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# THE DARKNESS OF THIS TIME

Ethics, Politics, and Religion  
in Wittgenstein

Edited by  
Luigi Perissinotto



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## PREFACE

The essays collected in this book derive from a long research collaboration amongst scholars with different backgrounds and perspectives; a research which took place between Valencia and Venice, and which, in recent years, resulted in at least two more volumes of essays.<sup>1</sup> The common factor of the present research is its fundamental perspective, based on two basic assumptions. The more explicit one, although it has not been the most obvious for a long time, concerns the centrality of Wittgenstein's philosophy, both for the spirit animating it, and for the method implementing it, for the philosophy (and, more generally, for the thought) of our time. In an era marked by science, and, in philosophy, by all different forms of naturalism, Wittgenstein's is a philosophy, which, without being idly anti-scientific, resists to the temptation, which is in itself (paradoxically) anti-scientific, of electing science as the sole and unique paradigm. For Wittgenstein, for the Wittgenstein of the beginnings, as well as for the one of the very last days, philosophy has clarification as its goal, and dogmatism as its most dreadful, because most seducing, rival. This (clarification and anti-dogmatism) is Wittgenstein's most important legacy, a legacy vindicated by all the essays collected in the present book, notwithstanding the variety of their themes and perspectives.

The second conviction concerns the interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy. For all the authors of the essays collected in this volume, with their respective philosophical sensibilities, Wittgenstein should be taken (philosophically, not just psychologically) seriously, when he declares, with reference to his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, that "the point of the book is ethical", or when he confesses, with respect to his whole work, that, despite not being a religious person, he cannot help "seeing every

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1 *Un filosofo senza trampoli. Saggi sulla filosofia di Ludwig Wittgenstein*, edited by L. Perissinotto, Mimesis, Milano-Udine, 2010; *Doubt, Ethics and Religion. Wittgenstein and the Counter-Enlightenment*, edited by L. Perissinotto and V. Sanfélix, ontos verlag, Frankfurt/Paris/Lancaster/New Brunswick, 2011.

problem from a religious point of view”, or, again, when he asks himself, with reference to his *Philosophical Investigations*, what place his work could occupy “in the darkness of this time”.<sup>2</sup> It is only by following these indications, parsimoniously disseminated in Wittgenstein’s texts, that it is possible to discover what, beyond disciplinary boundaries and sectorial interests, makes Wittgenstein an “all-round philosopher”. In this sense, the essays collected here do not intend to endorse secondary or circumscribed aspects of Wittgensteinian philosophy, but rather to enter, by sometimes peculiar paths and unconventional access points, the very heart of Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

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2 Quoted from, respectively *Letters to Ludwig von Ficker*, translated by B. Gillette, in *Wittgenstein. Sources and Perspectives*, edited by C. G. Luckhardt, The Harvester Press, Hassocks (Sussex), 1979, p. 94; M. O’C. Drury, *Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein*, in *The Danger of Words and Writings on Wittgenstein*, edited by D. Berman, M. Fitzgerald and J. Hayes, Thoemmes Press, Bristol, 1996, p. 79; *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2009<sup>4</sup>, p. 40.



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JOACHIM SCHULTE

## ETHICS AND AESTHETICS IN WITTGENSTEIN

Sometimes the possibility that part of Wittgenstein's philosophy might be informed by his ethical outlook is recognized by referring to the remarks from *Tractatus* 6.4 onwards as explicitly "ethical" ones. This, of course, is a way of putting the matter which more or less explicitly acknowledges that his philosophy has a latent side, and that this latent side is only allowed to play an implicit role.

Whatever the truth of the matter (if there is a truth of the matter), even though the following observations may throw some light on it, they are not primarily intended as a contribution to answering questions about Wittgenstein's implicit ethics. What I want to do is the following: I shall take my start from one man's insight into a certain aspect of Wittgenstein's way of writing philosophy. This insight will assist us in having a fresh look at one very short remark from the *Tractatus*. And we shall then see how far the results gained in this fashion will carry us.

1.

In my view, some of the people who knew Wittgenstein well have shown that they had a keen eye for certain characteristic features of his personality and his work, and they have shown this by giving accounts that are truly helpful in trying to get a grasp of his writings. For a start I shall draw on Engelmann's perceptive *Memoir*.

It is an obvious truth – and has been stated before – that a better understanding of Wittgenstein can be arrived at by taking into account as much of his specific cultural background as one can manage to dig up. But, although it is an obvious truth – and although it has been stated before –, it has not been sufficiently heeded. Or that's my impression, at any rate.

In many cases, what was a matter of course for Wittgenstein is not a matter of course for us; and what went without saying for him does not go without saying for us. But no matter whether we are dealing with the

*Selbstverständlichkeiten* of a certain time and place and culture or with an attitude that only a minority could be expected to share, these apparent commonplaces of late-nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century Vienna are always worth spelling out. The effort needed to make those attitudes and assumptions intelligible goes to show that in these matters nothing is ever quite as obvious as it might seem.

Wittgenstein met Paul Engelmann in the autumn of 1916, when he was sent to the Moravian town of Olmütz to be trained as an artillery officer. He knew Engelmann's name from the Viennese architect Adolf Loos, who had been Engelmann's teacher. Wittgenstein greatly enjoyed spending time with the slightly younger man, his family and his circle of friends. An intimate friendship developed, which lasted for a number of years and whose closeness we can speculate about by reading between the lines of the letters exchanged by the two men.

One feeling they certainly had in common was their fear that many of the most valuable achievements of European culture might soon be irretrievably lost. And they shared this feeling with their famous mentor Karl Kraus, who for both of them was a person and a writer of the greatest authority. And yet, there was a difference in their views. It would be difficult to give a very precise characterization of this difference, but it was there – and it allowed Wittgenstein to make creative use of his worries while it gave Engelmann a chance to put in words what for later generations is not easy to perceive.

In a chapter of his *Memoir* entitled “Kraus, Loos, and Wittgenstein” Engelmann points out that there is a striking parallel between certain methods employed by Karl Kraus and Wittgenstein's way of writing.<sup>1</sup> However, the parallel he has in mind is (as he says) difficult to pinpoint because Kraus was first and foremost a polemical writer, whereas Wittgenstein is not normally esteemed as a polemicist. But in Engelmann's view, even in this respect the difference is to a certain degree superficial. Kraus directed his polemics chiefly against individuals, often against people who – at least in their sphere of influence – exercised considerable power. Wittgenstein's polemic, on the other hand, is “completely impersonal”, as Engelmann writes. “The adversary [Wittgenstein] contends against in the *Tractatus* is philosophy itself.” Then Engelmann continues (and this is the first of his insights I wish to underline):

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1 Engelmann, P. *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir*, ed. B. F. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), ch. VII, pp. 122-132.

