The Significance of Aspect Perception
Bringing the Phenomenal World into View
The series publishes high-quality studies of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s work and philosophy. It is affiliated with The Nordic Wittgenstein Society, The Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen and The von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Helsinki. The series welcomes any first rank study of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, biography or work, and contributions in the subject areas of philosophy and other human and social studies (including philology, linguistics, cognitive science and others) that draw upon Wittgenstein’s work. It also invites studies that demonstrate the philosophical relevance of Wittgenstein’s Nachlass as well as purely philological or literary studies of the Nachlass. Each submission to the series, if found eligible by the series editor, is peer reviewed by the editorial board and independent experts. The series accepts submissions in English of approximately 80 000 – 125 000 words. For further information (about how to submit a proposal, formatting etc.), please contact: niklas.forsberg@filosofi.uu.se.

More information about this series at http://www.springer.com/series/13863
Avner Baz

The Significance of Aspect Perception

Bringing the Phenomenal World into View

Springer
Acknowledgments

The eight papers collected here were written over the past 20 years. The publication of this collection is therefore an opportunity to express my gratitude for all of the philosophical friendships that have left their marks on these papers and to acknowledge philosophical debts, more or less in the order in which they were incurred.

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Stanley Cavell, to whose memory I dedicate this book, for his characterization, in “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy,” of the grammar of judgments of beauty and its affinity to the grammar of the philosophical appeal to “what we say when,” for exemplifying a way of doing philosophy that—just like judgments of beauty as characterized by Kant—is at once inseparable from its particular occasion and universal in its insights and appeal, and for much, much else; Eli Friedlander, my MA thesis advisor at Tel-Aviv University, for introducing me to Cavell’s work and for early conversations on Kant and Wittgenstein; Leonard Linsky, for leading the reading group of Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations at the University of Chicago whose discussions prompted the writing of “What’s the Point of Seeing Aspects?”; Peter Hylton, my dissertation adviser at the University of Illinois, Chicago, who worked with me on that paper and whose unique combination of critical, analytic astuteness and encouragement was just what I needed; Bill Day and Victor Krebs, for inviting me to write what turned out to be “On Learning from Wittgenstein; or What Does it Take to See the Grammar of Seeing Aspects?” for a collection that became Seeing Wittgenstein Anew (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and for numerous conversations about aspects and other topics over the years; Bill, again, for generously reading closely a complete draft of this collection and giving me many penetrating comments and suggestions; Jim Conant, for helping me see, when that invitation from Bill and Victor came, that I had more to say about aspect perception than I had realized and for his friendship and support over the years; Stephen Mulhall, for graciously responding to my early criticisms of his reading of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspects—a reading whose phenomenological truth I only later came to appreciate; Martin Gustafsson and Jean-Philippe Narboux, my philosophical brothers, for much needed moments of laughter during those early years at the University of Chicago and occasionally since then, and for many (but never enough) conversations over the
years—on aspects, philosophical method, language, and many other topics—that were always philosophically inspiring and humanly reassuring; Martin, again, for reading through the penultimate draft of this collection and pressing me to clarify important issues that needed to be clarified; Juliet Floyd, for many conversations on aspect perception and for her encouragement and support; Marie McGinn and Oskari Kuusela, for inviting me to contribute what became “Aspect Perception and Philosophical Difficulty” to the *Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Dan Dennett, for playing the role of the “aspect denier” in conversations that led to “Aspect Perception and Philosophical Difficulty”; Kelly Jolley, Keren Gorodeisky, and Arata Hamawaki, for organizing the conference on beauty at Auburn University for which “The Sound of Bedrock: Lines of Grammar between Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell” was first written and for many conversations on aspects, beauty, Kant, and Wittgenstein, during that conference and in subsequent years; Gary Kemp, for inviting me to contribute what became “Aspects of Perception” to *Wollheim, Wittgenstein, and Pictorial Representation* (Routledge, 2016) and for several conversations about that paper and aspect perception more generally; Craig Taylor and Andrew Gleeson for organizing the conference on Wittgenstein and Ethics for which “Motivational Indeterminacy” was written; Reshef Agam-Segal for responding critically to my work on aspects over the years, thereby prompting me to clarify and further develop key moments in that work; Christian Martin, for organizing the conference for which “Wittgenstein and the Difficulty of What Normally Goes Without Saying” was written and for helpful comments on that paper; Sebastian Sunday Gréve, for inviting me to contribute what became “Bringing the Phenomenal World into View” to *Wittgenstein on Philosophy, Objectivity, and Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and for helpful comments on that paper; Charles Travis for serving (without choosing to) as one of my main philosophical interlocutors over the years, both on the topics of language and philosophical therapy and on the topic of perception; the Philosophy Department at Tufts, for being a wonderful place to do philosophy; and the students in two seminars on perception and aspect-perception that I recently taught at Tufts: Shantel Blakely, Hanwen Hu, Lutai (Michelle) Ju, Jonatan Larsson, Michael Mitchell, Kiku Mizunu, Brad Pearson, Hannah Read, Jussi Silliman, Estelle Tcha, and Michael Veldman. Thank you also to Michael Mitchell, again, for going over the final version of the whole manuscript, making any number of good suggestions, and for helping me generate the index.
Contents

