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What is the *locus* of abilities?

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Abstract Loughlin's (2018) uses Wittgenstein's remarks in *Philsophical Investigations* to motivate his 'wide' view of cognition. In opposition to other accounts of extended cognition, his view presents a negative solution to the location problem. Here, I argue that, if we consider Wittgenstein's remarks on the notion of ability, the support for the wide view is not as straightforward. The criteria for using the concept of ability are highly context-dependent, and there is not a single account for them. This shows that at best, a moderate form of anti-individualism for cognitive capacities can be defended on Wittgensteinian grounds. Furthermore, the suggestion that ontological questions can be bypassed is questioned.

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0. Introduction

It has become usual in the literature on 'extended cognition' (broadly speaking) to distinguish between the *hypothesis of extended mind* (HEM), the (narrow) *hypothesis of extended cognition* (HEC), and, as an alternative to those, the *hypothesis of embedded cognition* (HEMC)[1]. Which, if any, should be preferred has been the topic of much recent debate (for example, Sprevak 2010, Palermos 2014, Pöyhönen 2014, Bernecker 2014, Carter & Czarnecki 2016 and Loughlin & Zahidi 2017 all discuss it). Recently, Loughlin (2018) has argued against HEM but in favor of HEC on a supposedly Wittgensteinian basis. Here, I will argue that the version of HEC that arises is not necessarily less ontologically committal than HEM (consequently, that the 'wide view of cognition' is no less ontologically committal than the so-called 'process view'). Like Loughlin, I derive my argument from a reading of Wittgenstein's observations in *Philosophical Investigations*. However, instead of focusing on the issue of the location of the mental/cognitive, I will focus on the location of *abilities*. As a result, my argument will be mediated by the suggestion that whatever holds in the case of abilities will have consequences for the case of extended mind/cognition. I assume that in order to give an account of cognition it is necessary to give an account of what it can mean to possess cognitive capacities.

[1] The distinction between HEC and HEM is raised already by Clark and Chalmers (1998). HEMC was introduced by Rupert (2004), who refers back to McClamrock (1995).

I will proceed as follows. In section 1, I will draw the distinction between extended mind (HEM), extended cognition (HEC) and embedded cognition (HEMC), sketch Loughlin's argument to prefer HEC over HEM, and reformulate the discussion in terms of the concept of ability. In section 2, I examine Wittgenstein's account of abilities. Then, in section 3, I develop, from Wittgenstein's remarks, an extended ontology of abilities, and contrast it with Loughlin's 'wide' view of cognition. Finally, in section 4, I argue that, if we adopt a 'therapeutical' approach in our interpretation of Wittgenstein, *none* of the alternatives can be supported on Wittgensteinian grounds. My aim, then, is double: first, to gain a better grasp of the view of abilities we can extract from Wittgenstein's writings, and second, to raise a battery of concerns, in a Wittgensteinian spirit, about appealing to his views for discriminating between different formulations of the extended mind idea.

1. The state of the play

1.1. Mind vs. cognition, extended vs. embedded

As I pointed out in the introduction, it has become customary to distinguish between the *hypothesis of extended mind* (HEM) and the *hypothesis of extended cognition* (HEC). Roughly put, these hypotheses can be formulated as follows:

HEC

> Human cognitive processing extends into the environment surrounding the organism, and cognitive states can include as parts elements of the environment.

HEM

> Human mental states such as belief can be partly constituted by the environment.

The main difference between them is their topic: whereas HEC is a claim about *cognitive processes*, HEM is a claim about *mental states*. Thus, insofar as the latter can be seen as involved in cognitive processes, HEC can be taken as a more general claim. Pöyhönen (2014) and Bernecker (2014) claim, however, that the difference is deeper: in their view, HEC and HEM pertain to different domains (in the case of HEM, common sense psychological language, and in that of HEC, the explanatory language of cognitive science), address different issues and adduce different types of evidence. Loughlin (2018), who follows them, draws the distinction somewhat differently: according to him, whereas theorists who adopt HEM have ontological goals (to locate mental states, for example), HEC theorists have explanatory goals. This matters for his project, because he is skeptical about HEM's ontologizing aims. Indeed, the distinction between HEC and HEM is often made to redirect arguments towards HEC to the supposedly less defensible HEM (Carter, Czarnecki 2016: 260).