In his polemics Kraus resorts time and again to the technique of taking his victim 'at his word', that is, of driving home his accusation and exposing threadbare intentions by the simple means of citing the accused's own words and phrases. As Kraus in his literary polemic takes an individual adversary at his word, and through him indirectly a whole era, so Wittgenstein in his philosophical polemic takes 'language' itself (i.e. the language of philosophy) at its word. (Engelmann 1967, p. 127)

The second insight I want to draw your attention to is this: Engelmann connects the point about taking someone at his word with a line from *Tractatus* 6.421, where Wittgenstein says that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same: "*Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins.*" In this context Engelmann claims that we should not assume that Wittgenstein really meant to say that there is no difference whatsoever between ethics and aesthetics. To quote from his *Memoir*:

But the statement [*Tractatus* 6.421c] is put in parentheses, said by the way, as something not really meant to be uttered, yet something that should not be passed over in silence at that point. And this is done in the form of a reminder recalling to the understanding reader an insight which he is assumed to possess in any case. Seen from a different angle, the insight into the fundamental connection between aesthetics [...] and ethics is also a basic element in Kraus's critique of poetic language. (Engelmann 1967, pp. 124-125)

As a first step towards getting clear about Wittgenstein's view of ethics I should like to look at some details of the remarks by Engelmann just quoted. He emphasizes the fact that the claim about the identity of ethics and aesthetics is made in parentheses and, as it were, said by the way: *Der Satz steht ja in Klammern, wird also nur apropos gesagt...* Irrespective of whether or not Engelmann intended it this way, it could be taken as a reminder of Wittgenstein's way of dealing with his *Grundgedanke*, his fundamental idea of the *Tractatus*, which was tucked away in a remark with the very inconspicuous number 4.0312. And this practice of concealing his most fundamental ideas is a habit he did not shed in later years. On the contrary, I should say: in the *Investigations* this technique is developed to perfection. Witness the way in which his main tenet is hidden in the later work, where the remark that "What I want to teach is: to pass from unobvious nonsense to obvious nonsense" (§464) is placed in a very unobtrusive section of the book.

This fact about Wittgenstein's style, to which Engelmann has alerted us, should be borne in mind. It can be seen to exemplify an aesthetic principle with clear ethical connotations. This principle amounts to saying that one

should not emphasize what is regarded as particularly important or urgent. This chimes in obvious ways with Wittgenstein's known aesthetic preferences.

Perhaps the most instructive clue that Engelmann provides in the passage quoted is his allusion to Wittgenstein's polemic against philosophy, or the language of philosophy, itself by taking it "at its word". In some sense, this is no doubt correct; but the way in which it is correct stands in need of some spelling out. First of all, it is clear that Wittgenstein's polemic cannot really be directed against philosophy in a completely general and unqualified sense. That would be an undertaking of enormous dimensions and preposterous pretensions. In particular, it would straightaway run afoul of what we know with certainty about Wittgenstein's aesthetic views. For it would be a striking case of megalomania and incompatibility with Wittgenstein's aim of producing works of unostentatious, even chaste proportions – his preference for natural forms of expression and, as one might perhaps say, for what can be seen as something ordinary, everyday (*hausbacken*, as he liked to say).

At the same time, there is something right about Engelmann's generalizing way of characterizing the direction of Wittgenstein's polemic. For it must be remembered that there is no reason to think that Wittgenstein intends to argue against a particular school of thought or a specific group of thinkers. His very rare references to "realism" or "idealism" are far too sweeping and unfocussed to bear profitable interpretation in terms of particular thinkers or philosophical points of view. Mostly, I suppose, they are just labels that could without loss be replaced by other ones drawn from an arbitrary textbook of the history of philosophy. The early Wittgenstein, in particular, surely had no ambition to attack whole types of approach to philosophical thinking that he himself knew nothing about.

His specific criticisms of the ideas of individual thinkers (chiefly Frege and Russell) are exactly that: specific criticisms, which do not lend themselves to being used for the purposes of wholesale polemics.

So, what Wittgenstein may really be up to in those passages that Engelmann has in mind can perhaps be sketched as follows. He tries to capture what is typical of (some) philosophical ways of discussing matters and arguing with others for the purpose of reaching or excluding certain conclusions. His preferred way of capturing what is typical is exemplification. But that does not mean exemplification by way of true instances of a certain kind of reasoning or claim.

What I am trying to gesture at can perhaps be clarified by thinking of the contrast between a cartoon and a traditional portrait. A cartoonist tries

to capture what is typical about a certain kind of situation or occurrence by means of a few characteristic lines. This may involve exaggeration, distortion and caricature. But these need not be his aim, or at any rate not his primary aim. The painter of a portrait, on the other hand, will – if he is honest about it – try to capture specific features of his sitter: properties that are characteristic of him and no one else.

In a similar way (I should suggest, following Engelmann) Wittgenstein tries to reproduce typical features of whatever it is he aims to represent. And if his sketches show signs of caricature, distortion or exaggeration, this will not be accidental. To some extent it will be a result of the technique chosen, to some extent a deliberate judgement.

In a few cases I should go so far as to claim that what looks like a portrait is basically a cartoon intended to show what is typical. In particular, many pictures drawn by Wittgenstein that have often been taken as portraits of an earlier self would more helpfully be studied as representations of moves and kinds of reasoning that many or most philosophers are prone to fall for. Another aspect of this matter is that I should in a number of cases of this type suggest that Wittgenstein does not really have his own former views in mind or that, if he does, his account should not be taken as primarily an attempt at giving an accurate representation of the ideas of a younger self.

A qualification along similar lines is needed to ensure a profitable reading of what Engelmann says about “language itself” and the “language of philosophy”. Let us look at a couple of possibilities. It may well be that the language talked about in most parts of the early work is something very different from the everyday language mentioned in 4.002 and said to be part of the human organism while 5.5563 claims that its sentences are, “just as they stand, in perfect logical order”. But if that other, possibly extremely abstract, type of language is in view, it becomes hard to understand how it could be the target of Wittgenstein’s polemic. That would, after all, not be the language of a specific group of real or imagined speakers. It would be a theoretical object, and criticizing it would be a little like quarelling with the set of positive integers.

So, I do not think we shall get very far by starting at this end. Another possibility that suggests itself is trying to apply Engelmann’s gloss and see if it will help to speak in terms of the “language of philosophy”. This, I think, is on the right track, but the idea faces problems of an analogous kind as those mentioned before in connection with the attempt to capture by means of a drawing the typical features of certain objects. This “language of philosophy” is not simply the professional jargon of philosophers, even though such jargon may be a specific expression of it. The *Tractatus*

itself, for example, uses some but not all that much traditional terminology, though it does sport a fair amount of what must have seemed fancy modern lingo at the time of publication. But it is surely fair to say that one strand of the book is meant to demonstrate and expose typical and frequently hidden features of philosophical ways of thinking by paradigmatic uses of the language of philosophy. This project neither accuses nor exonerates a particular school of thought; it does not target a specific category of errors, pitfalls or prejudices. It is really meant to bring out something characteristic of philosophical thinking (in contrast to other ways of thinking). At the same time the employment of this language is intended to reveal its own shortcomings, and it should reveal them without any need of actually describing them.

This brings us to the question: Why polemics rather than eulogy or glorification, for example? This is a question which touches on ethical aspects while the idea of taking someone “at his word” introduces an aesthetic side of the matter. I think that Engelmann is right in emphasizing a polemical element in Wittgenstein’s thought, but it is not easy to see why this should be credited unless one accepts a certain type of interpretation as the correct one. Here, I shall limit myself to alluding to three largely independent sorts of reason for thinking that an interpretation along the lines envisaged by Engelmann can be justified.