1 Introduction ................................................................. 1

2 What’s the Point of Seeing Aspects? ................................. 13
  2.1 Introduction ............................................................ 13
  2.2 Seeing and (Merely) Knowing ....................................... 17
  2.3 The Grammar of Wittgenstein’s ‘Aspects’ ......................... 21
  2.4 Can Wittgensteinian Aspects Be Seen Continuously? ............ 26
  2.5 Aspects and Representation. ........................................ 30
  2.6 Soul Aspects? .......................................................... 33
  2.7 Conclusion: The Scope of Aspect Perception .................... 34

3 On Learning from Wittgenstein; or What Does It Take to See the Grammar of Seeing Aspects? ................. 35
  3.1 Introduction ............................................................ 35
  3.2 Learning from Wittgenstein I: The Work of Wittgenstein’s Remarks on Aspects ............................. 36
  3.3 Learning from Wittgenstein: II ...................................... 43

4 Aspect Perception and Philosophical Difficulty .................. 53
  4.1 Introduction ............................................................ 53
  4.2 Background ............................................................ 58
  4.3 ‘A Quite Particular’ .................................................... 61
  4.4 The Intransitivity of Aspects ......................................... 63
  4.5 Aspect Perception, Aspect Blindness, and Philosophical Difficulty ............................................... 65
  4.6 Aspect Perception and Things That Speak to Us ................. 69

5 The Sound of Bedrock: Lines of Grammar Between Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell. ............................... 71
  5.1 Introduction ............................................................ 71
  5.2 Cavell’s Two Proposals; and an Important Methodological Difference Between Kant and Wittgenstein .......... 72
  5.3 Kantian Beauty and Wittgensteinian Aspects ...................... 76
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Why Pleasure? The Allure of the System</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 ‘Subjective Universal Validity’ Without Pleasure</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Kantian Beauty, Wittgensteinian Aspects, and the Application of Concepts</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 The Sound of Bedrock</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Aspects of Perception</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Introduction</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 The Grammar and Phenomenology of Wittgensteinian Aspects</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Wollheim on Seeing-As</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Aspects and Concepts</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Aspects as Perceived Internal Relations</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Perceptual Indeterminacy</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Concluding Remark: Aspects and Beauty</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Motivational Indeterminacy</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 The Assumption of Motivational Determinacy</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Motivational Indeterminacy</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 An Illustration</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Concluding Remark: Problems and Riddles</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Wittgenstein and the Difficulty of WhatNormally Goes Without Saying</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Introduction: ‘Form of Life’ and the Conditions of Sense</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Stage Setting: Kant and the Difficulty of Understanding</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Wittgenstein and the Difficulty of Doing Justice to Our Relation to the Background</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 Bringing the Phenomenal World into View by Way of Aspect Perception</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5 The Natural Attitude and the Limitations of the Wittgensteinian Grammatical Investigation</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Bringing the Phenomenal World into View</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1 Introduction: Travis’s ‘Fundamental Question of Perception’ and the Repression of the Phenomenal World</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2 Travis’s (Kantian) Answer to the ‘Fundamental’ Question</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3 The Difficulty Posed by Wittgensteinian Aspects to Travis’s Account of Perception</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4 Sense Perception</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5 Travis, McDowell, and Two Ways of Missing a Hole in the Wall</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations for Works of Wittgenstein Cited


PPF  *Part II of the Philosophical Investigations*.

[^1]: The early papers in this collection, and occasionally the later papers too, use the original Anscombe translation of Parts I and II of the *Investigations*, as opposed to the more recent Hacker and Schulte revision of that translation. Where I saw no reason to update Anscombe’s original translation, I didn’t.
Chapter 1
Introduction

Abstract The Introduction describes the main respects in which my thinking about aspect perception, and about Wittgenstein’s remarks on the subject, has changed over the years. What has changed most significantly is not my reading of Wittgenstein’s remarks, but rather the extent to which I find the treatment of aspect perception in those remarks satisfying. While I still find useful and fecund Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigation of what he calls ‘aspects’, I have come to think that the experience of aspect perception also calls for a phenomenological understanding that situates that experience within the broader context of our essentially-embodied, pre-reflective and pre-conceptual perceptual experience of the world. And the Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation, I now believe, suffers from significant limitations in this respect.

