

**The Possibility of Anti-essentialism:**  
**An Examination and Defense of Wittgenstein's Family Resemblances**

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On my honor, I hereby swear that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid  
on this paper:

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## *Introduction*

Haig Khatchadourian and Robert Richman both present arguments disagreeing with Ludwig Wittgenstein's use of the word "family resemblance" as taken in an anti-essentialist context. I will argue that, though both articles help us to understand Wittgenstein's term and even to expand its use, Khatchadourian fails to correctly use the tools for finding a family resemblance, and Richman fails to distinguish different senses of the same word (as Wittgenstein does in *The Blue Book*). And therefore, an anti-essentialist argument based on family resemblances is still possible. I will also argue, however, that such an argument does not come from Wittgenstein or follow necessarily from his claims.

## *Wittgenstein and "Family Resemblances"*

Wittgenstein claims that when we try to find a commonality in everything that we call by some particular words, we discover that there is no essential commonality, but a "family" of commonalities, shared by some, not by all. He makes this claim about the words "game," "wishing" (and the like), "reading," and so forth.<sup>1</sup> For example, we apply the word "game" to board games, card games and ball games, among others. Looking individually at each of these categories, we find "multifarious relationships" (PI 66); that is, if we compare Chinese Checkers with Risk, Chutes and Ladders, and Diplomacy, we see that the only commonality between all of them is that they, in some way, use a board, but even what is on the board and how it is used differ. Chinese Checkers can use a board of any shape, as long as it contains a Star of David created out of round inlets on it; game-play involves moving marbles along the inlets. Diplomacy uses a board with a map of the pre-WWII Europe; game-play mostly involves talking to the other players about how they will

<sup>1</sup> He makes the claim about "game" in BB 17, PI 66 and 76, the claim about "wishing" in BB 19, and the claim about "reading" in BB 125 and PI 164. Other examples include: "arithmetic" (BB 20), "comparing" (BB 86-7), "can" (and the like: BB 117), "being guided" (BB 119), "language," "sentence," (both from PI 108), and "to derive" (PI 164).

*A note about citation:* BB always refers to *The Blue and Brown Books*, and PI refers to the *Philosophical Investigations*. Works in BB are cited by page number; works in PI are cited by paragraph number.

alter pieces of a particular color on the board. If we then compare the characteristics of board games to those of card games and then to sports or games of chance, we see that there is no one characteristic trait true of all games and that they are only related by certain “resemblances” (Wittgenstein, PI 66) or “likenesses” (BB 17).

Wittgenstein also uses the term “family resemblance” regarding certain situations, actions and clauses. He asks, for example, whether we can find an essential process to the situation of waiting for someone from 4:00 to 4:30 and the relevant clause, “to expect something from 4 to 4.30” (BB 20).<sup>2</sup> After claiming that there are endless processes that could constitute expecting something from 4:00 to 4:30, he asks us to compare these processes to the processes of expecting a person to tea and claims that the cases of expectation have no essential processes and thus form a family. If we look for an essence for these cases in the word “expectation,” then, we see that it too falls away: we might attribute a particular experience (the sensation of tension) to all times we would use the word “expectation,” but when we try to find the scope of this experience by calling it either “the sensation of expectation” or “the sensation of expectation that B [a particular person] will come,” we see that both uses fail us. The former does not fully describe the situation of expecting something from 4:00 to 4:30, and the latter is so specific that it changes depending on the particular person on whom we are waiting (Wittgenstein, BB 20-21). (I.e. if we call the experience “the sensation of expectation that B will come,” then when we talk about “the sensation of expectation that C will come” is called a different experience.) Thus, even if the experience of “expecting” has an essential sensation to it, that experience cannot be essential to “expecting something between 4:00 and 4:30.”

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<sup>2</sup> Some other examples: “Trying to copy” (BB 33), “Processes of recognizing” (BB 88), “General training” (BB 98), “Can continue the series” (BB 114-5 and PI 179)

From these examples, we see a few of Wittgenstein's methods for claiming that some word forms a family resemblance. The most obvious method we have seen is to show that the uses of a particular word do not share a common characteristic feature, where we understand the word "feature" in several ways: 1) as a "property" (ie: "game"), 2) as a "process" (ie: "expecting someone"), 3) as a "sensation" (ie: "expectation" understood as an experience), etc.<sup>3</sup> If we think we have found a common feature, we might 4) look at this feature and see if its range of use is too narrow or too specific.