One reason is connected with the cultural *Selbstverständlichkeiten* – those commonplaces that tend to go without saying – mentioned earlier. This is the reason that some of Wittgenstein’s early heroes expressed or toyed with the view that philosophy is fundamentally nonsense. These people articulated or held the view that the terms in which philosophical questions can be made to look comprehensible are such that philosophy itself appears empty or bankrupt. Some particularly striking quotations from Boltzmann are given and commented on in Brian McGuinness’s paper on the unsayable.<sup>2</sup>

A second reason can be found in passages where Wittgenstein formulates explicit criticisms of traditional philosophy. Examples of such passages are the *Preface* to the *Tractatus*, where he says that “the reason why [the problems of philosophy] are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood”, and 4.003, where he states in a similar vein that

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2 McGuinness, B. “The Unsayable: A Genetic Account”, *Approaches to Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 17-26.



Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical. Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language.

The third type of reason is by far the most speculative and tentative one. Roughly speaking, the dissatisfaction expressed by the first two reasons is exacerbated by our feeling that the deficiencies mentioned are due to a lack of self-awareness and determination to penetrate the complexities of our language. It is a sort of *selbstverschuldete Unmündigkeit* (a lack of independence for which the dependent person himself is to blame), which is objectionable in itself – in short, an ethical failing. That this is the thrust of Wittgenstein’s critical thought can be inferred from certain stylistic means used in the *Tractatus* as well as in later writings. These stylistic means involve unresolved ambiguities, irony and jokes. And it is a further characteristic of Wittgenstein’s way of writing that these three elements are often difficult to separate. My claim is that these stylistic means and their ethical as well as aesthetic interplay fulfil a number of functions. One of them is the goal of making us see that our lack of self-awareness and determination are responsible for our lack of understanding the shortcomings of philosophy.

## 2.

To clarify this third reason and some of the ideas behind it I shall avail myself of observations made by two people who, like Engelmann, knew Wittgenstein well for a certain period. The first of these is Friedrich Waismann, with whom Wittgenstein collaborated closely for a number of years and who left records of conversations that are among our most valuable aids in trying to understand Wittgenstein’s views between 1929 and 1934 or ’35.

In a frequently quoted passage from a letter to Schlick (reported by B. McGuinness) Waismann writes that Wittgenstein “has the marvellous gift of always seeing everything as if for the first time.<sup>3</sup> But [...] he always follows the inspiration of the moment and demolishes what he has previously planned”. This remark is of the greatest importance because it reminds us

3 McGuinness, Introduction to Waismann, *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (henceforth abbreviated to WVC, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 26

that quotations from Wittgenstein's manuscripts cannot without further ado be used to support views expressed in other contexts. But if Waismann is right about this (as I think he is), then at least part of what one might call Wittgenstein's "ethical" views are an exception: as regards the interrelations between ethics and aesthetics there seems to be no detectable difference between Wittgenstein's ideas as expressed in early, middle or late manuscripts, letters, lectures and conversations.

It is Waismann himself who has recorded a number of remarks concerning these questions. Here I just want to mention three points. The first one is that with reference to his own *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein emphasizes the fact that in ethics words have double meanings – an expressible and an inexpressible one (WVC, pp. 92-3). The second one is that in ethics one has to speak "in the first person", as Wittgenstein calls it (WVC, p. 117). He says that "all I can do is to step forth as an individual and speak in the first person". The third point is Wittgenstein's adaptation of Schopenhauer's dictum that while moralizing is easy, establishing morality is difficult. Wittgenstein changed this into the remark that while moralizing is difficult enough, establishing morality is impossible (WVC, p. 118).

The first thing to notice about these three points is that there is something peculiar, even questionable about each of them. Let us begin with the third one: why should moralizing, or preaching a sermon on morals, be difficult rather than easy (as Schopenhauer had claimed)? The answer, I think, has an ethical as well as an aesthetic side. It can be difficult to preach such a sermon because it is monstrous cheek to pretend that one has the right to tell other people how to behave. That is the ethical aspect. The aesthetic one is this, that the sort of holding forth typical of preaching a sermon is bound to be in bad taste; it offends against the rule that especially things judged to be of first-rate importance ought never to be dressed up in important-sounding language.

The second point (about stepping forth as an individual and speaking in the first person) can be read in more than one way, and the feature that Wittgenstein seems to want to stress is the futility of attempts at giving reasons if what you are really doing is to state your personal point of view. If you are honest about it, you should make it clear that this is what you are doing; and making it clear involves respecting the aesthetic maxim that your means of expressing something should be suited to this purpose. I think one can see the drift of my reconstruction of Wittgenstein's idea, but there is a further and perhaps less obvious point, viz. that the "first" person expressing himself is at the same time the link connecting ethical and aesthetic aspects. This may mean – and I think for Wittgenstein it *does*

mean – that to examine what is more or less open to view, viz. the aesthetic side of an expression, we can come to know what seems to be hidden, viz. its ethical background. Here I wish to underline the word “seems”, because if ethics and aesthetics are truly one and the same, there remains nothing to scrutinize once you have analyzed the aesthetic part. And that in turn amounts to saying that you have gained some understanding of the person whose expression you have been examining and who is the link connecting what may seem to be two different sides but turn out to be the same. In other words, the idea of a connecting link turns out to render itself superfluous, thereby showing the essential unity of the terms it was meant to connect.

As regards the first point, what is immediately striking is the fact that the distinction which, in the known version of the *Lecture on Ethics*, is made in terms of the contrast between a trivial or relative sense of words like “good”, on the one hand, and an ethical or absolute sense, on the other, is here drawn in terms of psychological and non-psychological meanings. But that is by the by. What is more instructive is the fact that double meanings are mentioned and that the contrast is drawn in such a summary way. For, whereas in the *Lecture on Ethics* itself matters are stated in a much more roundabout way, in Waismann’s brief report the distinction between expressible and non-expressible meanings becomes central and allows us to see that there is something quite bizarre about the whole idea. After all, in philosophy the chief reason for introducing the notion of the sense or meaning of an expression is that it reminds us of our ways of spelling out the meaning of our words or what we mean by them. Wittgenstein’s own slogan of the early 1930s as used in the *Big Typescript* (§ 9) and quoted in the *Investigations* (§ 560) was that the meaning of a word is what an explanation of its meaning explains. Obviously, the idea of an inexpressible meaning is out of place in this context.

As a matter of fact, I think the matter is more complicated and its bearing wider than that. This way of bringing in the idea of an inexpressible meaning is a deliberate kind of nonsense bordering on a joke. To talk about sense and meaning has a point only if you have an idea of how to render your meaning intelligible. This at any rate is in agreement with an important line of thought developed by Wittgenstein. So, why does he express himself in a way which suggests that it makes sense to attribute inexpressible meanings to certain uses of words? Well, the obvious answer is that he wants us to see the strangeness of a certain way of talking; and his technique involves this somewhat roundabout procedure as well as the elaborate joke about inexpressible meanings.

