"A People Thing": Philosophical Experiences*

Martin Stokhof

1 Introduction: philosophical experience

"A people thing: philosophical experiences". If you don't mind I will start with the latter, philosophical experience. The people will find their way into this story by themselves.

The word "experience" is special because it can pertain to such a wide variety of things: expertise ("an experienced politician"), uniqueness ("quite an experience"), sensory perception ("an experience of red", "experiencing what it is like to be bat",-a typical philosophical use), and so on. Generally speaking it concerns our interaction with our environment, and with ourselves. What is at stake in the present context is "experience" as an indication of specific features of this interaction.

Many aspects of experience are hard, or even impossible to capture in language. We can describe a whole range of properties of a situation, an event, an object: colour, form, movement, change. But there are aspects that seems to defy description.

Wittgenstein gives the following example:

> Describe the aroma of coffee! —Why can't it be done? Do we lack the

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* This is a lightly redacted version of the valedictory lecture I gave at the University of Amsterdam on May 12,2016. I have left out the personal remarks at the end, and added some references to place the argument in the context of current debates. However, I have kept the style of an orally delivered lecture that addresses a mixed audience.

> words? And for what are words lacking? But where do we get the idea that such a description must, after all, be possible? Have you ever felt the lack of such a description? Have you tried to describe the aroma and failed?
>
> (PI,610)

We can try, of course, and say, for example: "Coffee smells spicy, warm, sometimes a bit sweet."; or: "The smell of coffee is more creamy than that of tea." But the exact experience seems to escape us somehow. We can circumscribe it, but we can't really describe it. And in the end we give up: "Yes, well, you should smell it yourself."

Sensory experience is not the only example, this limit to what we can describe also occurs with other types of experience. What it is like to be in love with *this* man or woman; what working *there* is like; what it is to be ill; these are all cases that allow for description to some extent, but where there is also a residue of experience that escapes all attempts at description. "Something like that","But you should really experience it for yourself": in the end there is nothing more that we can say. What exactly it is that we can and can not describe does depend on a number of things: shared past experience helps, as does shared expertise, but in the end it helps only so much.

For philosophy these features of experience, these aspects that can not really be captured in language, are an interesting challenge. For science this is much less the case, since science isn't interested in such aspects of concrete experiences, but rather investigates the underlying general causal determinants thereof. Form the outset,science brackets individual experience as such.

This suggests that perhaps we need to distinguish between two different kinds of content, and that suggestion is the central topic of what follows. In the same text, *Philosophical Investigations*, in section 78, Wittgenstein gestures towards such a distinction by means of the following contrast: that between describing "how hight Mont Blanc is" and describing "how a clarinet sounds". The first one is easy (in 2015, it was 4808 meter and 73 centimeter), but the second?

What is interesting as well is that this issue extends to philosophy itself. The way in which certain philosophical problems occupy us, how a solution to such a

problem comes about, how we gain insight and what that insight exactly is: in many cases (not in all, of course) there is a residu, something that can not be captured in language, in a discourse or in an argument. This is related to the kind of problems that philosophy is occupied with (and in terms of which it distinguishes itself from science): these are often problems that directly or indirectly tie in with everyday experience.

It is experience in this sense that this lecture is about. I will discuss the role that this kind of experience plays in more detail and I will argue that it constitutes one way,-emphatically *one* way, not *the* way-, in which philosophy can define itself in the light of the increasing pressure it faces from science and the concomitant tendency towards naturalism in philosophy itself.

I will do so using some themes from later Wittgenstein. His work contains a number of interesting examples and observations concerning this kind of experience. And these examples and observation in turn play a key role in discussions about what, according to Wittgenstein, is the task and the nature of philosophy. So there is both a substantial and a methodological reason in Wittgenstein's work to explore this further. That being said, it is definitely true that similar phenomena have been discussed by other authors as well, the choice for focussing on Wittgenstein is mainly motivated by practical concerns.

The remainder of this lecture is structured as follows. I will begin with a short sketch of the methodological discussion concerning the role of philosophy in Wittgenstein's work. Then I will discuss three features of the kind of experience I am interested in. Next I will look at three examples, all taken from Wittgenstein's work,-certainty, aesthetic experience and religious belief-, and attempt to chart the commonalities and differences between these examples. Having done that I will try to indicate in what way a philosophy that focuses on the analysis of this type of experience may lay a claim to a position of its own, in particular in relation to empirical science. I will do so on the basis of a global sketch of the existential questions that confront philosophy, and the humanities in general.

A warning before I begin: in what follows I limit myself to my own analysis of the issues. That does not imply that others haven't said anything about them, on the contrary: there is an extensive literature about all of this. The limitation is simply one of time and space.

