ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Wittgenstein's method is simple: 'Describe language-games!'

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Abstract
There are many interpretations of what Wittgenstein's later approach entails and what its motivations are. Yet, despite extensive exegesis significantly deepening our understanding, his later approach—howsoever one interprets it—remains at best marginal and at worst ignored in contemporary philosophy. This is especially puzzling given the general consensus that Wittgenstein is a very influential philosopher. I suggest a change in approach. Rather than focussing on the potential differences to be found in Wittgenstein's work, in this essay I propose that Wittgenstein's later approach entails a core overarching method, which Wittgenstein summarises through a simple instruction: 'Describe language-games!' (PI §486). I first explicate this instruction before contrasting it with the dominant method in philosophy and proposing that a recently promoted philosophical approach—Investigative Ordinary Language Philosophy—offers a practical way by which to put Wittgenstein's method into action.

I | INTRODUCTION

There are many interpretations of what Wittgenstein's later approach entails and what its motivations are. For example, some claim that it entails a variety of methods,[1] whereas others claim that it does not really entail a method at all.[2] Competing interpretations claim that its motivation is, for example, elucidatory,[3] therapeutic[4] or constructive.[5] Yet, despite such extensive

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[1]e.g. Conant (2012).

[2]e.g. Schulte (2002).

[3]e.g. Hutto (2003).

[4]e.g. Hutchinson (2007), Harré (2008).

[5]e.g. Hacker (2013).

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exegesis significantly deepening our understanding, Wittgenstein's later approach—howsoever one interprets it—remains at best marginal and at worst ignored in contemporary philosophy. This is especially puzzling given the general consensus that Wittgenstein is a very influential philosopher. I suggest a change in approach. Rather than focussing on the potential differences to be found in Wittgenstein's work, in this essay I propose that Wittgenstein's later approach entails a core overarching method, which Wittgenstein summarises through a simple instruction: 'Describe language-games!' (PI §486).[6] This instruction is given in response to the question 'How is the word "justification" used?' (PI §486), but in answering it Wittgenstein gives a succinct restatement of his method.[7]

Wittgenstein's later approach, I argue, remains marginal in part because the extensive exegetical work that characterises much Wittgensteinian philosophy obscures this overarching method and does not effectively contrast it with other, more mainstream, philosophical approaches. In what follows, I first explicate Wittgenstein's methodological instruction before contrasting it with the dominant method in philosophy. I then propose that a recently promoted philosophical approach—Investigative Ordinary Language Philosophy (IOLP)—offers a practical way by which to put Wittgenstein's method into action.

II | WITTGENSTEIN'S METHOD (IS SIMPLE)

In this section, I consider each aspect of Wittgenstein's instruction to describe language-games: what we should be doing (describing) and what we should be doing it on (language-games). I then synthesise these two aspects into what I consider a core overarching philosophical method which—importantly for Wittgenstein's method to be effectively understood in the wider philosophical landscape—can be sensibly contrasted with other, more mainstream, philosophical methods.

II.I | Describing

In PI §109, Wittgenstein famously asserts that, in philosophical investigation, 'all *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place'. Although, at first blush, this seems straightforward, we are immediately confronted with the problem of making sense of what we mean by explanation; as Wittgenstein himself notes in in a voluminous set of remarks that have

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[6]Wittgenstein (2009).

[7]It is worth noting that although Wittgenstein's instruction is simple, as O.K. Bouwsma (1965) notes in his review of The Blue Book, this does not, unfortunately, mean that *doing* what Wittgenstein did is either simple or easy.

come to be known as the Big Typescript, 'We must know what "explanation" means'.[8] This is further complicated by remarks suggesting that, in some cases, Wittgenstein thinks that an explanation might just amount to a description—for example, 'what does it mean to say that we cannot explain (that is, describe) these elements' (PI §49)—which undercuts the very distinction he makes in PI §109.