Keywords Aspect perception · Grammatical investigation · Phenomenology

The eight papers collected here, more or less significantly revised and in some cases expanded from their originally published version, were written over a period of roughly 20 years, but in no way consecutively: in some cases, several years elapsed, and a significant amount of philosophical writing on other topics was done, between the writing of one of them and the writing of the next. They are unified by the fact that they each concern, or else draw upon in one way or another, Wittgenstein’s remarks on the perception of what he called ‘aspects’.

With the exception of the first paper, the writing of each of the papers was prompted by an invitation to contribute to some conference or edited collection of papers; and each of those papers was written under the assumption that it would be my last on the subject of aspect perception. Though I was retrospectively grateful in each case for the opportunity to come back to the topic of aspect perception, in each case I came to it from a different perspective and with a different underlying concern. I had not thought of myself at the time as having, or developing, a comprehensive and unified view on aspect perception. Nor, I should hasten to add, do I believe, or have ever believed, that Wittgenstein had a comprehensive and unified view on the subject. What Wittgenstein did have is a general approach to the understanding
and dissolution of philosophical difficulties—an approach that he sought to apply to the case of aspect perception. And what unifies the first four papers in this volume is that they were all written in (what I took to be) faithfulness to that approach and with the aim of elucidating and defending it.

By contrast, in the last three papers, and largely under the inspiration of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, I am moving away from Wittgenstein—both in the sense of finding less use for his remarks on aspects and sometimes finding them mistaken, and in the sense of no longer abiding by, and at certain points stressing the limitations of, (what I take to be) his general approach. The fifth paper marks a transition in this respect between the first four papers and the final three. To the still—rather—limited extent that I now have something like a comprehensive view of aspect perception and its significance, it is to be found in papers five through eight. And, in certain critical respects, that view goes beyond anything I have found in Wittgenstein.

I still find my early interpretation of what Wittgenstein means by ‘(seeing an) aspect’, as broached in the first paper collected here and elaborated and refined in later papers, to be broadly correct; and I find my early understanding of Wittgenstein’s general philosophical approach, as broached in the second and third papers and elaborated and refined in subsequent papers, to be broadly correct as well. What has changed most significantly over the years is that I no longer find fully satisfying Wittgenstein’s understanding of aspect perception. Even more significantly, I now see certain important limitations in Wittgenstein’s general approach to the understanding and dissolution of philosophical difficulties, in particular when it comes to aspect perception and to perceptual experience more generally.

By way of introduction to this collection, let me describe in some detail what I see as the most significant transformations in my thinking about aspects since I began writing on the subject almost two decades ago. One disagreement with my earlier self that encapsulates, in a way, the arc of my thinking about aspect perception over the years, has to do with the philosophical significance of what Wittgenstein calls ‘the dawning (or lighting up, Aufleuchten) of an aspect’—the striking, momentary experience that is expressible by saying that what we see has wholly changed, even though we know (and, in another common sense of ‘see’, see) that it has not changed. More specifically, it has to do with what, if anything, the dawning of aspects may teach us about (normal) human perception in general. On this issue, I now find that I did a certain injustice in my early papers to other interpreters of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspects—primarily Stephen Mulhall, but also Paul Johnston. These philosophers were arguing that the dawning of Wittgensteinian aspects was philosophically interesting, and interested Wittgenstein, first and foremost because it was a manifestation of some other, more basic and pervasive, perceptual relation that we have to pictures, words, stretches of human behavior, and arguably (on Mulhall’s view) to other things as well—but, at any rate, to anything that can be perceived under this or that aspect. They argued that this other perceptual relation is what Wittgenstein refers to by ‘continuous aspect perception’. The dawning of an aspect, Mulhall and Johnston proposed, may only properly be understood—its apparent ‘paradoxality’ ‘dissolved’, as Mulhall has put it—against the background of what Wittgenstein calls ‘continuous aspect perception’.

1 Introduction
I thought then, and still think today, that Mulhall’s and Johnston’s interpretation of Wittgenstein was forced (I argue this in ‘What’s the Point of Seeing Aspects?’). I also thought, and still think today, that their proposed understanding of aspect dawning—and more precisely the kind of understanding they were offering—was foreign to Wittgenstein’s philosophical approach (this is argued in the first part of ‘On Learning from Wittgenstein’). And, finally, I thought then, and still think today, that even apart from whether it is faithful to Wittgenstein, their proposed understanding of aspect dawning does not work—it only gives us the illusion of understanding that experience (this is argued in the second part of ‘On Learning from Wittgenstein’). I leave the detailed presentation of Mulhall’s and Johnston’s accounts, and the details of my criticisms of those accounts, to the first two papers in this volume. But, for all that, I now find that Mulhall and Johnston were onto something true, and important, in their (forced) reading of Wittgenstein.