2 Background: Wittgenstein's meta-philosophy

In the extensive literature about Wittgenstein's conception of the role of philosophy various commentators take opposite positions. There are those who are of the opinion that Wittgenstein sees only a therapeutic role for philosophy, and there are authors who hold that according to Wittgenstein philosophy's task is to engage in conceptual analysis as a necessary preparatory step for empirical investigation. The former we find in particular among the advocates of the so-called "new Wittgenstein", the latter view is more orthodox. ①

What is interesting to note is that, despite holding such opposite positions, both sides actually also share an assumption, viz., that content (of experience, or of an utterance that reports or expresses an experience) is always *discursive* content: something that can be asserted; that can play the role of premise or conclusion in an inference; that can be checked for truth. And that is exactly the kind of content that the experience that we started out with does *not* represent. And this means that the space in which philosophy has to secure a place of its own is limited in a principled way.

In line with this assumption both sides also seem to share the view that for the acquisition of *bona fide* knowledge we ultimately have to rely on science. For the "therapy only" proponents philosophy is of use only in so far as it leads us to accept this view by showing that by itself all it can do is show its own impotence. For the fans of "preliminary conceptual analysis" philosophy does have a preparatory task, one that is necessary for science to progress but that by itself does not produce any genuine knowledge. So both sides seems to subscribe to an assumption of scientism.

In the first instance I will concentrate my discussion on the first assumption:

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① The "new Wittgenstein" analysis originated in the work of Cora Diamond, and was taken up by several authors, among which James Conant, Alice Crary, Rupert Read; cf., the various contributions in Crary & Read (2001) for an overview. The orthodox position is most often associated with Peter Hacker (Hacker, 2004); another author who defends a similar position is for example H. O. Mounce (Mounce, 2001). Cf., Stokhof (2011) for a more detailed exposition, as well as for more details about the diagnosis of the controversy that follows.

Is all content indeed discursive? What would non-discursive content be like? And where could one find it? The second assumption will be dealt with later on, when I will briefly discuss the challenges posed by naturalism.

As I already mentioned, my starting point is formed by ideas from Wittgenstein's later works. However, if we would follow the two mainstream interpretations of Wittgenstein's meta-philosophy, then such a starting point simply does not exist, because according those views philosophy lacks any substantial content. Therefore we need to have a brief look at the arguments to that effect that are proposed.

2.1 Tractatus

For those who hold the "philosophy-is-therapy" view, the rejection of substantial philosophy is a constant in Wittgenstein's work. One passage,—close to the end of Wittgenstein's first book, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*—, that is often cited in support of that is this one:

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)
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> He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. (TLP, 6.54)

That leaves no room for doubt, or so it seems. What Wittgenstein appears to be saying here is that all along the reader has been taken for a ride: he thought he was getting a substantial theory about meaning, ontology, logic, but here, at the very end, Wittgenstein pulls the rug from under his feet. Presumably with the idea that if you bump your head this hard you will never again fall prey to the illusion that there is something that philosophy is about.

This seems to fit a naturalistic, scientistic point of view, in which there is only physical reality about which only science is able to deliver reliable knowledge. However, that very same TLP also contains references to other aspects of experience that seem to defy such a picture:

> There must indeed be some kind of ethical reward and ethical

punishment, but they must reside in the action itself. (TLP,6.422)

There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical. (TLP,6.522)

And it appears that it is such aspects that form the centre of what Wittgenstein is really concerned with, that are what is important in life.

But how is that in his later work?

2.2 Philosophical Investigations

The later work appears to be less straightforward. On the one hand there are passages in which Wittgenstein appears to want to limit philosophy to therapy:

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)

For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear. (PI, 133)

On the other hand, the major part of all that Wittgenstein has written, from his return to philosophy at the end of the 1920s to his death in 1951, consists of what appears to be substantial philosophy, about a wide range of subjects (meaning, psychological concepts, knowledge, mathematics, colour, and so on).

An indication that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is not a strictly negative, "therapy-only" one, but also does not coincide wit the "conceptual analysis as a prolegomenon to science" view, can be found in passages such as the following:

I wanted to put that picture before him, and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently: that is, to compare it with *this* sequence of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*. (PI, 144)

So philosophy does do something: it does not formulate explanatory theories, in

competition with the sciences; and it also does not provide a foundational analysis of concepts that can subsequently be used by the sciences to produce such theories. But what it does is at the same "liberating" (and that is what the therapeutic reading gets right), and something that provides insight in our possibilities of engaging with the world and ourselves. The scientific engagement is one of them (and that's what the other view captures), but it is not the only one.

This throws a different light on the identification of content with discursive content. And there are other reasons for that as well, for example if we look at meaning.

