazer’s project:

²⁸The German word “*bannen*” carries the same connotation and is sometimes translated by the word “bewitch.”

Frazer's account of the magical and religious views of mankind is unsatisfactory: it makes these views look like errors. (RFGB, p.119)

Frazer's description of magic as a precursor to modern science implies that magic is a practice that can be improved or overcome. According to Wittgenstein, magic is not something that can be corrected or improved. Wittgenstein puts the emphasis on this point when he describes the difference between science and magic:

Simple though it may sound, we can express the difference between science and magic if we say that in science there is progress but not in magic. There is nothing in magic to show the direction of any development. (RFGB, p.141)

Frazer's mistake was to assume that his contemporary had somehow got rid of magic:

The nonsense here is that Frazer represents these people as if they had a completely false (even insane) idea of the course of nature, whereas they only possess peculiar interpretations of the phenomena. That is, if they were to write it down, their knowledge of nature would not differ *fundamentally* from ours. Only their *magic* is different (RFGB, p.141)

Eliminating magic is impossible because the notions of error and correction are not a part of magic's language game. Now that we have an idea of Wittgenstein's objections against Frazer we may better understand what he meant when he qualified Frazer's mistake by the word "magical." Using the word "magic" to qualify Frazer's mistake seems to create a paradox. Wittgenstein's argument is that magic, by definition, is impervious to error. Wittgenstein is able to use the word "magic" in this way because magic sometimes pretends to be scientific:

An error arises only when magic is interpreted scientifically. (RFGB, p.125)

Wittgenstein thinks that magic is open to criticism when it claims to have some theoretical value. This is why Frazer's project can be qualified by the word "magical" in a negative way without creating a paradox. Frazer presents his view as part of a scientific endeavor and thus it can be described as bad magic.

If my reading is correct, we should find later uses of the word “metaphysics” that are analogously pejorative and that are addressed to criticisms of metaphysics. “Metaphysical” should be pejorative when the word describes misunderstandings of the nature the language game of metaphysics. The rare instances where the word “metaphysics” is used as a pejorative seem to fit Wittgenstein’s description of Frazer’s mistake. At the beginning of the *Remarks on Frazer*, Wittgenstein seems to confirm the similarity between misguided criticisms of magic and some misguided critique of metaphysics:

Was Agustin in error, then when he called upon God on every page of the Confessions?

But –one might say- if he was not in error, surely the Buddhist holy man was –or anyone else- whose religion gives expression to completely different views. But none of them was in error, except when he set forth a theory. (*RFGB*, p.119)

Wittgenstein illustrates his point by referring to Augustine. This is an author that stands on the limit between metaphysics and religion. This text seems perfect to explore the link between Wittgenstein’s uses of the word “magic” with his use of the word “metaphysics.” According to Wittgenstein, what discredits potential critics of magic is that they assume magic has theoretical claims. This seems to be the same reason for which Wittgenstein rejects the imaginary critique of Augustine. In a remark similar to the third sentence of the *Analogy*, Wittgenstein describes the task of the philosophers in a way that suggests that philosophers might be prone to commit the same kind of mistakes as Frazer did:

(All that philosophy can do is to destroy idols. And that means not creating a new one—for instance as in “absence of an idol”). (*BT* § 88)

As is the case with magic for Frazer, the urge to eliminate idols is prevalent in philosophy and can be misguided if it is perceived as an achievable goal.

It seems that at least some of the later pejorative uses of the word “metaphysics” are in line with the negative use of the concept presented in the *Analogy*. What is really important is to know if Wittgenstein only applies this label to traditional philosophers. If the term exclusively denotes tradition, then it is equivalent, if not synonymous, with the concept used in the *Tractatus*. If that was the case, it would undermine my view of Wittgenstein’s relation to tradition. However, there is evidence of what kind of philosophers Wittgenstein might have had in mind in a discussion regarding the relation of philosophy and science:

The question as we put it is already the expression of several confusions. This is shown by the mere fact that it almost sounds like a question of physics; like asking: "What are the ultimate constituents of matter?" (It is a typically metaphysical question; the characteristic of a metaphysical question being that we express an unclarity about the grammar of words in the form of a scientific question.) (*BB*, p.35)

Our craving for generality has another main source: our preoccupation with the method of science. I mean the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws; and, in mathematics, of unifying the treatment of different topics by using a generalization. Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. (*BB*, p.18)

These general considerations might be applicable to some traditional philosophers, but what is important for the purpose of this essay is that they fit Wittgenstein’s own description of the mistakes he made in the *Tractatus*:

My notion in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was wrong: 1) because I wasn't clear about the sense of the words "a logical product is *hidden* in a sentence" (and suchlike), 2) because I too thought that logical analysis had to bring to light what was hidden (as chemical and physical analysis does). (*PG*, p.210)

The problems described here and in the two previous quotes are not specific to the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein sometimes talks in similar terms about his later self and other philosophers. What is important here is not so much that the pejorative use of the word “metaphysics” exclusively refers to the *Tractatus*, but that it can. What we are set on demonstrating is that Wittgenstein’s method is not developed in opposition to a traditional conception of philosophy. On that view, criticisms of tradition are acceptable as long as they do not only apply to tradition. In Wittgenstein’s later work, the few pejorative uses of the word “metaphysics” do not primarily—and certainly not exclusively—refer to traditional philosophy. In fact, Wittgenstein’s early work seems to be the most common target of this pejorative characterization. This tendency to depict the *Tractatus* negatively is not the central point. What is important is that we found at least one example where Wittgenstein refers to the *Tractatus* using the word “metaphysics” in a pejorative way. Because this example refers, at least partially, to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein’s pejorative use of the word “metaphysics” cannot be referring exclusively to traditional philosophy and, thus, does not contradict my thesis.

4.2 *The metaphysics laid down in natural languages*

The comparison between magic and metaphysics seems to be coherent with Wittgenstein’s later work, such as the aspects of the *Analogy* that imply a pejorative use of the word “metaphysics”; however our interest in the *Analogy* comes from the apparently positive view of metaphysics it seems to imply. These positive implications are clearer in the first sentences of the *Analogy*. The word “magical” in the two final sentences refer to the misguided idea that a thing—also named “magic”—could be eliminated. In the first sentences, Wittgenstein

talks about “magic” as a thing that should be protected from ridicule. We now need to consider how the type of magic that cannot be eliminated can be compared with metaphysics.

When the late Wittgenstein uses the word “metaphysics” without referring to his early work and with no explicit negative connotation, he usually refers to one of two things. In these contexts, the word “metaphysics” refers either to some features of ordinary language or to the study of these features. The second case refers more directly to what we would call traditional philosophy, whereas the first does not seem to refer to any kind of technical inquiry. It is the second of these cases that is the center of our interest but, because the two meanings are deeply interconnected, it is important to introduce the first if we are to understand the second.

The first non-pejorative use of the word metaphysics refers to the origins of philosophical problems. This use can be compared to a description of magic given in Wittgenstein’s reply to Frazer’s description of Malays beliefs. Wittgenstein responds to what he thinks is a biased explanation and evokes the resemblance between metaphysics and magic:

How much more truth there is in this view, which ascribes the same multiplicity to the soul as to the body, than in a modern watered-down theory²⁹.

Frazer doesn’t notice that we have before us the teaching of Plato and Schopenhauer. (RFGB, p.141)

Wittgenstein connects the belief in souls to some of the key concepts explored by traditional philosophers. The comparison in itself confirms that the analogy between metaphysics and magic is a persistent theme throughout the *Remarks on Frazer*. This text also shows that the concept of metaphysics presented in the *Analogy* can refer, not only Wittgenstein’s past work, but also to a more traditional kind of metaphysicians (i.e. Plato and Schopenhauer). More importantly, the context of the quote confirms that the word “metaphysics” (and its comparison with magic) does

²⁹ Wittgenstein is responding to the following statement by Frazer “The Malays conceive the human soul as a little man [...] who corresponds [...] to the man in whose body he resides [...]”

not necessarily have a pejorative connotation. The comparison of primitive beliefs with metaphysics implies that traditional philosophy is legitimate, at least to the extent that it is comparable to primitive beliefs, because Wittgenstein's aim in the *Remarks* is to describe the primitives' beliefs in a more neutral way than Frazer. This passage is useful but here, again, the exact point of the comparison between magic and metaphysics is not clearly stated. At this stage of our argument, we might wonder why metaphysics, as understood in the second sense, is different from the kind of metaphysics associated with the *Tractatus* and why Wittgenstein would use it as a way to defend magic. In order to answer these questions we need to further examine Wittgenstein's analysis of magic.

Later in the *Remarks on Frazer*, Wittgenstein draws a distinction that should help uncover the basis of the comparison between magic and Plato's or Schopenhauer's works. The distinction is not explicit in the first of the following texts but the first excerpt can be clarified by juxtaposing it to the second:

If the adoption of a child proceeds in such a way that the mother draws it from under her clothes, it is surely insane to believe that an error is present and that she believes she has given birth to a child.

Operations which depend on a false, overly simple idea of things and processes are to be distinguished from magical operations. For example one says that the illness is moving from one part of the body to another, or takes precautions to divert the illness as it were a liquid or a condition of warmth. One is then creating a false picture for oneself, which in this case, means a groundless one. (*RFGB*, p.125)

In order to respond to Frazer's attacks against magic, Wittgenstein distinguishes between the simple practices of magical rites and what might be described as the interpretation of these rites as pseudoscience. Wittgenstein's goal is not to negate the existence of pseudoscience in primitive

or modern society but to differentiate it from magic. What separates genuine magical rites and pseudoscience (or science and magic in general) is the fact that rites are not based on theories:³⁰

Just as there are ‘infantile theories of sex’, so there are infantile theories in general. But that doesn’t mean that everything a child does has arisen *out of* an infantile theory as its basis. (*RFGB*, p.153).

The distinction between the non-theoretical understanding of magic and the theoretical interpretation of magic is similar to a distinction drawn by Wittgenstein regarding metaphysics. In a paragraph of the *Big Typescript* dedicated to the analysis of the concept “philosophy,” Wittgenstein evokes the kinship of modern philosophical terminology and magical or religious ideas in an effort to reconstruct the origin of philosophical perplexities:

And when I read Frazer, I would like to say again and again: All these processes, these changes of meaning, we have right in front of us even in our language of words. [...]

The scapegoat, on which one lays one’s sins, and who runs away into the desert with them—a false picture, similar to those that cause errors in philosophy. (*BT* §93)

Here, again, the comparison with magic (or mythology in this case) is transparent.³¹ This time it is employed to make two different points. Wittgenstein first underlines the similarities between beliefs that Frazer considers alien or primitive and some common concepts in Western languages:

I would like to say: nothing shows our kinship with those savages better, than that Frazer has at hand a word like “ghost” or “shade”, which is so familiar to him and to us, to describe the views of these people. [...](*BT* §93)

³⁰ Brian R. Clack, “Wittgenstein and Expressive Theories of Religion,” *International Journal of Religion* 40, no. 1 (1996): 59.

