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Surveyable Representations, the "Lecture on Ethics", and Moral Philosophy

Abstract

I argue that it is possible and useful for moral philosophy to provide surveyable representations (as the later Wittgenstein understands the concept) of moral vocabulary. I proceed in four steps. First, I present two dominant interpretations of the concept "surveyable representation". Second, I use these interpretations as a background against which I present my own interpretation. Third, I use my interpretation to support the claim that Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" counts as an example of a surveyable representation. I conclude that, since the lecture qualifies as a surveyable representation, it is *possible* to provide surveyable representations of moral vocabulary. Fourth, I argue that it is *useful* for contemporary moral philosophy to provide surveyable representations, because it may help to dissolve problems in current debates. I provide an example of such a debate, namely, the debate between cognitivists and non-cognivitists.

Wittgenstein did not write much about moral philosophy in his later works, at least not explicitly. Thus, it is tricky to attribute to the later Wittgenstein any clear views on morality. That is not to say, however, that moral philosophy has nothing to learn from Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Indeed, the point of this article is to show that moral philosophy has a great deal to learn from Wittgenstein's later writings. However, what it can learn is not in the first place to be found in (a reconstruction of) Wittgenstein's views on moral matters.

The significance of Wittgenstein's later philosophy does not lie in the theses or arguments that have been ascribed to it ("meaning is use", "the private language argument"), but in its *methods.* Philosophy is not about advancing theses, it is an open-ended set of

therapeutic methods for making philosophical problems disappear (PI 133). Philosophical problems arise "through a misinterpretation of our forms of language" (PI 111). That is, philosophical problems are the result of words and sentences being used out of the (linguistic and non-linguistic) practical contexts in which they are "at home" (PI 116), inevitably leading to "conceptual unclarities" (PPF 202).[1] These unclarities are dissolved "through an insight into the workings of our language" (PI 109). We lack that insight because

> […] we don't have *an overview* of the use of our words. – Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links.*
> The concept of a surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us. It characterizes the way we represent things, how we look at matters. (Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?) (PI 122)

The concept of a surveyable representation is "of fundamental significance" because giving a surveyable representation of the use of our words is a philosophical method, employed by the philosopher not merely so as to make himself understood, but also in order to get clear about the matter himself (Z 329). By "assembling what we have long been familiar with", a surveyable representation does not provide any new information, it just reminds us (PI 127) of things that we are prone to overlook "because of their simplicity and familiarity" (PI 129). Insight into the often overlooked workings of our language will reveal philosophical problems to be the result of conceptual confusions and ultimately make them disappear.

If the significance of Wittgenstein's later philosophy lies in its methods, a central question regarding the later Wittgenstein's significance for *moral* philosophy is this: is it possible and useful to apply Wittgensteinian methods in moral philosophy? A pivotal aspect of that question, and the main question of this article, is: is it possible and useful for moral

[1] "PPF" stands for "Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment", which has become, after the publication of the revised, fourth edition of the *Philosophical Investigations* (2009), the new title of what was previously known as part two of the *Investigations.*

philosophy to give surveyable representations of the *moral* use of our words?[2] Philosophers such as Johnston (1991) and Wisnewski (2007) have asked that question before, as part of a broader investigation into the usefulness of Wittgensteinian methods for moral philosophy (and given the significance that Wittgenstein attributes to surveyable representations, in a certain way one *has to* ask it in such an investigation). My focus on surveyable representations is narrower than Johnston's and Wisnewski's, but it also goes deeper. In the first two sections of this article, and in contrast to the scarce attention Johnston and Wisnewski pay to interpretational issues and to the question of what exactly a surveyable interpretation *is*, I will develop an interpretation of the concept of a surveyable representation on the basis of textual evidence and against the background of existing interpretations. Using my interpretation, I will then try to answer my main question. In the third section, I will argue that within a Wittgensteinian framework, it is *possible* to give surveyable representations of the moral use of words by providing the example of Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics". In the fourth section, I will argue that it is *useful* for contemporary moral philosophy to give such surveyable representations, because it may help to dissolve problems in current debates. Herein, I will also provide an example, namely, the debate between cognitivists and non-cognivitists.

1. The Concept of a Surveyable Representation: Two Interpretations

If one thing is for sure about the concept of a surveyable representation, it is, as Baker has pointed out, that "though clearly important, Wittgenstein's concept of a perspicuous

[2] By "the moral use of our words", I mean first of all the use of words which typically occur in moral statements (such as "good", "right", "ought") *in their moral sense*, that is, "the use of moral words" (in "a good knife", "good" is not a moral word). But, as (among others) Diamond has pointed out (1996: 251-252), statements can be moral statements without there being any typically "moral" words in them. Some words do not typically occur in moral statements, but only have a moral sense in certain contexts. I do not want to exclude surveyable representations of the use of these words (although I will focus on the use of moral words). Therefore, I write "the moral use of words" rather than "the use of moral words".

representation is not itself perspicuous" (2004: 23).[3] A number of interpretations have been put forward and commentators have acknowledged that their interpretations are not the only possible ones (Baker and Hacker 2005: 332; Hutto 2007: 300). This is not surprising, insofar that Wittgenstein explicitly qualifies only one thing as a surveyable representation in his entire oeuvre: the colour-octahedron (PR 51-52; see, for a picture, PR 278). The colour-octahedron is a surveyable representation of the grammar of colour because it clarifies how colour-words can and cannot be used meaningfully. It "wears the rules of grammar on its face" (PR 278): looking at the octahedron, we immediately see that it makes sense to talk about "yellowish red", but that it is nonsense to talk about "yellowish blue". Although the colour-octahedron is the only unambiguous example that Wittgenstein provides of a surveyable representation, commentators commonly, and rightfully, assume that a surveyable representation does not need to be an image, like the colour-octahedron. This is supported by Wittgenstein's remark that a verbal description can take the place of an image (PPF 18; AWL 27). But what does such a verbal description look like?