This is not the only place where Wittgenstein makes a joke of this kind. A near relative can be found in a famous letter to Ludwig v. Ficker, where Wittgenstein explains that the point of his book is an ethical one and proceeds to “quote” a statement from a possibly fictitious version of the preface to the *Tractatus*. He says: “My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one.”<sup>4</sup> A nice touch this, to call the inexistent part of the work the important one. Similarly, the inexistent ethical meaning tends to be presented as the one that really concerns us. But how can it concern us if there is no such meaning?

## 3.

Evidently we have manoeuvred ourselves into an impasse. What is more, I think we are supposed to end up in this place. To get out of this *cul-de-sac* involves at least two separate steps. The first one consists in appreciating various possibilities of falling into traps of the kind alluded to by speaking of illusory contrasts of meaning and making jokes about the importance of what does *not* exist. The second step is more difficult than it may look at first sight. Here, I shall only aim at the merest sketch. I start by quoting from a letter written by Frank Ramsey, another person who knew Wittgenstein well. In the passage I have in mind Ramsey says: “Some of [Wittgenstein’s] sentences are intentionally ambiguous having an ordinary meaning and a more difficult meaning which he also believes.”<sup>5</sup>

This, I think, is absolutely right and a most helpful piece of advice about how to read Wittgenstein. What may require explanation are the words “a more difficult meaning which he also believes”. The “more difficult meaning” can simply be interpreted as a less obvious, perhaps a *recherché* kind of meaning – a meaning whose appositeness takes some explaining. Ramsey’s remark that the second meaning is one which Wittgenstein “also believes” should be taken literally. He wants to insist that the second thought, which is different from and perhaps incompatible with the first one, is also to be regarded as acceptable. What we may be allowed to add is that the

4 Trans. in “Editor’s Appendix”, in P. Engelmann, *Letters and Memoir*, op. cit., p. 143.

5 Ramsey, letter to his mother, 20 September 1923 (Puchberg am Schneeberg), quoted in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, ed. by B. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 139 (no. 99, n.).

second idea, precisely because of its unobviousness, may be more interesting, more challenging – possibly something of an eye-opener.

Here we have arrived at a point of crucial overlap between ethics and aesthetics. I don't mean to emphasize that art is involved in cunningly providing for unobvious ethical connotations. This may occasionally be the case, but it is neither necessary nor directly connected with the salient point. What is decisive are the following two facts.

First, the business of providing and detecting second meanings involves writer and reader in an uninterrupted process of examining, choosing and dismissing words: one is almost forced to occupy a perspective from which the text will never appear closed, its sense wrapped up to be filed away. Another way of putting this is that Wittgenstein demands of himself that he writes like a poet or a novelist while his reader is invited to scrutinize the book with his eyes peeled for double meanings.

The second fact is this, that we are meant to accept *both* meanings. That is, the school of readers of his writings envisaged by Wittgenstein is one that does not look for the one and absolutely correct interpretation of his words. It is a school of acceptance, of serenely putting up with a state of affairs that offers (at least) two ways of reading those words but no criterion for deciding which of these readings is preferable. Of course, this does not mean that we should take into serious consideration every imaginable reading of Wittgenstein's writings and credit far-fetched double entendres as words of wisdom. On the contrary, the first maxim, according to which we should never stop reading critically, applies to the realm of second meanings just as much as to words that appear to wear their meanings on their sleeves.

To put it differently, in Wittgenstein's eyes the art of philosophical writing and reading is a duty-ridden business. On the one hand, it involves continuous, (self-)critical picking and choosing; on the other, it confronts us with the demand to regard the text in a spirit of acceptance, never expecting to be able to decide whether one of the possible alternative readings is, or is meant to be, the correct one.

This can be clarified a little by looking at a couple of passages from the *Tractatus*. Let us begin with a relatively simple case, proposition 6.4321: "*Die Tatsachen gehören alle nur zur Aufgabe, nicht zur Lösung* – The facts all contribute only to setting the problem, not to its solution." In a sense, this is the only correct translation, because *Lösung*, in German, requires us to read *Aufgabe* in the sense of problem – and not in the sense of task, as Ramsey and Ogden did when they translated our sentence as "The facts all belong only to the task and not to its performance". As a matter of fact,

the earlier translation was approved of, even requested by Wittgenstein. All the same, idiom requires the Pears-McGuinness rendering. However, I am fairly sure that in this context most German readers would naturally understand *Aufgabe* in the sense of task, even though *Lösung* does not fit. Only if you bear in mind that you should keep your eyes open for second meanings and notice that “problem” chimes well with the “riddle” which is mentioned a few sentences later will you become aware of the fact that both readings can be seen to do some work in the context of this remark.

My second example is a little more difficult. It is the first sentence of the splendid remark 6.124: “*Die logischen Sätze beschreiben das Gerüst der Welt, oder vielmehr, sie stellen es dar* – The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it.” An obvious difficulty in reading this remark lies in the fact that the propositions of logic have been said to have no descriptive content whatsoever. This difficulty might suffice to make readers cast around for alternatives. One possibility that comes to mind is the meaning “to form a particular shape” (as in the expression “to describe a circle” etc.). Another second meaning, which as a matter of fact comes into play quite often in Wittgenstein’s writing, is the reading of “*darstellen*” in the sense, not of “to represent”, but of “to be”. An example would be the German sentence “*Die Demokratie stellt einen Fortschritt dar*”, which means that democracy is progress. Allowing for these second meanings, we get an alternative reading like “The propositions of logic form the scaffolding of the world, or rather they are this scaffolding”. And this reading has its obvious attractions, especially if we bear in mind the literally correct one which has made us arrive at this alternative.

I think the basic idea should be clear enough. In conclusion, I should like to point out another connection between ethics and aesthetics. This concerns the topic of the unsayable, and hence one of the central themes of the *Tractatus*. Generally, Wittgenstein’s verdict that we must be silent about certain matters because nothing can be said about them is justified in a way that concentrates on the logic of our language. Thus it is claimed that the expression “to say” in its technical sense finds application only where we are dealing with empirical sentences, that is, what the *Tractatus* in a slightly curious phrase calls the totality of sentences of natural science.

What tends to be overlooked in this sort of discussion is the fact that, from Wittgenstein’s point of view, many things cannot be “said” for aesthetic reasons. The unsayable in this sense may be in bad taste or a *cliché* or simply too explicit. (Remember what I said about Wittgenstein’s adaptation of Schopenhauer’s dictum: according to Wittgenstein, a justification

of an ethical theory is impossible. In the light of the present reading of “impossibility”, such an undertaking is impossible, not in a theoretical, but in an aesthetic sense: it would offend against the precepts of good taste.)