In my first serious engagement with Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspects, and similarly to Mulhall and Johnston, I found in those remarks more than just a ‘therapeutic’, merely ‘negative’ response to various conceptual confusions and entanglements. The experience of noticing, or being struck by, an aspect, and the ‘language-game’ of giving voice to that experience and inviting others to share it, seemed to me humanly significant and philosophically interesting; and with a certain undeniable youthful, romanticist naiveté, I tried, in ‘What’s the Point of Seeing Aspects?’, to bring out and elucidate those significance and interest. But my Wittgensteinian skepticism of anything that has the form of a theory in philosophy, together with my—again, Wittgensteinian-inspired—failure to appreciate the depth of insight attainable by properly-carried-out phenomenology, had kept me for quite some time from recognizing the way in which the dawning of Wittgensteinian aspects does reveal something about (normal) human perception. In a word, I now think it reveals the role we play in bringing about and maintaining, ‘constituting’ as phenomenologists like to say, the unity and sense, which in turn need to be understood in terms of motor and affective significance, of the phenomenal world—the world as perceived and responded to prior to being thought, or thought (or talked!) about. And it also reveals our capacity for more or less playful, more or less creative, projection of perceivable sense onto some given object, or situation—the capacity that Merleau-Ponty refers to as the human being’s ‘genius for ambiguity’ and takes to be essential to normal human perception and behavior. So even though I still believe

---

1 Mulhall, I should note, did not think of himself as offering a theory of aspect dawning (and aspect perception). He took himself to be offering a Wittgensteinian dissolution of an apparent puzzle by way of the deliberate assembling of ‘reminders’. For reasons discussed in ‘On Learning from Wittgenstein’, I believe he was unclear about the nature of his own account.

2 Note that the ‘as’ here is not the ‘as’ of ‘seeing x as y’! The phenomenal world is not an aspect, but rather is the home of all aspects, and the background against which they dawn on us.

3 *Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith (trans.) (Routledge, 1996), 189/195. References to the *Phenomenology of Perception* will henceforth be given by ‘PP’, with the page number of the pre-2002 editions of the Smith translation, followed (as in the present case) by the page number of the 2012 Donald Landes translation. I have chosen to primarily use the pre-2002 Routledge edition of Smith’s translation, while consulting, and sometimes following, the Landes translation, because
that Mulhall was forcing Heidegger’s phenomenology onto Wittgenstein’s remarks, and still believe that Mulhall’s Heidegger-inspired ‘dissolution’ of the ‘paradox’ of aspect dawning does not work, I have now come to think that Mulhall was right in sensing that a phenomenological understanding was called for in the case of aspect dawning, and also right in sensing that aspect dawning reveals something important about normal human (and quite possibly not just human) perception. ‘Aspects of Perception’—a more recent paper in which I respond critically to Richard Wollheim, who also proposes that seeing aspects, or ‘seeing as’, as discussed by Wittgenstein, characterizes all (normal) human perception—is where I first present, and begin to reflect upon, that important change in my thinking about aspect perception.

This brings me to another important change in my thinking about aspect perception. Part of the peculiarity, and source of philosophical difficulty, of what Wittgenstein calls ‘aspect dawning’ (or the ‘lighting up’ of an aspect) is that it is a particular kind of perceptual experience. This particular kind of experience may be identified and investigated phenomenologically; but it may also be identified and investigated grammatically—in Wittgenstein’s sense of that term. A grammatical investigation of aspect dawning—of the experience of ‘noticing an aspect’ (PPF, 113)—would seek to elucidate ‘the concept [of noticing an aspect] and its place among the concepts of experience (Erfahrungs begriffen)’ (PPF, 115); and, as I emphasize at various points in the papers collected here, it primarily proceeds from a third person perspective, and by way of the elicitation of (Wittgensteinian) criteria: asking such questions as, ‘When would we say (=by what criteria would we tell, in this or that sort of context) that someone (else) was struck by an aspect, or was seeing something as something?’, or ‘When would we say that someone was (merely) interpreting what she saw one way or another, or treating it one way or another, as opposed to seeing it one way or another?’. And it’s important that these sorts of questions are meant to bring into view not just particular utterances (or other ways of expressing the experience of having been struck by an aspect) but the broader contexts in which those utterances have their sense and would (normally) be criterial for certain mental states, processes, and activities.