I will introduce two interpretations of the concept of a surveyable representation, Baker and Hacker's being the first. According to their reading, the notion of a surveyable representation can be interpreted in a narrow and a broad sense.

> Narrowly understood, a surveyable representation of the grammar of an expression appears to be a grammatical proposition or a few grammatical propositions that shed enough light on the matter at hand to dispel illusion and to highlight the grammatical category or role of the expression in question. Broadly understood, a surveyable representation is a synopsis of the grammatical rules for the use of an expression […] Either way, the selection of the salient rules of grammar is guided by *conceptual* problems that arise in the domain in question. (2005: 332)

Wittgenstein provided numerous examples of surveyable representations in a narrow sense:

[3] It is not easy to translate the original, German expression *übersichtliche Darstellung*. In the revised fourth edition of the *Philosophical Investigations*, *übersichtlich* has been translated as "surveyable" "to preserve the reference to *view* and *survie*w" (Notes to PI, PI p. 252), whereas Anscombe's translation (and consequently, most interpretations) uses "perspicuous". On this translation issue, see Backer and Hacker 2005: 308.

> He reminds us that naming is preparatory to the use of a word (PI 26), but not itself a move in the language-game (PI 49). He points out that a sample is a paradigm, something with which comparison is made, that it is not *described* by an ostensive definition (PI 50), hence that it is not a point at which language is 'connected to reality', but belongs to the means of representation; that understanding is not a mental state but is akin to an ability (PI 150); that to mean something is not the same as to think of it (PI 187); and so on. (ibid.: 333)

When it comes to the broad interpretation, however, the only example that Wittgenstein provides is his plan for the treatment of psychological concepts (Z 472, RPP I 895, RPP II 63, 148) (ibid.: 333).

There are two problems with Baker and Hacker's interpretation. First, their distinction between a narrow and a broad interpretation seems unnecessary. In both cases, the selection of salient grammatical rules is guided by conceptual problems, i.e., in both cases a surveyable representation is a set of only those grammatical rules needed to dissolve philosophical problems generated by our misuse of language. One could claim, say, that a broad surveyable representation is more "complete". But what does "completeness" amount to if not to a surveyable representation's "capacity" to completely dissolve philosophical problems; that is, a capacity that is common to both narrow and broad surveyable representations? There would be a difference if a broad surveyable representation was complete by providing an exhaustive description of everything that could possibly be problematic about the grammar of an expression, i.e., if it would contain an answer to every *possible* unclarity. But this interpretation demands a sense of completeness ("exhaustive", "*everything* that could possibly be problematic") that goes against the spirit of Wittgenstein's later philosophy (see PPF 202, Z 440). Baker and Hacker themselves acknowledge this elsewhere, noting that "the notion of a context-free, purpose-independent conception of the totality of rules for the use of an expression is out of place" (2009: 54; see also AWL 21 and Kuusela 2008: 67-68, 80-81, 85, 304). Moreover, such a demand for completeness is not met by Wittgenstein's plan for the treatment of psychological concepts (Z 465) and I am unable to see how it even possibly

could be.[4] Thus, I suggest to drop the exhaustive reading of the broad interpretation and (because this reading seems to me to be the only way to prevent the broad and narrow interpretations from collapsing into each other) to consider the distinction between a narrow and a broad interpretation of "surveyable representation" to be unnecessary.

The second problem with Baker and Hacker's interpretation of "surveyable representation" is that it takes surveyable representations to consist only of grammatical propositions. Glock agrees with their interpretation insofar that he describes a surveyable representation as "an enumeration or arrangement of grammatical rules/propositions" (1996: 280). An example of such a rule, according to Baker and Hacker, can be found in PI 150:

> The grammar of the word 'know' is evidently closely related to the grammar of the words 'can', 'is able to'. But also closely related to that of the word 'understand'. (To have 'mastered' a technique.)

Compare this with the beginning of PI 151:

> But there is also *this* use of the word 'know': we say 'Now I know!' – and similarly, 'Now I can do it!' and 'Now I understand!'

Both PI 150 and PI 151 produce "that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'", i.e. connections between the grammar of the words "know", "can" and "understand". Both PI 150 and PI 151 can be said to give us (part of) an overview of the use of our words and help us to dissolve certain philosophical problems, engendered, for example, by the confused ideas that to know something is a mental state and to understand something is a mental process. Therefore, an interpretation in which both PI 150 and PI 151 clearly qualify as (parts of) surveyable representations is preferable. But while it is clear that PI 150 consists of grammatical rules (rules for the use of words), things are quite different in PI 151. To be

[4] One might object that the colour-octahedron dissolves *all possible* problems with the grammar of colour-expressions and is therefore the only example of a surveyable representation in Wittgenstein's oeuvre. If this is true, it is difficult to understand why Wittgenstein did not include in his *Philosophical Investigations* the only example of what he judged to be "of fundamental significance". In any case, an example of a *verbal* surveyable representation seems, in the "exhaustive" reading of the broad interpretation, impossible to find in Wittgenstein's works. Because Wittgenstein explicitly states that "a method is now demonstrated by examples" (PI 133), we can expect Wittgenstein to have given at least some examples of surveyable representations.

sure, I am not saying that Baker, Hacker and Glock would not allow for PI 151 to be part of a surveyable representation (in case of which, of course, they would have to argue that PI 151 consists of (or is a) grammatical proposition(s)). What I am saying is that, in some cases, what I think clearly qualifies as (part of) a surveyable representation does not as clearly consist of grammatical propositions. Since there is a great deal of controversy as to what grammatical propositions are (see, for example, Aidun 1981 and Schmitz 2006), an account of surveyable representations that is not wholly dependent on a particular conception of grammatical propositions is preferable. One could argue that PI 151 is a grammatical proposition, but one could also argue as that it gives us an example of the actual use of words and not a rule for the use of words. Why would someone who adopts the latter claim be obliged to refrain from seeing it as (part of) a surveyable representation? Could not an example of the actual use of words help us to achieve an overview of the use of our words?