Because Wittgenstein never claims that all words or all situations are family resemblances, it might be a dubious – though tempting – enterprise to generalize from the examples that he gives to *all* words. Yet, if we can follow Wittgenstein's method, the way he determines that a word is a family resemblance, we will be able to at least lengthen our list in what will turn out to be useful ways.

Earlier, we saw that Wittgenstein claims that the uses of the word "game" form a family, yet when we narrowed our term to "board games," we claimed that each board game *does* share a commonality, that is, its use of a board. We are tempted, then, to claim that, although games might form a family resemblance, board games have an essence. But, the claim that the essence of board games is to use a board sounds equivalent to saying that the essence of expecting someone is to have an expectation. Both use a characteristic that seems like it belongs to everything we call a particular word *by definition* of that word. ("Of *course*," we might say, "expecting someone involves expectation. That is what makes it *expecting* someone rather than, say, meeting someone by surprise – unexpectedly.") Yet, we saw that Wittgenstein disagreed with this claim by showing that what we call

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps we could generalize these categories as such: "feature" means "property" for nouns and noun clauses (games, language, etc.), "process" for verbs (expecting, reading, to be guided, etc.) and "sensation" for words that are used in terms of experience (expectation as a tension, surprise as momentary flutter, lust as a burning, etc.)

“expectation” is not essential to “expecting someone”: it is either so broad that it cannot fully describe “expecting someone” or so narrow that it cannot apply to more than one case of “expecting someone.” Applying this same method to board games, we need to see if the phrase “using a board” can be used as an essence. If we call using a board in a game “using a board,” then our definition is too broad because “using a board” cannot fully describe how a particular board is used in any board game (remember the difference in use between Chinese Checkers and Diplomacy), and if we call using a board in a game “using a board as it is used in Chinese Checkers,” then our scope is too narrow because “using a board” would then only apply to the game of Chinese Checkers. Therefore, in the same way that “expecting someone” forms a family resemblance, “board game” does as well.

This conclusion might strike us in two ways: 1) If a word forms a family resemblance, a more specific subset of what we call by that word might form a family resemblance as well, even if we rig the subset to seem like it has an essence *by definition*. 2) Family resemblances *are* expandable to an extent, at least in the sense that we can discover family resemblances for words not called so by Wittgenstein. The second point, if we follow it to its extreme, leads us to the point contested by the authors examined here, namely the point that *no* word (or situation, etc.) has an essence. Note: we are not obligated to make the anti-essentialist claim presently, but if we accept that cases that *appear* to show the existence of an essence (ie: board games) in fact do not, then we have good reason to be skeptical about the existence of essences in general.

#### *Khatchadourian and “Capacity to Serve Human Needs”*

Khatchadourian argues that, although words like “game” do not share any characteristics, everything human-made that we call by the same word (like “game” and “chair”) shares a capacity to “serve a specific human need or needs” (344). In other words,

everything human-made – in “normal” conditions – can be used in some particular way, to fulfill some particular human end. Everything that we call “game” (in “standard” conditions) has the potential to give the players and/or spectators some kind of pleasure (Khatchadourian 344). Everything that we call “chair” (in “standard” conditions) has the potential to be sat on by a single person (Khatchadourian 348). Khatchadourian concentrates on words applying to human-made things because, he argues, everything that humans have made has been made to serve some human need, so it makes sense that everything we would call by that word would have the potential to serve that need. We will, for example, call a chair “a chair,” no matter the material out of which it is made or its shape, as long as these attributes do not keep us from sitting on it.

Khatchadourian makes two concessions in his attempt to clarify this theory: 1) the *use* of everything we call “game” (for example) might itself be a family resemblance, to a point, and 2) when we try to understand what a “standard” condition is, we see that defective items (like a chair with one of its legs missing) are still recognized, at least partly, by their characteristics.