This last-mentioned kind of impossibility plays a great role when it comes to making use of Wittgenstein’s notebooks or manuscripts in general. In the case of his notebook covering the Olmütz time, that is the notebook he used in the second half of 1916 and the first days of 1917, we find many entries that are helpful in the sense of lending more explicit or more traditional expression to his as it were “ethical” views. But most of this material does not appear in the published book. We can be sure that in many cases the earlier remarks were rejected, not because he thought they were wrong, but precisely because their expression was too explicit or too traditional. So, in a sense Wittgenstein’s decision to leave out certain remarks for the reason that they are in an aesthetic sense unsayable involves an ethical decision about what ought to be left unsaid and has ethical consequences in the sense that a great part of his ethical views are passed over in silence. From Wittgenstein’s own point of view, however, it may be preferable to say that these are not different forms of unsayability: what cannot or ought not to be expressed for aesthetic reasons is *ipso facto* unsayable for ethical reasons.





MARILENA ANDRONICO

## ETHICS AND AESTHETICS ARE ONE: HOW TO ESCAPE THE MYTH OF THE ORDINARY

### 1. *The problem*

In his *On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy* James Conant says that for Wittgenstein “All philosophical thinking and writing has [...] its ethical aspect”, and that Wittgenstein believed that “learning to think better [...] is an important means to becoming a better – i.e. to becoming (what Wittgenstein calls) ‘a real’ – ‘human being’” (Conant 2002, p. 90). In the same line, Conant adds that “even though Wittgenstein, in one sense, ‘has no ethics’ (if ‘ethics’ names a branch of philosophy with its own proprietary subject matter), in another sense, his thinking and writing – on every passage of his work – takes place under the pressure of an ethical demand”. Nowadays, there is a widespread tendency to emphasize the ethical tone of Wittgenstein’s philosophical work.<sup>1</sup> It probably originated with Stanley Cavell’s pointing out the “pervasiveness of something that may express itself as a moral or religious demand in the *Investigations*”, and adding that “the demand is not the subject of a *separate* study within it, call it ‘Ethics’”.<sup>2</sup>

The ethical value of Wittgenstein’s writing was long associated with *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, in accordance with Wittgenstein’s own statement in the November 1919 letter to L. von Ficker that the book had an ethical point, consisting in its not talking about what is usually called “ethics”; the Ethical, for the author of *Tractatus*, can only be delimited from within, by being silent about it.

In Cavell’s reflection, by contrast, the ethical point of Wittgenstein’s writing is extended to the whole of his production and is associated not so much with the delimitation of an alleged domain of the ineffable but with the rediscovery of the so called “ordinary”, “a structure of which is the structure of our criteria and their grammatical relations” (Cavell 1990, p.

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1 See for example (Backström 2011).

2 See (Conant 2002, p. 90, fn. 11) referring to (Cavell 1988, p. 40).

65). Cavell's move has been greeted with acclaim by philosophers favouring the "resolute reading" of *Tractatus*, who downplay or even deny any room for the ineffable in Wittgenstein's writings beginning with *Tractatus*. For these commentators, the ethical dimension of philosophical reflection and writing looms so much the larger as it helps the philosopher in curing his own metaphysical sickness by rediscovering and accepting the ordinary. In these authors's view, both rediscovery and acceptance entail that one becomes responsible for one's own words: hence the ethical issue of Wittgenstein's philosophical therapy.

Here are a few examples from the work of Italian scholars favouring the resolute reading of nonsense. Silver Bronzo, after highlighting the reasons why the early Wittgenstein has no use for the *language of ethics*, argues for what he chooses to call an *ethics of language*: "every use of language is inevitably characterized by an ethical dimension, as it involves our will in addition to our intellectual abilities" (Bronzo 2011, p. 627). Aldo Gargani, echoing Stanley Cavell's, Cora Diamond's, and James Conant's analyses, writes: "When Wittgenstein declares that words are to be brought back from their metaphysical to their everyday use he isn't just carrying on the work of philosophy as negative therapy: he is pointing towards an altogether new, alternative scenario, where we do not try to provide our certainties about the world with an epistemological foundation but to recover a world that, far from being theoretically grounded, is to be '*recognized*' and '*accepted*', as Cavell says". (Gargani 2008, p. XXIII). And he adds: "Consequently, Wittgenstein's work consists in a rediscovery of the ordinary, in singling out the forms of life and practice where men can find their footing, their *Halt*, without once more resorting to foundational endeavours (that do scepticism's job better than scepticism itself)" (*Ibid.*).

I do not by any means intend to deny that Wittgenstein lived in a permanent state of moral tension that also bore upon his conception of philosophical work. The many notes to be found scattered in his writings speak for themselves. Just consider the following two:

- "Whoever is unwilling to descend into himself, because it is too painful, will of course remain superficial in his writing." (MS 120, 1937-1938, p. 72)<sup>3</sup>

- "Work on philosophy [...] is really more work on oneself" (CV p. 24).

3 "Wer in sich selbst nicht hinuntersteigen will, weil es zu schmerzhaft ist, bleibt natürlich auch mit der Schreiben an der Oberfläche (Wer nur das Nächstbeste will, kann doch nur das Surrogat des Guten erreichen)" (MS 120, 1937-1938, p. 72).

My uneasiness stems from what I would like to call the *uncontrolled use* that some interpreters close to the New Wittgenstein trend (i.e. the resolute interpreters) make of certain words in order to buttress their preferred picture of Wittgenstein's philosophical work. Now, when dealing with Wittgenstein, *uncontrolled use* is the same as *metaphysical use*. For example, consider Conant's remark, quoted at the beginning of this article, that "learning to think better [...] is an important means to becoming a better [...] 'human being'". Shouldn't we specify what we mean by "think better" and "better human beings"? Think better than whom, or than which other way of thinking? Becoming better human beings than whom?

Analogous issues should be raised about the use of words such as "ethics", "ethical dimension", and "ordinary". Is it true that for Wittgenstein "every use of language is inevitably characterized by an ethical dimension"? Moreover, *whose* "ordinary" are we supposed to recover or accept? Is there a universal ordinary? If there were, what about the antiphilosophical and "against the grain" character of Wittgenstein's investigations, that these interpreters are fond of recalling?<sup>4</sup> If things were this way, wouldn't Wittgenstein be a new kind of metaphysical philosopher, a metaphysician of the ordinary?

Thus, in what follows I would like to address two issues:

(1) In what sense of "ethical" is it true that, for Wittgenstein, "All philosophical thinking and writing has [...] its ethical aspect"? (see above, Conant 2002)

(2) Many interpreters bring back (or even reduce) Wittgenstein's philosophy to his reminding us of the ordinary and leading us to accept it. Now, what is the ordinary? *For whom* is it ordinary?

Eventually, I would like to show that, first, what is described as the ethical character of Wittgenstein's philosophy is intimately connected with its aesthetic character (in a sense of "aesthetic" I will hasten to specify); and, secondly, that for this reason the dimension of the ordinary one can legitimately appeal to, when emphasizing the antiphilosophical and "against the grain" outcome of Wittgenstein's philosophizing, is not and cannot be a

4 In the last section of his paper Conant (Conant 2002) quotes the following remark from *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*:

One of the greatest difficulties I find in explaining what I mean is this: You are inclined to put our difference in one way, as a difference of *opinion*. But I am not trying to persuade you to change your opinion. I am only trying to recommend a certain sort of investigation. If there is an opinion involved, my only opinion is that this sort of investigation is immensely important, and very much *against the grain* of some of you. (LFM XI, p. 103).

generally human dimension but can only be characterized as an aesthetically based propensity to be identified as members of a community of likes: only such an identification can have ethical implications, in the sense that is relevant here.