In either case, HEC and HEM should be understood as claims about the *constitution* of the relevant states. If we replace constitution by dependence, we get the hypothesis of embedded cognition:

HEMC

> Cognitive processes do not extend outside the skin but they depend very heavily, in hitherto unexpected ways, on organismically external props and devices and on the structure of the external environment in which cognition takes place.

An important distinction between HEC/HEM and HEMC is that they yield different answers to the *location problem* for cognitive processes/states: while HEC/HEM claims that they extend into the environment, HEMC locates them inside the organism's body. This type of problem will be our concern in the sequel.

1.2. The wide view

Loughlin (2018) argues that the location problem can be bypassed by adopting a different view. He takes both the defenders and objectors of HEC as assuming what he calls a 'process view of cognition' (PV). The characteristic of this type of view is that «questions about what cognition or mentality is can be answered by identifying accompanying processes, where the term 'accompanying processes' refers to those sub-personal spatial and temporal processes ongoing during some task» (Loughlin 2018: 276). So the only difference between HEMC and HEC/HEM might be (depending on the formulation) the answer given to the location problem. Now, in Loughlin's view, PV should be rejected because what makes one's thinking a cognitive process is not the presence of ongoing processes which would be properly located anywhere, but its accord «with wider behavioural conditions, that is, the conditions found in norms-governed practices and contexts» (*ibidem*). He calls this view the *wide view of mentality* (it is described to greater detail in Loughlin, Zahidi 2017). According to him, the location problem does not meaningfully arise in the context of the wider conditions that characterize cognitive activities as such:

> If our cognitive or mental capacities are determined by our satisfying wider behavioural conditions, then while such capacities obviously have locations (in the trivial sense that everything occurs somewhere), it does not follow that such capacities also have boundaries and so can extend into the wider environment. HEM, in other words, is incoherent (Loughlin 2018: 280).

However, this does not undermine HEC, for cognitive processes might very well involve processes which *can* be meaningfully localized:

> there still remain questions to be asked about those causal mechanism that underpin a given cognitive or mental capacity. Causal mechanisms obviously have identifiable spatial and temporal boundaries. Hence, proponents of HEC can seek to determine if the mechanisms that underpin a given capacity can extend to include non-bodily processes and/or environmental objects. If they do, then HEC could be true (*ibidem*).

1.3. The cognition/ability parallel

Loughlin moves from talk of states and processes to talk of capacities quite freely, as can be seen in the quotes above. The original formulation of HEM, however, talks about mental states and characterizes them by the example of belief. How things like belief and cognitive capacities are on par is not trivially obvious. One way to understand the suggestion is that there is an underlying assumption that cognitive/mental capacities are themselves some kind of *state*[2]. But states can perhaps be meaningfully localized (at least not more cumbersomely than processes can): they could be located at the locations of whatever they are states *of*. Does this mean that the problem can be easily circumvented? Not really: the location problem for capacities is not trivial, even if it is

[2] Remember that HEC was initially formulated in terms of cognitive processes. Now, if we consider HEC as a claim about capacities, we will have to give some account of how capacities are related to processes. Here, I will merely assume that some account of this relation can be given.

interpreted as the problem of locating whatever the capacities are *of*, precisely because it is not obvious what that could be. The wide view, on the other hand, promises to dissolve the location problem by arguing that there is no way to make sense of the relevant capacities having a location in the required sense[3].

The problem, then, can be formulated in terms of how the location question should be dealt with in the case of dispositional properties. From those, it is the agentive notion of ability that may be more illustrative of the issues. On the one hand, cognitive capacities can be attributed as abilities, or seen as a type of ability in some cases. Abilities are always *of* someone or some kind of agent. The question is: under what conditions is someone attributable of an ability? On the model of the previous hypothesis, we will have hypotheses of *extended ability*, of *embedded ability* and of *wide ability*. Loughlin claims Wittgenstein's view of cognition follows the latter pattern. Is it so in the case of abilities?

2. Wittgenstein on abilities

Wittgenstein (1953) raises a similar question to the one I just made

> How do I know that I'll be able to do something? That is, that the state I am in now is that of being able to do that thing?[4] (PI: §388).