The Baker-Hacker interpretation was published in 1980. By 1991, Baker had become convinced that it was seriously misguided. In "*Philosophical Investigations* § 122: Neglected aspects" (2004: 22-51), he develops an interpretation of "surveyable representation" in explicit contrast to the Baker-Hacker interpretation, based on an early version of the *Philosophical Investigations* (TS 220). According to his interpretation,

> […] Wittgenstein called 'a perspicuous representation of our grammar' anything which has the function of introducing 'perspicuity' into some aspects of the use of some of 'our words' (i.e. anything which manifestly helps somebody to know his way about by dissolving some philosophical problems which bother him). There is no general restriction on what form a perspicuous representation may take. In particular, it need not be either a diagram (like the colour-octahedron) or an assemblage of grammatical rules for the use of 'our words'. (Baker 2004: 31)

I agree with the later Baker's critique, shared by Kuusela (2008: 225), that a surveyable representation need not be an assemblage of grammatical rules, as the Baker-Hacker interpretation claims. There are several techniques for introducing perspicuity into the use of our words. A simple language-game, for example, may qualify as a perspicuous

representation (Baker 2004: 33). Although he does not refer to Baker, Schroeder (2004: 147-169) takes up this suggestion by defending the claim that for Wittgenstein, "synoptic representations" are

> […] simple, fictitious language-games, like that of buying apples (PI 1), the builders (PI 2, 8, 15, 21), the description of coloured squares (PI 48, 64), ordering someone to fetch composite objects (PI 60, 62), or the reading of a table according to different schemas (PI 86) (ibid.: 148).

Another technique is to compare the use of certain words to the use of others (Baker 2004: 34). By way of similes and analogies, Wittgenstein often tries to break the spell of a certain analogy that "held us captive" (PI 115). We think, for example, that sensations are private objects, like beetles in boxes (PI 293). Bringing these unconscious analogies to light, "to pass from unobvious nonsense to obvious nonsense" (PI 464), helps to make our use of words surveyable.

2. The Concept of a Surveyable Representation: a Third Interpretation

Two interpretations of the concept of a surveyable representation have been briefly discussed: the Baker-Hacker interpretation and the later Baker's interpretation. I think that the later Baker's amendments to the Baker-Hacker interpretation are justified and I will take them into account in what follows. I will now provide an interpretation of "surveyable representation" in terms of conditions for something to count as a surveyable representation and techniques to produce surveyable representations. I will develop the interpretation against the background of the two interpretations that I have already presented. The systematized (and sometimes deliberately simplified) way in which I will present my interpretation may seem somewhat "un-Wittgensteinian", but I do not believe that it is so long as its status is properly understood. It is not "a preconception to which reality *must* correspond", but a model, "an object of comparison", "a sort of yardstick" (PI 131), and I will use it as such in sections three and four.

My interpretation is based on the assumption that Wittgenstein's methods are best understood "by relating his actual proceeding in the text to his own explanations, and vice versa" (Ammereller and Fischer 2004: xvii). This is to say that, if Wittgenstein states that the concept of a surveyable representation is of fundamental significance, there have to be examples of surveyable representations in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein's writings are "in fact replete with perspicuous representations" (Hutto 2007: 303), because "Wittgenstein's method, generally speaking, *is* that of the perspicuous presentation of language" (Kuusela 2008: 269, my italics).

In my view, the lack of explicit information on surveyable representations invites a fairly liberal interpretation. Rather than rule out candidates for surveyable representations with the argument that Wittgenstein never explicitly linked them to his concept of surveyable representations (as, for example, Baker and Hacker do with Schroeder's suggestion that fictitious language-games serve as surveyable representations) (2005: 329), I am willing to consider everything that is not at odds with the minimal conditions we have as a surveyable representation. What are these minimal conditions? First, a surveyable representation should remedy the problem of our not having an overview of the use of our words. Second, it should produce a kind of understanding which consists in seeing connections, an understanding that should contribute to the dissolution of philosophical problems engendered by our misunderstanding of the workings of our language. These conditions indicate the *problems* that surveyable representations are intended to solve (problem condition) and the *goals* that they are meant to achieve (goal condition).

There is no intrinsic characterization of surveyable representations (Baker 2004: 41; Hutto 2007: 303); that is, there are no intrinsic features that all surveyable representations must have in common. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein develops different techniques for producing surveyable representations, four of the most important ones of which I will

discuss.[5] These techniques constitute, what I will call, the proceeding condition. For something to count as a surveyable representation, it is not absolutely necessary to satisfy this condition, i.e., to display the use of one or more of these techniques, because I agree with Baker and Hutto that there is no general restriction as to what form a surveyable representation can take. Its satisfying the condition, however, together with its satisfying the two necessary conditions already mentioned (problem condition and goal condition), will speak strongly in favour of its being a surveyable representation.

The first technique, examples of which have been given, is the explicit statement of grammatical rules. Second, Wittgenstein points to our actual use of words (BBB 56, BBB 61). I have quoted PI 151, in which Wittgenstein points at some uses of the word "know". Another example is PI 183:

> We do say 'Now I can go on, I mean I know the formula', as we say 'I can walk, I mean I have the time'; but also 'I can walk, I mean I am already strong enough' […]

Third, "our method is not merely to enumerate actual uses of words, but rather deliberately to invent new ones, some of them because of their absurd appearance" (BBB 28). The invention of new uses of words and fictional concepts (CV 85) is exemplified in fictitious language-games, examples of which have been mentioned. Wittgenstein constantly asks us to "suppose", "think of" or "imagine" a situation in order to shed light on the ways in which words can and cannot be meaningfully used (BBB 61). Fourth, words or sentences are compared to others by way of analogies or similes. Wittgenstein writes that "What I invent are new *comparisons*" (CV 16) and that

> A philosophical problem can be solved only in the right surrounding. We must give the problem a new surrounding, we must compare it to cases we are not used to compare it with. (PO 457)

[5] Most commentators would call them "methods" (see Baker and Hacker 2005: 290-294), but I would prefer to distinguish "techniques" from "methods" here. A philosophical method is a (quite general) way of dealing with philosophical problems, of which "giving surveyable representations" is an example. Techniques are specific ways to practice a method.

