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On an Anthropological Tone in Philosophy

SANDRA LAUGIER

One can only describe here, and say: such is human life.
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's The Golden Bough*

PART I: PHILOSOPHY'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* represents a crucial stage in the evolving relationship between philosophy and anthropology. This work changed that relationship as radically as Wittgenstein transformed philosophy itself. However, for the most part, it has been philosophers who have studied and written on the *Remarks*, where they have found either an angle of approach for reading Wittgenstein or else evidence of an anthropological turn in his later philosophy (Chauviré 2005). But, too often, they have also used Wittgenstein's work to evaluate James Frazer's anthropology, and hence anthropology in general, or to judge what constitutes good ethnographic method and what does not (see, for example, Bouveresse 1977; Hollis and Lukes 1982; Sperber 1982; etc.). In short, they have used the *Remarks on Frazer* to once again arrogate for philosophy a superordinate, even supervisory position over anthropology—an ironic inversion, considering that Wittgenstein always sought to

destroy philosophy's privilege and to bring it back down to the "rough ground" of ordinary life: "Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems to destroy everything interesting, all that is great and important? What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards [*Luftgebäude*]" (Wittgenstein 1953: §118).

It is for this reason that the publication of this volume is an important intellectual event—in particular, because of the decisions by the authors and editors to showcase some of the most important contemporary anthropological perspectives on this text. This will perhaps be taken as a provocation by philosophers, but for me, the strength of this project lies both in its *teaching* and in its *content*—in the same way that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is important for the way it forces us to examine our position as well as for its content. The impression that it is provocative is highly revealing: after all, many contemporary philosophers, including Wittgenstein, have had no problem expressing their opinion of anthropology or proclaiming that they themselves are doing anthropology. It is now anthropology's turn—as an established discipline in its own right—to take on this text and assess its significance and provocation for it.

Taking an anthropological perspective makes it possible to do away with the idea that Wittgenstein is simply critiquing Frazer (and thus, anthropology, or a certain form of anthropology) by demonstrating his errors (see Lambek, this volume). It becomes clear that this is *not* what he is doing when we look at the passage where he reproaches Frazer for attributing erroneous "opinions" to the natives and suggests that it is he, Frazer, who is mistaken rather than the natives. The right way to read Wittgenstein is to grasp instead to what extent the very attribution of beliefs, opinions, or theories is a trap: we are as "mistaken" as Frazer if we attribute to Wittgenstein an opinion on Frazer (that is, the opinion that Frazer is mistaken). Thus, Wittgenstein teaches his readers (in what is sometimes called his therapeutic tone) to realize that we ourselves, as philosophers with anthropological pretensions, have been mistaken and have gone astray.

In fact, it is somewhat astonishing that philosophers who read the *Remarks on Frazer*—even those who are experts on Wittgenstein—do so as if Wittgenstein were a "traditional" philosopher who criticizes points of view or data on the basis of a theory. On this point there is a similarity between how Wittgenstein's reading of Frazer and his "critique" of Sigmund Freud have been used. In both cases, a denunciation of "mythologies" is invented and ascribed to Wittgenstein. This is often done for ideological or scientific purposes, by ignoring or bypassing Wittgenstein's typical method, which is to make us understand, or see, what we really mean. In the case of Frazer, such mistaken interpretations are coupled

with an ignorance of the very notion of “mythology.” The first thing we must acknowledge (and which this volume teaches us) is that the aim of the *Remarks* is *not* to criticize anthropology or to do “philosophical” anthropology but rather for the reader to be transformed by the anthropological point of view, which is not the same as “playing anthropologist.”