³¹ Let it be noted that the relevance of the *Analogy* for the question of the nature of philosophy is confirmed by the fact that Wittgenstein draws from his notes on Frazer in later reflections on the nature of philosophy.

This is in line with the objection against Frazer previously mentioned, but the core of Wittgenstein's argument is not the nature of magic but the origins of philosophical problems. Wittgenstein explains that the problems of philosophy are rooted in pictures already present in ordinary language:

An entire mythology is laid down in our language. [...]

So long as one imagines the soul as a thing, a body, which is in our head, this hypothesis is not dangerous. The danger of our models does not lie in their imperfection and roughness but in their unclarity (fogginess). (*BT* §93)

However, Wittgenstein insists that it is not the pictures themselves that are faulty. As in the case of magic, it is the interpretation of these pictures as theories that creates the problems:

The danger sets in when we notice that the old model is not sufficient but then we don't change it, but only sublimate it, as it were. So long as I say the thought is in my head, everything is all right; things get dangerous when we say that the thought is not in my head, but in my spirit. (*BT* §93)

In the final sentence of the final paragraph of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein stresses the distinction between the use of metaphors and the problems they sometimes create:

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

In this remark, Wittgenstein distinguishes the puzzling pictures often used in ordinary language from the development of theories about these pictures. The remark follows a discussion on the nature of mental processes and is intended to show that, even though they seem incredibly complex, some philosophical problems have their source in perfectly common analogies. Wittgenstein explains that, rather like the idea of a soul, the picture of a mind or the vocabulary regarding mental entities is not problematic in itself. The problem is, rather, to think we should reform or eliminate the concept because of the simile-problems this picture might create. This is

coherent with the way Wittgenstein sometimes refers to the source of philosophical problems as “traps of language” (BT§90). In themselves, these traps are irremovable and are the same for everyone (BT§ 90). They should thus be impervious to ridicule and impossible to eliminate. The problem comes from the tendency to read a theory in what is actually a simple simile. This use of the word “metaphysics” can help understand why Wittgenstein’s metaphysics should not be ridiculed and could not be eliminated. If we take the word “metaphysical” as referring to these irremovable dead ends in ordinary language, then the first sentence of the *Analogy* is less perplexing. On that interpretation the prohibition to make fun of “magic” or “metaphysics” would not necessarily apply to the philosophical discipline but only to the linguistic fact at the source of philosophical problems. This interpretation clarifies an aspect of the *Analogy* but my goal here was not only to give a plausible interpretation of the *Analogy*. I was set to question whether or not the *Analogy* could tell something about Wittgenstein’s view of the history of philosophy. This interpretation does not clarify this question.

4.3. *The Analogy and traditional philosophy*

The word “metaphysics” could take at least one non-pejorative meaning, but this meaning does not directly refer to what we would call traditional philosophy. “Metaphysics,” in that non-pejorative sense, is only the name for some peculiar features of natural languages. What I mean when I say that Wittgenstein’s relation to metaphysics has changed is not simply that his use of the word is less derogatory regardless of what he called “metaphysics.” I wanted to show that his relation towards the history of philosophy was generally incompatible with a strict opposition between his work and tradition. This is the second goal of this chapter. In order to accomplish it we need to give an interpretation of the comparison between magic and

metaphysics that will be relevant for our study of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy.

We saw that Wittgenstein compared the works of Plato, Schopenhauer and Augustine to magic in the *Remarks on Frazer*. These remarks confirmed that the *Analogy* could be understood as a direct comparison between some parts of the history of philosophy and magic. It would be tempting to look at these remarks to construct an interpretation of the *Analogy* that would suite our needs. The interpretation of the *Analogy* that will help to elucidate Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy does not rest on such direct comparisons. The interpretation that will show the relevance of the *Analogy* for the study of Wittgenstein's relation to the history of philosophy rests on a comparison between the study of metaphysics and Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer. Wittgenstein suggests that the most important aspect of his *Remarks on Frazer* is not to be found in the view of magic he constructs but in his assessment of Frazer's mistakes:

One must start out with error and convert it into truth. That is, one must reveal the source of error, otherwise hearing the truth won't do any good. (*RFGB*, p.119)

If this opening paragraph applies to the remarks that follow, then the main point of the *Remarks on Frazer* is not to construct a positive theory of magic but, rather, to attack Frazer's position on the subject. If this is true, one should read the *Analogy* keeping in mind that the main point of the comparison between metaphysics and magic is not to highlight some shared characteristics of the two activities. If the point of the *Analogy* is not a direct comparison between magic and metaphysics, then it must be about Frazer's analysis of the phenomenon.

The key to understand the relevance of the *Analogy* for our study of Wittgenstein's relation to tradition comes from a comment Wittgenstein made in the *Remarks on the*

Foundations of Mathematics. In this comment, Wittgenstein suggests that the challenges of philosophy and of ethology are comparable:

What I have to do is something like describing the office of a king;--in doing which I must never fall into the error of explaining the kingly dignity by the king's usefulness, but I must leave neither his usefulness nor his dignity out of account. (*RFM* VII § 3)

This quotation suggests that we could understand the *Analogy* as comparing the challenges Frazer faced in his analysis of magic with the problems facing the philosopher when he studies metaphysics. In that sense, the *Analogy* would not be a comparison of magic and metaphysics but the comparison between the anthropologist and the philosopher. On that reading the object of the *Analogy* would not be metaphysics itself but the philosopher's study of metaphysics. We already saw that Wittgenstein did not see metaphilosophical question as special kinds of philosophical problems (*PI*, § 121). Since, according to the text quoted above, philosophical problems are comparable to the task of describing the office of a king it seems legitimate to say that the philosophical study of metaphysics and philosophy would also be comparable to this kind of anthropological inquiry. This interpretation would lead us to read the *Analogy* as a comparison between challenges implied by the anthropologist's study of magic and the philosopher's study of the history of philosophy.

The challenges Wittgenstein highlights in his criticisms of Frazer seem to be comparable to some of the problems he might have faced in his treatment of past philosophers. Wittgenstein mainly raises two kinds of objections regarding Frazer's analysis of magic. Both aspects of Wittgenstein's critique are mentioned as possible faults for the philosopher in his inquiry in the text of the *Remarks on Foundations of Mathematics* quoted above. Wittgenstein's first objection is that Frazer assumes that primitives' beliefs are errors. This would correspond to the idea that it

is possible to overlook the dignity of the King (or the depth of magic) in the description of his office. The second objection is against Frazer's tendency to explain these errors by formulating hypotheses about their origins. This objection would correspond to the error one might make in trying to explain the dignity of the king as a result of his usefulness.

These criticisms seem, at least in principle, applicable to the philosopher's treatment of past philosophers. The first lesson that can be drawn would be that the philosopher should not simply regard expressions of metaphysical bafflements in traditional philosophy as errors. That is to say that the philosopher should not see them as the result of stupidity or as something that can be definitively overcome. Just as the anthropologist should not be satisfied with the idea that the people he is studying are stupid, the philosopher cannot attribute the difference with his predecessors to their foolishness. The philosopher's responsibility would be to account for the difficulty his predecessors faced in a way that does not put him in the position to assume that they were fundamentally different in intelligence to herself or himself:

One keeps hearing the remark that philosophers really make no progress, that the same philosophical problems that had occupied Greeks are still occupying us. But those who say that don't understand the reason it must be so. [...] I read '...philosophers are no nearer the meaning of 'reality than Plato got...' What a strange state of affairs. How strange in that case that Plato could get that far at all! Or, that we were not able to get farther! Was it because Plato was so smart? (*BT* §90)

Wittgenstein's last question is rhetorical. The problem he poses in this text springs from his refusal to attribute the longevity of philosophical problems to the stupidity of philosophers that followed Plato. This means that Wittgenstein refuses to attribute the state of philosophical

development to the stupidity of philosophers. This alone suggests that Wittgenstein applied the first methodological lesson drawn from the study of magic to the study of past philosophers.

The second methodological lesson drawn from the criticism of Frazer was that magic and rituals should not be explained by hypothesis about their origins. Applied to the study of metaphysics, this would mean that, when a philosopher confronts a particularly persistent philosophical problem, he cannot diminish its importance by referring to something like its verbal origin:

The reason is that our language has remained the same and seduces us into asking the same questions over and over. [...] Language contains the same traps for everyone; the immense network of well-kept (passable) false paths. And thus we see one person after another walking the same path [...] (BT §90)

Wittgenstein accounts for the philosophers' difficulties without positing their stupidity, but he also avoids explaining their origins in a way that would diminish their depth. The philosopher must, as it is the case with the description of the office of a king, describe the philosophical perplexities without taking away their depth. Wittgenstein explains the lack of progress in philosophy by the fact that philosophical problems are rooted in the proprieties of natural languages. The way Wittgenstein treats the Greeks in that text is radically different from what we would expect in Carnap's interpretation of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein uses the verbal nature of philosophical problems as a way to account for their persistence rather than as a reason to distance himself from those that were baffled by them. Wittgenstein even insists that the traps the philosophers are stuck in are the same for everyone. This is a major break from what we saw in the carnapien interpretation of the *Tractatus*. In Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus*, philosophical problems had their source in a faulty use of language by the philosophers themselves and could

be eliminated by simple clarifications. According to that understanding of the origin of philosophical problems, tradition was not only misguided and inept in the way it responded to problems but also it was responsible for their very existence. The explanation for the origin of the philosophical problems suggested by the last two uses of the word “metaphysics” is radically different from the view found in the *Tractatus*.

4.4 Conclusions

In this chapter my goals were to confirm that the way Wittgenstein uses the word “metaphysics” in the *Analogy* is concordant with the way he uses it in his later works, as well as to defend value of the *Analogy* as a key for the understanding of Wittgenstein’s later views on the history of philosophy. I started to build an argument leading to the first goal at the beginning of chapter two. Because I have successfully explained the meaning of the *Analogy* by referring to his later work, we can now confirm that the *Analogy* is generally concordant with Wittgenstein’s general outlook on the nature of philosophy after 1930. The same could be said about the use of the word “metaphysics” in the *Analogy* because I was able to find parallels in later text for the three ways one could understand of the word “metaphysics” in the *Analogy*.