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Comparisons allow us to see both similarities and differences between something and what it is compared to (between, for example, "knowing" and "saying" (PI 78)). They can also help us to understand that certain analogies forced their way into our thinking (for example, the analogy between a sensation and a private object).[6]

Although this list of techniques is by no means exhaustive, these are, in my view, four of the most important (maybe even *the* four most important) techniques used by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* to surveyably represent the use of words.[7] To my knowledge, nobody has yet argued that all of these techniques can be used to produce surveyable representations. At least three of them (except for the actual use of words), however, have been explicitly linked with the concept of surveyable representations by several commentators. First, Glock (1996: 280) and Baker and Hacker (2005: 331) have pointed out that surveyable representations consist of rules for the use of words. Second, Baker (2004: 33) allows for language-games to be surveyable representations. Schroeder sees language-games as being the only plausible candidates (2004: 148) while Hutto mentions them as "prime examples" of surveyable representations (2007: 304). Third, the idea of giving a surveyable representation by way of analogies and similes is articulated by Baker (2004: 34) and Kuusela (2008: 233), who quotes Wittgenstein: "The purpose of a good expression [and] a good comparison is that it makes possible an immediate overview" (MS 112, 112r). It is also suggested by Moore in his notes on Wittgenstein's lectures:

[6] In PI 130, Wittgenstein writes that "language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language". Hence, there is no sharp distinction between presenting fictitious language-games (third technique) and offering comparisons (fourth technique). There is also no sharp distinction between presenting grammatical rules showing how words can and cannot be meaningfully used (first technique) and showing how words are actually being used (second technique). Nevertheless, I think it is useful to draw the distinctions as I have done: we can, for example, show how words are being used without explicitly stating rules (see PI 151) and not all comparisons are fictitious language-games (take, for example, the analogy between philosophical methods and therapies in PI 133).

[7] Other techniques include, first, Wittgenstein's asking us to consider how we would teach someone the use of certain expressions (LA 2, PI 208). A second technique is the invention of different notations, for example Wittgenstein's invention, in the *Tractatus*, of the T/F notation (see Baker and Hacker 2005: 293; Glock 1996: 279; Baker 2004: 30; AWL 98-99; BBB 23). A third technique is giving a picture representing grammatical facts (the colour-octahedron, for example).

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> Moreover, I [Moore] cannot possibly do justice to the extreme richness of illustration and comparison which he [Wittgenstein] used: he was really succeeding in giving what he called a 'synoptic' view of things which we all know. (PO 50)

The more it exhibits and combines these techniques and the more it approaches "the same points […] afresh from different directions" (PI p. 3), the more likely the representation is to be surveyable, i.e. to succeed in dissolving philosophical problems. This is why Wittgenstein often uses the four techniques to surveyably represent the use of one word. An example can be found in PI 150-151, where he offers a rule for the word "know", compares it to "is able to", provides an example of how it is actually used and asks us to imagine a situation in which the word "know" can be used. All of these techniques can be said to produce "that kind of understanding which consists in seeing connections". In this case, they help to make us to see the connection between "to know" and "to be able to". They help us to dissolve philosophical problems engendered by our thinking (mistakenly) that "knowing something" is a hidden, inner mental state (the problem of Cartesian dualism, for example).

My interpretation of surveyable representations can be summarized as follows:

> Giving surveyable representations is an important method of therapeutic philosophy (but certainly not the only one), a way of getting us to see that the philosophical problem we are struggling with is based on conceptual confusions. A surveyable representation should remedy the problem of our not having an overview of the use of our words and expressions (problem condition). The more it approaches the same points from different directions, the more it displays the use of a variety of techniques, the more likely the representation is to be surveyable. Prime examples of techniques for giving surveyable representations, ubiquitously used by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, are: showing how words and expressions are actually being used, showing how words and expressions can and cannot be meaningfully used (by, for example, setting up fictitious examples and inventing language-games), offering comparisons to highlight differences and similarities between the uses of words and expressions, stating rules for the use of words by way of grammatical propositions (proceeding condition). Surveyable representations produce a kind of understanding which consists in seeing connections. This understanding should contribute to the dissolution of philosophical problems engendered by our misunderstanding of the workings of our language (goal condition). Surveyable representations cannot be complete in an absolute sense. They are complete in a relative sense (relative to a philosophical problem) if they succeed in completely dissolving the philosophical problem we are struggling with. Whether a representation is surveyable, i.e. whether the results of applying different techniques have been represented surveyably, ordered "in such a manner as to shed light upon the problems" (Baker and Hacker 2009: 257), will ultimately be judged by its succeeding to dissolve philosophical problems.

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This interpretation (although it is quite liberal in comparison to existing interpretations) excludes a lot of what Wittgenstein does in the *Tractatus*.[8] The *Tractatus* simply does not display the variety of techniques that Wittgenstein uses in the *Investigations* to approach the same problems from different directions. On the contrary, one could say that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein approaches the problem of our not understanding the logic of our language (TLP 4.003) from one direction only, i.e., by trying to formulate the general, underlying form of the proposition (TLP 6).

3. The "Lecture on Ethics" as a Surveyable Representation

In November 1929, Wittgenstein gave a lecture on ethics (PO 37-44) to the Heretics Society in Cambridge. At the time, his later philosophy and his new method were only "just dawning" (Hacker 1996: 85). In his lecture, he "reiterated the view of the *Tractatus* that any attempt to say anything about the subject-matter of ethics would lead to nonsense" (Monk 1991: 277). It is, therefore, no wonder that commentators have seen the lecture as "backward-looking" (Hacker 1996: 302) and "evidently an elaboration of ideas already mooted in the *Tractatus*" (ibid.: 77). Because the concept of a surveyable representation is often understood as central to Wittgenstein's later philosophy alone, it might, at first, be difficult to see how the view that the lecture on ethics qualifies as a surveyable representation can be defended.