## 2. *Ethics and Aesthetics*

There is no doubt that Wittgenstein credited the *Tractatus* with an ethical point (see above, fn.1). What is controversial is how the point should be understood. What I would like to stress in this respect is that at the time of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein was insisting on the deep closeness of ethics and aesthetics, and that no matter whether one goes along with the standard reading of *Tractatus*, which regards the saying/showing distinction as theoretically meaningful, thus acknowledging both the paradoxical outcome of Wittgenstein's work and the ineffability of ethics, or whether one endorses the *New Wittgenstein* view, rejecting the book's paradoxical outcome and denying that Wittgenstein actually kept to the saying/showing distinction.<sup>5</sup>

As we know, in *Tractatus* both ethics and aesthetics are transcendental, as "Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same" (T. 6.421) and "Ethics is transcendental" (*Ibid.*). We know as well that the connection of art and ethics consists in this, that "The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*" (NTB 7.10.1916). Clearly, when Wittgenstein is talking about aesthetics in this context he has in mind the work of art and what he takes to be the right attitude to it. After the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein will only explicitly address ethics in the *Lecture on Ethics*, while he will intersperse his writings with aesthetical remarks, besides giving lectures on aesthetics in 1938, from which we possess notes taken by some of the attending students (Rhees and Smythies among them).

In the *Lecture on Ethics*, Wittgenstein says he will employ Moore's definition of "ethics", modifying it slightly. In *Principia Ethica*, ethics had been defined as "the general enquiry into what is good"; Wittgenstein will say that "Ethics is the general enquiry into what is valuable", adding: "I do this because I want to include in my notion of ethics also what is commonly understood to belong to the subject matter of Aesthetics" (LOE p. 137).

Now, what could that thing be that is "commonly understood to belong to the subject matter of Aesthetics"? Though literature on the issue has

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5 See (Monk 2005, pp. 20-21).

much increased in the last few years,<sup>6</sup> the answer is not straightforward. Wittgenstein begins his lectures on aesthetics by stating that “The subject (Aesthetics) is very big and entirely misunderstood” (LC I §1, p. 1), which appears to imply that little that is normally taught in Philosophy departments under the label of “aesthetics” will be relevant to the discussion. Once more, it is up to Wittgenstein to introduce order and clarity. But, as so often, the fragmentary nature of Wittgenstein’s remarks on aesthetics leaves plenty of room for interpretation. Personally, I have always been struck both by Wittgenstein’s remark of 1936 about the “queer resemblance between a philosophical investigation (perhaps especially in mathematics) and an aesthetic one.” (CV p. 25) and by the later (1949) statement that “I may find scientific questions interesting, but they never really grip me. Only *conceptual* and *aesthetic* questions do that” (CV p. 79).

In the attempt to understand the nature of Wittgenstein’s “queer resemblance”, I have come to the persuasion that his post-*Tractatus* remarks on aesthetics address two distinct issues: (1) on the one hand, they are about the meaning of aesthetical words and our understanding of aesthetical judgments; (2) on the other hand, they bear on aesthetic experience, i.e. on aesthetic disquiet/puzzlement and the satisfaction of it. In remarks of the first kind, Wittgenstein tackles the issue of understanding aesthetic judgments from an anthropological and contextualist viewpoint: to understand the meaning of aesthetical words, we must describe a whole culture and the role that words occurring in aesthetic judgments play within such culture.

The words we call expressions of aesthetic judgment play a very complicated role, but a very definite role, in what we call a culture of a period. To describe their use or to describe what you mean by a cultured taste, you have to describe a culture. What we now call a cultured taste perhaps didn’t exist in the Middle Ages. An entirely different game is played in different ages. (LC I §25, p. 8).

What belongs to a language game is a whole culture. In describing musical taste you have to describe whether children give concerts, whether women do or whether men only give them, etc., etc. (*Ibid.*)<sup>7</sup>

Remarks of the second kind present and describe aesthetic experience in ways that are not entirely obvious. On the one hand there is disquiet, that consists in being affected by certain sequences of sounds, or of pictures, or words. We feel that something is wrong. Such a disquiet cannot be assuaged by causal explanation; what is needed is comparison of a particular kind.

6 E.g. (Lewis 2004), (Hagberg 2007), (Budd 2011).

7 On this topic see (Budd 2011, p. 780).

“The sort of explanation one is looking for when one is puzzled by an aesthetic impression is not a causal explanation, not one corroborated by experience or by statistics as to how people react” (LC II §11, p. 21).<sup>8</sup> “What we really want, to solve aesthetic puzzlements, is certain comparisons – grouping together of certain cases” (LC IV §2, p. 29). On the other hand there is aesthetic satisfaction, occasionally accompanied by words of approval such as “right” or “correct”. When we are satisfied, it is as if something “clicked” (LC III §1, p. 19). “It is as though you needed some criterion, namely the clicking, to know the right thing has happened” (*Ibid.*). But the picture of something clicking, Wittgenstein says, is just a simile: “really there is nothing that clicks or that fits anything” (*Ibid.*). Rather, finding that something is the right thing may come from having developed a *feeling for the rules* (LC I §15, p. 5); it may consist in agreeing with someone about the right thing being right or correct. Wittgenstein describes the case of a tailor learning the rules of tailoring and developing sensitiveness to such rules, whether he is just mechanically following them or interpreting them (LC I §15, p. 5). Even more interestingly, in the following remark he describes the case in which -in looking for the right word- correctness and agreement support each other:

What is in my mind when I say so and so? I write a sentence. One word isn't the one I need. I find the right word. 'What it is I want to say? Oh yes. That is what I wanted.' The answer in these cases is the one that satisfied you, e.g. someone says (as we often say in philosophy): 'I will tell you what is at the back of your mind:...' – 'Oh yes, quite so.' The criterion for it being the one that was in your mind is that when I tell you, you agree. (LC II § 37, p. 18)

It seems to me that the reference to philosophy in this quotation is enlightening, as it allows us to understand to what extent Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations – conceptual investigations – resemble the construction of agreement among people endowed with the same aesthetic sensibility, that is among people who are engaged in aesthetic judgment and the contextual pursuit of the experience of aesthetic satisfaction which silences (aesthetic) disquiet. Here, satisfaction is achieved because the right word has been found; in the tailor's case, it is achieved because an agreement has been reached concerning the suit's right length or right cut.