The question itself seems to commit to the *state view* (SV). The puzzle raised lies in *identifying* the states that correspond to the abilities in question. Earlier, Wittgenstein had presented the problem with the case of learning to calculate:

> Ask yourself: Is it conceivable that someone learn to calculate in his head without ever calculating aloud or on paper? – «Learning it» presumably means: being brought to the point of being able to do it. Only the question arises, what will count as a criterion for being able to do it? (PI: §385).

The setup here makes one think Wittgenstein is worried about misidentifying having learned to calculate in one's head if one has not ever calculated in a different medium, so to speak. The same issue appear when thinking of the involved abilities: does one have the ability to calculate in one's head if one doesn't also have the ability to calculate aloud or in paper? When put like this, however, the problem shows an interesting symmetry: the same problem arises when one considers the cases where one may have the ability to calculate aloud but not the others, or when one may have the ability to calculate in paper and not the others. Put differently, the problem may be that the possession of abilities is anatomic, in some sense: to have certain abilities entails having other abilities. This, however, is explicitly not Wittgenstein's view at this point, for he continues:

> But is it also possible for some tribe to be acquainted only with calculation in the head, and with no other kind? Here one has to ask oneself: "What will that look

[3] In light of this, Loughlin's suggestion that cognitive capacities can at the same time have locations but not boundaries and thus no extension in the environment is problematic. Are capacities supposed to be point-like, or perhaps cloud-like? If the first, they could be located directly in the environment; if the second, they would have extension. One way to elaborate the idea is to say that locating capacities is a form of feature-placing (Strawson 1959), although it is not clear how much that helps.

[4] Cf. Wittgenstein (2005: 35, 111): «What counts as a criterion for being justified in saying that one is able to do something?».

> like?" – And so one will have to depict it as a limiting case. And the question will then arise whether we still want to apply the concept of calculating in the head here – or whether in such circumstances it has lost its purpose, because the phenomena now gravitate towards another paradigm (*ibidem*).

Here, a form of atomism seems patently open: perhaps it is possible for someone to be able to calculate in the head without being able to calculate aloud or in paper. What does the fact that we can think of or imagine this case tell us, though? To follow the exercise of imagining the case is to examine how the concept of calculation is used, what criteria pertain to it and how those apply to the case. The strategy of identifying criteria is recurrent in the *Investigations*, but it also occurs elsewhere with subtle modifications.[5] Before returning to the way in which this strategy is developed around the notion of ability, a more contained (but closely related, as it will be clear) example might be illustrative. In *Remarks on Colour* (1977), he considers the case of «yellowish» (III, §§110-112). There, he also identifies a limit case (yellowish blue), in opposition to «simpler cases» (yellowish red, brown, and white, and so on). Faced with the limiting case, one is faced with options: when prompted to produce a sample of something yellowish blue, someone could act in different ways (in Wittgenstein's example, someone could either be at a loss of what to do, or they could perhaps produce a sample of something which is blue-green). The perhaps *too* natural thing to ask is which of those is the right response. But for Wittgenstein, this is not the point at which to ask this: instead, he constructs a scenario where one can imagine of a possible disagreement between the two parties, depending on whether blue-green can be said to be yellowish (this means, of course, that it is the reaction to produce a blue-green sample that arises doubt)

> *I* say blue-green contains *no* yellow: if someone else claims that it certainly *does* contain yellow, who's right? How can we check? Is there only a verbal difference between us?» (*ivi*: III, §111).

He continues by an examination of the inferential affordances (the «mathematics of colour» of III, §3) that the cases exhibit, and seems to conclude that one of the responses would indicate that the person who responded thus was not able to learn a certain language-game (the one he describes):

> […] – Won't one recognize a pure green that tends neither towards blue nor toward yellow? And of what use is this? In what language-games can it be used? – He will at least be able to respond to the command to pick out the green things that contain *no* yellow and those that contain *no* blue. And this constitutes the demarcation point 'green', which the other does not know[6].
> The one can learn a language-game that the other one cannot (*ivi*: III, §111, cont.).