It seems clear that when Wittgenstein proposes that explanation must disappear from philosophical investigation, he does not mean explanation in a very general sense—the details that someone gives to make something clear—but in two more specific senses. First, the kind of (empirical) explanation one finds in the sciences. As Gruender notes, this is because, for Wittgenstein, empirically explaining phenomena is the 'unique function of science' and philosophy is emphatically not a science.[9] The central reason for this assertion is that philosophical problems are not, like those in the sciences, empirical but conceptual. Emphasising this point, Hacker notes that 'no empirical discoveries can solve or dissolve [philosophical problems], any more than discoveries in physics can solve problems in mathematics'.[10] To illustrate this, we can consider two different kinds of question.

First, the question, 'Are there snakes in Ireland?' To answer this question, we could travel to Ireland and conduct an extensive observational study of the island to establish whether snakes are present. If, after such an extensive study, no snakes are found, we could reasonably, if fallibly, argue that there are no snakes in Ireland. We could lend further weight to this finding by consulting the fossil record to establish whether snakes had ever been in Ireland, then conducting an ongoing study in which people can report any snake sightings, which could be investigated. Furthermore, from our empirical findings we could abductively infer why that is the case. Although some may still hold that the Christian missionary St Patrick rid Ireland of snakes whilst he was busy converting its peoples from paganism, the most accepted explanation is that snakes could not get there in the first place simply because the climate was not favourable and the island's land link to Britain was cut before snakes made their way there. This explanation could be effectively assessed using accepted geological findings related to the most recent ice age.

Second, let us consider the question, 'What makes a good university student?' If we attempt to answer this question empirically, we might, as we could do in Ireland, conduct an extensive observational study. We might from this identify a range of characteristics of a good university student: they are punctual, intelligent, hardworking, kind, engaged, they get good

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[8]Wittgenstein (2005, 308e).

[9]Gruender (1962, 524).

[10]Hacker (2015, 45).

grades. But, with this question, we have a problem we did not encounter with the previous one. Namely, that with this question it is unclear which of these characteristics should be held as the criteria and which merely symptoms. After all, with the previous question the criterion is clear—the presence of snakes—but with this question, one could reasonably take any one of the observed characteristics as the criterion (or many as the criteria) for a good student. Furthermore, it is likely that we would encounter many students we instinctively perceive as 'good' yet who do not share common characteristics. Some may be intelligent but not hardworking; some may get good grades but be unkind. Wittgenstein famously illustrates this kind of problem through considering the activities that we all call 'games'. As he notes, 'if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that… we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way, can see how similarities crop up and disappear'. (PI §66). This leads Wittgenstein to state that, if we wanted to explain to someone what a game is, 'we'd [simply] describe games to him, and we might add to the description: "This and similar things are called games"' (PI §69). An attempt to add a further explanation—perhaps grounded in common characteristics or suchlike—would add nothing to our understanding of what games are, derived directly from the descriptions of a range of different games.

Of course, most (but not all) philosophers do not claim to be conducting empirical investigations. This brings us to the second, and more pertinent, kind of explanation Wittgenstein thinks must disappear from philosophical investigation. In the Big Typescript, he explicitly highlights this kind of explanation in stating that 'there is constant danger of wanting to use this word in logic'.[11] Many philosophers do advance explanations, through proposing philosophical theories. To take just one example, with respect to the relationship between conscious experience and brain activity, there are a raft of incompatible materialist, interactionist, epiphenomenalist and protopanpsychist theories that vigorously compete for attention. However, unlike in the sciences, these theories are not abductively inferred from observations nor (could be) empirically tested using the hypothetico-deductive method but are derived through rational argument from purported acceptable premises. Herein lies the problem.

Given that, in philosophy, there is persistent disagreement about almost all foundational issues, almost all philosophical premises can be easily denied by denying the foundational philosophical positions on which they are grounded.[12] In most cases, therefore, it is not epistemically irrational for someone who understands a philosophical argument to deny it. As Chalmers

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[11]Wittgenstein (2005, 308e).
[12]See Chalmers (2015) and Williamson (2016).

notes, this means that most philosophical arguments do not lead to (explanatory) agreement but sophisticated disagreement.[13] We can illustrate this problem by considering what might be considered 'acceptable premises' in our earlier problems. With respect to the explanation advanced for why there are no snakes in Ireland, we can identify premises including that 'the climate was too cold for snakes to emerge in Ireland' and that 'when the climate cooled sufficiently Ireland was then isolated from other landmasses by the sea'. These are premises that have clear criteria and which can be feasibly assessed. Consider now what acceptable premises we might identify regarding an explanation of what makes a good university student. There are no such acceptable premises. Any premise we might suggest—'good students get good grades', 'good students are kind', etc.—can be easily denied and equally feasible alternatives offered. Given the normative nature of the problem, these are not premises that can be empirically assessed and nor are they premises that are foundational. Therefore, suggesting that one such premise is preferable to another merely begs the question.