In order to accomplish the second goal I, have sketched an interpretation of the *Analogy* that made it relevant for our study of Wittgenstein’s view of the history of philosophy. According to this reading, the *Analogy* highlights not only a similarity between magic and metaphysics but also between the study of metaphysics and the study of magic. It is on that interpretation of the *Analogy* that the word “metaphysics” can be understood as referring to the academic discipline we call philosophy. This reading confirms that part of the purpose of the

Remarks on Frazer was to reveal the methodological challenges related to the philosophical study of the history of philosophy. The texts cited also suggest that the application of the lessons drawn from the criticism of Frazer to the study of past philosophers would push Wittgenstein to a less antagonist relation with tradition. If philosophical difficulties are imbedded in natural languages, the philosopher is absolved from the responsibility of having created them and his incapacity to solve them in any definitive fashion is explained. This view of the origin and nature of philosophical difficulties suggest a more tempered relation to traditional philosophy. This would support my main contention, but I still need to confirm that Wittgenstein applied these methodological lessons in his treatment of past philosophers. To confirm this interpretation, we will need to give examples of Wittgenstein actually defending the philosophical tradition against unjust attacks and draw parallels between these defenses and the one he offers for magic against Frazer. This is the object of the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Wittgenstein on Heidegger

We demonstrated that Wittgenstein did not always use the word “metaphysics” as a pejorative. However, the goal was not to understand Wittgenstein’s relation to the word “metaphysics” but, rather, to understand his relation to the history of philosophy. We already made some progress towards that goal, but only indirectly. We uncovered three meanings of the concept of “metaphysics” in Wittgenstein’s later work. We saw that no use of the word “metaphysics” implied that the word could be used as a way to divide between good and bad philosophy or between traditional and Wittgensteinian philosophy. Although neither of the two first uses of the word “metaphysics” were directly applicable to our assessment of Wittgenstein’s relation to tradition, it was necessary to study them. These two uses set the proper background for the understanding of the third use, and they help to support, if only partially, our main contention.

In this chapter I pursue two different goals. The first is to substantiate the claim that Wittgenstein is reluctant to dismiss or ridicule traditional philosophers. The second is to exemplify how the *Analogy* and the *Remarks on Frazer* can help explain his attitude towards tradition. In the first two sections of this chapter, I will present two discussions Wittgenstein had about Heidegger. Heidegger will serve for the purpose of our study as the representative of the tradition against which Wittgenstein supposedly constructs his method.³² The first text shows, in

³² Obviously I am not using the word “tradition” in a chronological sense. Heidegger was born the same year as Wittgenstein. They are contemporary, but they are not of the same tradition. In our discussion about the *Tractatus* we defined tradition including Wittgenstein’s most direct predecessors and any hypothetical ancient allies. Although the chronological meaning of tradition roughly fitted this definition of tradition, the central criterion was definite enough to be independent of strictly temporal conditions. The same thing is true regarding contemporaneous and future metaphysicians. Even according to Carnap’s interpretation, which puts Wittgenstein in the center of a historical shift in philosophical paradigm, chronology is only partially important. As we will see later on, Carnap puts Heidegger in the same category as all traditional metaphysicians. We can, thus, safely assume that Heidegger was representing the traditional way of doing philosophy that took the pejorative name of “metaphysics” in the *Tractatus*.

general terms, that Wittgenstein did not insist on the opposition between his work and those of Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Augustine. As I said earlier, my argument is not that Wittgenstein is never critical of tradition but, rather, that his program does not imply a radical opposition to tradition. With that in mind, what the first text demonstrates is that Wittgenstein held a more generous attitude towards these traditional philosophers than one would have expected from a thinker who sees his work as a radically different kind of inquiry. The second discussion will help clarify why Wittgenstein held this more generous attitude towards Heidegger.³³ I will compare Wittgenstein's interpretation of Heidegger's sentence "the nothing noths" with Carnap's critic of the same quotation. I refer to Carnap to highlight what kind of position we should expect if Wittgenstein saw his work in opposition to tradition. I will argue that we can account for the difference between Carnap's and Wittgenstein's analysis of Heidegger by referring to Wittgenstein's critic of Frazer.

5.1 Wittgenstein on Heidegger, Kierkegaard and Augustin

In a conversation recorded by Waismann in January 1930, Wittgenstein comments on a quotation from Heidegger's *Being and Time*. It is obvious that Wittgenstein had a limited

³³ It is important to note that some interpretations of the same texts lead to nearly opposite results from ours. Notably; Mathieu Marion, "Wittgenstein on Heidegger and Cosmic Emotions," in *Philosophical Papers Dedicated to Kevin Mulligan* (Genève: Université de Genève Faculté des Lettres, 2011) and P. M. S. Hacker, "Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 53(2003):210. In his paper, Marion argues that; "given an appropriate understanding of their contexts, Wittgenstein's comments on Heidegger indicate that he did not perceive himself as embarked, in any possible way, in the same enterprise as Heidegger; they are not on the same side but on opposite sides of the spectrum" (p.3). Marion is responding to Rorty's attempt to unite Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey under the label of pragmatist. Although I am in no way trying to attribute the level of unity Rorty is arguing for some aspects of Marion's critic conflict with my position. Because Marion's position is not representative of the literature on the subject I will only respond to some of his arguments. The arguments in favor of my own interpretation of the texts will serve as a rebuttal to his more general point. I will not respond to Hacker directly because Richter already gave a systematic rebuttal in Duncan Richter, "Did Wittgenstein Disagree With Heidegger?" *Review of Contemporary Philosophy* 6 (2007).

understanding of the book. The discussion is of little interest as a piece of Heideggerian exegesis; however, the conversation gives an insight into Wittgenstein's changing perception of tradition. Some of Wittgenstein's interlocutors probably considered *Being and Time* as an example of metaphysical nonsense. Carnap's article on Heidegger was not yet published but it is reasonable to assume that the members of the Vienna Circle already had a similar view of Heidegger to the one presented by Carnap in his famous paper. Considering this context, Wittgenstein's stance in this conversation is unsettling. He first admits that he:

[...] can imagine what Heidegger means by being and anxiety. (WVC, p.68)

This admission alone is disconcerting. Wittgenstein acknowledges that there is something to understand in Heidegger's words, and he also claims to understand it. He goes on and explains what it is he understands:

Man feels the urge to run up against the limits of language. Think for example of the astonishment that anything at all exists. This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, and there is also no answer whatsoever. Anything we might say is *a priori* bound to be mere nonsense. Nevertheless we do run up against the limits of language. Kierkegaard too saw that there is this running up against something and he referred to it in a fairly similar way (as running up against paradox). (WVC, p.68)

The second sentence of the quotation above may look like a depreciatory characterization of Heidegger's work. The rest of the excerpt, however, reveals that Wittgenstein was not trying to describe Heidegger's work when he talked about the "urge to run up against the limits of language." The expression "running up against the limits of language" does not describe what Heidegger is doing but what Wittgenstein thinks Heidegger is trying to describe. This characterization might fit Heidegger's work, but, in this specific context, Wittgenstein is clearly

not trying to characterize Heidegger's work.³⁴ Wittgenstein is actually trying to describe what Heidegger meant in a specific statement. According to the editors, Wittgenstein is referring to a specific passage of *Being and Time*³⁵ where Heidegger distinguishes between fear and anxiety:

What is the difference phenomenally between that in the face of which anxiety is anxious and that in the face of which fear is afraid? That in the face of which one has anxiety is not an entity within-the-world.³⁶

Heidegger defines anxiety as a relation between the *Dasein* and what is outside his world. When Heidegger defines "anxiety," he is not trying to say something about what is outside this world, but he gives a description of the human relation with what he cannot grasp. In his 1929 lecture, Wittgenstein defines ethics as a will to "go beyond the world" (*LE*, p.44) and as something that sets one "running up against the walls of [his] cage" (*LE*, p.44). Heidegger's description of the nature of anxiety is concordant with Wittgenstein's depiction of the ethical experience:

I believe the best way of describing it is to say that when I have it I wonder at the existence of the world. And I am then inclined to use such phrases as 'how extraordinary that anything should exist' or 'how extraordinary that the world should exist. (*LE*, p.41)

³⁴ Even if Wittgenstein was describing Heidegger the expression 'running up against the limits of language' is not necessarily negative (c.f. Clack, "D.Z. Phillips," 119.)

³⁵ Fredrich Waismann, *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979), ed. note 68. Mathieu Marion argues that Wittgenstein only read 'What is metaphysics?', if he actually read anything from Heidegger. In fact Marion raises doubts about the authorship of the text. He gives some reason for thinking that Waismann tampered with the text, mainly in order to add the references about Heidegger (c.f. Marion, "Wittgenstein on Heidegger and Cosmic Emotions"). Although part of the following argument rest on the assumption that the text is faithful we never assume that Wittgenstein had any deep understanding of Heidegger's work. These doubts are not particularly important for our discussion because we are not concerned with Wittgenstein's relation with Heidegger *per se*. The goal is to investigate Wittgenstein's general view on the history of philosophy. Whether or not Wittgenstein actually spoke about Heidegger or about another philosopher as long as Wittgenstein was not talking about himself we can draw legitimate inferences about his relation to the history of philosophy from this text.

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 227-228.

To be sure, the convergences between Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's points of view are superficial. The point, however, is that Wittgenstein chooses to highlight what he could understand in what Heidegger wrote. Regardless of the many possible points of contention, Wittgenstein tries to understand Heidegger's and Kierkegaard's works rather than dismissing what they say as mere nonsense. In that respect this conversation not only indicates a reluctance to "make fun" of metaphysics but also it shows that Wittgenstein was inclined to find common ground with both a traditional philosopher and contemporary metaphysicians.

Even when he mentions the urge to say "nonsense," Wittgenstein is not as dismissive as one might expect:

I think it is definitely important to put an end to all the claptrap about ethics [...] In ethics we are always making the attempt to say something that cannot be said, something that does not and never will touch the essence of the matter. It is *a priori* certain that whatever definition of the good may be given –it will always be merely a misunderstanding to say that the essential thing, that what is really meant, corresponds to what is expressed (Moore). But the inclination, the running up against something, indicates something. St. Augustine knew that already when he said: What, you swine, you want not to talk nonsense! Go ahead and talk nonsense it does not matter! (WVC, p.68-69)

First, it is worth noting that it is not Heidegger or Kierkegaard that is found guilty of "claptrap" but, rather, G.E. Moore. This fact in itself challenges the idea that Wittgenstein had a particular problem with metaphysicians or traditional philosophers. Even the so called "claptrap" is said to "indicate something." Wittgenstein explains what he means by paraphrasing Saint Augustine. The text he is alluding to comes from the *Confessions*:

Yet, O my God, my life, my holy Joy, what is this that I have said? What can any man say when he speaks of thee? But woe to them that keep silence--since even those who say most are dumb.

(Saint-Augustine, *Confessions*, I, IV)

The word “dumb” translates the Latin “*muti*,” which, like the English word, can refer to a lack of speech and not necessarily of intelligence (other translations put the less ambiguous “mute” rather than “dumb”). After discussing the many paradoxes that seem to make a discourse about God impossible, Augustine refuses to give any superiority to the agnostic’s respectful silence. The text undermines the idea that silence is superior to metaphysical claptrap. Augustine’s advice is to “go ahead and talk nonsense” rather than the advice that “one must be silent” found in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s use of Augustine’s quotation can be read as a reminder of the respect expressed at the end of the *Lecture on Ethics* because men’s tendency for “running up against the limits of language” (*LE*, p.44) applies not only to ethics but also to metaphysics in general.