It is, then, an agentive possibility/ability that seems to decide the question. But if that is the case, the question we raised about the criteria for abilities has methodological importance. To capture the ability in question here we have to raise further questions which should be decided in turn by appealing to some criteria. So what are those?

[5] Wittgenstein introduced the notion of criteria in the *Blue Book* (1958), although in a slightly different sense. Cf. Witherspoon (2011) for an overview of the issues concerning the notion.

[6] It is unclear in what sense Wittgenstein means that 'green' is a 'demarcation point', but this remark probably connects to his discussion of primary colors (to which he briefly returns in §113), or perhaps to his earlier discussion of 'saturated' colors (cf. esp. III §6).

Where should we locate them? It turns out, these questions shed light on some remarks he makes in §112:

> And indeed *this must* be what constitutes colour blindness of all kinds. For if the 'colour-blind' person could learn all the language-games of normal people, why should he be excluded from certain professions?

Wittgenstein appears to claim that color-blindness depends on a certain impossibility to learn a language game. However, it is not obvious what type of modality bears on the question. One way to think of color-blindness is that it is some kind of physiological or psychological phenomenon, and thus that the impossibility is either physiological or psychological. Surely, in some cases it is true that the source of the impossibility to learn will be of either kind. However, there is a sense of ability in which one is able to do something even if one is physiologically or psychologically prevented (perhaps contingently) from doing it. This seems to suggest that the extension of the relevant abilities and the extension of these types of possibilities does not coincide. This must have been an open possibility for Wittgenstein, who goes on to ask whether the capacity to learn a game is a matter of logic or psychology (§114). I don't want to read this question, however, as if it suggested that the right view was that the impossibility to learn a game is a *logical* question, although §110 already indicates that logic does play an important role in the domain of the concerns there raised; indeed, the case of yellowish is meant to illustrate what role it plays[7]. Nevertheless, I think that it is fair to say that the criteria for having or not having the ability in question is not a purely psychological matter, however the psychological is delineated. In any case, the impossibility is described as conceptual: «I say: The person who cannot play *this* game does not have *this* concept» (§115)[8]. The domain of the ability will shift with the domain of the understanding of the relevant concepts. If this is right, in the case of cognitive capacities their criteria will track the relevant properties of the concepts involved, like 'thinking', 'remembering', and so on.

Precisely, in the *Investigations* the question of the criteria for abilities appears in the context of characterizing 'mental' concepts such as those. In particular, it appears in Wittgenstein's discussion of the concept of understanding: «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)» (PI: §150).

What he is pointing at in this section of the text (which begins in §149 and continues to §155) is that it *seems* that to understand, to know and to be able to do something all seem to be some kind of state. By virtue of this view, some questions appear as natural, namely, (1) whether they are the states 'behind' the manifestation of certain conditions (those given when it is appropriate to say that someone *does* understand, know and so on), and constituted by underlying or accompanying processes, and (2) how these states persist in time ('when are we able to do something?'). The former questions are

[7] In the context of the *Remarks* 'logic' is meant in a special sense, which is not our task to elucidate here. For the notion of 'logic' in the *Remarks*, cf. I §22, II §3, III §§12-13, 19, 80. For the relation of logic and 'phenomenology', cf. II §3. Wittgenstein also talks of a 'mathematics' (III §3) and of 'geometry' of colour (III §86), which I think should be understood as falling under the purview of 'logic' in the relevant sense.

[8] Notice that at this point we have shifted twice, first from the criteria for the use of the term 'yellowish' to those for ascribing the ability to learn a particular language-game which bears on a limit case for the original concept, and then from there to the criteria of concept possession generally, bringing in at each stage a new set of questions concerning relevant language-games.

misleading, we are warned, because they lead to the view that knowing/understanding is constituted by psychological or mental, inner, processes. This, precisely, may be what drives the appeal of questions of the second type, or questions about the location of the states (depending on how one conceives of the hypothetical inner processes). A direct argument against the 'hidden processes' view is given in §154:

> how can the process of understanding have been hidden, given that I said "Now I understand" because I *did* understand? And if I say it is hidden–then how do I know what I have to look for? I am in a muddle".