The realisation that explanatory theories in philosophy can be easily denied by denying the premises on which they are based leads Wittgenstein to suggest that any attempt to provide *philosophical* explanations supported by rational argument is doomed to fail. Doing so provides no better understanding than simply describing instances of the phenomenon we are interested in. He thus rejects the common view of a philosophical problem as leading to '*explanatory* questions whose answers 'explain the facts' thereby enabling us to understand why things are as they indeed are',[14] instead respecifying it as 'something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to explain it' (PI §89). The first half of Wittgenstein's instruction thus seems perfectly clear: We should be describing and not explaining (in the specific senses previously outlined).

II.II | Language-games

The second half of Wittgenstein's instruction identifies what we are supposed to be describing: language-games. Grounded in his critique of philosophical explanations, Wittgenstein makes clear that the appropriate approach to philosophical investigation (i.e. description) 'gets its light – that is to say, its purpose – from the philosophical problems' (PI §109). But philosophical problems are not, as we have seen, empirical problems, solved using scientific methods. Instead, Wittgenstein proposes that they are 'solved through an insight into the workings of our language, and that in such a way that these

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[13]This is empirically demonstrated in a 2020 survey of the views of 1785 philosophers (Bourget and Chalmers ms).

[14]Rescher (2001, 3–4).

workings are recognized' (PI §109). Before unpacking this, let us consider an example, through explicating the Wittgensteinian philosopher Frank Ebersole's philosophical investigation into the puzzle of what in addition to a bodily movement is involved in an action.[15]

Ebersole starts his investigation by proposing two answers to a simple question: 'What are you doing?' (1) 'I'm still trying to think of that word for last night's crossword puzzle: the one for 24-across'. (2) 'I'm sharpening the barb on this fish hook'.[16] In so doing, Ebersole establishes a common distinction between mental actions and bodily movements. He then notes that whilst it is easy to understand a bodily movement, mental actions seem to have an additional component that causes a puzzle. Rather than trying to develop a theory about what these mental actions might involve, Ebersole instead just describes a series of examples in which such actions could sensibly occur and reflects on the realisations these descriptions bring about. He first focusses on games, such as chess, concluding that rules and conventions are required to understand an action and, as such, a bodily movement becomes an action in certain circumstances. He is soon disabused of this notion, however, when further examples he works through—such as of a father and child discussing chess moves—demonstrate that all the exploration of games shows is that actions take place in a social background. He continues his investigation by describing and reflecting on a range of other situations, through a set of 11 examples, such as these:

> A girl just from the country has answered the advertisement of a city place for a "girl dancer." She tells the manager that she has had some experience and asks about the job, He says, "We want a belly dancer." She does not know what that is. The manager calls one of the waitresses, who used to be a belly dancer, and the waitress gives a demonstration. The country girl says, "I simply could not make those bodily movements." She is morally offended. Making those bodily movements is something she will not do. So these bodily movements are not the things that enter into bodily actions: they *are* actions. And as actions, they get the country girl's censure.[17]

> Imagine a drummer whose violent and rapid beat set his arms muscles into uncontrolled spasmodic action. He may execute a final long rapid roll in this manner and then quickly leave the stage to take antispasmodic pills and to relax. This would be a rare and

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[15]Ebersole (2001d).

[16]Ebersole (2001d, 356).