1) We saw Khatchadourian claim earlier that all games share the capacity to give pleasure to the players and/or spectators. The term “pleasure,” however, is ambiguous. Some games may give physical and psychological pleasure, like a ball game, while others might give a combination of intellectual and psychological pleasure, like a card game (Khatchadourian 346). The common pleasure (in which all games have the capacity to serve), he argues, is psychological, but even this can be split into different kinds: chess may evoke an “intellectual” pleasure, while card games might evoke a combination of “intellectual” pleasure and “feeling.” In this last split, however, Khatchadourian claims to be making a distinction between how pleasure is produced rather than a distinction between

different kinds of pleasure-experiences. Thus, although we can split games into which ones produce different kinds of experiences of pleasure, we are not stuck in an infinite regress, so Khatchadourian still claims there is a “*relatively* determinate kind of effect” produced by games and therefore a capacity, in the game itself and which is similar in all games, to produce that effect of giving pleasure (346-7).

2) Khatchadourian defines “standard” conditions as conditions that are causally necessary for a thing to be used in a particular way, as opposed to “non-standard” conditions which impede the use of a thing in a particular way (351). This definition proves problematic for him, though, in the case of a “broken chair,” which is called a “chair” even though under standard conditions, it fails to let us sit in it. To explain this problem, Khatchadourian claims that *we have come* to associate objects that have a particular use with some set of characteristics, so we call objects with similar characteristics by the same name even if they do not share this use, but we qualify the name (ie: a “*broken chair*”) because it either lacks certain characteristics of what we call “chair” or because it lacks characteristics necessary for being used for what a chair is used (352-3). For example, chair with three legs is a “broken chair” either because we expect a chair to have four legs or because it would require a fourth leg for us to be able to sit in it.

With these concessions, Khatchadourian holds that he has shown that everything human-made that falls under a particular word shares a potential to be used in some way, which gives us a form of essentialism despite allowing the existence of family resemblance words in the sense of words whose referents lack essential characteristic(s).

These concessions, however, if examined closely, show that essentialism has not been proven. In regard to the first (that a use can itself be a family resemblance), Wittgenstein might employ the same tool that we used with “board games” earlier. If we

claim that all games share the capacity to give us pleasure, we are speaking about the experience of pleasure in terms of a sensation. As Khatchadourian notes, when we talk about “pleasure,” we do not mean any one particular sensation, though he claims that a sensation common to all games is “psychological pleasure.” Are we then to claim that a game has the potential to give “the sensation of psychological pleasure” in general or that a game is to give “the sensation of psychological pleasure in playing Chinese Checkers”? We find, again, that the former is too broad and does not fully describe the sensation of playing Chinese Checkers, while the latter is too narrow and cannot be used to describe “the sensation of psychological pleasure in playing Diplomacy.” The problem is not only that these sensations are *produced* in different ways (as Khatchadourian holds), but that *the words* we use to draw a boundary around what kind of pleasure we mean will always draw the boundary unsatisfactorily (see: Wittgenstein, BB 19). We should not, therefore, accept Khatchadourian’s conclusion that human-made objects have an essence in their capacity to be used in a particular way, because this use too forms a family resemblance.

Khatchadourian’s second concession (that we call objects by a particular word not only because of their potential use but also because of the characteristics we have come to expect in objects with that word), when coupled with the family resemblance of uses, shows that what we originally called a “feature” (see Wittgenstein’s first three methods above) also forms a family resemblance. Instead of referring to an object’s “common feature” as only its “properties,” we also talk about its “use” without leaving ordinary discourse. For example, we can say “This is a chair because it has four legs, a seat and a back,” or “This is a chair because I can sit in it.” In neither case are we showing an essential feature of a chair, but both are cases of definitions that appear grammatically similar but define in terms of features which share no common feature.



So, although Khatchadourian fails if he thinks that he has found the essence of a human-made object in its potential use, he has helped us expand our tools for determining a family resemblance. Instead of three kinds of feature (property, process and sensation), we have a four (including use). We also understand that “feature” forms a family resemblance, such that different kinds of features, not discussed by Wittgenstein, can still be used to show whether a word forms a family resemblance or not.

*Richman and “Something Common”*

Robert Richman distinguishes two types of claims made by Wittgenstein: a) that all objects (situations, etc.) that we call by a certain word share “something in common” and b) that some words do not have fixed boundaries regarding how we use them (Richman 821). He defines essentialism (as he uses it) solely as disagreeing with the former claim, so it might still agree with the latter (Richman 822). The implication of Richman’s claim is that, in disproving essentialism, it does not help to claim that a particular word is vague in its application. Most of Richman’s paper is then concerned in understanding what we mean by the word “something in common” in order to help us determine whether objects that we call by a certain word share it.