Although Wittgenstein's new method was indeed just dawning, the concept of a surveyable representation can already be found in the *Philosophical Remarks*, a collection of notes made by Wittgenstein between February 1929 and April 1930. In fact, the example of the colour-octahedron is taken from these very notes. The concept of surveyable representation can be found in another early source, namely, the first part of Wittgenstein's

[8] Not everything, because I do not want to exclude the invention of different notations (see footnote 7) from being a technique for producing surveyable representations.

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"Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*", which was written in 1931 (PO 133).[9] In his lectures between 1930 and 1933, Wittgenstein used the term "synopsis" for *Übersicht* (Baker and Hacker 2005: 308). I have quoted Moore, who said that Wittgenstein "really succeeded in giving a synoptic view of things". Moore also notes that "he [Wittgenstein] said you might say that what is satisfactory in Darwin is not such 'hypotheses', but his 'putting the facts in a system' – helping us to make a **'**synopsis**'** of them" (PO 107) and that

> He also said that he was not trying to teach us any new facts: that he would only tell us 'trivial' things – 'things which we all know already'; but that the difficult thing was to get a 'synopsis' of these trivialities, and that our 'intellectual discomfort' can only be removed by a synopsis of *many* trivialities – that 'if we leave out any, we still have the feeling that something is wrong'. […] I imagine that it was in this respect of needing a 'synopsis' of trivialities that he thought that philosophy was similar to Ethics and Aesthetics. (PO 114)

The *Philosophical Remarks,* fragments from the "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*" and these quotes from Moore suggest that the concept of a surveyable representation was central to Wittgenstein's thought by the early 1930s. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he may have had it in mind at the end of 1929, when he wrote the "Lecture on Ethics". Another interesting aspect of Moore's quote is that it links Wittgenstein's synopsis with the methods of ethics and aesthetics. This suggestion has also been articulated by Baker and Hacker. For them, the notion of surveyability is "implicit in his [Wittgenstein's] fragmentary remarks on ethics and aesthetics" (2005: 307). Both the facts that the notion of surveyable representation may very well have been present in Wittgenstein's thinking at the time he wrote the "Lecture on Ethics", and that a link between surveyability and Wittgenstein's

[9] The "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*" concern methods of anthropological hermeneutics, not philosophical methods (see also Hacker 2001: 75). A surveyable representation, in the sense in which Wittgenstein uses the concept in these remarks, is therefore rightly characterized as "a particular sort of arrangement of related cases of a phenomenon" (Eldridge 1987: 242). What is surveyably represented is not necessarily the use of our words. Baker has criticized the Baker-Hacker interpretation because, on their reading, "it is a pleonasm to say that the subject-matter of a perspicuous representation is 'the grammar of our language' or 'the use of our words'" (2004: 27). The interpretation of surveyable representations that I have presented tries to clarify the notion as it is used in the *Philosophical Investigations.* Because surveyable representations are explicitly linked in the *Investigations* with giving us an overview of the use of our words and remedying the lack of surveyability of our grammar, I do agree with the statement that is disapprovingly quoted by Baker. Wittgenstein may well have thought that "hypotheses about historical development or observations about a religious ritual" (ibid.: 28) can be identified as surveyable representations, but this is not how he uses the concept in the *Investigations.*

approach to ethics is plausible, are, of course, not arguments for the lecture being a surveyable representation. They do, however, at least allow for the possibility of defending this idea.

In order to decide whether the lecture on ethics qualifies as a surveyable representation, I will use my interpretation of a surveyable representation as an object of comparison. Does the lecture satisfy the aforementioned conditions (the problem condition, the proceeding condition and the goal condition)? The problem of our not having an overview of the use of our words is central to the lecture and, therefore, the problem condition seems to be met. Wittgenstein explicitly states that he wants to "impress" upon us "that a certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through *all* ethical and religious expressions" (PO 42). Our misuse of moral words like "ethics", "good" or "right", as well as seemingly non-moral words like "important", "miracle", "safe", "existence" or "wondering", generates philosophical problems. What Wittgenstein demonstrates in this lecture is that we are misled by surface similarities in our language. In "He is a good tennis player", "good" is used in a relative sense, because the player is good *relative to some predetermined standards* of playing tennis well. The statement "He is a good tennis player" can be translated in terms of those standards without using the word "good". Instead of saying "He is a good tennis player", we can say "He usually wins when he plays tennis". In "He is a good man", "good" is used in an absolute sense, because, according to Wittgenstein, this kind of goodness is *not relative to some predetermined standards*. Therefore, there is no possible translation in terms of such standards. The similarity of form between "He is a good man" and "He is a good tennis player" misleads us, as it makes us think that what we are saying about the man is akin to what we are saying about the tennis player. But the difference is tremendous: Wittgenstein thought of "He is a good tennis player" as a meaningful proposition, while he thought that "He is a good man" was nonsense. This is a clear example of how misunderstandings of the workings of our language generate philosophical problems.

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Does the "Lecture on Ethics" satisfy the proceeding condition? First, we should investigate whether it shows how words are actually being used. Wittgenstein states that "*the first thing that strikes one* about all these expressions [expressions containing words like 'good'] is that each of them is *actually used* in two very different senses" (PO 38, my italics). Not only does Wittgenstein point to how words are actually being used, he also asks us, second, to imagine situations in order to shed light upon the ways in which words can and cannot be meaningfully used.