The later Wittgenstein, as I read him, though sometimes moved to give phenomenological descriptions in his reflections on aspects, was generally suspicious of phenomenology, and skeptical of its capacity to lead to philosophical enlightenment. As I point out in ‘Wittgenstein and the Difficulty of What Normally Goes Without Saying’, these suspicion and skepticism come out clearly and explicitly in his remarks on aspects. In my early papers on aspect perception, I followed

---

the 2002 edition has many typos, and because, despite occasional imprecisions, I find the Smith translation superior to Landes’s in three important respects: it better preserves the poetic qualities of Merleau-Ponty’s French; it does not break Merleau-Ponty’s long paragraphs into shorter ones (which sometimes results in real distortion of meaning); and, in faithfulness to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological account of language, it translates the French ‘sens’ context-sensitively, rather than always translating it by the English ‘sense’. Another important advantage of the Smith translation is that it uses footnotes, rather than endnotes, thereby making it easier not to miss those of Merleau-Ponty’s notes that are substantive, as quite a few of them are.
Wittgenstein in focusing on grammar and leaving phenomenology more or less to the side—though without ever denying that the dawning of an aspect is grammatically, a perceptual experience. I thought then, and still think today, that quite a few readers of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspects have gotten themselves confused, and into trouble, by failing to attend properly to the grammar of what he calls ‘aspects’.

As I argue in ‘Aspect Perception and Philosophical Difficulty’, Wittgenstein’s suspicion of phenomenology, and the shift to the third person perspective, are well motivated, and serve him well, when it comes to the sorts of concepts, and phenomena, on which he focuses in the first part of the Investigations: understanding, learning, meaning (one’s words one way or another), thinking, naming, reading, following a rule, intending, and so on; and they are also useful in elucidating the concept of ‘(noticing an) aspect’ and its place among our concepts of experience. But I now believe that Wittgenstein’s general approach serves him less well, and sometimes leads him astray, when it comes to the experience of aspect dawning and its relation to other moments, features, and dimensions of human perceptual experience. The philosophical danger of being misled, or handicapped, by confining oneself to Wittgensteinian grammar is no less real, I now believe, than the danger of getting confused, and lost, as result of its neglect. I now believe that, at least when it comes to aspect perception and to perception more generally, the Wittgensteinian grammatical-conceptual investigation should be complemented by properly-executed phenomenology, and vice versa.

A striking feature of the majority of the commentaries with which I am familiar on Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspects is that they shirk at once both the Wittgensteinian work of grammatical investigation—which aims at placing the concept of ‘noticing an aspect’ (and thereby the concept of ‘aspect’) in relation to other concepts of experience—and the difficult work of phenomenology, which, as I’ve already noted, Wittgenstein himself also for the most part shirked. As a result, the insights afforded by a Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation are missed, the conceptual confusions and entanglements it is designed to help us dissolve remain undissolved, and at the same time claims are made in those commentaries about ‘human perception’ or ‘normal human perception’—of pictures, stretches of human behavior, stretches of human discourse, everyday mid-size objects, or what have you—where it is entirely unclear what is supposed to be the basis of those claims, and where little reflection often suffices for revealing their phenomenological crudeness and implausibility. Is it plausible to think that (normal) human beings have some one, particular sort of perceptual relation, or attitude, toward cutlery, for example—a relation that, contrary to what Wittgenstein seems to be saying (PPF, 122), may aptly be described as ‘the continuous seeing of an aspect’, and which holds irrespective of whether the perceiver is using the knife and fork for eating (while focusing on her food or on the conversation around the table), or is using them creatively for some other purpose, or is setting the table, or is observing the setting of the table, or is setting the knife and fork aside, perhaps together with a bunch of other things, in order to make space for something else, or is examining the knife and fork for rust, or is having one’s glance momentarily fall on the knife and fork, or is merely having them lie somewhere within one’s field of vision while
focusing on something else altogether? I think it is not plausible. And yet claims have been made by Wittgenstein’s interpreters (just as claims have been made by analytic philosophers who are not Wittgensteinian), about what happens when (ever) one sees midsize everyday objects such as a knife and a fork, or what constitutes such a seeing. The Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation could help us appreciate the sorts of difficulties and confusions philosophers may get themselves into by staring, or imagining themselves staring, at a red cube that lies on the desk in front of them, and trying to say what happens to them, or in them, in such moments. But it can only do so much to elucidate perception, and the world as perceived.