Throughout his argument, Richman limits himself to considering univocal terms because the referents of these are the things an essentialist claims have something in common (824). Such a limit necessitates, by the definition of “univocal,” that the referents of these terms share something in common (though only trivially); if they did not, we would call them “ambiguous” rather than “univocal” (Richman 824). But, what commonality (Richman then asks) do the referents of these terms share? Here, he distinguishes three kinds of answer: 1) The referents of such a term (say, “ $\varphi$ ”) necessarily have in common that they share the property of being  $\varphi$ . 2) some set conjunction of

elements in the objects we call “ $\varphi$ ” is necessary and sufficient to call an object “ $\varphi$ ,” such that only when these elements occur in an object, and always when they do, can we call an object “ $\varphi$ .” 3) Some set disjunction of elements in the objects we call “ $\varphi$ ” is necessary and sufficient to call an object “ $\varphi$ ” (Richman 825). Richman claims that the first answer is trivial<sup>4</sup> and that the second answer is unproven (and even untenable). The third answer is disputed by Wittgenstein as comparable to saying that what runs through an entire thread (which is made up of individual fibers) is “the continuous overlapping of those fibers” (Wittgenstein, PI 67, qtd in Richman 826). Richman claims that Wittgenstein’s analogy does not hold because the overlapping of fibers cannot be called a “fiber” itself, while the disjunction of properties has traditionally been called a “property” (Richman 826), implying that the third answer might, in fact, function as a good answer.

Richman then complicates the family resemblance position by distinguishing between “simple properties” and “complex interrelationships” (826). Wittgenstein makes the distinction between showing someone pictures in which yellow ochre appears, the case of showing someone pictures of multiple shapes that are all yellow ochre, and the case of showing someone different shades of a blue (PI 72). Richman claims that color terms are simple but can be viewed as complex when viewed as a disjunction. “Yellow ochre” is

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<sup>4</sup> I would argue that this answer is not only trivial but also unfair to Wittgenstein. It is made both by Richman here and also by Mendel Cohen, who claims that the *prima facie* thesis (that there is nothing common to all objects which are W) is self-contradictory because all such objects share at least that they are W (Cohen 217). Although it is indeed self-contradictory to claim that “not all W are W,” this claim is not the one Wittgenstein makes, even when taken literally. To talk about “all games” in the sense of “everything that is objectively a game” is already to miss Wittgenstein’s point. When we talk about “all games,” for Wittgenstein, we talk about “all objects that we call ‘game,’” and it is not at all necessary that all things we call “game” have in common the fact that they *are* games. We might claim that all things we call “game” have in common the fact that we call them games, but this claim says nothing about the essence of games, only about how we talk about them. Therefore, we should not be so quick to claim that the tautology “all W are W” (or “all  $\varphi$  are  $\varphi$ ”) solves the essentialist dilemma, even in a trivial way. Thus, if we define a “univocal” term as a term whose objects all share a single property, then there is not *necessarily* any such thing as a univocal term. (To claim otherwise is to beg the question.) On the other hand, if a “univocal” term is a term with only one meaning, then we cannot claim that every object called by that term shares a property. We might use “red” only when a single color is present, but we will see (below) that identifying a common property in the objects with this color *still* proves difficult.

viewed as simple because all pictures share that color whereas “blue” is viewed as complex because it is being showed as the disjunction of all of its shades. Richman replaces both terms by “red,” and sees that the term “red” can be both simple and complex, such that the distinction between a simple term and a complex one is unclear (826). If we hold that the distinction is unclear, however, then we lose the power of the terms “simple” and “complex” such that Wittgenstein’s claim that the referents of some words do not have anything in common becomes pointless because there is no separation between them and the words that *do* share something in common.

If, instead, we hold that we *can* distinguish between “simple” and “complex,” we can analyze “having something common” as a complex term (because the objects to which it refers do not appear to share any common properties). But, if “having something common” is a family resemblance term, then it would be difficult to claim that any objects that share a family resemblance *do not* “have something in common.” Richman uses the example: a set of objects -  $s1, s2, s3$ , etc. - are called by the simple word “S.” The set of objects, by definition of falling under simple word, falls under the phrase “have something in common.” A set of complex objects -  $t1, t2, t3$ , etc. - are called by the complex word “T.” To show that this set also falls under the phrase “have something in common,” we only have to show that this set has some similarity to the set  $s1, s2$ , etc. One similarity between both sets is that each element is similar to the next. Therefore, the complex set falls under the family resemblance term “have something in common,” even though (by definition) it does not. Thus, given a dividing line between “simple” and “complex,” the notion of “family resemblances” proves problematic (Richman 827-8).