That said, *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough* is a significant text from Wittgenstein’s crucial “middle” period. It is frequently discussed in Wittgenstein scholarship, even if many studies have focused on his philosophy of religion rather than on his view of anthropology or non-Western cultures. Furthermore, Wittgenstein is often treated with a kind of reverential if anxious distance, or even distrust, by philosophers and anthropologists. But among those who approach Wittgenstein with erudition and familiarity, there has been an attempt to push back and ask what *meaning* references to and citations of Wittgenstein have within anthropological literature—as if there were something incongruous about anthropologists citing Wittgenstein, although philosophers do not hesitate to make references to, say, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Marcel Mauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, Philippe Descola, or Tim Ingold. Of course, here I have intentionally listed anthropologists with philosophical backgrounds, whose work has contributed to such intertextualities. Yet there is a form of tacit domination at work here, such that philosophy is always placed over and above anthropology—even if there is, at the same time, a relation of mutual fascination between the two disciplines.

This peculiar relationship between the two disciplines deserves to be studied at length. Here, however, I would like to examine how Wittgenstein’s philosophy constitutes a true *account* of anthropology, not a cynical or critical use of it. Given that philosophy has long claimed to take up the task of anthropology, this leads to the question of how anthropology can in a sense claim to be philosophy—not through a kind of upgrading of its status but rather because it illustrates the philosophical method Wittgenstein proposes: attention to ordinary human forms of life in their unity and diversity; that is, attention to forms of life and lifeforms. It is for that reason that this afterword does not claim to add another element to commentaries on the *Remarks*, either those of Wittgenstein scholars or the remarkable works by anthropologists gathered and masterfully presented by Stephan Palmié in this volume.¹ These essays represent high-quality, careful Wittgensteinian scholarship, and have much to offer readers of

1. For earlier work by anthropologists on the later Wittgenstein, see Needham (1985); James (2005); Das (2006); and Lambek (2015).

all backgrounds. They do not need to be complemented by philosophy, as I will now explain.

PART II: FROM A PRAGMATIC POINT OF VIEW

Within the recent history of anthropology, the relationships between this discipline and philosophy have been rearranged in various ways. It is no insult to anthropology to say that (as a discipline) it was born out of a philosophical concern. The difficulty is that philosophy and anthropology came to be related (they are “cousins,” as Wittgenstein says about “agreement” and “rule” [1953: §224]) ever since philosophy began to attend to *the human* in general, as part of the “modern” turn represented by Immanuel Kant; they grew apart precisely because philosophy, when it takes an anthropological tone, speaks of the human *in general*—without paying attention to the various ways of being human or to the various ways in which humans may be living beings.

Anthropology, in its Kantian version, emerges when the question of the human is no longer only metaphysical (let alone theological) but comes to comprise its own domain of philosophy. Of course, this does not mean that concern with the human did not exist prior to modernity; rather, it existed as a non-autonomous domain of the moral sciences. Anthropology emerges within the framework of a philosophy freed of (or at least critical of) metaphysics, where the question of “the being of man” had previously been subordinated to the question of metaphysics (that is, the question of the foundation of all being and becoming). This, however, did not set the stage for an independent field of inquiry. It only cleared the ground for reflections on the human as an ethical and political—thus, *practical*—being who lives in society: what in the West has traditionally been referred to as the “moral sciences.”

In fact, it was with Kant’s reversal of traditional metaphysics and his separation of knowledge from moral theology that anthropology claimed its title. Kant’s critique of metaphysics necessitated a reformulation of the question of the human, of its place and method of investigation. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (2006), Kant distinguishes between anthropology from a “physiological” point of view (the science of humans as natural beings; the science of “what nature makes man”) and anthropology from a pragmatic point of view, that of man “as a freely acting being”; the science of humans as social and political beings, or of shared forms of human life. Modernity centered the

philosophical question raised by this “anthropology from a pragmatic point of view” as the study of the behavior befitting the human as a citizen of the world. But this anthropology was understood in conformity with the delimitation of traditional “practical” disciplines that took the human as an ethical and sociopolitical being as their subject.