> *Supposing* that I could play tennis and one of you saw me playing and said 'Well, you play pretty badly' and *suppose* I answered 'I know, I'm playing badly but I don't want to play any better', all the other man could say would be 'Ah then that's all right'. But *suppose* I had told one of you a preposterous lie and he came up to me and said 'You're behaving like a beast' and then I were to say 'I know I behave badly, but then I don't want to behave any better', could he then say 'Ah then that's all right'? Certainly not; he would say 'Well, you *ought* to want to behave better'. Here you have an absolute judgment of value, whereas the first instance was one of a relative judgment. (PO 38-39, my italics)

Third, comparisons are everywhere in the "Lecture on Ethics". For instance, Wittgenstein compares "playing badly" with "behaving badly": while it makes sense to say that you do not want to play any better, saying that you do not want to behave any better does not (PO 38-39). He tries to clarify what the word "ethics" means by using metaphors. He writes that "I can only describe my feeling by the metaphor, that, if a man could write a book on Ethics which really was a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world" (PO 40). He goes on to say that "Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water [even] if I were to pour out a gallon over it" (PO 40). He also points out analogies and similarities between ethical language, the language of aesthetics (PO 38) as well as religious language (PO 42). He compares a scientific way of looking at things with a way of looking at things as miracles (PO 43). Fourth, the "Lecture on Ethics" contains explicit statements of grammatical rules:

> In fact the word good in the relative sense simply means coming up to a certain predetermined standard. (PO 38)

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> Every judgment of relative value is a mere statement of facts and can therefore be put in such a form that it loses all the appearance of a judgment of value. (PO 39)
> Now what I wish to contend is that, although all judgments of relative value can be shown to be mere statements of fact, no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of absolute value. (PO 39)
> To say 'I wonder at such and such being the case' has only sense if I can imagine it not to be the case. (PO 41)
> To be safe essentially means that it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me and therefore it's nonsense to say that I am safe *whatever* happens. (PO 42)

In short, examples of important techniques used by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* abound in the "Lecture on Ethics". Different techniques are combined to surveyably represent the use of words. The use of "good", for example, is surveyably represented by all four techniques. Considering that the text of the lecture is only eight pages long, it is no exaggeration to call it a concentration of examples of the later Wittgenstein's techniques. Thus, it obviously meets the proceeding condition.

Does the "Lecture on Ethics" produce a kind of understanding which consists in seeing connections between the uses of words? It certainly shows how words can be used in a variety of ways, as is illustrated by the examples of "safe", "wonder", "good", "bad", "ethics", "miracle" and the explicit grammatical rules quoted above. It thereby produces an understanding which consists in seeing connections between, for example, ethics, aesthetics and religion, or between certain uses of what are typically taken to be "moral" words ("good") and seemingly non-moral ones ("wonder"), both of them having a relative and an absolute sense, or between different uses of the same word (relative and absolute sense of "good").

Does the "Lecture on Ethics" contribute to the dissolution of philosophical problems engendered by our misunderstanding of the workings of our language? A central claim of the lecture is that ethical statements, i.e., statements in which words are typically used in an absolute sense, are nonsensical statements: the extrapolation of words from relative contexts to absolute contexts results in a violation of grammar. To say that, for example, "I am safe whatever happens" is to violate a grammatical rule. This runs "against the boundaries of

language", "against the walls of our cage", and is "perfectly, absolutely hopeless" (PO 44). Therefore, ethics cannot be a science and does not contribute to our knowledge in any sense (PO 44). The philosophical idea that it does is misguided, and so are, consequently, the philosophical problems generated by that idea. An example of such a problem, mentioned by Wittgenstein, is the problem of finding a description or a definition of "absolute value". It is useless to look for such a description, because "no description that I can think of would do to describe what I mean by absolute value", and "I would reject every significant description that anybody could possibly suggest, *ab initio*, on the ground of its significance" (PO 44). Because the lecture on ethics contributes to the dissolution of philosophical problems generated by a misunderstanding of the workings of our language, the goal condition is met.

Thus, the "Lecture on Ethics" fulfills all three conditions and thereby qualifies as a surveyable representation of the moral use of words. Why is this important? First, by showing that the lecture is a surveyable representation, we can substantiate the claim that it is possible to work out such representations within a Wittgensteinian framework. If Wittgenstein himself has done so (although he did not present the lecture as such), there are apparently no principled reasons against the application of the notion of a surveyable representation to the moral use of words, although some authors seem to think that there are (see, for instance, Kelly 1995, Richter 1996 and Diamond 1996).[10] The first part of the main question of my article, then, can be answered affirmatively. Second, the fact that the lecture is a surveyable representation has remarkable consequences for its interpretation and its place in Wittgenstein's work. One could argue that it is almost redundant to say that Wittgenstein uses

[10] I have chosen to show the possibility of surveyable representations of the moral use of words by giving an example (simply because that seems to me the most convincing way), rather than by giving reasons for the possibility and showing the reasons of others against the possibility to be unconvincing. For reasons of space, I cannot treat in any detail Kelly's, Richter's and Diamond's reasons for rejecting the possibility here. In general, they think that ethics is too different from other philosophical subjects Wittgenstein treats (or that ethics is no philosophical subject at all) for it to be treated by the same methods, for instance because ethics is personal or because there is nothing to be said in ethics.

Wittgensteinian methods in his own work. As I have pointed out, however, giving surveyable representations is a method of the *later* Wittgenstein which excludes a great deal of what Wittgenstein did in the *Tractatus*.[11] The lecture is certainly an elaboration of Tractarian views that are absent in the *Investigations*, for example of the ideas that all moral uses of "good" have "typical features in common" (PO 38) and that ethical statements are nonsense (TLP 6.421 and PO 44). In that sense, the lecture is looking backwards. But that does not guarantee the conclusion, generally endorsed by Wittgenstein interpreters, that it is much closer to the early than to the later Wittgenstein (Hacker and Monk have been mentioned, see also Johnston 1991: 225 and Kelly 1995: 575). Showing that the lecture is a surveyable representation brings out important methodological connections with the later Wittgenstein; that is, Wittgenstein apparently uses a "later" method in what is traditionally thought to be an "earlier" work. The lecture is looking backwards when we look at its views on moral matters, but methodologically it is looking ahead. I do not pronounce on the question of whether it is closer to the later than to the early Wittgenstein. I only want to show that there are important connections with the later Wittgenstein and that these are often overlooked if one labels it as "early". In that sense, this section shows that (and how) the notion of surveyable representations developed in the first sections can be used to bring out methodological affinities of philosophical texts with the later Wittgenstein's work in general and helps to see, in particular, the "Lecture on Ethics" as a transitional text in Wittgenstein's oeuvre.