[17]Ebersole (2001d, 367).

unusual type of action. Nothing of this kind enters into all the simple actions involved in walking, pointing, eating sitting, writing, climbing, in which we engage throughout the day.[18]

In working through these examples, Ebersole comes to a new realisation that there are many behaviours that we initially conceive of as bodily movements but which, on further reflection, we come to see as actions. In so doing, he comes to realise that the puzzle he started with—what in addition to a bodily movement is involved in an action—was misguided. Instead, bodily movements and actions are just different ways of describing something from different aspects: the former from a physiological perspective and the latter from a socio-cultural one. For example, the moving of a pawn in chess can be understood as a bodily movement (under the description of the kinds of grip involved in moving a pawn) or as an action (under the description of making a move in a chess match). Importantly, in working through these examples and coming to better understand the problem, Ebersole makes no recourse to external, deniable premises or abstract theories. His understanding is gained merely from the realisations that emerge from working through the descriptions of the situations. This returns us to Wittgenstein's language-games.

In focussing on the importance of the processes and practices of language for making sense of phenomena, Wittgenstein calls 'the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a "language-game".' (PI §7). Thus, it is clear that when Wittgenstein refers to language-games (i.e. what is to be described in philosophical investigation), he is not just referring to language use, speaking or suchlike. Given that language use cannot be made sense of without the activities, practices and context in which it occurs, when Wittgenstein refers to language-games, it is perhaps clearer to say that he is referring to something like the everyday situations we see in Ebersole's investigations. As Wittgenstein stresses, 'the word "language-game" is used… to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (PI §23). To help us understand what he means, he gives two sets of examples of what he means by a language-game. First, in the Big Typescript[19]:

> Making a report, such as "light", "dark".
>
> Issuing a command "Turn on the light!", "Lights out"
>
> Answering the questions "Light?", "Dark?" with yes and no.

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[18]Ebersole (2001d, 368).

[19]Wittgenstein (2005, 162e).

Carrying out an order.

Asking a question and checking the correctness of the answer to it.

Carrying out negative and positive orders. Disjunctive ones.

Uttering a hunch (turning up cards) and verifying it.

Simplifying the form of a proposition ($\sim\sim\sim p = \sim p$), drawing conclusions.

Solving a problem of applied mathematics.

Making a drawing and describing it.

Narrating a course of events.

Inventing a story.

Setting up and testing a hypothesis.

Compiling a table.

Greeting someone.

Second. in PI §23:

Giving orders, and acting on them –

Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements –

Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) –

Reporting an event –

Speculating about the event –

Forming and testing a hypothesis –

Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams –

Making up a story; and reading one –

Acting in a play –

Singing rounds –

Guessing riddles –

Cracking a joke; telling one –

Solving a problem in applied arithmetic –

Translating from one language into another –

Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

Further relating his account of language-games to description, Wittgenstein makes clear that 'the point is not to explain a language-game by means of our experiences, but to take account of a language-game' (PI §655). By 'taking account', he means that the sense of an everyday situation is not found by recourse to external explanations but is already there in the situations themselves, if only we make it explicit. Moreover, Wittgenstein is clear that 'giving examples is not an indirect way of explaining [in the admissible very general sense outlined previously] – in default of a better one' (PI §71). Returning to his focus on games, he notes:

> Imagine that I were standing with someone in a city square and said ["Stay roughly here"]. As I say it, I do not bother drawing any boundary, but just make a pointing gesture – as if I were indicating a particular spot. And this is just how one might explain what a game is. One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way. – I do not mean by this expression, however, that he is supposed to see in those examples that common feature which I – for some reason – was unable to formulate, but that he is now to employ those examples in a particular way. (PI §71)

There is one further point to make with respect to language-games as Wittgenstein conceives of them. Because, for Wittgenstein, philosophical problems are conceptual not empirical, the situations to be described in philosophical investigation do not have to be *actual* situations but can also be *imagined*, so long as any sensible observer would consider the situation under investigation one that *could* occur in everyday life (and thus has rules, customs and conventions that could be settled). The second half of Wittgenstein's instruction thus seems as clear as the first: What we are supposed to be describing is language-games (i.e. actual and imagined everyday situations).