3 Meaning: hybrid and "travelling" expressions

The focus on discursive content that is a characteristic feature of many philosophical and linguistic approaches to meaning does not do justice to the multiplicity and variety of our everyday language.

If we take a closer look we can see that "discursive" and "non-discursive" do not partition the meaningful utterances we can make: there are also hybrid expressions, that have both a discursive and a non-discursive aspect; and there are "travelling" expressions, that are can be classified sometimes as discursive, sometimes as non-discursive depending on the context in which they are used.

Some examples: so-called "predicates of personal taste", which include aesthetic adjectives; exclamations; swear words and curses; prayer and other forms of ritual language use; so-called "Moore-statements"; .... Some of these will be discussed in more detail later on.

The existence of such expressions suggests that a classification in terms of "discursive versus non-discursive" stems from a misguided, too static view on meaning: many meanings, and hence also many concepts, are hybrid, flexible, dynamic. They are open to change and the changes can be initiated along both the discursive and the non-discursive dimension.

And that in its turn is an indication that it is better to think of the relationship between science and philosophy, too, in terms of flexibility and change, and not in terms of static opposition.

Which brings us to philosophy, and to the main topic of this lecture: the nature and the role of non-discursive content in philosophy.

We will treat three topics that play a role in Wittgenstein's later work: certainty; aesthetic experience; and religious belief. The choice of these topics does not imply any strong claims, for example that this would amount to an exhaustive overview of nondiscursive content, or that Wittgenstein's analyses of these phenomena would somehow be final. That is not the case.

But before we enter into a discussion of these three concrete phenomena we need to take one more step, and give a global characterisation of what constitutes nondiscursive content.

4 Features of non-discursive content

On the basis of what we have see so far the following three characteristics appear to provide a good handle. First of all, non-discursive content is that: *content*, i. e., it concerns utterances that are not just the expression of an emotion or a sensation. Think of "Ouch" when experiencing pain, or "Hurray" as an expression of joy, or the giggling that is prompted by being tickled.

That content, and this is the second feature, is related to a subject, in the sense that in its specification the subject plays a role, but also in those cases where this is a particular subject the content is something that can be accessed by several subjects: non-discursive content is *shareable*.

The third feature indicates that non-discursive content is related to external reality, but in a specific way: it has a *normative* dimension that plays a role in how we act in the world, how we react to what is framed in the world by this content.

Note that these three features imply the possibility of hybrid and travelling expressions/concepts. Using these features as guidelines we will now take a closer look at Wittgenstein's remarks on the three kinds of non-discursive content we mentioned above, and we will investigate how these phenomena relate to them.

We start with certainty.

5 Certainty

Wittgenstein's analysis of certainty constitutes the last body of work that he has done: *Über Gewißheit/On Certainty*[①] is a collection of notes that he made in the last year and a half of his life, the last entry dating from a couple of days before he died.[②]

The notes start with Wittgenstein's analysis of Moore's refutation of radical scepticism, in which statements such as "I know that this is a hand" play a special role. These are statements, Moore argues, that support the conclusions that, contrary to what the radical sceptic claims, we do indeed have knowledge of the external world.

We can leave the question whether Wittgenstein does justice to Moore's argument aside (he does not, but then again, doing justice to other people's ideas was never one of Wittgenstein's strengths). What is interesting in the present context is the alternative he develops, viz., that these are not statements that we *know*, but that what is at stake here are things that are *constitutive* for the language game of knowledge: they are what makes our epistemological practices possible, but as such they are not part of the practices they enable.

Before we can talk about knowledge, about doubt, evidence, justification, proof, truth and falsity, we first need to accept certain contents. These contents Wittgenstein calls "certainties". These certainties stem from difference sources, and hence differ in nature. But what they have in common is that they are outside the realm of doubt and proof.

The following are a few examples that can be found in Wittgenstein's text: basic aspects of human cognition, such as object-permanence and proprioception; basic features of our natural environment, such as gravity, the movements of celestial bodies and the changing of the seasons; basic conceptual structures and contents, such as the existence of the earth and the directedness of time;

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① Wittgenstein (1969); henceforth "OC".

② That is not to say that all ideas and concepts explored in OC are new; some of them can be traced back to Wittgenstein's work of the late thirties, such as "Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness", from 1937. Cf., Gennip (2008) for further details.

elementary facts that we learn during socialisation and in education, such as the shape of the earth and the boiling temperature of water; and individual facts, such as your name, where you live, what you had for breakfast, that NN is your longtime friend.

As we see, certainties are not limited to a particular domain, and they can change over the course of time. So certainty is a *functional* category: something is not a certainty per se, but functions as such. Certainties forms a conceptual framework, a "world picture" ("Weltanschauung") as Wittgenstein calls it, within which our epistemic practices take place.