[11] One could argue that Wittgenstein aims, in the *Tractatus*, at a surveyable representation of the logic of language. In a certain sense of 'surveyable representation', this is undoubtedly true, but it is clear that the surveyable representation Wittgenstein aims at in the *Tractatus* is highly different from the surveyable representations he provides in the *Investigations*. In this article, I present an interpretation of 'surveyable representation' *as used in the* Investigations (see also footnote 9) and argue that *this interpretation* excludes a lot of what Wittgenstein does in the *Tractatus*. The way I present surveyable representations is inextricably interwoven with the use of the later Wittgenstein's techniques, and in this sense Wittgenstein does not provide surveyable representations in the *Tractatus* while he does provide them in the "Lecture on Ethics". I do not want to deny, however, that Wittgenstein aims, in the *Tractatus*, at a surveyable representation in another sense.

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4. Are Surveyable Representations Useful for Contemporary Moral Philosophy?

That surveyable representations of the moral use of words are possible and that the "Lecture on Ethics" qualifies as such a representation is an interesting result for Wittgenstein scholars. It helps to refute claims about the inapplicability of Wittgenstein's later methods to moral philosophy and to reconsider the place of the lecture in Wittgenstein's work. However, if nothing more than a possibility was at stake, moral philosophers would have little reason to care about surveyable representations. Therefore, I will try to show in this section that surveyable representations of the moral use of words, as I have interpreted them in sections one and two, are not only possible but also useful. "Useful" here means that they may help to dissolve problems in current debates in moral philosophy. To be sure, I do *not* claim, first, that *all* problems in moral philosophy can be dissolved by giving surveyable representations. Surveyable representations help to dissolve conceptual unclarities and not all problems in moral philosophy boil down to such unclarities. More specifically, I think that surveyable representations are more likely to be of help for problems in metaethics than for problems in normative or applied ethics (although I do not exclude the latter possibilities).[12] Therefore, I do not advocate the replacement of traditional methods in moral philosophy by the Wittgensteinian method of giving surveyable representations. In some cases, surveyable representations of the moral use of words can serve as a useful methodological addition to traditional methods. Second, I do not claim that the mentioned techniques for producing surveyable representations are new (that moral philosophers have not compared the use of words, have not stated rules for the use of words or have not invented fictitious examples to throw light on how words and expressions can be used). Rather, I think that a conscious combination of these various techniques, a conscious employment of the method of giving

[12] Someone might object to my article by claiming that surveyable representations cannot be of help for problems in moral philosophy, because conceptual investigations will never tell us what to do. Here, however, one (unjustly, I believe) equates "problems in moral philosophy" with "moral problems" or "moral dilemmas".

surveyable representations which I have tried to make explicit, is to be recommended. Third, my suggestion does not entail a critique of normative moral philosophy, as if surveyable representations were normatively neutral: one's choice of comparisons, rules and examples of actual or fictitious word-use may well be illustrative of one's normative standpoint.[13]

I will make a case for the usefulness of surveyable representations for contemporary moral philosophy by giving an example of a problem and indicating how surveyable representations could contribute to its dissolution. (I can only provide indications: to dissolve the problem by giving surveyable representations would require a lengthier treatment than can be offered here.) The problem, a popular topic in contemporary metaethics, concerns the semantic function of moral judgments and can be stated in the form of a dilemma: "Cognitivism or non-cognitivism?" Cognitivists think that moral judgments express beliefs, non-cognitivists think that they express non-belief states (emotions, prescriptions, etc.). For the problem to be dissolvable by giving surveyable representations, it should first of all fulfill the problem condition; that is, it should be based on a misunderstanding of the workings of language, on our not having an overview of the use of words. Gill (2009) and Sinnott-Armstrong (2009) have convincingly argued that both parties in the debate assume that moral judgments *must* have a semantic function in common: if one moral judgment expresses a belief, then *all* moral judgments must do so. Wittgenstein would have severely criticized the misunderstanding of the workings of language involved here. Why should we assume that there is "something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term" (BBB 17; see also PI 65-67)?[14] Why assume that *all* moral judgments must have a semantic function *in common*, i.e., that they all express beliefs (cognitivism) or that

[13] In this respect, I fully agree with Wisnewski's explanation of why a Wittgensteinian clarificatory ethics necessarily involves critique (2007: 87-97): the way we surveyably represent the use of words makes clear what we find important about them. Johnston (1991), by contrast, tends to see surveyable representations as normatively neutral.

[14] In the "Lecture on Ethics", Wittgenstein himself had assumed this: he wanted to point at "the characteristic features" that moral statements "all have in common" (PO 38).

they all express non-belief states (non-cognitivism)? If it can be shown that some moral judgments express beliefs, while others express emotions or prescriptions, the dilemma can be dissolved.

Some authors have recently suggested that the dilemma may indeed be a false one, or that we should at least seriously consider that possibility (Gill 2008, Gill 2009, Loeb 2008, Sinnott-Armstrong 2009). They have, however, been very careful not to claim that it *is* a false dilemma. For that conclusion to be valid, they think that a great deal more research is necessary. For our purposes, it is important to look at the *methods* that these authors propose for such research. It is conspicuous that they all repeatedly and almost exclusively put their hopes on empirical research, i.e., investigations of actual word-use (Gill 2009: 232, Loeb 2008: passim; Sinnott-Armstrong and Wheatley 2012: 371). Their reasoning is as follows: we do not know whether moral judgments have a semantic function in common, and thus we need more examples of actual moral judgments. I do not doubt that these examples may be useful, but more will be necessary. First, one simply cannot gather examples of moral judgments without knowing what "moral judgment" means, that is, without knowing what it is that one wants to gather examples of. Second, given that one has gathered examples of actual moral judgments in their actual contexts, these examples will have to be ordered, selected and interpreted. The examples alone will not tell us anything about whether the judgments qualify as beliefs, emotions or prescriptions or whether they have a semantic function in common. Therefore, empirical research will simply not be enough.