As I propose in ‘Wittgenstein and the Difficulty of What Normally Goes Without Saying’, a basic problem with the Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation vis-à-vis phenomenology is that our ordinary and normal use of words tends to partake in what Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl, calls ‘the natural attitude’—very roughly, our tendency to overlook or bypass our perceptual experience in favor of its objects, and ultimately in favor of an objective world, or the world as objectively understood, that we construct, together, on the basis of that experience and into which we fit those objects. This means that leading the words of our philosophizing—including words (and concepts) that might be thought to refer us to perceptual experience, such as ‘see’, ‘hear’, ‘feel’, ‘notice’, and so on—back to the language-games in which they have their natural home (PI, 116) will only take us so far when it comes to elucidating our perceptual experience(s). And it might in fact lead us astray by encouraging what phenomenologists have called ‘the experience error’—the error, that is, of giving ontological and (therefore) explanatory primacy to the world as objectively known (or taken to be known) relative to the phenomenal world, or the world as perceived: taking the former to (causally) determine the latter, whereas in reality it is only in, and against the background of, the latter that we ‘constitute’ the former (establish objective causal relations, for example, or otherwise attribute objectively establishable properties to objectively (re)identifiable objects, in judgments assessable in terms of truth and falsity, against the background of shared practices of measurement, experimentation, calibration, and so on). In ‘Wittgenstein and the Difficulty of What Normally Goes Without Saying’, I argue that both Wittgenstein and some of those following him have committed the experience error, and misconstrued aspect perception, and normal perception more generally, as a result.

One manifestation of the experience error has been the tendency to identify aspects with (or in terms of) empirical concepts. This identification of aspects with

4 Compare Merleau-Ponty: ‘It is in terms of its intrinsic meaning and structure that the sensible world is “older” than the universe of thought […] It is by borrowing from the [sensible] world structure that the universe of truth and of thought is constructed for us’ (The Visible and the Invisible, Lefort, C. (ed.), Lingis, A. (trans.), Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968, 12–13). The issue of how the phenomenal world relates to the objective world, or, more precisely, how the world as pre-reflectively perceived and responded to relates to the world as thought (and talked) about and understood objectively, is extremely complex and intricate, and I don’t presume to be able to give anything like a full and fully satisfying account of it. But it’s an important issue, and in papers five through eight I do what I can, at this point, to elucidate it.
empirical concepts goes back to Peter Strawson, is central to Richard Wollheim’s account of ‘seeing as’, and manifests itself, as we will see, in more recent accounts of aspect perception as well. Wittgenstein himself, as far as I can tell, was not altogether clear on this issue. Though some of his remarks suggest that, and why, it would be a mistake to identify aspects with empirical concepts, other remarks encourage that idea. At some point, for example, he proposes that in the dawning of an aspect, ‘it is as if one had brought a concept to what one sees, and one now sees the concept along with the thing’ (RPPI, 961). I think it matters that Wittgenstein is being quite tentative and metaphorical in this and similar remarks, whereas the tendency among commentators, as we will see, has been to take what he says here quite literally. And while I think I know what sort of experience Wittgenstein is trying to express in remarks such as this one, and though I myself found such remarks useful for certain purposes in my early writings on aspect perception, they now seem to me problematic. I now believe that it is actually unclear what taking such remarks literally could possibly mean, or come to; and even when taken metaphorically, it is not altogether clear what they are inviting us to imagine, or whether they truly elucidate the seeing of aspects, as opposed to only giving us the illusion of understanding it.

In ‘Aspects of Perception’, I argue that on two common and plausible ways of understanding ‘concept’—a narrower, traditional one in which concepts are thought of as constituents of possible judgments, and a broader, Wittgensteinian one in which ‘our concept of X’ refers to whatever it is that ultimately guides us in our competent employment of ‘x’ (since the competent employment of ‘x’ in a wide enough range of contexts is our ordinary criterion for ‘possessing the concept of X’) —the identification of aspects with (or in terms of) concepts makes no clear sense. Now, there might be an understanding of ‘concept’ on which the identification would make sense and be illuminating; but, to the best of my knowledge, no such understanding of the word has been offered by those who have proposed the identification. Instead, what Wittgenstein would call ‘a picture’ of concepts has been relied on—a picture that conflates concepts and what Wittgenstein describes as ‘physiognomies’ that stand in ‘internal relations’ to each other, and which covers up and distorts, at once, both the Wittgensteinian grammar of ‘concept’ and the phenomenology of perception.

In addition to partaking in the experience error, the identification of aspects with, or in terms of, concepts also partakes in the tendency in Western philosophy to over-intellectualize human perception—a tendency that has also manifested itself in John McDowell’s influential account of perception, in Mind and World and subsequent writings, on which all (normal, adult) human perception is ‘conceptualized’. One of the main tasks of papers Four through Eight is to provide reasons for resisting that intellectualist-objectivist tendency, as it manifests itself in different ways in Strawson, Wollheim, McDowell, and others, while at the same time recognizing, and elucidating, the sort of sense (or intelligibility) that the phenomenal world has for us, and apart from which our empirical, objective judgments—or, if you will, our applications of concepts—would not have had their sense for us. In this way, Sellars’s ‘myth of the given’ is avoided—that is, the myth of the senseless given is avoided; for the un-conceptualized given is not a myth. But it is avoided—as I pro-
pose in ‘Bringing the Phenomenal World into View’, in response to Charles Travis’s recent critique of McDowell—not by way of a Travisian (Wittgenstein-inspired) quietism that avoids any attempt to describe the world as perceived prior to becoming the object of true-or-false judgments, nor by way of a McDowellian (Kant-inspired) transcendental story about what perceptual experience must be (like) if a certain philosophically construed cognitive achievement (i.e., the formation of empirically ‘justifiable’ ‘judgments’, or Kantian Erkenntnisse) is to be possible. Rather, the myth is avoided by way of true phenomenological description that attempts to bring out and elucidate what we are already, pre-reflectively familiar with. In other words, the myth is avoided not by way of what Wittgenstein calls ‘thinking’ (about what must be the case), but rather by way of what he calls ‘looking and seeing’ (what is the case) (PI, 66).