At many other places Wittgenstein presents the philosopher's job, as he sees it, as a kind of activity by which the philosopher's interlocutor is lead

8 “You could say: ‘An aesthetic explanation is not a causal explanation’” (LC p. 18).

to see differences or similarities (see LC III §35, p. 27), or as an activity aiming at “persuading people to change their style of thinking” (LC III §40, p. 28): synthetically, it could be presented as a process of persuasion aiming at *educating the interlocutor’s sensibility* so that he comes to see the problems the philosopher sees, and the solutions to such problems the philosopher sees as such. Such education, or shaping of a common sensibility, is what I elsewhere called the *aesthetic commitment* of conceptual inquiry as Wittgenstein understands it;<sup>9</sup> where the word “aesthetics” does not refer to the philosophy of art but to the dimension of *aisthesis*, the perceptual hook onto the world that – in our case – makes both the philosopher and her interlocutor sensitive to the same phenomena, or rather, to the same grammatical facts.<sup>10</sup> “The capacity [the talent] for philosophy consists in the ability to receive a strong and lasting impression from a grammatical fact.” (P §90, p. 183)

In a remark included in *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein criticizes people who say they cannot make any judgment about this or that because they have never learned philosophy, as if philosophy were a science coinciding with a certain body of knowledge, like medicine. But then he adds:

What one can say, however, is that people who have never carried out an investigation of a philosophical sort, like most mathematicians for instance, are not equipped with the right optical instruments (*den richtigen Sehwerkzeugen*) for that sort of investigation or scrutiny. Almost [Similarly], as someone who is not used to searching in the forest for berries [flowers, berries or herbs] will not find any because his eye has not been sharpened for such things (*sein Auge .. nicht geschärft ist*) & he does not know where you have to be particularly on the lookout for them. Similarly someone unpractised in philosophy (*der in der Philosophie Ungeübte*) passes by all the spots where difficulties lie hidden under the grass, while someone with practice pauses & senses (*dort stehenbleibt & fühlt*) that there is a difficulty here, even though [although] he does not yet see it. - And no wonder, if one knows how long even the practised investigator, who realizes there is a difficulty, has to search in order to find it. (CV pp. 33-34)

9 See (Andronico 2010).

10 Here one could object that metaphorical “perception” of grammatical facts should not be conflated with genuine perception. However, if we keep in mind that Wittgenstein’s remarked that the way we classify things, together with language (or languages), has “become nature for us”, then such a conflation may turn out to be legitimate from Wittgenstein’s viewpoint. (“Wir sind an eine bestimmte Einteilung der Sachen gewöhnt. Sie sind uns mit der Sprache, oder den Sprachen, zur Natur geworden”, RPP II 678).



If aesthetic and conceptual inquiries share the feature of producing a certain sharpening of the eye, of cultivating a sensibility for philosophical problems, we may wonder whether, for Wittgenstein, this has ethical implications as well.

Now, the implication I see has something to do with the idea of the transformation of life; a transformation that should be the outcome of the kind of philosophical investigation Wittgenstein recommends, thanks to which we learn to see “grammatical difficulties” where we couldn’t see any. As we already know, from Wittgenstein’s point of view the difficulty of philosophy is not an intellectual one, but is “the difficulty of a change of attitude. Resistances of the will must be overcome” (P § 86, p. 161). This means that philosophizing requires working “on one’s own conception. On the way one sees things. (And what one demands of them)” (P § 86, pp. 161-162).

Once again, Cavell is among the scholars who have stressed this point (i.e., transformation of life), elaborating on its connection with the therapeutic character of Wittgenstein’s philosophizing but also coloring it with an undue appeal to responsibility. In his discussion of Wittgenstein’s remarks on private language in the *Investigations*, Cavell claims that

the fantasy of a private language, underlying the wish to deny the publicness of language, turns out, so far, to be a fantasy, or fear, either of inexpressiveness, one in which I am not merely unknown, but in which I am powerless to make myself known; or one in which what I express is beyond my control. (Cavell 1979, p. 351)

adding a few lines below that such a “fantasy would relieve me of the *responsibility* for making myself known to others” (*Ibid.*, my italics). Wittgenstein’s argument against the possibility of a private language is thus redescribed as a struggle between me and myself, a struggle where wish and fear loom large; though “wish”, “fear”, and “myself” (and, of course, “responsibility”) are not subjected to grammatical analysis in Wittgenstein’s sense. Cavell is addressing a reader sympathetic to his viewpoint (a sincere, straightforward person’s viewpoint, one might say) on which it is good to make oneself known to others; however, he seems to be taking for granted that there has to be such a thing as a self, that may or may not be shown or concealed. In this respect, his picture of the self looks typically Cartesian. I doubt that all this would be consonant with the kind of renewal of philosophy Wittgenstein pursued.

There is no doubt that one of the tasks Wittgenstein intended his philosophical activity to be carrying out was that of bringing words back from



their metaphysical to their everyday use, in which they are at home (*Heimat*) (PI 116), so that one could reach a place that gives philosophy peace and makes philosophical problems completely disappear (PI 133). However, it is equally clear that such a task is reinterpreted by Cavell and his disciples as, first and foremost, a *morally valuable* task, relating us to something that can be called “our nature”: “When my reasons come to an end ... I am thrown back upon myself, upon my nature as it has so far shown itself” (Cavell 1979, p. 124). But it seems to me that dissolving philosophical problems in Wittgenstein’s sense and “rediscovering the ordinary”, or our nature, in Cavell’s sense, are non-coinciding operations.

### 3. *Which ethics?*

The picture of the ordinary that comes out of Cavell’s and his disciples’ writings is both splendid and perverse: on the one hand it captures our attention and mobilizes our imagination, but on the other it involves a whole mythology by way of its proponents’ use of the word “ordinary”: a use that they take to be neutral and innocent but is really philosophical. Is this – one would like to ask – the ordinary meaning of “ordinary”? Or again: what’s the connection between “recognizing” (under Wittgenstein’s guidance) a form of expression whose use had been misunderstood, and taking responsibility for it? It seems to me there is no obvious connection: recognizing a form of expression in Wittgenstein’s sense is relocating it in the language game where it had been “at home”; it involves unravelling a conceptual tangle, which may be an end in itself (it puts philosophy to rest),<sup>11</sup> or it may be the beginning of further, non-philosophical developments.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, couldn’t we decide just to reject a form of expression once it has been recognized, forever excluding it from our language?

Clearly, the last question is a rhetorical and provocative one; yet it serves the purpose of questioning a picture – “the ordinary”, in the philosophi-

11 I’d like to recall here that in the *Sketch for a Foreword* Wittgenstein declares : “For me [...] clarity, transparency, is an end in itself.” (CV p. 9, 1930)

12 See (RPP I 950): “What is it, however, that a conceptual investigation does? Does it belong in the natural history of human concepts? - Well, natural history, we say, describes plants and beasts. But might it not be that plants had been described in full detail, and then for the first time someone realized the analogies which had never been seen before? And so, that he establishes a new order among these descriptions. [...] the new arrangement *might* also give [my italics] *a new direction to scientific investigation.*”

cally loaded use – that, seen from a Wittgensteinian perspective, appears to have acquired the rigidity of a mental cramp. It looks as if those who speak of the ordinary in these terms wanted to single out a dimension of the human – of what it is to be a human being – that is both nearest to us, as it is shared and experienced by everyone, and at the same time very far, as it is the endpoint of a very special philosophical itinerary, the terminal point of a particular reading of Wittgenstein’s work. But I find it hard to believe that Wittgenstein’s teaching could be regarded as issuing in a final conception of what it is to be human, or as reaching a safe place where one could rest and feel forever sheltered from philosophical temptations.