II.III | Describing language-games

In the previous subsections, I have explicated the two aspects of Wittgenstein's simple methodological instruction to describe language-games. In so doing, I have made clear that, for Wittgenstein, philosophical investigation entails describing instances of everyday situations of the phenomenon under investigation.[20] Moreover, because the phenomenon manifests in these situations through what we do and say in them, in order to make sense of it we need to work through the rules, customs and conventions that give sense to what we say and do (and which are made explicit through our descriptions). Wittgenstein gives a term for this particular mode of descriptive, conceptual investigation—*grammatical*—which is much wider than the traditional use of the word (i.e. as referring to the structural relationships of words in a language). As Wittgenstein puts it, 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is' (PI §373). With this useful conceptual clarification in mind, we can see that Wittgenstein's later approach is neither empirical (because philosophical problems are not empirical) nor rational (because reasoning requires starting from deniable premises) but another mode of inquiry entirely: grammatical. Therefore, Wittgenstein's methodological instruction to describe language-games can be conceived as an instruction on how to conduct grammatical investigation.

Importantly, unlike the dominant rational approach to philosophy, which purportedly results in knowledge in the form of discovery, a grammatical approach results in something quite different (and more modest): understanding in the form of realisation.[21] The former approach creates new knowledge that perhaps we could not even have conceived of, eliciting a response of the form 'who would have thought of that!'[22] The latter approach creates no new knowledge but instead brings us to a realisation about something we already knew, eliciting a response of the form 'Of course! I should have thought of that'.[23] For example, Ebersole's realisation that a situation can be made sense of as both a bodily movement and an action, depending on which aspect we describe it under. This is clearly not new knowledge, insofar as in everyday life we already, without thinking, quite easily make sense of situations as both bodily movements and actions. The understanding we gain from Ebersole's philosophical investigation is thus not a new way of thinking or a new theory, but a reminder of how we ordinarily make sense of

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[20]Importantly, by 'everyday' situations we do not exclude situations that are uncommon, or situations that are described using technical language, if that is appropriate. Instead, what are excluded are situations described using metaphysical language, which are thus abstracted from (and thus make no sense in terms of) the lives in which we lead. As Wittgenstein (PI §120) notes, 'I must speak the language of every day [insofar as] … your very questions were framed in this language; they had to be expressed in this language, if there was anything to ask!'.

[21]Hacker (2013).

[22]Hacker (2013, 110).

[23]Hacker (2013, 110).

bodily movements and actions, which has become confused once we start to think about them philosophically.[24] This might seem a modest finding, but, as Wittgenstein notes, many purported philosophical problems are caused by confusions such as this. The important difference between knowledge as discovery and understanding as realisation is captured by Wittgenstein's somewhat gnomic assertions that 'problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with' (PI §109) and that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' (PI §124). With this conceptual understanding of Wittgenstein's later approach in place, I now turn to making clear how it can be contrasted with the dominant method in contemporary philosophy. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate how Wittgenstein's method might be better promoted and understood.

III | CONTRASTING WITTGENSTEIN'S METHOD WITH THE DOMINANT METHOD IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

The questions philosophy asks and the methods it uses to ask them are, of course, myriad. It is far beyond the scope of this paper to give an extensive survey. Nevertheless, contemporary philosophy is commonly characterised as comprising two broad traditions—Anglo-American analytic philosophy and Continental philosophy—and it is uncontentious to note that, currently, the former significantly dominates.[25] Although Wittgenstein's later approach cannot be easily situated in either tradition, I propose that the core method his later approach entails (describing language-games) can be fruitfully contrasted with other methods that are situated in these broad traditions. For the sake of brevity, in what follows I focus on the dominant analytic method: the method of argumentation.[26]

An argument is a symbolic structure in which premises offer support to a conclusion. This broad definition can of course be elaborated, but I should like to avoid any unnecessary scholasticism. I wish only to make the common Peircean distinction between three kinds of argument—deductive, inductive and abductive—and note that analytic philosophy largely trades in the former, wherein the truth of an argument's premises is conceived as necessitating the truth of its conclusion. As is commonly accepted, the necessity of a deductive argument is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength insofar as if the

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[24]Of course, the realisations one comes to through one's own philosophical investigations—the 'of course!' reaction—could be disagreed with when communicated to others. This highlights that grammatical investigations are both not easy to do and not easy to effectively communicate.

[25]This broad categorisation can, of course, be critiqued from many angles. However, for my purpose of relating Wittgenstein's method to other methods in philosophy, it serves a useful pragmatic function.

[26]Fosl and Baggini (2020).

information contained in the premises is true, then the conclusion is necessarily true. But, as I have previously discussed, it is a weakness insofar as the information contained in the premises could be false to begin with.