Kant effected the break from metaphysics that was necessary for the emergence of this anthropology and reshaped the question of the human. The most radical passage can be found in his *Introduction to Logic* ([1800] 1885): if “philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the ultimate and essential aims of human reason,” then it boils down to the following famous questions:

1. What can I know?
2. What must I do?
3. What may I hope for?
4. What is man?

“Metaphysics answers the first question,” Kant writes, “morality the second, religion the third”—hence the three *Kritiken*—and the fourth, Kant says, is answered by anthropology. And he continues, “In reality, however, all these might be reckoned under anthropology, since the first three questions refer to the last” (Kant [1800] 1885). This amounts to placing philosophy within the frame of anthropology, and thus appears to reinvent the relations between the two disciplines. Except that anthropology is not here conceived of as a proper domain of knowledge, so its mission is still a matter of philosophy, as the study of the human per se. From “anthropology from a pragmatic point of view” was born the whole domain of “philosophical anthropology” (ranging, in German thought, from Wilhelm von Humboldt to Martin Heidegger, Arnold Gehlen, Helmuth Plessner, or Jürgen Habermas), which reverses Kant’s discovery—anthropology as *the* question because it is the question of the human—and instead establishes the monopoly of philosophy over anthropology.

Given this philosophical background, one of Wittgenstein’s goals in his *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough* was to subvert precisely this kind of philosophical anthropology: his immediate curiosity about *The Golden Bough*, which Maurice O’Connor Drury describes, was certainly due to the intuition that ethnographic material could offer a response to the mounting anthropological pretensions of philosophy. Rather than presenting a mere critique of Frazer and deriving whatever normative consequences might follow for anthropology, we

can say that Wittgenstein takes the critique of the kind of metaphysics impeding the autonomization of anthropology a step further.

To understand this step, we need to consider that to affirm the existence of anthropology as a discipline was to affirm its autonomy in relation to philosophy, and especially in relation to “philosophical anthropology.” This was not an easy task in a consensual universe of fascination and reciprocal *claims* that ethnologists and philosophers made upon each other; a universe of discourse where modern philosophy saw itself as anthropology, and where anthropology aimed at a kind of generality beyond that achievable by a single discipline. The result is a form of rivalry or equivalence that still structures contemporary thought. Superseding this historical disjuncture requires philosophers to stop claiming that they are doing anthropology by mere philosophizing, and instead—as Wittgenstein clearly recommends in the *Philosophical Investigations*—that they aim to grasp the proximity between the results and methods of the two disciplines that becomes inevitable once philosophy attends to ordinary life. It is necessary, moreover, for it to renounce “philosophical anthropology” for good. In other words, the desire regularly expressed for philosophy to provide “foundations” for the social sciences and the recurrent question, “What can philosophy draw from anthropology today?” need to be put on hold.

For Wittgenstein, neither logic nor mathematics nor social science required a foundation in the sense usually meant by philosophers—that is, in the sense that these fields would risk collapse or, in any case, appear totally arbitrary, if philosophers failed to logically found them. In the twentieth century, the connection between anthropology and Wittgenstein’s thought has, for the most part, been drawn by philosophers or social scientists who deliberately chose to do philosophy. Here the French case may be instructive. French anthropology derived much of its prestige, particularly with Claude Lévi-Strauss and *L’Homme*, from a dialogue with French philosophy (Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, etc.), as opposed to Anglophone analytical philosophy. Wittgenstein’s thought was not available in France until it was discovered by Pierre Hadot, Jacques Bouveresse, and later by Pierre Bourdieu, Luc Boltanski, and others. In France, Wittgenstein has largely been explored by sociology (see Salgues 2008 for an insightful analysis). Anthropology left Wittgenstein to the Wittgenstein specialists. In fact, the first French publication of Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough* was in the famous journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* in 1977, where it was followed by Bouveresse’s now-classic commentary. The lasting friendship and theoretical alliance between Bourdieu

and Bouveresse undoubtedly played a major role in Wittgenstein's reception in French sociology: he was essentially ignored by anthropologists, perhaps because of his "official" connection to analytic philosophy and the lasting influence of Louis Althusser on French anthropology. This is especially clear from use of the *Remarks* to rationalize ethnography through the recurrent use of select passages focusing on beliefs, rites, and ceremonial practices (Bouveresse 1977; de Lara 2005). Note here that none other than Bourdieu, in an intervention shortly before his death, presented himself as an actual Wittgenstein scholar defending rational procedures and Wittgenstein as a "serious" author:

One of the philosophers who ranks among the most demanding and rigorous can thus . . . sometimes find himself converted into a kind of philosopher for non-philosophers, allowing sociologists or historians with philosophical claims to situate themselves in an indefinable place, halfway between philosophy and sociology, where they can escape the jurisdictions and sanctions of both disciplines. (Bourdieu 2002: 346–47)

As if "philosopher for non-philosophers" were a kind of insult—and as if it were necessary to prevent Wittgenstein from being used by anyone but those "good" philosophers and philosophically inclined sociologists! This normative use of Wittgenstein, and especially of the *Remarks on Frazer*, has been characteristic of twentieth-century analytic angst (see Quine [1953] 1980, 1960; Geertz 1984; Laugier 1992, 1996; see also chapters by Kwon, Severi, and Taussig, this volume), as if "postanalytic" philosophy, after Willard van Orman Quine and Donald Davidson, after the thesis of the indeterminacy of translation and the idea of a conceptual scheme, had created the risk of radical pluralism and skepticism, which would bar any understanding between (however) divergent human forms of life. The *Remarks* were brandished against the relativist scarecrow—even though, as Lévi-Strauss had quite early indicated, anthropology was precisely (as Wittgenstein also advocated) a matter of *paying attention* to people's thinking, avoiding both *reading* absurdities into them ("imputing properties to indigenous thought"; see Quine [1953] 1980) and conforming to a sanitized version of "our" common sense.² As Lévi-Strauss once put it, apropos an imaginary "here,"

2. See Severi's discussion of Sperber (this volume). See also Kwon (this volume); Quine (1960); Lévi-Strauss (1962); Needham (1972). For a discussion of Quine's anthropological tone, see Laugier (1992, 2013: ch. 4).

Mana really is Mana here. But one wonders whether their theory of Mana is anything other than a device for imputing properties to indigenous thought which are implied by the very peculiar place that the idea of mana is called on to occupy in their own thinking. Consequently, the strongest warning should be sounded to those sincere admirers of Mauss who would be tempted to halt at that first stage of his thinking; their gratitude would be not for his lucid analyses so much as for his exceptional talent for rehabilitating certain indigenous theories in their strangeness and their authenticity. (Lévi-Strauss 1950: 57)

Here, the relevance of Wittgenstein's irony in the *Remarks* is obvious:

Frazer is far more *savage* [English in the original] than most of his *savages* [English in the original], for these savages will not be as far removed from an understanding of spiritual matters as an Englishman of the twentieth century. His explanations of primitive practices are much cruder than the meaning of these practices themselves. (p. 44; emphasis mine)

Still, for Lévi-Strauss, the question—central to ethnography through today—of the risk of resorting to “mere description” remains, and he wants to prevent readers of Mauss from feeling encouraged by the latter’s “exceptional talent for rehabilitating certain indigenous theories in their strangeness and their authenticity.” He writes:

We would risk committing sociology to a dangerous path: even a path of destruction, if we then went one step further and *reduced social reality to the conception that man—savage man, even—has of it*. That conception would furthermore become empty of meaning if its reflexive character were forgotten. Then ethnography would dissolve into a verbose phenomenology, a falsely naïve mixture in which the apparent obscurities of indigenous thinking would only be brought to the forefront to cover the confusions of the ethnographer. (Lévi-Strauss 1950: 57–8; emphasis mine)

Here we may compare the notion of description proposed by Lévi-Strauss and Veena Das (*Textures of the Ordinary*, unpublished ms). Das introduces a concept taken from the later Wittgenstein: *forms of life*, which require description—and even an “excess of description” (perhaps even a “verbose

phenomenology”)—because what must be described is no longer belief or opinions but rather what life is *like*.