5.2 Wittgenstein and Carnap on the phrase “the nothing noths”

This short piece about Heidegger seems to confirm what we said about Wittgenstein’s relation to the history of philosophy thus far. Wittgenstein is not positioning himself in a direct opposition to Heidegger or Kierkegaard. He even affirms that he can understand what they tried to say. This position seems to support the idea that Wittgenstein did not construct his philosophical method in direct opposition to traditional philosophy. With the length of this discussion being limited, it is difficult to understand why Wittgenstein adopted this position. Fortunately, Wittgenstein expresses similar ideas in a much lengthier discussion. We will now turn to this text and try to understand the nuances of Wittgenstein’s

position by comparing it to a similar text by Rudolf Carnap. In order to understand the reasons behind their diverging points of view, I will be using the *Remarks on Frazer* as a key for interpretation.

The comparison with Carnap is convenient because the lengthier discussion about Heidegger is focused on the statement “the nothing noths.” This phrase was the object of a famous essay by Carnap. As we saw earlier, Carnap’s understanding of the nature of metaphysics was influenced by his interpretation of the *Tractatus*. We have already used the *Tractatus* to illustrate the kind of opposition to tradition I deny exists in Wittgenstein’s later work. By comparing Carnap’s reading of Heidegger with Wittgenstein’s discussion on the same text, it will be possible to see why Wittgenstein does not establish a strict distinction between his line of work and Heidegger’s, as Carnap does. Carnap’s reading can serve as an illustration of the kind of criticism of metaphysics to which the later Wittgenstein no longer adheres. In order to highlight the divergence between Wittgenstein’s and Carnap’s analysis of Heidegger, I will read Wittgenstein’s analysis of “the nothing noths” as if it were a critique of Carnap’s comments on the same sentence. My exposition of the contrast between Wittgenstein’s and Carnap’s account of Heidegger’s sentence will reveal how Wittgenstein’s criticism of Frazer can be applied to the study of metaphysics. The discussion about Heidegger will also help highlight the importance of the *Analogy* for the understanding of Wittgenstein’s relation to the history of philosophy. I will argue that what Wittgenstein said in the *Analogy* and in his criticism of Frazer’s conception of magic can be applied to Carnap’s criticism of metaphysics.

5.2.1 Therapeutic approaches

The difference between Carnap's and Wittgenstein's views of Heidegger is transparent in the very first lines of the discussion recorded by Waismann:

If we want to deal with a proposition such as 'The nothing noths' or with the question 'Which is prior, the nothing or negation', then to *do it justice we ask ourselves*: What did the author have in mind with this proposition? Where did he get this proposition from? (VW, p.69)

Wittgenstein explicitly states that his goal is to give justice to Heidegger's statement. Carnap, on the other hand, claims to have achieved the very opposite. He claims to have demonstrated that not only Heidegger's, but all metaphysical statements are meaningless;

In the domain of *metaphysics*, including all philosophy of value and normative theory, logical analysis yields the negative result *that the alleged statements in this domain are entirely meaningless*³⁷.

Wittgenstein's first preoccupation is to be fair. He seems to assume, unlike Carnap, that Heidegger had something in mind when he wrote "the nothing noths." This attitude is concordant with what we read in the previous discussion about Heidegger.

It is also possible to draw a parallel with the general tone Wittgenstein takes when responding to Frazer. When analyzing the savages' beliefs, Wittgenstein attributes their oddity to a difference in vocabulary. He tends to underline what they share with the Western world rather than what makes them alien. The difference with Frazer is similar to the one with Carnap. Wittgenstein wants to give justice to what Heidegger is saying and Carnap's goal is to show that any attempt at understanding it is hopeless.

³⁷ Carnap, "Elimination of Metaphysics," 11.

The difference between Wittgenstein's and Carnap's expectations regarding the value of Heidegger's work could simply be attributable to a difference in style. The dissimilarity between Wittgenstein's and Carnap's tones could be explained by their more or less generous characters. Referring to this kind of psychological explanation is not satisfactory. For one thing, such generosity is incompatible with what we know of Wittgenstein's character. More importantly, attributing this divergence to psychological dispositions suggests that Wittgenstein is an incompetent philosopher, unable to support his claims rigorously. It might be the case, but this is not a justifiable assumption. There is much to gain by being generous and searching for a sufficient philosophical justification. Wittgenstein gives a hint about the nature of his philosophical motivation later on in the discussion:

Our method resembles psychoanalysis in a certain sense. To use its way of putting things, we could say that a simile at work in the unconscious is made harmless by being articulated. And this comparison with analysis can be developed even further. (And this analogy is certainly no coincidence.) (VW, p.69)

Some have argued that this analogy with psychoanalysis is an indication of Wittgenstein's contempt for Heidegger because it implies that Heidegger suffered from a mental impairment;³⁸ however, the emphasis of the comparison seems to be on the nature of Wittgenstein's method, rather than on the state of Heidegger's mental health. The comparison with psychoanalysis echoes one of the definitions of philosophy Wittgenstein gave in the *Investigations*:

The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to. -The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question. - Instead, a method is now demonstrated by examples, and the series of examples can be

³⁸ Marion, "Wittgenstein on Heidegger and Cosmic Emotions," 4

broken off. — Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a single problem. There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies. (P.I. §133)

In the *Investigations*, the comparison of philosophy with therapies is a way to highlight the diversity of philosophical methods. In the context of the discussion about Heidegger, this aspect of the comparison is not crucial. If the comparison is not used to highlight the variety of philosophical methods, then it might suggest that the dissolution of philosophical problems must work on an individual level. That is to say, philosophical elucidations, like therapies, need to be worked out on individuals. The exact meaning of the comparison is not crucial. The significant fact is that the comparison with psychoanalysis implies that Heidegger's sentence has some level of meaning. If Wittgenstein's analysis relies on an interpretation in the psychoanalytical sense, then the sentence "the nothing noths" must have a meaning. It might be that the reader expects a deeper meaning than what Wittgenstein exposes, but the sentence must convey something that can be interpreted. There is no need to assess the validity of Wittgenstein's interpretation. What is important is simply that he accepted that the sentence can be interpreted. This is not something Carnap is ready to concede before he assesses whether or not the sentence really means something.

5.2.2 *Diagnosis*

Contrary to Carnap, Wittgenstein does not even consider the possibility that Heidegger's sentence was pure nonsense. This cannot be an oversight on Wittgenstein's part because he extensively used the strategy Carnap adopts in the *Elimination* in the *Tractatus*. By assuming that Heidegger's sentence has a meaning, Wittgenstein implicitly rejects Carnap's strategy. How

are we to explain this rejection? Part of the response is Wittgenstein is not ready to admit that Heidegger (or anyone) could have been misled in saying something completely nonsensical without realizing it. Carnap tries to account for that implausible idea by explaining how some sentences can give an illusion of meaning. Carnap's notion of an illusion of meaning, however, is incompatible with Wittgenstein's understanding of meaning. Explaining the difference between Carnap and Wittgenstein on this point will help show that Wittgenstein's generous attitude towards Heidegger is more than just a whim.

Carnap does not deny that Heidegger was under the impression that the sentence "the nothing noths" has a meaning, but he postulates that it was only an illusion and that he was, in fact, uttering nonsense. In §4 of *The Elimination of Metaphysics*, Carnap introduces the distinction that accounts for the illusion of meaning. Carnap distinguishes between syntactically incorrect sentences such as "Cesar is and" and pseudo-statements which are syntactically correct, such as "Cesar is a prime number." Both statements are meaningless, but the second can sometimes pass unnoticed because its syntax is sound. Carnap puts the sentence "the noting noths" in the second category, implying it only has the appearance of meaning. This distinction explains how Heidegger and Heideggerians were able to fool themselves to the point of understanding a sentence that has no meaning.

This explanation is not available to Wittgenstein because he defines meaning as use, with the belief that view there is only one kind of meaningful statement—ones that have a use. There is no reason to reject the categories of meaningless statements, but the only reason statements can be said to be meaningless is that they are not used. For Wittgenstein either a statement is obviously meaningless or it is not:

When a sentence is called senseless, it is not, as it were, its sense that is senseless. Rather, a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation. (*P.I.* §500)

Wittgenstein's comment can be read as a critique of Carnap's concept of pseudo-statement. It is important to distinguish between Carnap's project to eliminate some combinations of words from Wittgenstein's description of a "combination of words" as being "excluded from the language" or "withdrawn from circulation." The second sentence's phrasing is ambiguous and could suggest that Wittgenstein is recommending the exclusion of some combination of words from language, but the first sentence implies that examining a combination of word cannot be a sufficient ground to demonstrate that this combination of words lacks meaning or that it should be withdrawn from circulation. Carnap might suggest we withdraw a combination of words from circulation because it can be shown to lack meaning. Wittgenstein on the other hand points out the difficulty of demonstrating that a sentence is meaningless apart from pointing to the fact that it is out of circulation. As we will see, Carnap accepts that the sentence "the nothing noths" has content without having meaning. This notion of the content, as opposed to meaning, is how Carnap accounts for the implausible idea that Heidegger was unknowingly formulating meaningless statements. This notion of pseudo-meaning corresponds to what Wittgenstein calls "the sense that is senseless" in § 500. Rather than distinguishing between content and meaning Wittgenstein's distinguishes between sentences that are in circulation and sentences that are not. Because the meaning of a sentence can rest on its use, the syntax or grammar of the phrase is completely irrelevant in the assessment of its meaning. Nothing in principle would prevent a grammatically incorrect sentence to gain an ordinary use. For example the sentence "Cesar is and" could come to be used as a synonym for the phrase "nonsensical statement" and, thereby, gain meaning. Whether or not such an event is likely is irrelevant. What is important is that the

grammatically unsound sentence “Cesar is and” is as likely to gain this meaning as the grammatically sound “Cesar is a prime number.” On that view, the idea of apparent meaning makes no sense. There is no significant distinction between the sentence “Cesar is and” and “Cesar is a prime number” because neither has a common use. If the sentence “the nothing noths” is excluded from circulation it is strictly equivalent to the sentence “Cesar is and,” even if it seems more grammatically sound. Conversely, if a sentence is in circulation, even in the relatively limited circles of Heideggerian scholars, that sentence must have a meaning. It is not only that the idea that Heidegger and all the Heideggerians have been randomly uttering meaningless sentences is implausible, Wittgenstein’s conception of meaning compels him to accept that a sentence like “the nothing noths” has a meaning simply because it is in use.