In analytic philosophy, it is commonly accepted that the rational method of argumentation is the overarching way in which philosophical investigation proceeds (i.e. the way in which philosophical theories and explanations are derived), but that the method also subsumes numerous, more specific procedures: for example, identifying fallacies, tautologies, self-contradictions, etc.; attempting refutations; making analogies; employing reductions; etc. I propose that, although not comprising a similarly formal method, and having widely different underlying assumptions, Wittgenstein's grammatical approach to philosophical investigation can be conceived structurally in the same way, as entailing an overarching method (describing language-games). This, I argue, helps to overcome what is perhaps the most troubling of Wittgenstein's statements for my account: namely, that 'there is not a single philosophical method' (PI §133).

As perhaps most famously exemplified by Conant,[27] many philosophers have pointed out that there are numerous ways in which Wittgenstein goes about his grammatical approach to philosophical investigation. Eriksen, for example, provides a long list[28]:

> he invents language-games as objects of comparison to existing practices (PI:§ 2); he reminds the reader of facts (PI:§ 27), mentioning well-known details about human nature and the world (PI:§ 25); he poses questions (PI:§ 10), at times he is adopting a tone that (to this reader, at least) is characterised by humour and sarcasm (PI:§§250,327); he points to differences or similarities between real or invented language games (PI:§§ 164,268); he invents alternative natural histories and cultures (PI:§§ 142,312); he produces drawings to illustrate philosophical points (PI:§ 86); he employs metaphors and analogies (PI:§§ 119,164); he asks the reader to engage in certain activities – for example, to imagine something, to ask oneself a question, to compare two phenomena, to contemplate or examine something (PI:§§ 4,78,79,330,411,502,578); he draws a line between phenomena that we find strange and those that are familiar (RFGB:123); he dismisses a question's implicit presuppositions by exposing it as a nonsensical question (PI:§47).

One can feasibly, as Conant does, argue that (in line with a particular interpretation of PI §133) the myriad ways in which Wittgenstein goes about

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[27]Conant (2012).
[28]Eriksen (2023, 6).

philosophical investigation mean that Wittgenstein's later approach entails a variety of methods.[29] However, as Wyss notes, one can just as feasibly argue that these myriad ways of describing language-games are merely a *variety of procedures* that an *overarching method* (which provides a general strategy) enables one to create or apply.[30] Analogously with the method of argumentation, which is the overarching method of rational analytic philosophy, describing language-games is the overarching method of Wittgenstein's later grammatical approach, and the various ways in which he goes about that are the variety of procedures it subsumes.[31]

There is, of course, no knock-down argument that supports or refutes either interpretation. However, I propose that, pragmatically, it is better to conceive of and explicate describing language-games as a core overarching method for a number of reasons: (i) despite their differences, all the procedures Wittgenstein employs share a set of underlying assumptions about philosophical investigation; (ii) presenting Wittgenstein's later approach as a variety of different methods (without an overarching method) obscures the core grammatical approach to philosophical investigation that underpins them; (iii) presenting a core overarching method will make it easier to compare Wittgenstein's later approach with more dominant approaches to philosophical investigation; and (iv) having a core overarching method by which to frame Wittgenstein's later approach makes it easier to promote and explicate what such an approach entails. In this way, philosophers can, for example, assess the assumptions that underpin both the rational method of argumentation and the grammatical method of describing language-games, and thus decide which approach they have more affinity with.[32] Without presenting a core overarching method, this comparison process becomes more difficult, which in turn also makes understanding and promoting Wittgenstein's later approach more difficult. This, I argue, is the current state of affairs in philosophy and is a contributory factor as to why Wittgenstein's later approach remains marginalised, despite his purported influence.

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[29]Conant (2012) further argues that because there are an unlimited variety of grammars (i.e. the rules, customs and conventions that have to be settled for a situation to make sense), there must be an analogous unlimited variety of methods for investigating them.

[30]Wyss (2015).

[31]Moreover, Moore's (1955, 26) notes on Wittgenstein's lectures in 1930–1933 suggest that Wittgenstein himself stated that 'a "new method" had been discovered'.