If we are ever right in our claims of understanding or ability, the states they presumably are must be something which is in plain view. Despite this, it is something which is clearly not obvious. Something like a positive view is given in §§154 and 155. On the negative side, understanding is not to be seen as a 'mental process'. Instead,

> If something has to stand 'behind the utterance of the formula', it is *particular circumstances*, which warrant my saying that I can go on–if the formula occurs to me (*ibidem*).

> So, what I wanted to say was if he suddenly knew how to go on, if he understood the system, then he may have had a distinctive experience– and if he is asked: "What was it? What took place when you suddenly grasped the system?", perhaps he will describe it much as we described it above – but for us it is the *circumstances* under which he had such an experience that warrant him saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on (PI: §155).

The criteria for understanding are not 'internal' (to the subject of the state in question), but contextual (they depend on the circumstances)[9]. We can get at them by raising certain generic questions, which are illustrated (much later in the text) with the case of having an opinion:

> To have an opinion is a state. – A state of what? Of the soul? Of the mind? Well, what does one say has an opinion? Mr. N.N., for example. And that is the correct answer.
> One should not expect to be enlightened by the answer to *that* question. Other questions that go deeper are: What, in particular cases, do we regard as criteria for someone's being of such-and-such an opinion? When do we say that he reached this opinion at that time? When that he has altered his opinion? And so on. The picture that the answers to these questions give us shows *what* gets treated grammatically as a *state* here[10] (PI: §573).

In §580, Wittgenstein famously claims that «an 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria». This means that the criteria for the 'process' or 'state' depend on features of the circumstance the subject of the 'process' or 'state' is embedded in, not that they depend on behavioral factors. Furthermore, that these states have such-and-such as their *subjects* does not mean that they depend only on them. This leaves the door open for an anti-individualist analysis of understanding, knowledge, and abilities, to which 'communitarian' readings of Wittgenstein have latched on (this is the kind of reading I

[9] In the *Brown Book* (1958: 117-118), Wittgenstein argues that when we ascribe an ability (for example, to solve a mathematical problem) to someone, we are making something like a conjecture based on a certain model of the state the subject's mind is at, which gives a different view.

[10] Cf. PI: §572.

think Loughlin assumes). The fundamental idea is that at the bottom of the use of these concepts lie practices, which are at least in principle fit to be shared by some community or the other, and which are themselves constituting of meaning in the circumstances where they are at play. In this way, it is the ongoing practices which give support to the states which characterize understanding, knowledge and ability. However, this is not the same as the anti-individualist claim. What is claimed is not that the *possession* of abilities is constitutively anti-individualist; rather, the claim is that the *attribution* of abilities (on which our use of ability-language hinges) involves anti-individualist criteria. The stronger anti-individualist reading depends on the further assumption that there is nothing more to abilities (or any of the other notions) than the satisfaction of the criteria for attribution. This shows how the stronger anti-individualist reading could align itself to some form of anti-realism.

Hacker, arguing against the communitarian view, claims that «the mode of acquisition of an ability is not part of the criteria for the current possession of that ability» (Hacker 2010: 102), effectively ruling out the strong anti-individualist reading. This claim repeats a point made earlier (Hacker 1990, Baker & Hacker 1990) against Malcolm's (1989) argument that solitary speakers of a language are, for Wittgenstein, impossible. The support for Hacker's claim comes from a remark by Wittgenstein in MS 124 (I quote from Hacker 2010):

> there can be human beings who are acquainted only with language-games which one plays by oneself. Indeed, it is imaginable that these human beings should have a rich vocabulary. We could imagine that an explorer came to this country and observed how each one of them accompanied their activities with articulate sounds, but did not address others. Somehow the explorer gets the idea that these people are talking to themselves, listens to them in the course of their activities, and succeeds in producing a probable translation of their talk into our language. By learning their language, he reaches the position in which he can predict actions which the people subsequently perform, for some of their utterances are expressions of decisions or plans. (How these people were able to learn their language is here irrelevant) (pp. 213 ff.).