If culture is a matter of shared ways of life as well as of bequeathing and inheriting capabilities and habits as members of society, then clearly it is participation in forms of sociality (Wittgenstein’s forms of life) that define simultaneously the inner and the outer, that allow a person to speak both within language and outside it. Agreement in forms of life, in Wittgenstein, is never a matter of shared opinions. It thus requires an excess of description to capture the entanglements of customs, habits, rules, and examples. (Das 1998: 179)

Here again the question is the boundary between philosophy and anthropology. “Between the fundamental absurdity of primitive practices and beliefs, proclaimed by Frazer, and their specious validation by the evidence of a supposed common sense, invoked by Malinowski, there is room for a whole science and a whole philosophy” (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 99).

But what is the philosophy Lévi-Strauss calls for? One way to avoid or clarify these discussions about describing (still present today) would be, as this book allows us to do, to go back to the letter of Wittgenstein’s text. As all the comments gathered here show, this calls upon us to turn to description as well as to revisit the question of common sense, which is not transparent to ourselves. Wittgenstein’s main discovery, especially in the *Remarks on Frazer* but also throughout the 1930s, is of the uncanny character of common sense or ordinary life, hence of description.

Are mathematical proposals anthropological proposals that say how we human beings infer and calculate? —Is a collection of laws a book of anthropology that says how the people of this people treat thieves, etc.? —Could we say: “The judge consults a book of anthropology and then sentences the thief to a prison sentence”? Fine, but the judge doesn’t use the collection of laws as an anthropology manual. (Wittgenstein 1954: §65)

PART III: THE UNCANNINESS OF THE ORDINARY

Wittgenstein’s later approach, as a philosophical method attentive to ordinary uses, is the most powerful subversion of philosophy’s craving for an

anthropological monopoly. This subversion can only be achieved in a reversal of metaphysics, and a return to ordinary life (see Laugier 2008, 2009). The ordinary is not *given*; rather, it pertains to the idea that “a whole mythology is deposited in our language” (p. 48). Ordinary language is “highly cultivated” and also contains everything that matters to the human (“in this sense every view is equally significant” [p. 52]). Wittgenstein explicitly states that “our” own language (by which he means the language he shares with his interlocutor) is “primitive” (1953: §5; 1958: 17).

And when I read Frazer, I keep wanting to say at every step: All these processes, these changes of meaning are still present to us in our word language. (p. 50)

Frazer’s representation of human magical and religious notions is unsatisfactory: it makes these notions appear as *mistakes*. Was Augustine mistaken, then, when he called on God on every page of the *Confessions*? (p. 32)

Frazer, Augustine, Freud, Fyodor Dostoyevsky all provide, Wittgenstein suggests, views we are able to *make sense of* even if they may be strange—or terrifying. Anthropology’s task is to give sense to thought and words—which would be “dead signs” were we not able to give them meaning, significance, and importance.

One could say “every view has its charm,” but that would be wrong. What is correct is that every view is significant for whoever sees it so (but that does not mean one sees it as something other than it is). Indeed, in this sense every view is equally significant. (p. 50f)

Here, the matter of error and common sense becomes the matter of significance and self-reliance, and of your capacity to put yourself in someone else’s place. In “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” the moral philosopher Cora Diamond (2003) examines our moral capacity to put ourselves in the place of an animal, whether this is Kafka’s monkey speaking to the Academy or an animal being killed in a slaughterhouse. Diamond cites an essay by J. M. Coetzee (2004), “The Life of Animals” (included in his novel *Elizabeth Costello*), in which a network of texts—Kafka’s *Report to an Academy*, Wolfgang Köhler and his account of experimenting on apes, Thomas Nagel’s bat, René Descartes’s *cogito*—are gathered around the character of an Australian writer, Elizabeth

Costello, who is coming to the United States to address a conference on animal rights. Coetzee and Diamond both investigate our ability to understand the other, however strange. Diamond shows that Kafka's text—by giving voice to a monkey, Red Peter—allows one to place oneself in the position of a radically different other. Costello claims that the experience granted by literature is that of sympathy, the possibility of imagining what it would really mean to be in a strange being's position. Why not imagine that one is Red Peter, a monkey?