As an alternative to the empirical method, surveyable representations of the moral use of words are more promising if we want to dissolve the dilemma. Given the proceeding condition, such representations could *include* the empirical evidence mentioned above because that evidence would show how words and expressions are actually being used. But surveyable representations, displaying the use of a variety of techniques, have much more to

offer here. First, comparing the use of words and expressions may help to understand what moral judgments are and to convert chaotic heaps of data into ordered overviews. Putting certain expressions next to others allows one to see differences and similarities between them and to put together what belongs together.[15] For example: "We say 'He believes that abortion is wrong', but we also say 'He just felt that what she did was wrong', and we also speak of moral sentiments. We say that it is true that killing is wrong, but we also say that this truth is different in kind from the truth of empirical beliefs." Second, it may be helpful to state rules for the use of words. A simple but very important example has already been mentioned: things do not need to have something in common in order to be commonly subsumed under a general term. By stating this rule, the spell of the picture (PI 115) that they *must* have something in common can be broken. Third, fictitious examples can make clear how words and expressions can be used.[16] Consider three examples:

(1) John and Jack are walking down the street. John sees a woman being attacked. He wants to help her but he is in a wheelchair. He cannot do anything. He thinks that Jack has not seen the attack and says: "Somebody's being attacked there." Jack reacts indifferently: "She probably asked for it." Clearly, he does not intend to do anything. John is irritated and pokes him in the back, saying: "That woman needs help."

(2) James and Julia are watching television. Julia is pregnant. They are watching a documentary that shows how criminals cut open the bellies of heavily pregnant women and take out their babies to sell them. A pregnant woman is being interviewed. Because the police did nothing to stop the criminals, her husband has set up a neighborhood watch group, but he has recently been killed by the criminals. The

[15] Wittgenstein compares his method to "putting together books which belong together", "taking up some books which seemed to belong together, and putting them on different shelves" (BBB 44), and to putting together a jigsaw puzzle (BBB 46).

[16] On fictitious examples, thought-experiments and their role in Wittgensteinian moral philosophy, see Diamond 2002.

woman is mortally afraid as she knows that the criminals have made her and her baby their target. Julia cries: "That woman needs help!"

(3) Jenny is terminally ill and is suffering unbearable pain. She has requested euthanasia. A committee assesses her request. The advantages and disadvantages of euthanasia and Jenny's specific case are being amply discussed. A member concludes: "That woman needs help."

Using these examples, one could argue (as well as on the basis of actual examples or even better, because a set of actual examples may not include three examples of exactly the same statement) that "That woman needs help" is a moral judgment in all three cases, that it expresses a prescription in 1), an emotion in 2) and a belief in 3), and that, therefore, our dilemma is a false one.[17]

The suggestions above (although they may be no more than promissory notes) show that a conscious employment of the Wittgensteinian method of providing surveyable representations is more likely to dissolve the "cognitivism or non-cognitivism?"-dilemma (goal condition) than the empirical method recommended by Gill, Loeb and Sinnott-Armstrong.[18] That is not to say that the empirical method is bad or useless, but that it is one-sided, that any empirical investigation of moral judgments requires a prior understanding of what moral judgments are and that data have to be selected and ordered. Different techniques for producing surveyable representations allow one to select and order the data in various ways and to approach the same problem from different directions according to Wittgenstein's ideal. Empirical research which, in Wittgenstein's words, testifies of " a preoccupation with

[17] In footnote 7, I mentioned as an additional technique for producing surveyable representations Wittgenstein's asking how we learn the use of certain words. In PI 77, he asks how we learnt the use of the word "good". Answering this question ("A father saying to his child that it is wrong to do something can best be understood as prescribing the child not to do it.") may contribute to the dissolution of the "Cognitivism or non-cognitivism?"-dilemma.

[18] For a detailed treatment of these issues and an attempt at Wittgensteinian dissolution of the dilemma, see my "De Semantische Uniformiteit van het Morele. Over een Vooronderstelling in de Hedendaagse Metaethiek" ("The Semantic Uniformity of Morality. On an Assumption in Contemporary Metaethics") (2015).

the method of science" (BBB 18), is not to be excluded, but surveyable representations promise a richer overview of the moral use of words. This richer view, for which I have tried to make a case in this section, makes them particularly useful for contemporary moral philosophy. In conclusion, I can answer my main question affirmatively: surveyable representations of the moral use of words are both possible within a Wittgensteinian framework and useful for contemporary moral philosophy. This important Wittgensteinian method can and should be transferred to moral philosophy. Wittgenstein himself seems to endorse its transferability:

> We are going from one subject-matter of philosophy to another, from one group of words to another group of words. An intelligent way of dividing up a book on philosophy would be into parts of speech, kinds of words. […] You would have another chapter on numerals […] another kind of confusion: a chapter on 'you', 'I', etc. – another kind: a chapter on 'beautiful', *'good'* – another kind. We get into a new group of confusions; language plays us entirely new tricks. […] There is constant surprise at the new tricks language plays on us when we get into a new field. (LA 1, my italics)
> What we want to know, to get a bird's-eye view of [*übersehen wollen*], is the use of the word 'good' […] (RPP I 160).[19]

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Biographical note

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Benjamin De Mesel (1982) is a Ph.D. Fellow of the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO). He works at the Centre for Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy, KU Leuven, Belgium. He investigates the possibility of applying Wittgensteinian methods to problems in (meta)ethics. His recent publications include "Moral Modesty, Moral Judgment and Moral Advice. A Wittgensteinian Approach", *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 75 (1), pp. 20-37 and "De semantische uniformiteit van het morele. Over een vooronderstelling in de hedendaagse metaethiek" ("The Semantic Uniformity of Morality. On an Assumption in Contemporary Metaethics"), forthcoming in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*.