In Wittgenstein's analyse we can then distinguish three levels:

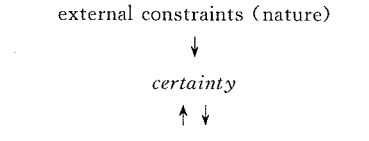

Figure 1: The three levels picture

There is nature, which includes not just our natural environment but also our human biological and psychological condition. There is certainty, ie., the contents that function as certainties and that form our world picture. And then there are the epistemic and other practices that are constituted by these certainties, within which we have such concepts as knowledge, methods for acquiring it, procedures for doubt and justification, and so on.

Nature restricts what can function as certainty: some logically possible conceptual frameworks simply are not adequate given the constraints that nature puts on them, and others, on the contrary, "prove their worth", as Wittgenstein puts it (OC 474). But nature does not force one conceptual framework on us, as is evident from the fact that our world picture changes, and that different world picture can co-exist in different communities.

There is exchange between levels of certainty and knowledge. During the socialisation period and the following process of education a world picture is formed, we learn to accept contents as certainties, without bothering about proof or evidence, simply because we are not yet sufficiently versed in the relevant epistemic practices.

Once we are, however, the possibility of a reverse interaction opens up: what functions as a certainty might, for all sort of reasons, come under discussion, and thereby be brought within the scope of an epistemic practice. And in the other direction, something that was once a new and surprising piece of knowledge may fade into the background an become part of our world picture, one of our certainties.

Wittgenstein illustrates the dynamics between certainty and knowledge with the following analogy:

> But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness: nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.
>
> [...]
>
> It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid. The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.
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> But if someone were to say "So logic too is an empirical science" he would be wrong. Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing.
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> (OC, 94-98)

This passage makes clear that the functional distinction between certainty and the realm of knowledge is subject to change. What is interesting for us is that the process of change takes time and that it is not homogeneous across a community. Not everyone starts doubting the same thing at the same moment in time; and reversely, not everyone accepts something as certain simultaneously. The consequence of that is that there will always be things that are in transition, and that different people may take different stances toward them. There is, so to

speak, a "purgatory" of statement that are subject to doubt for some, are accepted as certain by others, and that count as refuted, or on the contrary as proven, for again other groups of users.

What is important is that the contents of these statements, which we can indeed call "travelling statements", do not belong unambiguously to the discursive domain, but also can not be unequivocally characterised as part of the non-discursive domain. For empirical science such statements, and the concepts they contain, are problematic. The same holds for a philosophy that has solely therapeutic aims. And they are also difficult to fit into the practice of orthodox conceptual analysis. But they do exist.

6 Aesthetic experience

A second domain of non-discursive content that Wittgenstein has analysed is that of aesthetic experience. The main source here is not work of Wittgenstein himself, but a compilation of notes taken by his students of lectures that Wittgenstein has given on this topic in the summer of 1937, that have been published under the title *Lectures on Aesthetics*. ①

Wittgenstein uses the term "aesthetic" in a fairly traditional sense: he is not concerned with art, or beauty, but with a particular type of normative judgement. Hence, aesthetic experience is not connected with a special kind of objects ("works of art"), or with special properties of objects ("beauty"). Rather, it relates to objects and events that are being judged in a particular way according to rules that are embedded in a culture, a tradition, a society. Aesthetic experience concerns practices of evaluation in the context of a way of life.

This shows itself also in the fact that Wittgenstein takes his examples from the sphere of the artisanal rather than the artistic. His heroes are the architect who ponders the proper design of a doorway; a tailor who is cutting the fabric for the lapels of a dinner jacquet; a piano player who studies the right performance of a sonata.

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① Wittgenstein (1978a); henceforth "LA".

What links these different practices is that they are concerned with activities that involve rules that enable a normative judgement of what someone does or makes, or of the way in which someone does or makes something. And the being able to act in accordance with such rules is an expertise, an acquired body of practical knowledge that is first and foremost expressed in application, in acting.

An aesthetic judgement therefore has nothing to do with feelings or emotions, as Wittgenstein illustrates in the following analogy:

> Suppose there is a person who admires and enjoys what is admitted to be good [in music, MS] but can't remember the simplest tunes, doesn't know when the bass comes in, etc. We say he hasn't seen what's in it. We use the phrase "A man is musical" not so as to call a man musical if he says "Ah!" when a piece of music is played, any more than we call a dog musical if it wags its tail when music is played. (LA, Ⅰ.17)

"Being musical" is being able to *do* something, not *feel* something. And one is musical 'by nature' only to a certain extent, it is largely a matter of education and training, in the context of a culture in which music and musical practices are embedded and connected with all kinds of other practices (religious, social, educational).