This concludes what I have to say in general terms about how my thinking on aspect perception has evolved over the years. The fuller story is to be found in the eight papers collected here. All of these papers were previously published elsewhere (though five of them in edited volumes that, in my experience, tend to be read only by few). In preparing them for this volume, I tried to abide by the following principle: to revise each paper however extensively, wherever I saw a way to tighten, clarify, or otherwise improve its original line of argument (or prose) and fit it with that of the other papers, but not to alter that line of argument. This sometimes meant leaving passages—more so in the earlier papers, of course—that are not fully in line with my current thinking, or style (including what now strikes me as the youthful naiveté of the first paper). Wherever that happened and seemed to me significant enough, I added a note to register my dissatisfaction with my earlier self, and to point out places in later papers where I believe I do better.

The eight papers and their original places of publication are:

1. ‘What’s the Point of Seeing Aspects?’, originally in Philosophical Investigations 23:2 (April 2000): 97–122. This paper presents a grammatical characterization of Wittgensteinian aspects that is inspired by Kant’s (grammatical) characterization of judgments of beauty in the Critique of the Power of Judgment, and goes against Mulhall’s and Johnston’s influential reading of Wittgenstein remarks on aspects at various crucial junctures. And it offers a broadly romanticist understanding of the significance of aspect perception—where that includes both the experience of ‘aspect-dawning’ and our typical ways of sharing it, or trying to.

2. ‘On Learning from Wittgenstein; or What Does it Take to See the Grammar of Seeing Aspects?’, originally published, together with a response from Mulhall, in Seeing Wittgenstein Anew, William Day and Victor Krebs (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2010. This paper revisits Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspects, as well as my earlier disagreement with Mulhall on how to read those remarks, but its focus is on Wittgenstein’s general approach—as exemplified in his remarks on aspects—to the elucidation and dissolution of philosophical difficulties. In the second part of the paper, I apply that approach, as I understand it, to Mulhall’s proposed ‘dissolution’ of the ‘paradox’ of aspect-dawning. This critical engagement with Mulhall was my first sustained attempt to practice what I then thought
of as Wittgensteinian therapy, and later also came to think of as a form of ordinary language philosophy. In this respect, this paper was an important step toward subsequent attempts of mine to argue with mainstream analytic philosophers over questions of method, on behalf of ordinary language philosophy.\(^5\)

3. ‘Aspect Perception and Philosophical Difficulty’, originally in The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein, Marie McGinn and Oskari Kuusela (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2011. This paper continues the work of ‘On Learning from Wittgenstein’ of articulating an understanding of Wittgenstein’s approach to the understanding and dissolution of philosophical difficulties, and situates in that context Wittgenstein’s invocation of aspect perception, or ‘seeing as’, in the Brown Book. At the same time, in arguing, following Wittgenstein, for the ‘inseparability’ of the aspect from the object that ‘has’ it, or from the object that is perceived ‘under it’, the paper prepares the ground for the argument, in ‘The Sound of Bedrock’ and ‘Aspects of Perception’, against the widespread tendency to identify Wittgensteinian aspects with, or in terms of, empirical concepts. In this way, it also prepares the ground for ‘Bringing the Phenomenal World into View’.

4. ‘The Sound of Bedrock: Lines of Grammar between Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell’, originally in the European Journal of Philosophy 24 (2016): 607–628. This paper, which takes its bearing from Stanley Cavell’s ‘Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy’, continues the work of ‘What’s the Point of Seeing Aspects?’ of exploring the grammatical affinity between Kant’s ‘beauty’ and Wittgenstein’s ‘aspect’; but it then goes on to develop a Wittgensteinian critique of Kant on two fronts: first, it questions Kant’s commitment to ‘systematicity’ in philosophy, and his related tendency to treat what Wittgenstein calls ‘grammar’ as, at best, an indication of something else—namely, the workings of our cognitive ‘powers’, or faculties, in their (systematic) inter-relations; and, second, it challenges Kant’s understanding of ‘concept’—an understanding that is shared by many in contemporary analytic philosophy, and which essentially divorces concepts from our (evolving and context-sensitive) linguistic practices.