There are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else, there are people who have no such capacity (when the lack is extreme, we call them psychopaths), and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it. There is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. (Coetzee 2004: 79–80)

Anthropology becomes a name for this capacity, as illustrated often in Wittgenstein at the very moment when he discovers the concrete sense of the limits of language posited in the *Tractatus*. For example, Wittgenstein imagines in the *Remarks*

that I might have had to choose some being on earth as my soul's dwelling place, and that my spirit had chosen this unsightly creature as its seat and vantage point. Perhaps because the exception of a beautiful dwelling would repel him. Of course, for the spirit to do so, he would have to be very sure of himself. (p. 50)

Few Wittgenstein scholars have pointed to this poetic passage about being born in a tree in the forest:

If a human being were free to choose to be born in a tree in the forest, then there would be some who would seek out the most beautiful or highest tree for themselves, some who would choose the smallest, and some who would choose an average or below-average tree, and I do not mean out of philistinism, but for just the reason, or the kind of reason for which someone else chose the highest. That the feeling we have for our life is comparable to that of a being that could choose its standpoint in the world has, I believe, its basis in the myth—or belief—that we choose our bodies before birth. (p. 52)

As Bouveresse notes (at a moment when he is not obsessed with telling us what's wrong with Frazer):

What Wittgenstein reproaches Frazer with is a total lack of comprehension or consideration for certain foundational images, whose strangeness seems to him to require an explanation at all costs. It doesn't occur to him that the "aberrations" that he condemns and whose presence he would like to explain as far as possible could correspond to things whose sense is quite simply inaccessible to him because of his own limitations. (Bouveresse 2007: 373)

He reminds us of something Wittgenstein said to Drury:

The Cathedral of St Basil in the Kremlin is one of the most beautiful buildings I have ever seen. There is a story—I don't know whether it is true but I hope it is—that when Ivan the Terrible saw the completed Cathedral he had the architect blinded so that he would never design anything more beautiful. (Drury 1981: 178)

Wittgenstein explained his reaction, by saying, "What a *wonderful* way of showing his admiration!" To this, Drury replied it was "a *horrible* way." This suggests a reconception of ritual violence (see Puett, this volume), a mutation through the concepts of violence, of wonder, and of the ordinary, of the separation between "barbarity" and the "modern" vision of humanity (which is at the core of Das's vision [2007]).

One could also relate this whole discussion to understanding what is apparently nonsensical—better yet, as Diamond (2000) explains, understanding someone who speaks nonsense (which is not the same as understanding a nonsensical proposition). Wittgenstein says in his "Lectures on Religious Belief":

Suppose someone, before going to China, when he might never see me again, said to me: "We might see one another after death"—would I necessarily say that I don't understand him? I might say [want to say] simply, "Yes. I *understand* him entirely." . . . No, it's not the same as saying "I'm very fond of you"—and it may not be the same as saying anything else. It says what it says. (Wittgenstein 1966: 70–71)

To understand *someone* is not like understanding sense. In 1931—at the moment of his discovery of Frazer's work and his writing the first set of notes—at

the end of his famous “Lecture on Ethics,” Wittgenstein made some observations in an anthropological tone, concerning expressions that are apparently nonsensical, such as “I wonder about the existence of the world”:

I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just *to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it. (Wittgenstein 1965: 12)

PART IV. ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE ORDINARY AND AGREEMENT IN LIFEFORMS

In her contribution to this volume, Das explains why it is wrong to talk about such expressions as *opinions*. She refers to a passage from Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations* on opinions: “My attitude toward him is an attitude toward a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul” (PI: §178). This passage is central to Stanley Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein (Cavell 1979): our interactions with others are not based on any *opinion* about their being human but in our acknowledgement of them, of our sharing a texture of life.

This strongly suggests the need for an ethics within Wittgenstein’s anthropological tone. Here the same criticism that I have applied to the concept of “philosophical anthropology” could be applied to “moral anthropology” as a way to dispense with the ordinary ethics that emerges from the descriptions of life.