(The upshot of this case for understanding the possibility of private language is not my concern.) I think Hacker is mistaken when he takes this latter sentence as supporting his claim concerning the identification of abilities, which is significantly stronger than what one can gather from the text. Wittgenstein does not say that the mode of acquisition of an ability is never relevant for the identification of abilities; he simply observes that in *this* case ('here') it is not. Furthermore, Hacker's claim is in tension with PI § 573, quoted above, where questions about the conditions in which someone acquires an ability seem to be relevant after all[11]. Wittgenstein has not laid down a set of principles for the application of the concept of ability in all cases, but merely examined the notion as it pertains to certain salient cases (for example, insofar as the notion of ability pertains to those of understanding, knowledge and learning). Consequently, both the hypotheses that the conditions of acquisition of abilities are either never or always required for the identification of abilities, and the hypotheses that the criteria for abilities is either always or never anti-individualist, are wrong. The only elements of a

[11] This may support the exegetical hypothesis, which Baker and Hacker (1990) dismiss, that Wittgenstein could have suppressed the parenthetical remark from the similar point in PI §243 due to a change in mind, or because he was not happy with it on the grounds of inconsistency. Lacking additional evidence, however, that hypothesis should be rejected as well, for (as I just pointed out) Wittgenstein's remark is *not* wrong.

positive view that Wittgenstein seems to commit to in *all* cases is the claim that abilities are states of some kind, and that their criteria are not internal[12]. This view is compatible with moderate forms of both individualism and anti-individualism. If the criteria for *cognitive* capacities is either, then that constitutes a peculiarity of whatever the 'cognitive' is supposed to be.

The moderate anti-individualist reading, however, may seem more appealing than the individualist one (perhaps on independent grounds disconnected to Wittgenstein's exegesis). One reason for this, which I think *has* exegetical significance, is that (from a methodological perspective) anti-individualism has the advantage to (simply put) give us more places to look at. Individualism should reject hypotheses about the relevance of factors which escape the domain of the individual; anti-individualism has no such constraint. As a consequence, it provides more elements to bring into the pictures we build to make sense of the phenomena. If, like Wittgenstein says, if our philosophical aim is to «render surveyable» what we are dealing with (PI: §125), as to provide «overviews» of the use of our words/concepts (PI: §122), the elements we use for these reconstructions should be adequate to the task: «hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links*» (PI: §122). There are no guarantees that the elements we find will be enough for our purposes, so principled restrictions can be counterproductive. I will return to this later.

3. Extended abilities

Loughlin's 'wide view' is intended to redirect our gaze to the wider set of conditions which constitute the circumstances where using 'cognitive' concepts is appropriate, and thus, present a better overview of their use. In this sense, his project is positive. Loughlin seems to claim that the crucial difference between the views he rejects and his 'wide' view is that the former commit to objectionable ontologies. This is the drive behind his main criticism of HEM[13]. Here, I want to point out a difficulty with the suggestion that 'going wide' avoids metaphysical commitments.

When Wittgenstein discusses the notion of ability, he is not focusing on it; instead, he works it out as necessary in order to examine other notions. His picture is not complete. It is possible to flesh out the anti-individualist reading of Wittgenstein's view of abilities by the introduction of new distinctions for clarificatory purposes. For example, we could introduce a notion of *locus*, as the extension of entities which support an ability and their arrangement, and observe that the subject and the locus don't have to be identical. I am the subject of my abilities (this is why they are *mine*), but I am not necessarily their locus. Take the case of the ability to embrace someone. If I have it, someone *else* has to have certain dispositions too. Thus, the locus of this ability extends beyond the person it has as its subject out into the surrounding circumstance, and is affected by the structure of the circumstance (remember PI: §155)[14].

The locus is important in that case because it is, *of* the circumstance, what *supports* the ability. Identifying the ability is achieved by identifying its locus. Because circumstances extend into the world, loci and abilities can do it as well. Loci are not always pieces or

[12] The treatment of the issue in these terms seems to be consistent thorough Wittgenstein's later philosophy, as it can be gathered from the sources I've been using here. What changes is his account of the relevant criteria.

[13] And HEMC, as he points out in Loughlin (2018: 280, note 11), insofar as this view also commits to what he calls the «process view».

[14] Cf. Wittgenstein 1977: III, §§297, 301.

parts of 'outer' circumstances: the locus of an ability could simply be its subject: for example, my ability to bite has me as its locus (or even, a part of myself)[15]. There is no general location for loci: to place them in each case, we have to raise certain questions, namely, the questions that, when answered, give sense to our talking of abilities as states (cf. *ivi*: §573).