If Wittgenstein tries to understand Heidegger, it is not to avoid being rude to Heideggerians. It is because he has no other choice. The first point of divergence between Wittgenstein’s and Carnap’s comments about Heidegger is rooted in a philosophical disagreement. This is important because I want to argue that Wittgenstein had philosophical reasons to reduce the distinction between his work and the work of traditional philosophers. The notion of pseudo-meaning was also central to the tractarian definition of metaphysics. Thus, this brief discussion relates to the core issue of this essay. By contrasting Wittgenstein’s and Carnap’s initial responses to Heidegger, we have established that Wittgenstein’s rejection of the notion of pseudo-meaning was one of the factors at the root of the fading distinction between his work and those of past philosophers. Wittgenstein’s disagreement with Carnap goes deeper and has further implications regarding his relation to tradition.

5.2.3 Etiologies

Carnap and Wittgenstein disagreed on the eligibility of “the nothing noths” as a meaningful sentence. Surprisingly, except for the general tone and style, Carnap’s and Wittgenstein’s analyses of the sentence are not as different as one could expect. In fact, even their apparently opposite starting points might be reconciled because there is a significant terminological incongruity between the two authors. Carnap’s concept of meaning is narrow and does not necessarily include all forms of expressions encompassed by Wittgenstein’s use of the same word. What Carnap rejects as nonsense can still have content and can have a “use” in the sense that Wittgenstein would understand the word. In order to see if and how the difference between Carnap and Wittgenstein goes deeper than semantics, it will be useful to look at the actual analyses the two authors propose.

Carnap accepts that the sentence “the nothing noths” has content, even if he insists it has no meaning:

[...] metaphysics does indeed have a content; only it is not theoretical content.³⁹

Carnap can recognize that metaphysics has content without accepting it has meaning⁴⁰ because he defines having a “meaning” as a special case of having content. According to Carnap, a sentence has a meaning only when it has a cognitive content. Carnap explains the difference between cognitive and non-cognitive content as such:

The difference between our thesis and that of the *earlier antimetaphysicians* should now be clear.

We do not regard metaphysics as ‘mere speculation’ or ‘fairy tales.’ The statements of fairy tale

³⁹ Carnap, “Elimination of Metaphysics,” 28.

⁴⁰ The possibility of a sentence having content without what Carnap would strictly call a meaning might confirm the § 500 of the *Investigations* is, as suggested in the previous subsection, applicable to Carnap’s analysis.

do not conflict with logic, but only with experience; they are perfectly meaningful, although false. Metaphysic is not '*superstition*'; it is possible to believe true and false propositions, but not to believe meaningless sequences of words. Metaphysical statements are not acceptable as '*working hypotheses*'; for a hypothesis must be capable of entering into relations of deducibility with (true or false) empirical statements, which is just what pseudo-statements cannot do.⁴¹

Carnap's definition of meaning rests upon a sentence's potential to relate with empirical statements. Heidegger's sentence is, therefore, said to be meaningless, because it bears no such relations with the rest of language. For Carnap, Heidegger's sentence really has content but that content does not enter in a relation of deducibility with other propositions. Wittgenstein also describes the special character of Heidegger's sentence, referring to the fact that it does not enter in a relation of deducibility with other propositions:

If someone says 'The nothing noths', then we can say to this, in the style of our way of considering things: Very well, what are we to do with this proposition? That is to say, what follows from it and from what does it follow? From what experiences can we establish it? Or from none at all? What is its role? Is it a proposition of science? And what position does it occupy in the structure of science? That of a foundation-stone on which other building-blocks rest? Or has it the position of an argument? I am ready to go along with anything, but at least I must know this much. I have nothing against your attaching an idle wheel to the mechanism of our language, but I do want to know whether it is idling or with what other wheels it is engaged. (VW, p.73)

For Carnap, the alternative to theoretical content is expressive content. Metaphysical statements are expressive in nature. This account is also very close to Wittgenstein's description:

I would like to make use of the following simile to make clear the significance of this enquiry: anyone who is accustomed to eating less than his fill is most familiar with hunger among all the

⁴¹ Carnap, "Elimination of Metaphysics," 22.

discomforts of the stomach, and his immediate reaction to any discomfort of the stomach is to want to eat, even if this discomfort arises quite exceptionally from his having already eaten too much. Thus we are accustomed to calm our mental disquiets by tracing certain propositions back to more fundamental ones. But if our disquiet arises from some unclarity about grammatical relations in some domain of language, we will then, on the one hand, be tempted by force of habit to apply here the useless remedy of tracing things back to more fundamental propositions, and, on the other, we feel sure that we have no use for a foundation in the down-to-earth sense of the term. We would like to begin philosophy with something which should be the foundation of everything to follow, of all the sciences, and yet at the same time it is not supposed to be a ‘foundation’ simply in the sense of the bottom course of bricks in a house. Here we are confusing two things in the way that can happen if we describe the foundation of a building sometimes as the bottom course of bricks and sometimes as solidity. This dilemma gives rise to the need to begin philosophy with, so to speak, an inarticulate sound. And a proposition such as ‘The nothing noths’ is in a certain sense a substitute for this sort of inarticulate sound. The proposition ‘I have knowingly known something about my knowledge’ is also such an inarticulate sound. (VW, p.75)

Wittgenstein’s description of Heidegger’s sentence as an “inarticulate sound” is concordant with Carnap’s interpretation of metaphysics as some kind of esthetic expression. The implication of the analogy with a stomach discomfort is that the content of the sentence is more akin to the expression of a feeling than to a testable statement. Looking at Carnap’s and Wittgenstein’s analysis of Heidegger’s sentence, it is difficult to understand why they eventually reach such opposite conclusions.⁴² Both accept that Heidegger’s sentence has no theoretical content. Both also describe its actual content as being expressive in nature. The only difference is that for

⁴² As we said, some commentator argued that there is no significant difference between Carnap and Wittgenstein’s view of Heidegger. As Hacker put’s it; “The difference between Carnap and Wittgenstein on this issue lies largely in the bedside manner” (Hacker, “Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians”18). We do concede that some differences between Carnap and Wittgenstein appear larger than they actually are. Our reading will, however, lead us to a position closer to Richter’s and Conant’s response to Hacker’s reading (Richter, “Did Wittgenstein Disagree.”); James Conant, “Two Conceptions of Die Überwindung der Metaphysik: Carnap and Early Wittgenstein,” in *Wittgenstein in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Wittgenstein, the concept of meaning includes non-theoretical content.⁴³ One could be tempted to attribute their divergence to the terminological difference mentioned above. This disagreement could easily be eliminated by correlating Wittgenstein's concept of "meaning" to Carnap's concept of "content," which would include what he calls non-cognitive content. This, however, does not suffice to completely bridge the gap between Wittgenstein's and Carnap's analysis of Heidegger's sentence. The fundamental difference remains that Wittgenstein does not think, as Carnap does, that the kind of thing Heidegger does needs to be eliminated.

5.2.4 Prognosis

The real divergence between Carnap and Wittgenstein is in what they think should be done with propositions, such as "the nothing noths". Regardless of the way Carnap names sentences that cannot work as hypotheses he surely thinks that such sentences should be taken out of circulation. Even if he clearly admits the peculiar nature of Heidegger's sentence, Wittgenstein does not deny that it has its place in philosophy.

Carnap thinks that non-theoretical propositions have no place in philosophy. This is something obviously suggested by the title "*The Elimination of Metaphysics*." It is confirmed throughout the text by Carnap's general tone and by some explicit statements. In the article, Carnap presents himself as an "opponent of metaphysics"⁴⁴ and then provides a derogatory

⁴³ As we saw in the discussion about the notion of pseudo-meaning, Wittgenstein had reasons to reject a strict distinction between expressive and cognitive statements. The blurring of this distinction also seems to play an important role in Wittgenstein's treatment of magic (c.f. Clack, "Wittgenstein and Expressive Theories of Religion," 54).

⁴⁴ Carnap, "Elimination of Metaphysics," 10.

description of metaphysics as an “inadequate”⁴⁵ substitute for music. In fact, for Carnap metaphysics fails equally as a form of expression and as a theoretical endeavor:

Metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability. Instead they have a strong inclination to work within the medium of the theoretical, to connect concepts and thoughts. Now, instead of activating, on the other hand, the need for expression in art, the metaphysician confuses the two and produces a structure which achieves nothing for knowledge and something inadequate for the expression of attitude.⁴⁶

The inescapable conclusion is that metaphysics is superfluous. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, accepts that Heidegger’s sentence has no cognitive content and that it raises confusion but he seems to accept its importance. He describes Heidegger’s statement as a mere ornament but does not call for the elimination of ornamental propositions. On the contrary he insists that:

Calling attention to boundedness is something desirable. We finish off posts of all kinds with knobs even where this is not demanded by functional considerations. A post must not simply stop. At other times there is a need not to emphasize, but rather artificially to conceal boundedness. An object must fade into its surroundings. In this style the edge of a tablecloth was given lace borders, which were originally nothing more than scallops cut into the cloth, for we did not want it to be sharply bounded. But at other times we give a border its own color in order to call attention to it. And that is just how it is with this argument: it is a desideratum, e.g., to trace back to a creator the coming into being of the universe even though this in a certain sense explains nothing and merely calls attention to the beginning. (This last reflection is of the type of those made by the architect Loos and is certainly influenced by him.) (VW, p.77)

Wittgenstein even suggests that non-theoretical propositions are a part of the definition of philosophy:

⁴⁵ Carnap, “Elimination of Metaphysics,” 30.

⁴⁶ Carnap, “Elimination of Metaphysics,” 30.

(A simile is part of our edifice; but we cannot draw any conclusions from it either; it doesn't lead us beyond itself, but must remain standing as a simile. We can draw no inferences from it. As when we compare a sentence to a picture (in which case, what we understand by 'picture' must already have been established in us earlier //before//) or when I compare the application of language with, for instance, that of the calculus of multiplication. Philosophy simply puts everything before us and neither explains nor deduces anything.) (*BT* § 89)

Heidegger's sentence fits the characterization of simile given above. According to this remark, the fact that "the nothing noths" is a sentence from which we can draw no inference does not put it outside the realm of philosophy. The ornamental quality of Heidegger's proposition, rather, seems to confirm the philosophical nature of Heideggerian inquiry. As to the question of the value of metaphysics as a philosophical discipline, what we saw in the previous chapter suggests that Wittgenstein abandoned the concept of metaphysics Carnap uses in his final verdict. The concept of metaphysics put forward by Carnap implied that it was a branch of philosophy and that the use of pseudo-propositions was its defining characteristic. Wittgenstein does not share this point of view because he sees sentences *à la* "the nothing noths" as one of the defining characteristic of philosophy. In fact, Wittgenstein seems to consider that the impulse to include ornamental propositions is something common and valuable even outside philosophy. He finds such uses even in the most respected and rigorous kinds of inquiry:

Here we are thinking of how sometimes a physicist, in a preface to a work on the principles of mechanics, makes a bow to the law of causality, declares that this law is one of the foundations of physics, and thereafter makes no further mention of it in the text. Here we ask: in what sense is this proposition a foundation of physical investigations? Not, at any rate, in the sense of any of those propositions from which conclusions are drawn in such investigations. And, we want to know, are we dealing here with one of the polite formulae of the sort exchanged before discussing business? (*VW*, p.73)

This is another point of disagreement between Carnap and Wittgenstein that could be attributed to a semantic incongruity. This disagreement is easily explained by the fact that Wittgenstein and Carnap do not share the same definition of philosophy. A divergence in their definitions of philosophy is still significant for the core problem of this essay. My goal is to determine if the distinction between Wittgenstein's work and past philosophers is still an important working force in his later work. Wittgenstein's position regarding Heidegger clearly shows that his definition of philosophy does not rest on a strict distinction between Wittgenstein's work and those of philosophers akin to Heidegger. Even if the divergence between Carnap and Wittgenstein is only semantic, Wittgenstein's terminology clearly shows his desire to blur the boundary between his work and the works of past philosophers. This is the point of divergence that is relevant for the study of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views. The fact that this divergence is manifested in a terminological incongruity does not mean it is trivial or arbitrary. Wittgenstein's choice of terminology can be explained by referring to his critique of Frazer.