[32]This process of assessment, of course, applies not just to the method of argumentation but other methods in philosophy. Indeed, other methods in philosophy—notably certain phenomenological methods—share many more assumptions with Wittgenstein's grammatical approach. I focus on the method of argumentation because it is the dominant method in philosophy and precisely because its assumptions are so different to a grammatical approach, which helps to foreground that such a methodological comparison is useful across all philosophical (i.e. conceptual) methods.

IV | INVESTIGATIVE ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

I finish my explication of Wittgenstein's method by highlighting a particular approach to philosophical investigation—Investigative Ordinary Language Philosophy (IOLP)—which I argue most closely follows Wittgenstein's methodological instruction. Highlighting this approach is useful as it offers a practical way by which to put Wittgenstein's method into action and demonstrates how, despite being marginal, Wittgenstein's method has been and currently is being successfully employed in philosophical investigation.

In developing an idiosyncratic reading of Wittgenstein as an empiricist—which, along with most commentators, I reject[33]—Cook proposed that there are three varieties of ordinary language philosophy: standard, metaphysical and investigative.[34] He further proposed that the latter variety, IOLP, has one main architect—Frank Ebersole—and that, moreover, given the deficiencies of not just mainstream philosophical methods but also the standard and metaphysical varieties of ordinary language philosophy, IOLP 'may be the only sort of philosophy that will ever produce viable results'.[35] Setting aside Cook's unorthodox view that although Wittgenstein may have proposed something like this method he did not follow his own methodological advice, in explicating IOLP and highlighting Ebersole as its main architect and practitioner, Cook gives us an exemplar by which to demonstrate Wittgenstein's method.

In line with many other Wittgensteinian philosophers, Ebersole situated his approach in the broad tradition of ordinary language philosophy. However, he was also aware that the grammatical approach he adopted was not what most people think of as ordinary language philosophy.[36] Indeed, he classed himself as an ordinary language philosopher merely 'because the examples needed [for the method] are of an 'ordinary' kind – involving familiar surroundings, people, occurrences, actions, and issues'.[37] Moreover, by examples, Ebersole means 'bits of stories, involving scenes or situations in which a person will properly and sensibly say something or think something'.[38] This clear focus on *situations*, not just language use, demonstrates, as Levi notes, how Ebersole is, per my interpretation of Wittgenstein's instruction, 'faithful not to ordinary language but to the facts about human situations, as revealed by what people say and mean in those situations'.[39] As a result, in a (reluctantly written)

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[33]For discussion, see Hertzberg (1998), Dwyer (1999), Richter (2001), and Hutchinson and Read (2008).

[34]Cook (1999).

[35]Cook (1999, 150).

[36]Cook (1999) argues—I think convincingly—that what most people think of as ordinary language philosophy are the defective standard and metaphysical varieties that he critiques. See Hardman and Hutchinson (2022) for a recent explication of this issue.

[37]Ebersole (2002a, 328).

[38]Ebersole (2002a, 325).

[39]Levi (2004, 311).

methodological postscript, Ebersole distanced himself from extant ordinary language philosophy by noting that 'I can assure you my essays are not like the work of the usual or ordinary 'ordinary' language philosopher'.[40]

Like Wittgenstein, Ebersole did not see a clear distinction between philosophy and metaphilosophy[41] and thus stated that he does 'not want to give the impression that I have a list of rules I follow or try to follow'.[42] However, although not wanting to provide a strict set of methodological rules or instructions, he did state that what he termed 'more-or-less-rules' or 'something-like-guides' can be helpful in successful philosophical investigations.[43] In this spirit of something-like-guides, a recent explication of IOLP proposed that the method has four (albeit non-prescriptive) stages[44]: (1) identify the issue that informs the process of investigation; (2) construct detailed and convincing examples of everyday situations in which the issue under investigation might realistically occur; (3) comment on your examples in relation to the issue under investigation, other examples you discuss and existing philosophical accounts; and (4) assemble the examples and your comments into a coherent narrative. This process, I argue, gives a more practical way to conceive of Wittgenstein's method and can be a helpful 'something-like-guide' to employing it. Moreover, Ebersole's approach to philosophical investigation resulted in more sustained grammatical investigations than one finds in Wittgenstein's writings, in which the grammatical investigations are often short and scattered. Therefore, I argue, studying Ebersole's work is notably beneficial for philosophers looking for examples of philosophical investigation as Wittgenstein intended. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to provide a full explication of one of Ebersole's investigations, I finish my focus on IOLP by providing a summary of one of his investigations into the issue of 'feeling pain'.