Agreement *in* language is not in opinions but in form of life (Wittgenstein 1953: §242). By replacing opinions or beliefs with the concept of form of life in what we may call his anthropological picture,³ Wittgenstein destroys the

3. See the excellent presentation of the concept of form of life and the concept of language-games by Myrhe (this volume). See also Laugier (2018).

idea of attributing beliefs—that is, the core of traditional epistemology (and anthropology). Here, his strongest interpreter is Cavell, for whom the *availability* of Wittgenstein’s philosophy is conditioned by recognition of forms of life and lifeforms—the whirl of organism—as the objects of philosophical and anthropological description. The anthropological method in philosophy (what J. L. Austin calls “fieldwork”; [1962] 1975: 185) does not turn philosophy into anthropology, but still outlines a common task shared by anthropology and philosophy, the attention to the ordinary.

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of . . . when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls “forms of life.” (Cavell 1969: 52)

Cavell takes inspiration from Wittgenstein when he defines “the uncanniness of the ordinary” inherent to the anthropological tone. In his foreword to *Das Life and Words*, Cavell (2006) defines the ordinary as our ordinary language in so far as we constantly render it foreign to ourselves, which brings up the Wittgensteinian image of the philosopher as explorer of a foreign tribe, moved to “philosophical wonder by their strangeness to themselves, therefore of himself to himself”; this tribe is ourselves, for it is *we* who are foreigners and strangers to ourselves—“at home perhaps nowhere, perhaps anywhere” (Cavell 2007: x). This intersection of the familiar and the strange is the location of the ordinary and of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of culture:⁴ “Wittgenstein’s anthropological perspective is one puzzled in principle by anything human beings say and do, hence perhaps, at a moment, by nothing” (Cavell 1989: 170).

Parallel to the mystery of ethnography and translation (see James, this volume), there is the enigma of speaking the same language—of the child being capable of learning language, the uncanniness of the use of ordinary language. It is crucial for Cavell that Wittgenstein says that we agree *in* and not *on* language:

4. “Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture” is the subtitle to “Declining Decline,” Part I of Cavell’s *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (1989).

language precedes this agreement as much as it is produced by usage. The transition from social life forms to human life forms is not the return to a human universal but rather crosses two dimensions of the life form, natural and social (see, for example, Pitrou 2017). This concept of lifeform is probably the most promising concept to be born out of the new alliance between philosophy and anthropology: it is not only social and biological but also inseparably ethnological and ethological.

Attention to the everyday is attention to what is before our eyes. From a different stance, Michel Foucault was acutely aware of this:

We have long known that the role of philosophy is not to discover what is hidden, but to render visible what precisely is visible—which is to say, to make appear what is so close, so immediate, so intimately linked to ourselves that, as a consequence, we do not perceive it. (Foucault [1978] 1994: 540–41)

If “a whole mythology is deposited in our language,” the philosopher’s work is then to unearth “the great treasure deposited deep down the tree of language” (see Kwon). Which means that *describing* is not seeing: it’s *plowing*. “We must plow over language in its entirety” (p. 44). Heonik Kwon reminds us that Wittgenstein briefly worked as a gardener. Still, there is also violence in the very idea of plowing, as in Emerson’s 1844 *Address on the Anniversary of Emancipation in the British West Indies*: “Language must be raked.”⁵

The editors of *Philosophical Occasions* note that the exact words of what became §415 of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* can be found at the very beginning of a manuscript (MS 119) dated from 1937: “What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities, however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes” (Klagge and Nordmann in Wittgenstein 1992: 369).

Here, then, we have the gist of Wittgenstein’s later ethnographic method, formulated as such soon after his curious discovery of *The Golden Bough*: an anthropology of our forms of life as ordinary language users. The present volume offers a perspicuous view on how twenty-first-century anthropologists

5. “Language must be raked, the secrets of the slaughter-houses and infamous holes that cannot front the day, must be ransacked, to tell what negro-slavery has been” (Emerson [1844] 1919). Wittgenstein was a reader of Emerson.

have come to appreciate and to read this ethnographic gesture on the part of Wittgenstein.

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