5.3 Heidegger and magic

Wittgenstein thinks Frazer misunderstands his task as an anthropologist and tries to correct some of his assumptions about the way one should conduct the study of human behaviors. The lessons drawn from this critique of Frazer can help clarify why Wittgenstein seems reluctant to distance himself from Heidegger. I will try to make the links between the lessons drawn from the comments on Frazer and Wittgenstein's reading of Heidegger.

Wittgenstein's first objection against Frazer is that he makes the people who practice magic look stupid. Frazer thinks that magical beliefs and rituals are the consequences of

erroneous ideas regarding the natural world. According to Wittgenstein, Frazer fails to understand that magic is not a theoretical endeavor. Wittgenstein thinks it is a mistake to think that every practice must be motivated by a belief. Frazer assumes that the scientific mindset underlies every human phenomenon (R.F.G.B. p. 125). This leads him to describe magic as if it was nothing more than bad science. According to Wittgenstein, this is an oversimplification of human experience. Wittgenstein's refusal to read Heidegger as a sophisticated form of self-delusion is comparable to this objection against Frazer.

According to Wittgenstein, this oversimplification of human nature shows that Frazer misunderstood his task as an ethnologist. Frazer felt compelled to formulate a hypothesis in order to explain human practices because of the influence of the natural sciences. Wittgenstein's critique can be read as an argument against Frazer's scientism.⁴⁷ For Wittgenstein the language of cause and effect does not apply to the human realm in the same way it does with natural objects:

The difference between a reason and a cause is brought out as follows: the investigation of a reason entails as an essential part one's agreement with it, whereas the investigation of a cause is carried out experimentally. (WLC, p.40)

Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer implies that the study of magic falls into the category of the investigation of reason. The motivation behind the distinction between reason and cause are complex. There is no way to account for them in this context; however, the consequences of this distinction are clear and significant for the problem at hand. Wittgenstein thinks that inquiries about human phenomena must stay purely descriptive:

⁴⁷ James C. Klagge, *Wittgenstein in Exile* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 140.

Here one can only *describe* and say: this is what human life is like (*RFBG*, p121).

Wittgenstein favors a method of descriptions over Frazer's causal explanations of the origin of magic. This is significant for our study of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views because it means that the philosopher, when he studies metaphysics as a historical phenomenon, must limit himself to descriptions.

Many of the divergences between Carnap and Wittgenstein are explained by assuming that Wittgenstein stayed true to this maxim in his assessment of Heidegger's sentence. In a purely descriptive view, there is no place for a reform of language. This position and the absence of the notion of pseudo-meaning explain Wittgenstein's initial reluctance to reject Heidegger's sentence as being meaningless. The obligation for the philosopher to limit himself to description excludes more than just normative discourse. Wittgenstein contrasts descriptions with prescriptions and also with what he calls "explanations." Carnap's view of metaphysics clashes with Wittgenstein's methodology because, in order to support his analysis of metaphysics, Carnap formulates a hypothesis on its origin. Carnap's characterization of metaphysics as pure nonsense needs to be complemented by a credible psychological explanation that would account for how one could be misled in such a way. This is something Carnap recognizes:

Our claim that the statements of metaphysics are entirely meaningless, that they do not assert anything, will leave even those who agree intellectually with our results with a painful feeling of strangeness: how could it be explained that so many men in all ages and nations, among them eminent minds, spent so much energy, nay veritable fervor, on metaphysics if the latter consisted of nothing but mere words, nonsensically juxtaposed?⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Carnap, "Elimination of Metaphysics," 28.

Carnap is obligated to formulate a hypothesis about the origins of metaphysics in order to explain why something that it is completely unnecessary might have come about. Carnap proposes the following answer:

Perhaps we may assume that metaphysics originated from *mythology*. The child is angry at the 'wicked table' which hurt him. Primitive man endeavors to conciliate the threatening demon of earthquakes, or he worships the deity of the fertile rains in gratitude. [...] Which, now is the historical role of metaphysics? Perhaps we may regard it as a substitute for theology on the level of the systematic, conceptual thinking. [...] On closer inspection the same content as that of mythology is here still recognizable behind the repeatedly varied dressing: we find that metaphysics also arises from the need to give expression to a man's attitude in life, his emotional and volitional reaction to the environment, to society, [...] ⁴⁹

Carnap explains metaphysic as a substitute for mythology and mythology as a substitute for scientific explanations. Carnap's hypothesis on the origin of mythology is obviously susceptible to the same criticism as Frazer's theories about magic. A comparison could also be drawn between Carnap's hypothesis about the origin of metaphysics and Wittgenstein's objections against Frazer's hypothesis about the origins of magic. Metaphysics is as human a phenomenon as magic is. The philosopher should not formulate hypotheses as to what might have caused the emergence of metaphysics. The methodological principle, according to which the anthropologist should limit himself to description, is also one of the central principles of Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology. This is not a coincidence. Wittgenstein's philosophical program is subject to the same limitation as any other human science. When the philosopher studies the grammar of the word "rule," he must limit himself to description. The same principle applies to his study of the word "metaphysics." Ultimately, what accounts for the fact that Wittgenstein

⁴⁹ Carnap, "Elimination of Metaphysics," 28-29.

defended Heidegger is that, while talking about a philosophical topic, Wittgenstein was limited by his philosophical methodology.

5.4 Conclusion

Wittgenstein's defense of Heidegger is important in our assessment of his relation to tradition, but it supports only a portion of the view I am defending, and it does so only in a limited way. The credit given to a metaphysician of Heidegger's kind is comparable to the space Wittgenstein gave to primitive religion in his response to Frazer. Wittgenstein recognizes the right of Heidegger to talk as he does, but he never directly says that what they are respectively doing can be compared. My goal was not simply to show that Wittgenstein acknowledges and values a traditional conception of philosophy, but that his program was defined in agreement with tradition. The defense Wittgenstein gives of Heidegger's work leaves room (at least in principle) for a strict division between tradition and Wittgenstein's own work. One could argue that the methodology that stops Wittgenstein from putting forward a criticism of metaphysics is what sets him apart from traditional philosophy. This is the problem I want to address in my concluding chapter.

6. Conclusion

My initial claim was that a major argument against Wittgenstein's philosophical program could be answered by abandoning the distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks. What I have been arguing thus far is that Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysics" does not imply this distinction and that some of his comments about past philosophers are less hostile than we might have expected if the distinction applied. The rejection of the distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks implies more than these two points. The strongest implication of my proposal is that Wittgenstein's normative remarks are actually descriptive.

Before I complete my argument, I will briefly reiterate the previous results of my study. I will raise some possible objections against my arguments. The answer to these objections will give us the occasion to demonstrate that Wittgenstein's apparently subversive metaphilosophical views can indeed be read as descriptions of the history of philosophy. Answering these objections should also help clarify the link between what I have demonstrated thus far and the problems I presented in the introduction.

6.1 Recapitulation

In the previous chapter, I presented two texts that explicitly support the idea that Wittgenstein did not construct his philosophical method in opposition to tradition. I took Heidegger as the representative of a more traditional conception of philosophy. I compared Wittgenstein's respectful treatment of Heidegger with Carnap's antagonistic position. I have argued that the difference between the two positions can be explained by applying Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer to the study of metaphysics. This conclusion supports my main contention and

also the reading of the *Remarks on Frazer* presented in the fourth chapter. In the fourth chapter, I had argued that the *Remarks on Frazer* could be read as a series of methodological lessons for the philosopher. This reading of the *Remarks* was inspired by a particular idea from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*:

What I have to do is something like describing the office of a king;--in doing which I must never fall into the error of explaining the kingly dignity by the king's usefulness, but I must leave neither his usefulness nor his dignity out of account. (*RFM* VII § 3)

This reading of the *Remarks on Frazer* also rested on the interpretation of the *Analogy* I previously proposed. In the first chapter, I argued that the *Analogy*, a text that was supposed to serve as a prelude to the *Remarks on Frazer*, could support my view of Wittgenstein's relation to tradition. The *Analogy* explicitly affirmed that magic and metaphysics could be compared. The *Analogy*, however, did not clearly state the nature of the resemblance and seemed to stand alone in the Wittgensteinian corpus. In the second and third chapters, I compared the *Analogy* with some of Wittgenstein's later texts, and concluded that the text was representative of Wittgenstein's later position. The study of the *Analogy* also gave the opportunity to review Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysics." I have compared Wittgenstein's later use of the word "metaphysics" with the use implied by a specific reading of his early work in order to show that the later use of the word did not imply a strict distinction between Wittgenstein's concept of philosophy and the more traditional one. I opened my study with this discussion because it helped to support the challenge of the distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks which was proposed in the introduction. Originally, I questioned the value of the distinction because it made Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views appear untenable. Exploring the relevant text made my challenge more plausible, but the demonstration

will not be complete until I return to this original problem. I also need to explain why the support I gave so far for my position is incomplete.

6.2 Objections and responses

I have provided arguments showing that Wittgenstein did not express a strong animosity towards tradition, but I did not define his relation to the history of philosophy in a positive and unambiguous way. This would have been a shortcoming if my goal was to describe the nature of Wittgenstein's relation to tradition. Although the main focus of the essay was on comments by Wittgenstein about tradition, the main goal was to challenge the idea that Wittgenstein's comments about the concept of philosophy were always either normative or descriptive. The goal was to show that there was no place for a clear distinction between Wittgenstein's work and the works of past philosophers, not necessarily to give a complete interpretation of his relation with the history of philosophy. In other words, I only made a negative claim about the extent of the gap between Wittgenstein and tradition.