In his analyses of aesthetic experience and the meaning of aesthetic judgements, Wittgenstein introduces an interesting concept, viz., that of "directed discontent". That term indicates an internal relationship between an experience and an object or event:

> There is a "Why?" to aesthetic discomfort not a "cause" to it. The expression of discomfort takes the form of a criticism and not 'My mind is not at rest' or something. It might take the form of looking at a picture and saying: "What's wrong with it?"(LA, Ⅱ.19)
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> Suppose someone said: "The tempo of that song will be alright when I can hear distinctly such and such." I have pointed to a phenomenon which, if it is the case, will make me satisfied. (LA, Ⅲ.3)

Directed discontent is not just a feeling, it is it is an experience that aims at improvement. That means it is normative, and rule-based, and something that can be shared by other experts, minimally in this sense that they understand why

someone reacts the way he or she does and proposes such-and-such changes.

This also means that the meaning of an object,—for that is what is at stake here—, is not objective in the sense that it can be identified with certain physical characteristics that it has or to specific causal processes in which it occurs. The object gets its meaning because it exists in a particular practice, and it is thanks to that practice that it can be guiding for action. And the same goes for events that are involved in an aesthetic experience.

So aesthetic experience does not originate from purely objective characteristics of objects or events, but it is nevertheless intersubjective: aesthetic experiences can be shared, and aesthetic judgements have a communicative function and are action-guiding. The dual roots of aesthetic experiences are crucial here: their intersubjectivity stems from "nature", viz., our shared human nature, *and* from "nurture", viz., the existence of shared practices into which we are acculturated.

That also determines the relationship between a scientific approach to phenomena and an aesthetic one. Of course, both are possible, and necessary, but they concentrate on distinct aspects, and when done properly, do so in distinct ways. Science focuses on the objective and causal, and aims for law-like generalisations. Aesthetics, in Wittgenstein's sense, is concerned with the *meaning* these phenomena have *for us*, as creatures that are determined both naturally as well as socially and culturally.

With that Wittgenstein introduces a distinction that I consider essential for our understanding of the relationship between philosophy, along with a number of other humanities disciplines, and the sciences. The latter investigate *what-something-is*, the former are concerned mainly with *what-something-is-for-us*.

And that difference also plays a role in the third topic: religious belief.

7 Religious belief

Throughout his life Wittgenstein had a tense relation with religion. "I am not a religious man, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view" he once said to his student Drury. It is clear that Wittgenstein did not dismiss religion as such, but also that he had very distinct ideas about what is a

truly religious belief and what constitutes a truly religious attitude.

On this topic, too, we have to make do by and large with indirect evidence: what we know about Wittgenstein's ideas about religion comes from reports on conversations he had about the topic with friends and students, and from the notes his students made from three lectures that Wittgenstein gave about the topic of religious belief in 1937, that have been published as *Lectures on Religious Belief*. ①

As in the case of aesthetic experience the relation between scientific explanation and the meaning that these phenomena have for us in our daily life is a central theme in Wittgenstein's remarks on religious belief.

> Not only is it not reasonable, but it doesn't pretend to be. What seems to me ludicrous about O'Hara is his making it appear to be reasonable.
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> Why shouldn't one form of life culminate in an utterance of belief in a Last Judgement? But I couldn't either say "Yes" or "No" to the statement that there will be such a thing. Nor "Perhaps," nor "I'm not sure." It is a statement which may not allow of any such answer. (LRB, Ⅰ)

Farther O'Hara was someone who tried to make the Christian faith acceptable by pointing out what he took to be the rationally and historically accurate elements of it. That approach is rejected by Wittgenstein as misguided: truly religious belief is not a matter of seeking and weighing evidence, as if it was concerned with a scientific hypothesis. It is definitely something that people can commit to. But it is not something to which the usual testing procedures apply: religious belief is outside the domain of the discursive, outside the domain of the scientific.

For Wittgenstein this is a *characteristic feature* of a truly religious belief, anything that does not bear this mark he dismisses as superstition. With that a lot of things that people believe who consider themselves religious is implicitly cast aside by Wittgenstein as superstitious. In his view a truly religious belief is

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① Wittgenstein (1978b); henceforth "LRB". There is also primary material: in the miscellaneous remarks that have been gathered and published under the title *Culture and Value* (Wittgenstein, 1998; henceforth CV) there are a number that deal with these topics. In what follows we mainly draw on LRB because there Wittgenstein explicitly addresses the status of religious belief, whereas the remarks in CV are by and large concerned with their content.

something that has nothing to do with a belief in the existence of an entity, or entities, or in the occurrence of certain events (in the past or in the future).