Ebersole starts his investigation simply by foregrounding a common picture of what feeling pain entails:

> We may think something like this. If I feel a pain, there is something there to feel. A pain is something there to feel. So maybe one of the reasons we think of pains as though they were entities or objects or beings is that we think they are among the things we feel. The things we feel are things. We think this way because we have a certain picture of feeling. We think of feeling as a mental reaching across or through the body.[45]

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[40]Ebersole (2002a, 326).

[41]As is evident from this essay, although I sympathise with this view, I do think that, pragmatically, it can be useful to make this (albeit fuzzy) distinction, at least whilst learning how to go about philosophical investigations as Wittgenstein intended.

[42]Ebersole (2002b, 325).

[43]Ebersole (2002b, 325).

[44]Hardman and Hutchinson (2022, 8).

[45]Ebersole (2001a, 125).

This picture raises puzzling issues for Ebersole, such as that, when thinking of pain in this way, one naturally thinks of pain as a specific object that, therefore, has a location. As with his investigation into bodily movements and actions, he proceeds by working through a range of everyday situations in which the phenomenon of feeling pain might reasonably manifest. For example[46]:

> While hiking with a friend, I limp to a halt and sit on a log holding my knee. "What's wrong?" "I have a terrible pain in the knee." (I certainly do not say, "I feel a terrible pain in the knee.")

> A man has suffered paralysis of the legs and is slowly recovering. Every day the doctor touches, probes, moves his legs. He asks, "Do you feel anything?" One day the patient says, "Yes. I feel a deep pain in the ankle."

> I have injured a leg and am suffering from an unbearable pain in the knee. I am given a local anaesthetic and gradually the pain subsides. My leg becomes completely numb. Later the doctor asks "How is it now?" "I can feel the pain again." Or "I can feel that pain again" My sensitivity is returning to normal.

Working through these and other examples leads Ebersole to a number of realisations. First, the realisation that, in most situations, people do not ordinarily talk of 'feeling' pain, but instead of 'having' pain. Second, that when people do talk of 'feeling' pain, they do so in very specific situations involving sensibility or numbness. He then surmises that we might say that 'feeling' pain and 'having' pain are not the same, inasmuch as 'the background for 'I feel a pain' must be carefully prepared'.[47] Therefore, the picture we started with does not now seem so problematic because 'feeling' pain only makes sense within the narrow scope of sensibility and numbness. In most cases, pain is just something we have or have not. With this picture in mind, the problems we started with—such as that of pain being located in a specific bodily location and then being transmitted to an *I* elsewhere—dissolve.

It is, of course, impossible to provide the full experience of a grammatical investigation merely by offering a summary of it. Therefore, to fully appreciate the value of such an approach, reading and reflecting on grammatical investigations is vital. Ebersole, for example, has conducted a number of such

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[46]Ebersole (2001a, 127).

[47]Ebersole (2001a, 128).

investigations on a range of topics beyond those already discussed, including whether seeing a star is like other cases in which it turns out we have not seen what we thought we saw,[48] and the comparison between perception and dreaming.[49] Furthermore, although such grammatical investigations are marginal in contemporary philosophy, there has been a recent resurgence of philosophy based on Ebersole's approach—notably in philosophy of mind and philosophy of medicine—which, I argue, provides a modern blueprint for how Wittgenstein's method can be implemented.[50]

V | CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have aimed to show that Wittgenstein's later, grammatical, approach to philosophical investigation does, despite arguments to the contrary, entail a core overarching method: describing language-games. I further argue that, although few philosophers have committedly followed Wittgenstein's methodological instruction, the approach of Frank Ebersole—which Cook termed Investigative Ordinary Language Philosophy—offers a practical way by which to put Wittgenstein's method into action.

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[48]Ebersole (2001b).

[49]Ebersole (2001c).

[50]See, for example, Hardman (2022, 2023, 2024), Hardman and Hutchinson (2021) and Tsilipakos (2023).

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