One might still feel that this claim was too ambiguous to be meaningful. Taken by itself the affirmation that a philosopher does or does not distinguish his work from other philosophers is almost tautological. This assertion can be seen as both true and false for any given philosopher. It is important to recall that I defined the distinction I was challenging in a specific way. I clarified my position in the introduction by referring to Diamond's response to some objections against the coherence of Wittgenstein's program. I argued that, in order to adopt Diamond's response, we had to reject any distinction that would, in Diamond's terms, imply that past philosophers did not share some basic philosophical requirements with Wittgenstein's philosophical program. In the introduction this criterion remained relatively abstract, but I have

presented some examples of philosophers adopting this kind of distinction when reading Wittgenstein's early work. Carnap's reading of the *Tractatus* represented one of these readings. My only requirement was to show that a distinction of this kind did not exist in Wittgenstein's later works.

6.2.1 Two objections

The arguments provided so far might seem unsatisfactory, even if they come in support of this less ambitious objective. First, even if we grant that I have discredited the idea that Wittgenstein was an enemy of tradition, I did not present much positive evidence showing that he did share anything significant with tradition. Second, I have overlooked some textual evidence that seems to contradict my view.

Through a reading of Wittgenstein's texts about Frazer and Heidegger, I was able to show that Wittgenstein did not draw an explicit distinction between his own work and those of some likely candidates to illustrate the kind of tradition against which Wittgenstein's method was supposed to be constructed. The advantage of using texts about Heidegger was that Wittgenstein's, almost apologetic, defense of such a likely target for criticism made the possibility for him to find allies within the history of philosophy appear more likely. The fact that I have focused on these texts, however, limited the quantity of positive evidence I could provide for my view.⁵⁰ Because my focus was mainly on rebutting the idea that Wittgenstein was an enemy of tradition, I did not give enough attention to some other texts that could challenge

⁵⁰ I did provide some direct evidence that Wittgenstein did not perceive his method as a radical break from past philosophical work. The lack of clear definitions for the vocabulary related to philosophy and Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysics" were two important arguments for the absence of a distinction. I reviewed a large part of Wittgenstein's use of the word "metaphysic," assuming that if a strict distinction could be found, it would be associated with the same word used as a pejorative in the *Tractatus*. I found no clear distinction. This was an interesting result but not a definitive one because Wittgenstein could have implied the distinction without articulating it.

my position. Some of Wittgenstein's remarks on the nature of philosophy are counterintuitive enough to be read as direct defeaters for my rejection of the distinction between normative and descriptive aspects of his metaphilosophical considerations. A number of these remarks convey a concept of philosophy that is so subversive that it appears absurd to imagine that it could be reconciled with any traditional conception of philosophy. Some remarks also depict philosophy in a very negative way. These negative depictions seem to suggest that Wittgenstein had, in fact, in some way divided his reflexions on the concept of philosophy between the promotion of a good kind of philosophy and the description of a bad kind of philosophy. I may have shown that Wittgenstein had no animosity towards tradition, but I still need to explain why his strange ideas on the nature of philosophy should not be taken as attempts to reform it and why his negative depictions of philosophy are not indicative a strict distinction between normative and descriptive considerations.

6.2.2 One response

I need to confront the difficulty posed by a number of apparently subversive or negative depictions of the nature of philosophy and to present some positive evidence for my claims. Fortunately, it will be possible to kill these two birds with one stone. I contend that it is possible to interpret the remarks that seem to contradict my view in a way that actually supports it. If I am able to show that it is the case I will have solved both problems.

In an essay about Wittgenstein's views on progress, Jacques Bouveresse draws from Wittgenstein's personal notes and from friends' accounts of conversations to show that Wittgenstein was reluctant to attribute any level originality to his work:

S'il y a une nouveauté et une originalité incontestables et profondes du style de pensée wittgensteinien, c'est sans aucun paradoxe dans cette dernière direction qu'elles doivent être

cherchées. La valorisation systématique de l'innovation et du progrès est une des caractéristiques constitutives de l'esprit de civilisation actuelle et une des raisons pour lesquelles notre époque, qui est celle de la science et de la technique, ne peut, selon lui, être en même temps celle de la philosophie proprement dite.⁵¹

Bouveresse speaks to Wittgenstein's view of progress in the political and historical sense, but he derives this view from Wittgenstein's texts about the originality of his philosophical work. Bouveresse's assessment of Wittgenstein's view of his own work directly contradicts the idea that Wittgenstein thought he invented a radically new kind of philosophical method. There is an obvious limit to an account based on Wittgenstein's personal notes and discussions. Wittgenstein's assessment of his own work is not necessarily correct. Wittgenstein might have stumbled upon a new philosophical method that he was not himself ready to recognize. Bouveresse's findings are still useful.

Because there are reasons to think that Wittgenstein did not think his philosophical views represented any kind of radical progress, it is possible to justify a new approach to his metaphilosophical remarks. There is no need to take Wittgenstein's self-assessment at face value, but it is still important to take it seriously. If Wittgenstein's assessment of his own work is correct, then we should be able to read his metaphilosophical remarks as if they were applicable to both the history of philosophy and his work.

Wittgenstein's descriptions of the nature of philosophy are so counterintuitive that it seems difficult to read them as descriptions of the works of past philosophers. Some remarks appear to be deliberate attempts to reject parts of what is traditionally understood as the job of the philosopher. The possibility opened by Bouveresse's analysis of Wittgenstein's personal views is to read them as an unusual description of the history of philosophy, or as a critique of a

⁵¹ Jacques Bouveresse, "L'Animal Cérémoniel," in, *Essais I. Agone*, (2000): 146.

common point of view on what philosophers actually do, despite their apparently subversive nature.

Here is a sample of Wittgenstein's remarks that appear to challenge my view. The first set of remarks represent instances where Wittgenstein qualifies philosophical questions using a pejorative vocabulary (talking of philosophical problems as, "houses of cards" "false," and "nonsensical," or of the philosopher as "pathological" or "bewitched"):

Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language. (*PI* §109)

Where does this investigation get its importance from, given that it seems only to destroy everything interesting: that is, all that is great and important? (As it were, all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) But what we are destroying are only houses of cards, and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stood. (*PI* §118)

The results of philosophy are the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense and the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language. (*PI* § 119)

What is your aim in philosophy?-to show the fly the way out of the fly bottle. (*PI* §309)

It is also possible to highlight a number of remarks where Wittgenstein describes philosophy in neutral, yet unusual, ways:

The philosopher treats a question; like an illness. (*PI* § 255)

And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place. (*PI* § 109)

If someone were to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them. (*PI* §128)

With the most natural reading of these remarks, they seem to be referring to tradition, or at least to some other philosophers. On the other hand, it seems reasonable to take every comment that

seems to challenge our natural understanding of the nature of philosophy as a description of Wittgenstein's program. Some remarks are undeniably counterintuitive, while the others are clearly negative, but this does not mean that these are attempts by Wittgenstein to distance himself from tradition.

This reading rests on the expectation that Wittgenstein's descriptions of the history of philosophy should be conventional and, on the assumption, that he would not portray his own work in a negative way. Since Wittgenstein's views are often counterintuitive and his tendency to be hard on himself is well documented we are justified in searching for an alternative interpretation of this kind of remarks. If we are to take Wittgenstein's claims of conservatism seriously, then we have to take the negative remarks as self-examination and the subversive ones as unconventional attempts at description.

6.2.2.1 Negative Remarks

Let us first see how even the more negative descriptions can be reconciled with my interpretation. The idea here is not to deny that Wittgenstein sometimes describes philosophical practices in a negative way. Wittgenstein does distinguish between good and bad practices in philosophy. This does not mean that the distinction Wittgenstein draws is actually compatible with the kind of rigid dichotomy that would support a strict distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks. In a discussion with Schlick, Wittgenstein articulates a distinction that is, perhaps, the closest he gets to the kind of rigid dichotomy I have argued against:

I should like to indicate the difference between a dogmatic and an undogmatic procedure by means of an example. First I shall speak dogmatically, and then undogmatically. Thus I say, If a proposition is verified in two different ways, then it has different senses in these two cases. That

still sounds odd and could give rise to objections. [...] Now, however, I shall express myself undogmatically and simply draw attention to the following point: the verification of a proposition can itself only be given by means of a description. Thus the fact of the matter is that we have two propositions. The second proposition describes the verification of the first one. What, then, am I going to do? I simply lay it down as a rule of grammar that the first proposition is to follow from the second one. Thus I do not talk of sense and what sense is at all; I remain entirely within grammar. If you now say that one sentence has two different verifications, then I will point out that these verifications are described by different propositions; thus, in deriving the same proposition, we *proceeded according to different rules; and I did not want to say anything more than that.* (WVC, p.186)

It is worth noting that Wittgenstein is not proposing a formal criterion to distinguish between his method and that of others, but between what he calls “dogmatism” and an “undogmatic” way of expressing a point of view. The word “dogmatism” suggests that the distinction implies a certain value judgment, but it is important to note that Wittgenstein is not talking about a class of dogmatic philosophers that would need to be distinguished from undogmatic ones. What Wittgenstein calls “dogmatism,” thus, cannot be equated with what we called “metaphysics” or “tradition” in this essay. It seems that Wittgenstein is describing something like a collective tendency rather than two opposing traditions. Wittgenstein seems to recognize something like a “dogmatic” tendency in his thinking. He presents the goal to overcome this as a personal task:

As I have often said, philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather abandon a certain combination of words as senseless. In another sense, however, philosophy requires a resignation, but one of feeling and not of intellect. And maybe that is what makes it so difficult for many. It can be difficult not to use an expression, just as it is difficult to hold back tears, or an outburst of anger //rage//. (BT §86)

We can read this passage as an admission that Wittgenstein is, as most philosophers are, subject to some particularly bad intellectual tendencies. The desire to hold on to dogmatic expressions

appears to be one of these tendencies. After all, the kind of expressions Wittgenstein thinks the philosopher must abandon are not supposed to lead the philosopher to any genuine intellectual renunciation. Because dogmatic expressions can be reformulated into undogmatic ones, abandoning them does not prevent anyone from saying anything. Dogmatism seems so common that Wittgenstein himself had to struggle with it. Dogmatism is undeniably something bad, but it is not the kind of concept that can found a distinction radical enough to divide the history of philosophy into two camps.

The reading exemplifies how Wittgenstein's negative remarks can be read as a part of an authentic investigation of the nature of philosophical problems, rather than as an attempt to distinguish himself from tradition. The propensity to express ideas in a dogmatic language is one of many examples where Wittgenstein points out some negative philosophical tendency that actually corresponds to his own shortcomings. Rather than an expression of contempt, Wittgenstein's negative depiction of philosophy can often be read as honest attempts to come clear with some inevitable difficulty he shared with other philosophers.

6.2.2.2 Subversive Remarks

The possibility to translate dogmatic statements into undogmatic ones also gives a framework to interpret Wittgenstein's apparently subversive descriptions of philosophy in a way that do not situate his method apart from tradition. The method Wittgenstein illustrates with the definition of "proposition" opens the possibility to rewrite parts of the history of philosophy in a way that would eliminate some important conflicts. This text suggests that the apparently normative remarks can be read as translations of dogmatic expressions into an undogmatic language.