Finally, after showing that essentialism is not as problematic as it first appeared to be and that family resemblance is more so, Richman argues that essentialism is more useful

because it helps us to explain the limit of the application of a word (ie: why we *do not* use it to describe some objects), whereas family resemblances do not (828). After all, we cannot claim that two objects have *no* similarities (as we saw when we compared the set called “S” and the set called “T” above), so Richman claims that, in addition to all else, proponents of family resemblances need to describe the criteria by which to decide when an object does not fall under a family resemblance (829).

Central to the latter half of Richman’s article is a confusion of two forms of the word “property.” While we *can* talk about the a disjunction of properties in the same way that we talk about a property (“The game ‘Sorry!’ is played with two or three or four players” as opposed to “The game ‘bridge’ is played with four players”), this parallelism causes confusion in a similar way to confusions discussed by Wittgenstein in *the Blue Book*.<sup>5</sup> When we talk about a “property” in the latter sense, if we follow Wittgenstein’s use, we talk about *visual* properties. Wittgenstein tells us to “*look and see*” when we attempt to find a common property in games (PI 66). When we watch people play bridge, we always see four players.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, when watch games of “Sorry!” we do not see a specific number of players. That is, it is not true that “we see two or three or four players”; at this point, we have already moved beyond seeing. It is only true that “we see two players or we see three players or we see four players.”<sup>7</sup> We can then combine these variously-

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Wittgenstein claims that when we talk about the locality of thought as inside our heads, we are speaking of “locality” in a different sense than when we talk about the locality of thought as being on paper (when we write) or in our mouths (when we speak). In the former example, we are not speaking in spatial terms, as in “three inches behind my left eye,” but only using a confusing grammatical structure. This confusion is the result of a grammatical misunderstanding caused by the parallel structure of “where do you see the tree?” and “where do you see the visual field [in the middle of which is the tree]?” making us want to answer both of them in spatial terms (Wittgenstein, BB 7-9).

<sup>6</sup> This observation assumes, of course, that one player is not playing multiple hands. If we saw such a phenomenon, we might have to alter our observation to: “we always see four hands being played.”

<sup>7</sup> One might object that nobody ever speaks in this way. We are more inclined, perhaps, to say that “we see two or three or four players.” But, both of these sayings are far less common than “this game has between two and four players,” which no longer claims to have anything to do with what we have seen. On the other hand, phrases with “I see ... or ...” are commonly used in the form, “I see two or three players. *I’m not sure.*” In this form, we are not claiming that the game has the property of either two or three players but that we are not sure what we are seeing, so we cannot say for certain *what* property it has.

occurring visual properties and claim that the game has between two and four players, but it is *not* true that all games of “Sorry!” share a single visual property regarding the number of players. Therefore, although a disjunction of properties might be called a “property,” it is called so in a different sense than “a property” used to describe the world (and to determine if we find commonalities in it).

This point is central to Richman’s argument because it allows Richman to make his distinction between “simple” and “complex.” Earlier, Richman used the example of simple “color terms” to show that a simple term could be viewed as complex because we can identify a certain color as “red” and show it to be common to a set of pictures, but we can also describe “red” as a complex disjunction: “crimson or scarlet or ...” (Richman 826). But, whereas examples of the former are shown (by pointing, for example), examples of the latter cannot be. We might see scarlet or crimson, but we cannot *see* their disjunction. Wittgenstein does not deny that examples of properties can be shown and that those properties can be given terms, but when we try to define those terms, we cannot find their essence. For example, if one asks for a common property for all objects that are called “paintings in which the color red appears,” we enthusiastically say, “they have the color red in them!” When one then asks for a common property for all objects that are called “objects having the color red in them,” we are tempted to point and say “they have *this!*,” but “this” is only an example of what we call “red,” and it is an example that has a particular shape not essential to the word “red” (see Wittgenstein, PI 72-3). In other words, as soon as we attempt to *define* a word (and not just show/describe examples of it), we might find that the examples of this word have no essential property in common, *assuming that* a property (as we mean it here) cannot be a disjunction of properties. (Otherwise, I could say, “they have scarlet or crimson or ...”) In other words again, there is not necessarily any such thing as a