For Wittgenstein the central point of a truly religious belief is the *attitude* to which it gives rise. That attitude determines everything, and is separated from anything that is relevant for determining one's position in a factual, scientific debate. There evidence, doubt, proof and refutation are crucial; in the case of a truly religious belief they don't play a role at all.

In the second lecture on religious belief Wittgenstein ruminates how he would react to someone who expresses a belief in the miracle of a bleeding statue (of a saint, or Mary, or Christ). Under normal circumstances, he says, he would regard this as a matter of superstition and he would attack it by investigating the phenomenon, providing a scientific explanation, and expose fraudulent behaviour: Wittgenstein as a kind of "myth buster".

What is interesting is that Wittgenstein also indicates that in certain cases this approach would completely miss the mark:

> I could imagine that someone showed an extremely passionate belief in such a phenomenon, and I couldn't approach his belief at all by saying: "This could just as well have been brought about by so and so," because he could think this blasphemy on my side. Or he might say: "It is possible that these priests cheat, but nevertheless in a different sense a miraculous phenomenon takes place there."
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> I have a statue which bleeds on such and such a day in the year. I have red ink, etc. "You are a cheat but nevertheless the Deity uses you. Red ink in a sense, but not red ink in a sense." (LRB, Ⅱ)

"Red ink in a sense, but not red ink in a sense." That means: yes, there is deceit and manipulation, and hence there is a scientific explanation for the event. But its *meaning* escapes that: that is not a matter of evidence or explanation, it is the role the phenomenon plays in our lives.

In this way Wittgenstein characterises truly religious beliefs as contents that also belong to the non-discursive domain. On the one hand a religious belief is about things that we can investigate empirically; on the other hand it has a meaning that is independent from that: what it is and what it is-for-us are two

separate aspects of the same phenomenon.

But if evidence,—seeing an appearance, having a revelation, trusting the literal meaning of a text—, does not play a role and can only led to superstition, how do truly religious beliefs originate?

For Wittgenstein it are first and foremost the events in our personal life that are operative here:

> Life can educate you to "believing in God". And experiences too are what do this but not visions, or other sense experiences, which show us the "existence of this being", but e. g. sufferings of various sorts. And they do not show us God as a sense experience does an object, nor do they give rise to conjectures about him. Experiences, thoughts,—life can force this concept on us. So perhaps it is similar to the concept "object".
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> (CV, 1950)

The kind of experience that can lead us to adopt a religious attitude is not like the experience of something empirical. And that means that the religious belief does not take part in the epistemic practices that are connected with our empirical experiences.

The term "object" does not refer, but indicates a way of classification,—it is not a material, but what Wittgenstein calls a "formal" concept—; in the same way the term "God" does not refer to some entity, Wittgenstein claims, but serves as an indication of a particular way of valuing, an attitude. And that attitude is on that transcends specific practices:

> [...] he has what you might call an unshakeable belief; It will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in his life. (LRB, I)

8 The motley of non-discursive content

Of course, there is a lot more to be said about these topics but I hope that this concise treatment has made clear that in the domain of certainty, that of aesthetic experience and that of religious belief, there is a notion of content that has the three characteristics that we have associated with the non-discursive: not

purely expressive, but also not entirely descriptive; related to a subject, but not private; and connected with the world, but at the same time normative and action-guiding.

But there are also differences. Non-discursive content is not always the same, rather, it concerns a motley of phenomena. One difference is the amount of homogeneity: for example, consider the diversity of sources of certainties and compare that with the much more homogeneous structure of an aesthetic practice. Also, the amount of variation along the social-cultural dimension can be different: that distinguishes religious belief from aesthetic experience. And the extent to which a phenomenon is subject-related is another variable: at that point certainty differs from religious belief.

But behind all resemblances and difference two factors play a role in all forms of non-discursive content: on the one hand it is related to the world and constrained by the world; on the other hand it is at the same time "something with people", i. e. , the result of socialisation and education, resulting in shared practices. This Janus-faced character of non-discursive content we find reflected in language.

9 Travelling expressions

As I pointed out earlier, it is important not to view the discursive and the non-discursive as two disjunct domains, as pertaining to two ontological spheres that are strictly separated and that do not influence each other in any way. The characteristic features that we associated with non-discursive content already indicate that this is a wrong view. And that is reinforced if we look at the linguistic expression of discursive and non-discursive content.