Talk of loci of abilities introduces a new category into our language, and it explicitly ontologizes the support of abilities. Nevertheless, it should be explanatorily equivalent to Loughlin's wide view. The wider conditions of satisfaction have to have some support; precisely, their support should coincide with the *loci* (we can see the loci view as equivalent to the wide view with an explicit ontology). Consider the case of someone who uses a Smartphone. The relevant abilities are *of* the person, but their locus extends to the Smartphone as well. The arrangement of the locus should be explained by the normative context that makes it intelligible. So the same observations that the wide view provides for explanatory purposes should be preserved in the locus view[16]. As long as the wide view appeals to mechanisms and capacities, it should be possible to give an ontologizing reconstruction like this; hence, the wide view by itself cannot be ontologically non-committal. Rather, one ontology is traded by another. This puts pressure on a possible reply that the distinctions being made here are not metaphysical constructions, but merely 'grammatical' observations. One is tempted to say that if ontology was not speculation, it would look like grammar (which is to say that grammar looks like ontology).

4. No resolution

So far, I have assumed that something like a view on the topic I'm dealing with can be extracted from Wittgenstein's work, in a way that could be illuminating to the recent debate on the hypotheses of extended mind, broadly conceived. The previous section was meant to illustrate a problem with proceeding to frame positive hypotheses in light of it. If using Wittgenstein's remarks to identify the correct criteria for the application of the concept of ability (and the others we mentioned), as I just suggested, ultimately yields something for which one can still give a metaphysical account, the question arises whether that is in line with Wittgenstein's own goals, given that he often explicitly renounces 'metaphysics' (most famously, in PI: §§116, 118). Loughlin is keen to emphasize, precisely for this reason, that his concerns are not metaphysical, but merely explanatory. However, this still cannot evade the issue, because Wittgenstein also seems to renounce explanation (cf. PI: §126). Should this lead us to a 'pyrrhonian' picture of philosophy, where the point of it is just to escape the nonsense of theorising? In such a picture the whole debate at hand falls apart *as philosophy*.

I think that is not the right attitude to take, although I think it is true that by pursuing positive accounts we go further than Wittgenstein was (perhaps) willing to go. The point, then, is to escape from the impasse. It is important to notice, with Baker (2004), that Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophy in PI §§89-132 should not be read as an account of the nature of philosophy, but in a more restricted sense. In particular, I take them to be expression of the drives that lead his own investigations: they are what should be understood in order to follow him, not what one should do when doing philosophy. In this way, positive investigations are still within the realm of philosophical

[15] Dispositional properties with loci can lack subjects (they could be 'features' in the sense of Strawson, 1959). However, abilities are agentive, and should have them.

[16] By making explicit that *loci* can be structured, the view can perhaps yield richer descriptions of how it is that the subject is in the relevant states.

possibility, even if they might be outside of Wittgenstein's own self-restricted reach. Some of the most valuable insights in PI are, precisely, that we cannot rest at ease:

> Consider […] 'games'. […] What is common to them all? – Don't say: "they must have something in common […]" – but *look and see* whether the is anything common to all. – For if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look! (PI: §66).
> One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to *look* at its application and learn from that (PI: §340).

In the case of the concept of ability, the main result of Wittgenstein's investigations is a recognition that

> The criteria which we accept for 'fitting', 'being able to', 'understanding', are much more complicated than might appear at first sight. That is, the game with these words, their use in the linguistic intercourse that is carried on by their means, is more involved – the role of these words in our language is other than we are tempted to think.
> (This role is what we need to understand in order to resolve philosophical paradoxes. And that's why definitions usually aren't enough to resolve them; and even less so the statement that a word is 'indefinable') (PI: §182).

It is doubtful that Wittgenstein's own investigations should count as finished on this point (it makes no sense, I think, to say that clarification can ever be finished)[17]. We may, then, move beyond Wittgenstein's own remarks and do the necessary clarifying work ourselves. Perhaps we should not, but that is a different question altogether.

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[17] Wittgenstein (1977), I §15: «In every serious philosophical problem uncertainty extends to the very roots of the problem. We must always be prepared to learn something new».

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