“simple” word if a “simple” word is a word that can be defined using a necessary property.<sup>8</sup>

If there *are* no simple words, then Richman is wrong to dismiss family resemblances as necessarily problematic based on his argument comparing simple and complex objects.<sup>9</sup>

Early in Richman’s argument, we saw the implicit claim that using the vagueness of a word does not help to disprove essentialism (see above). This claim does not threaten Wittgenstein as a describer of language, but if his methods are to show that some word is *necessarily* a family resemblance term, then the fourth method (outlined above) comes into question. This method is: when we find that we think a property is shared by all objects called by a particular word (say, “expecting someone”), we see if the term we use to denote this property (say, “experiencing a sensation of tension”) is too broad or too narrow to fully describe it. If we understand “too broad” here as claiming that the term’s vagueness disallows its use as a property, then this method cannot be used against essentialist arguments (as we used it against Khatchadourian). This understanding might be Wittgenstein’s intension (though it is unlikely<sup>10</sup>), but his argument still holds if we understand the broadness of a term to be problematic in a different sense. When we talk

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<sup>8</sup> I.e: “a game is something that (among other things, perhaps) *necessarily* has the potential to give us pleasure.”

<sup>9</sup> In fact, even if we grant Richman that simple terms *do* exist, the rest of his argument by no means follows. That simple words and complex words share the similarity that each object called by that word has similarities to another object called by the same word does not *necessarily* prove that they both fit under “something common” (understood as a family resemblance term) because this proof would require that any two objects that share a similarity fall under the same family resemblances, which is obviously not true. A computer cannot be called “a tree” just because both a computer and a tree share the property of existing in space and time. Like Richman at this point, we need to clarify the criteria under which we can say that one object falls under a family resemblance term because it shares similarities with another object under that term. Such a project is, however, outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>10</sup> His sentence on the subject in *The Blue Book* reads, “To say that you are in a state of expectation admittedly does not fully describe the situation of expecting that so-and-so will happen” (BB 20). We can read “fully describe” as claiming that “the sensation of expectation” does not define the particular sensation of tension felt waiting for a person to arrive, but assuming that Wittgenstein uses his terms carefully, such a reading is unlikely because he claims in the *Philosophical Investigations* that philosophy does not involve “logico-mathematical discovery” and does not “explain” or “deduce” (PI 125-6). So if we are doing philosophy when we try different terms in *The Blue Book*, we should not be doing any of these things (which are similar to defining). Instead, that a term does not “fully describe” a sensation might mean that the sensation as we experience it is something different than what is described by “the sensation of expectation.” This line is the line that I take in what follows.

about a term describing a sensation as being “too broad,” we are saying that the term describes a *different*, broader sensation. The sensation of eating is different than the sensation of eating hot peppers; we experience eating generally in a different way than we experience eating a specific thing. Analogously, the experience of using a board generally is different than the experience of using a board for Chinese Checkers. This is not only to say that the term “using a board” is vague but that the experience it describes is not the experience that we had set out to describe when looking for the essence of board games. And, because Wittgenstein’s fourth method above does not therefore rely on vagueness of terms to disprove essentialism, we are allowed to use it as a tool.

### *Conclusion*

We started with the position that family resemblance words are words whose objects (experiences, etc.) share no single, unifying feature. We could determine if a word is a family resemblance with four methods: look for common properties, common processes or common sensations, and if we find one, see if that property (process, etc.) has the correct scope. By looking at Khatchadourian, we learned that a “feature” is a family resemblance term and added “common use” to our earlier list of methods. By looking at Richman, we learned that we have to be careful about confusing “having an indefinite boundary” with “lacking an essential feature,” especially with the last method. We understood “if a property has a correct scope” as “if the term that we think captures a common property (process, etc.) actually captures it rather than something more general or more specific than we intended.” In a broader context, we have also defended anti-essentialist arguments based on the concept “family resemblance” from misunderstandings of Wittgenstein. It should be noted, however, that Wittgenstein himself would not approve of an anti-essentialist argument. It requires that we generalize *from* the specific examples

that we (and Wittgenstein) have described *to* a theory. But, generalizing is an action that Wittgenstein thinks gets us into problems as philosophers (Wittgenstein, BB 17). For Wittgenstein, then, perhaps all we have done is added a few more examples (“board game,” “feature,” etc.) to his list of family resemblance terms.

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