The link between the discursive and linguistic expression is obvious. But non-discursiveness does not preclude the use of language, on the contrary: language plays an important role here as well. Of course, that role is not the same everywhere, here too we are dealing with a motley and not with a nice all-white table cloth. Certainties, for example, usually go un-expressed, and are couched in language only when they get into a "transitional state". But aesthetic experience really needs language, both in education and in application. And

religious belief is sometimes connected to specific types of statements. But linguistic expression appears everywhere, and what is crucial to note is that it is often the same words and phrases and sentences that can function in both the discursive and the non-discursive domain.

Not all expressions are like that, of course. In the context of scientific investigation we often *define* new expressions with the aim of using them in in 100% discursive manner. Mathematics is perhaps the best example of this, but it also plays an important role in the sciences.

What is interesting for us are those expressions that are not limited to the discursive domain. Here we can think of expressions of everyday language that can be used in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes, discursive as well as non-discursive. A telling example is our psychological vocabulary, that we use to talk about ourselves, describe and explain actions and motives, but that we also rely on in the various ways in which we conduct empirical investigations of ourselves.

Crucial here is that the border between the discursive and the non-discursive is open: that is what makes "travelling expressions" possible. And that means that the results of scientific investigation can influence the meaning of everyday expressions that we also use in the non-discursive domain: by travelling from one to the other these expressions effect such changes. Of course, this can also go in the other direction: the way in which expressions are used in the discursive domain may depend in part on the meaning they have when used in the non-discursive domain. And when that happens "what something is" in part depends on "what something is-for-us".

10 Conclusions and consequences

There is of course a lot more to say about all this, but at this point I do think we can draw a couple of conclusions: that there is indeed such a thing as non-discursive content with the characteristic features that we have suggested; that it occurs in a wide variety of contexts and applications, and that, because it is not limited to just one type of phenomenon, it is heterogeneous in nature; and, finally, that one way of getting a grip on it is via the analysis of hybrid and

travelling expressions.

Another conclusion that I would like to suggest is that, as the work of Wittgenstein that we have made such ample use in the above illustrates, the reality of non-discursive content creates the possibility of substantial philosophy, i. e., philosophy that stands to science neither in a competitive nor in a preparatory relationship.

Philosophy can be more than just therapy, and I think the phenomena that we have discussed show that Wittgenstein thought the same. But that does not put philosophy in the same space as empirical science. Philosophy is not "also a kind of science, only different"; neither is it an endeavour with the sole task of clearing the conceptual way for science. The dilemma between "therapy-only" and "preparatory conceptual analysis" thus is a false dilemma, and hence can be avoided. And that means that this form of philosophy also offers an alternative for a scientistic view.

Important for the issue of scientism is the observation that we just made, viz., that there are open borders between the discursive and the non-discursive: this indicates that the borders between science and philosophy and the everyday are open as well, that there can be influences in various directions, and that the relationships between them are not strictly hierarchical and fixed. This is also relevant for the last subject that I want to treat today: the challenges of naturalism, and the consequences for the humanities in general, and for philosophy in particular.

11 The challenges of naturalism

Naturalism is a complex topic: it has many aspects and can be analysed in various ways. Here I will not try to do justice the the subtle distinctions between various naturalistic positions. For present purposes it will suffice to work with a global sketch of the challenges that a naturalistic approach, broadly construed, poses. So in what follows we will understand naturalism as any position that adopts the assumption that only natural phenomena are real and that every natural phenomenon can be fully understood in an empirical way. So: "No spooky stuff", and no appeal to other methods than the ones of empirical science.

The challenges that naturalism poses for the humanities are actually quite diverse, and range from straightforward one-sided reductionism to various forms of pluralistic co-operation. The details are complex, of course, but for our purpose we can group them under three general headings.

The first type of challenge is methodological: a discipline can be confronted with another discipline that investigates the same object, asking the same questions, but that does so with different methods. The result is a methodological pluralism, and that induces in its turn the non-trivial issue of the comparability of results that have been obtained with different methods.

A second, more far-reaching challenge is epistemological: this is when the same object is approached from within a different epistemic practice; the goals of the investigation are different and hence the requirements that the results should meet are different as well. In some case the outcome is a stable division of labour, but there is also the potential of direct competition. The challenge here takes on the form of maintaining the claim on the objectivity of the results that the original epistemic practice delivers.

The third and most serious challenge is the ontological one: here the object of investigation is actually changed, in this sense that a particular phenomenon is construed along different ontological lines. (The recent reduction of the human mind to the human brain is a telling example, but there are numerous others.) The result in the first instance is ontological pluralism, with two ontologically distinct objects existing side-by-side, and the challenge is to justify this pluralism. From the point of view of naturalism, however, such a justification is not forthcoming and that means that from that perspective reductionism from the old object to the new one is the only option.

As said, these are very global characterisations, and in actual cases the challenge of naturalism takes on slightly different forms.