Wittgenstein's comments about Saint Augustine can help illustrate how his apparently subversive remarks on the nature of philosophy can be read as unconventional descriptions of some aspects of traditional philosophy. Some of Wittgenstein's comments on Augustine seem to be examples of remarks that stand on the edge between historical commentary and normative statements, which fit particularly well with the reading I am proposing. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein cites Augustine more than any other philosopher, and in the rest of his work the *Confessions* are one of the most frequent references. At least some of these references use Augustine as a positive example. When Wittgenstein formulates a critique against Augustine, he often emphasizes that Augustine's errors stem from the very nature of the problems he faced. Even in the most negative reference to Augustine, Wittgenstein leaves some place for more charitable interpretations.

Wittgenstein's most famous reference to Augustine is, perhaps, the lengthy quote from the *Confessions* at the beginning of the *Investigations*. The quote introduces a view of language that Wittgenstein continually questions in the rest of the book. Augustine's view could easily be seen as Wittgenstein's nemesis. Supposing that Wittgenstein really was trying to oppose tradition, Augustine would serve as an ideal placeholder for tradition, and his erroneous views about language would serve as a good illustration of the failure of the old method. The other references to Augustine in the *Investigations* suggest that Wittgenstein's critique was limited to Augustine's view of language. An earlier remark even suggests that Wittgenstein's intention was not to correct Augustine's view of language but, rather, to give a more limited and appropriate interpretation of his description of the nature of language:

I have remarked that we are inclined to view our language as much simpler than it is. Cf.

Augustine, who said that he learned Latin by learning the names of things. Surely he learned also

such words as 'not', 'or', etc. We can criticize his view in either of two ways: that it is wrong, or that it describes a simpler thing than we call language. (WLC. p.46)

The two ways to criticize Augustine represent a similar alternative to the dogmatic versus undogmatic attitudes contrasted in the text quoted earlier. The second way to criticize represents an undogmatic account of Augustine's views. Wittgenstein suggests that showing how Augustine's account is an accurate representation of some part of language would be more fruitful than reading it as an incomplete representation of all language. Wittgenstein translates Augustine's view in an undogmatic language by reading his incomplete description of language as an example of the strategy that consists in presenting simple language games to solve complex philosophical problems:

We can criticize his view in either of two ways: that it is wrong, or that it describes a simpler thing than we call language. The latter may be compared to giving a description of games which applies only to a special class of games. Inasmuch as our language is complex, I shall point out simpler structures which can be set side by side with it to see what light they shed on it (WLC. p.46-47)

Wittgenstein presents what appears to be the most obvious weakness of Augustine's view of language (its narrow range of application) as the example of one his favored methodological tactics (referring to simple language games). Wittgenstein's reading might very well be incompatible with Augustine's actual intentions, but this is beside the point. The important fact is that Wittgenstein seems to be looking for a way to deflate the importance of his disagreement with Augustine. There is further evidence that Wittgenstein's critique of Augustine was an attempt to reinterpret Augustine's view in an undogmatic way, rather than a way to distance himself from Augustine.

Wittgenstein's comments on Augustine's view of language can be contrasted with the arguments Wittgenstein presents against his old conception of language. Wittgenstein's criticism of the *Tractatus* is grounded on the criticism of his early method. Wittgenstein attributes his error in the *Tractatus* to a thirst for generality:

Our craving for generality has another main source: our preoccupation with the method of science. I mean the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws; and, in mathematics, of unifying the treatment of different topics by using a generalization. Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. (*BB*, p.18)

One might expect Wittgenstein to attack Augustine's method on similar grounds, but this is not the case. Although, in the instance of the question of language, Augustine seems to strive for generality, Wittgenstein cites the Augustinian treatment of the problem of time as an example of the opposite approach:

So too, Augustine calls to mind the different statements that are made about the duration of events, about their being past, present or future. (These are, of course, not philosophical statements about time, the past, the present and the future.) [...] Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, brought about, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of our language. Some of them can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another; this may be called 'analyzing' our forms of expression, for sometimes this procedure resembles taking a thing apart. (*PI* § 90)

Augustine asks a question ("What is time?") that could easily lead to the kind of generality Wittgenstein wants to abandon. Wittgenstein, however, presents Augustine as if he had abandoned the kind of general definition of time one would expect. Wittgenstein even describes

the series of questions and assertions by which Augustine opens his reflexions in a way that evokes the method of perspicuous representation at the heart of his new approach to philosophy.

Wittgenstein goes on and describes the nature of philosophy in his usual unorthodox manner:

Our inquiry is therefore a grammatical one. And this inquiry sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. (*PI* § 90)

The adjective ‘grammatical’ is far from being a common one when it comes to describe the nature of philosophy. Still, Wittgenstein uses the pronoun “our.” The choice of this pronoun is ambiguous and not at all rare for Wittgenstein. It is still relevant because it is used in the context of a discussion about Augustine. Wittgenstein could be clarifying Augustine’s method by alluding to his own, or he could be illustrating his method by referring to Augustine’s. Either way, the text implies that Wittgenstein’s ideas on the nature of philosophy are not meant to be revolutionary. It is not only the use of the word “our” that suggests this. Wittgenstein describes the kind of problems and difficulties essential to philosophy by referring to the kind of problems tackled by Augustine:

[...]it is, rather, essential to our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything new by it. We want to understand something that is already in plain view. For this is what we seem in some sense not to understand. Augustine says in Confessions XI. 14, “quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio”. -This could not be said about a question of natural science (“What is the specific gravity of hydrogen?”, for instance). Something that one knows when nobody asks one, but no longer knows when one is asked to explain it, is something that has to be called to mind. (And it is obviously something which, for some reason, it is difficult to call to mind.) (*PI* § 89)

The first sentence in the quote above is a good example of the kind of counterintuitive definition of philosophy that could support the claim that Wittgenstein’s program is subversive. The idea

that philosophical investigations should not lead to discovery is not only out of the ordinary but also it seems to be designed to contradict a traditional understanding of philosophy. Here again, the statement is not explicitly normative. Because Wittgenstein's uses the ambiguous pronouns "our" and "we," the main justification to read this text as an appeal to reformation is its counterintuitive nature. However, the reason Wittgenstein gives to accept this definition involves a direct quote from Augustine. Wittgenstein reads his own doctrine in Augustine's series of questions about the nature of time. The idea that one always know what time it is except when we are asked, is read by Wittgenstein as way to say that the philosopher's only task is to put forward a series of well-known facts. Wittgenstein does not read Augustine's assertions about time as a tentative theory of time but as the kind of trivial reminders involved in the method of perspicuous representation.

Wittgenstein's reading of Augustine is, to say the least, creative. Many things could be said about the liberties he takes with Augustine's text. Fortunately, Wittgenstein's competence as a historian of philosophy is not what is at stake here. It is still worth noting that Wittgenstein's creative reading does not lead him further from, but closer to Augustine. The most important thing, however, is not that Wittgenstein is generous towards Augustine but that he presents parts of his program in the context of a discussion about him. The remarks about Augustine reveal that even the most counterintuitive aspects of Wittgenstein's program were sometimes presented as descriptions. Quietism, for example, is not put forward as a normative or revolutionary scheme. It is presented as a position that stems from the very nature of philosophical problems, and that is even implied by something Augustine said. If Wittgenstein is ready to trace back this aspect of his program to the legacy of Augustine, then the idea that his program is too controversial to be concordant with tradition appears less plausible.

The comments about Augustine also constitute the kind of positive evidence we were looking for. The observations about Augustine represent a set of remarks that are neither strictly normative nor strictly descriptive. It is exactly the kind of ambiguity one should expect if Wittgenstein did not distinguish between the normative and descriptive aspects of metaphilosophical considerations. It is also the key to answering the problem posed by the counterintuitive remarks about the nature of philosophy. The creative work made by Wittgenstein to draw his program closer to Augustine's shows that metaphilosophical comments can be read without assuming there is a distinction between normative and descriptive aspects of an inquiry about the nature of philosophy.

6.3 Results

The most controversial aspect of Wittgenstein's program is, arguably, the idea that philosophers should not put forward theories or debatable statements. This position is also at the heart of the kind of arguments against Wittgenstein's program I presented in the introduction. Our inquiry into Wittgenstein's texts about the nature of philosophy was intended as a response to these kinds of arguments. The objection we were set to address pointed to some inconsistency in Wittgenstein's program. Three apparently obvious features of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical views seemed to conflict. The first feature is the subversive nature of some definitions of philosophy put forward by Wittgenstein. The second feature is Wittgenstein's apparent disdain for tradition. These two features, when combined to the often repeated claim that philosophers should not construct any theory and avoid putting forward anything but trivial statements, created two related problems. First, the claim to avoid controversial propositions seems to clash with Wittgenstein's apparent attempts to reform philosophy. Second,

Wittgenstein's alleged disdain for tradition seems to make his claim to avoid novelty in philosophy implausible. We already saw how Diamond solved the first problem. Her solution implied a rejection of the distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks. What we did by rejecting the distinction is question the importance of the first two features in order to defend the plausibility of the third one. I have shown that Wittgenstein's view of the history of philosophy is not as negative as it might have appeared and, perhaps more importantly, that the novelty of his method is often tempered by his attempts to trace it back to historical figures such as Augustine. That is not to say that no meaningful distinction could be traced between Wittgenstein's method and tradition. We cannot even conclude that Wittgenstein's program is safe from any other lines of attack. The only definitive result is that the distinction between Wittgenstein's work and the traditional concept of philosophy is at least vague enough to save Wittgenstein's program from the kind of inconsistency presented in the introduction. This might seem to be a feeble conclusion, but it is, at least, one that helps make sense of Wittgenstein's philosophical program.

The route we took to arrive at this modest conclusion might have opened some interesting possibilities. Rejecting the distinction between normative and descriptive metaphilosophical remarks is an opportunity to look at the history of philosophy through Wittgenstein's eyes. Comparing maieutic with quietism or Kant's concept of transcendental illusion with the Wittgenstein deflationary depiction of philosophical problems might be as constructive for the historians of philosophy as it would be for Wittgensteinians. This perspective also opens the possibility to exploit Wittgenstein method's to highlight some common problems in philosophy. Wittgenstein's claim to triviality and apparently degrading description of philosophical activity could be read as a solution to a fundamental tension implied by any philosophical inquiry. The

conflict between the need to solve essential and fundamental problems through the use of apodictic, universal and, thus, trivial propositions could indeed be the problem Wittgenstein was trying to solve when he described the nature of philosophy in such an unusual way. However, our inquiry into Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical view should not be read as anything more than a reminder of the disclaimer that serves as a foreword for the *Investigations*:

The trouble about progress is that it always looks much greater than it really is.

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