5. ‘Aspects of Perception’, originally in Wollheim, Wittgenstein, and Pictorial Representation: Seeing-as and Seeing-in, Gary Kemp and Gabriele Mras (eds.), (Routledge, 2016). This paper argues against the widespread tendency to identify aspects with, or in terms of, concepts. It also presents my first attempt to elucidate, and support, Merleau-Ponty’s claim that in order to understand human perception, we must recognize perceptual indeterminacy as a ‘positive phenomenon’.

6. ‘Motivational Indeterminacy’, a significantly expanded version of a paper originally published in the European Journal of Philosophy 25 (2017): 336–357. This paper questions the widespread assumption of motivational determinacy—an assumption shared by philosophers as otherwise different from each other as

\(^5\)Those attempts culminated in When Words are Called For (Harvard University Press, 2012) and The Crisis of Method in Contemporary Analytic Philosophy (Oxford University Press, 2017).
Aristotle, Hume, and Kant, as well as by their contemporary followers. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* and Wittgenstein’s remarks on aspect perception, and using moments from a couple of Alice Munro’s short stories for illustration, the paper argues that since it is the phenomenal world that solicits, or elicits, or otherwise motivates, much of what we do, say, think, and feel—including much that is morally significant; and since we play an active role in how we perceive things, and therefore in the ‘constitution’ of the phenomenal world, so that not just judgment, but perception itself is already active or, as Kant would say, ‘spontaneous’; it follows that our motivation is more or less indeterminate as well—more so, the more what we do, say, think, or feel is ‘personal’, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, or creative.

7. ‘Wittgenstein and the Difficulty of What Normally Goes Without Saying’, originally in *The Form of Our Life with Words*, Christian Martin (ed.), (De Gruyter, 2018). This paper proposes that Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘form of life’ belongs in a region of his thought that gave him real trouble in his final years, and concerns what may generally be described as the background conditions of sense. I propose that the main challenge, for Wittgenstein, is doing justice to our perceptual relation to those background conditions, and that what he needs, but is barred by his general approach and method of grammatical investigation from properly appreciating and utilizing, are the insights afforded by phenomenology, as glimpsed, but sometimes also occluded, in his remarks on aspects.

8. ‘Bringing the Phenomenal World into View’, a significantly expanded version of a paper originally published in *Wittgenstein on Objectivity, Intuition, and Meaning*, James Conant and Sebastian Gréve (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2019. Using aspect perception as a point of entry, this paper argues that the phenomenal world—the world as perceived and responded to prior to being thought, or thought about—is repressed in both Travis’s work on perception and McDowell’s. In focusing exclusively on perception as providing us with objects of judgments, or Fregean thoughts, both Travis and McDowell ignore altogether the world as it presents itself to us apart from any judgment or (objective) thought about it. And yet, it is that world that solicits, or elicits, movements and words from us—including what may be called ‘judgments’—and provides the background apart from which they would not have whatever sense they have for us.

Let me end this introduction with a remark about the argumentative structure of the papers collected here. To some extent, each of the papers proceeds as a critical response to some particular philosopher or philosophers, and some particular text or set of texts; and it has been suggested to me that, since the points I try to make in those papers seem general, or anyway generalizable (as is partly shown in this introduction), I should not have focused, in setting up my arguments, on some particular

---

6The ‘much’ here is meant to allow for the possibility of ‘full-blown’ Kantian ‘actions’ that are based on objective knowledge and on reasoning. But even then, there is the question of what, at the end of the day, grounds the knowledge and motivates the reasoning; and here, I submit, we come once again to the phenomenal world and to our pre-reflective response to it.
philosopher(s) or texts(s). In response let me just say that, though I always try to indicate how the words of the philosopher(s) I’m responding to are expressive, or representative, of broader philosophical tendencies, commitments, and ambitions, at the same time I have, on the whole, found it valuable to respond to concrete embodiments of those tendencies, commitments, and ambitions. This is one of the most important lessons I have learned from the work of Stanley Cavell: that one way (I’m not denying there are others) of grounding one’s words when one does philosophy, and guarding oneself (as much as one can) against what Wittgenstein refers to as the ‘metaphysical’, or ‘idle’, use of words, is to begin one’s philosophizing by attending closely to the words of particular others, and making a genuine effort to see what they mean, or could mean, or perhaps need to mean (given their express or apparent purposes and commitments), with their words.

This is also the main reason why I have decided against turning the papers collected here into one, unified monograph. Doing so, I feared, would have covered up the fact that, at the end of the day, my philosophical views, such as they are, may not be separated without distortion from their occasions—from the particular texts that prompted their articulation, from the particular places from which I came to those encounters, and from the dialectical process of articulating myself in relation to others.