12 Humanities challenged

Within the broad field of the humanities the starting position is usually quite similar: traditionally disciplines in the humanities use primarily qualitative research methods and in doing so aim for a specific kind of knowledge about and

insight in their object of study.

If the naturalistic point of view is connected with the success of the physical sciences and the methods used there, then the naturalistic challenge at first takes on the form of a methodological challenge, and promotes the use of quantitative, experimental, and computational methodologies that are being successfully used in other disciplines.

For different disciplines in the humanities that methodological challenge comes from different directions. For example, in the historical sciences sources are population dynamics, epidemiology, macro-economics, and similar disciplines that deal with large historic data sets; in media studies it is quantitative sociology or neuro-aesthetics; linguistics is challenged by cognitive neuroscience, probabilistic modelling, artificial intelligence and deep learning; and so on.

The way in which the process develops depends on a number of things: the specific nature of the humanities discipline; the developments in the sciences discipline; technological developments: e. g. , the emergence of brain imaging techniques (such as fMRI) that enable "in vivo" brain research; or tools for recombinant DNA-research.

So not all humanities disciplines are in the same situation. However, there seems to be a pattern: when a methodological challenge turns into an epistemological one, and ultimately becomes ontological the relationship between the challenged discipline and its challenger(s) changes along a continuum: cooperation as an equal partners may turn into the humanities discipline becoming a subdiscipline and eventually may lead to a complete take-over.

What is important to note here is that the question whether a challenge is in fact justified in some cases seems to play a subordinate role: it is whether it is considered as such by other researchers, by funding organisations, and the science community at large that is often the decisive factor.

And that leads us to the issue of objectivity.

13 Objectivity as a shared challenge

The challenges that confront the humanities are not just an intellectual but also a social and political reality. Objectivity is a key element here, because,

presumed or actual, objectivity is a necessary condition for public, and hence political, acceptance of and support for science in general. And as objectivity is more and more associated with practical applicability, it becomes more and more urgent to answer the question of the objectivity of the humanities properly.

First task for the humanities here, it would seem to me, is to stress time and again that objectivity as such is not an absolute concept that is firmly anchored in an independent reality. Saying this I do not mean to refer to the fact that also in the "hard" sciences all kinds of assumptions of a psychological, social and cultural nature play a role in the construction of the objects of investigation, in the applications of methodologies and in the interpretation of the results. All that is is true,—to a certain extent—, but not what is at stake here.

What is important in this context is that next to the objectivity that exists independently of us, there is also an objectivity that we as humans collectively constitute. There is objectivity that manifests itself in discovery, through experiment and observation, and that forms the basis of causal, law-like explanation that is connected with control and application. But there is also another form of objectivity that comes to the fore in recognition, in shared practices and institutions, and that forms the basis of justification and is connected with meaning, what things are-for-us.

This second objectivity springs from the recognition, in others and in ourselves, of both a shared nature and a shared culture. This is the objectivity that is action-guiding: it ranges from the natural ways in which we react to our environment to the complex social and cultural institutions that we erect and maintain on that basis. It is the objectivity that allows us to assess the meaning that objects, customs, actions have for people living in a different age, in different social, cultural and economic circumstances. And it is the objectivity that is intrinsically connected with the meaning we assign to ourselves, to our own lives.

If this reminds us of what we observed earlier,—in the discussion or certainty, aesthetic experience and religious belief—, that is no coincidence, of course. Therefore, by way of conclusion, I want to return briefly to philosophy.

14 Philosophy challenged

Among the humanities philosophy is special in that it faces an extra challenge: Is there something that philosophy is about?

With all other disciplines in the humanities, whatever questions are raised regarding method and purpose, one thing is not disputed: what they are about. How that object is best construed is a different question, of course, and one that can indeed be answered in different ways. But that, for example, the historical sciences deal with the past, that language is the subject matter of linguistics, or that religious studies deal with religion, is something that is not questioned.

But philosophy is a different matter. Is there a distinct subject matter that philosophy deals with? Or is philosophy a particular way of being "clever"? It will be clear that I side with the former view, but in a particular way. Philosophy can be substantial, but not in the same as as the sciences are. The discursive domain is what the sciences, including the other humanities, are concerned with, and here philosophy has no substantial role to play any more. But the non-discursive asks for a different way of understanding that complements that of the sciences. And this is where, I would suggest, philosophy does have an important contribution to make.

Philosophy is difficult, because it requires inventiveness, flexibility, and openness. And cleverness? Well, being clever is not a prerogative of the philosopher, and it is not what makes a philosopher. And perhaps philosophy is better served with something else:

> The valleys of foolishness have more grass growing in them for the philosopher than do the barren heights of cleverness.
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> (CV, 1949)

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