Once more, here I am not denying that Wittgenstein, as a human being, lived in a state of constant moral tension, wishing to become a better man. Such a tension is shared by many ordinary people as well as by scholars and scientists. However, I fail to see any obvious transition from this aspect of Wittgenstein’s life to the idea that the recognition of ordinary uses of certain linguistic expressions can make the recognizer a morally better person. Wittgenstein remarked: “You cannot lead people to the good; you can only lead them to some place or other; [...]” (CV p. 5). The view of the ordinary that has been defended by Cavell and the “New Wittgenstein” adepts doesn’t merely fuel a mythology that is now permeating a certain philosophical jargon; in addition, it fails to account for Wittgenstein’s attempted characterization of the relation between his writings and his readers:

If I say that my book is meant for only a small circle of people (if that can be called a circle) I do not mean to say that this circle is in my view the élite of mankind but it is the circle to which [These are the people to whom] I turn (not because they are better or worse than the others but) because they form my cultural circle, as it were my fellow countrymen in contrast to the others who are *foreign* to me. (CV pp. 12-13)

The country (*das Vaterland*)<sup>13</sup> that Wittgenstein is talking about is not the home of every man and woman, and certainly not of supposedly *better* men and women; it is a cultural circle that includes those who, by reading his works, have been persuaded by his amazing theoretical and aesthetic enterprise. These are people whose sensibility for philosophical problems

13 German original: “[...]so will ich damit nicht sagen dass dieser Kreis meiner Auffassung nach die Elite der Menschheit ist aber er ist der Kreis an den [es sind die Menschen an die] ich mich wende (nicht weil sie besser oder schlechter sind als die andern sondern) weil sie mein Kulturkreis sind, gleichsam die Menschen meines Vaterlandes im Gegensatz zu den anderen die mir *fremd* sind” (CV pp. 12-13)

has become attuned to Wittgenstein's. They have developed a keen eye for grammatical misunderstandings: they can see them where other people do not see any and they see them inexorably, so to speak; they cannot do otherwise.

Only in relation to this last aspect can one speak of the ethical implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy. People belonging to Wittgenstein's "cultural circle" have not reached a base – the ordinary – that could reassure them as to their humanity; on the contrary, whatever results they may reach are every time temporary. The shared philosophical sensibility that leads them to see old (philosophical) problems in a new way goes together with awareness of the new perspective's partiality: it requires constantly and individually facing those who do not belong to the circle, the foreigners. Thus the mankind Wittgenstein is carving out in his work is no reassured mankind that has found a *Halt*, a footing, in the ordinary; it is mankind facing the task of keeping alert to the constant occasions for misunderstanding that language offers.

A similar conclusion, it seems to me, is reached by Hilary Putnam (Putnam 2007). Though he admits that conversations with Cavell and James Conant lead him to think that it is wrong to read Wittgenstein as if his main concern had been what is discussed in departments of philosophy (Putnam 2007, p. 10), he criticizes Peter Gordon's interpretation of Wittgenstein's work. On Gordon's view, all of Wittgenstein's efforts were meant to argue "that philosophy is a disease, and that we require only a therapy that will remind us of those common meanings that generally worked for us when we were going on about our daily and unphilosophical affairs." (*Ibid.*). By contrast, Putnam insists that "the tendency to become enchanted with nonsense and to try to force reality [...] to allow itself to be seen through the lens of inappropriate pictures, is neither the monopoly nor the creation of professional philosophy", (Putnam 2007, p. 11) and that "what concerned Wittgenstein was something that we saw as lying deep in our lives with language (and he certainly did not think one could be 'cured' of it once and for all, and certainly not by simply being reminded 'of those common meanings that generally worked for us when we were going on about our daily and unphilosophical affairs')" (*Ibid.*). On Putnam's view, the lesson Wittgenstein taught us is that "the need for and the value of escaping the grip of inappropriate conceptual pictures is literally ubiquitous", so that the pursuit of clarity his work was meant to exemplify "needs to go on *whenever* we engage in serious reflection". He then concludes that "if this idea is grasped, we will see that far from being a way of bringing an end to

philosophy, it represents a way to bring philosophical reflection to areas in which we often fail to see anything philosophical at all.” (*Ibid.*)

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LUIGI PERISSINOTTO

“...IN THE PRESENT”.  
ETHICS AND FORM OF LIFE IN WITTGENSTEIN<sup>1</sup>

The terms “ethics” and “form of life” are fraught with difficulties, as is their conjunction. A first and obvious difficulty is due to the heated disagreement among scholars about what Wittgenstein means by “ethics” and – to make matters worse – to the considerable confusion about what he means by “form of life.” Strictly connected with this there is a second difficulty: “form of life” is an expression that appears (both in the singular and in the plural) only (and certainly not with the reputed frequency) in the texts (manuscripts and typescripts) subsequent to the *Tractatus*; “ethics”, for its part, is a term that seems to belong more to the ambit of the *Tractatus* – especially if in this ambit we include the *Lecture on Ethics* of 1929<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Works by Wittgenstein and abbreviations: *BIB*: *The Blue Book*, in *The Blue and Brown Books*, edited by R. Rhees, Oxford: Blackwell, 1969<sup>2</sup>; *CV*: *Culture and Value*, edited by G. H. von Wright with H. Nyman, revised edition by A. Pichler, translated by P. Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006; *LE*: *Lectures on Aesthetics*, in *Lectures and Conversations on Psychology, Aesthetics and Religious Belief*, edited by C. Barrett, Oxford: Blackwell, 1966; *NB*: *Notebooks 1914-1916*, edited by G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979<sup>2</sup>; *PI*: *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, revised 4<sup>th</sup> edition by P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; *PR*: *Philosophical Remarks*, edited by R. Rhees, translated by R. Hargreaves and R. White, Oxford: Blackwell, 1975; *RFM*: *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, edited by G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1978<sup>3</sup>; *RPP*: *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. I edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe; vol. II: edited by G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman, translated by C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, Oxford, Blackwell, 1980; *T*: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by C. K. Ogden, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922; translated by D. F. Pears and B. McGuinness, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961; *Z*: *Zettel*, edited by G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967.
- 2 L. Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics*, edited by E. Zamuner, V. Di Lascio and D. Levy, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2007.

– and to that which, in the loosest way possible, we could call the “post-*Tractatus*” phase. There is, finally, a third, and more specific, difficulty: form (or forms) of life is a tool that belongs, so to speak, to the toolbox<sup>3</sup> of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, while “ethics” is a term that seems, rather, to characterize its spirit and orientation.<sup>4</sup>

The list of difficulties could, of course, be continued. But to avoid further excuses and delays let me state, without more ado, the theme that, abetted by (or thanks to) the title I have chosen, I shall develop in this paper. The position I intend to maintain is the following: (1) Wittgenstein’s entire life is marked, from beginning to end, by a question (which I would like to call “ethical”) that is posed explicitly for the first time in the *Notebooks 1914-1916*: “But is it possible for one so to live that life stops being problematic?” (*NB*: p. 74); (2) the philosophical method practiced by Wittgenstein is, fundamentally, part and parcel of his answer to this question;<sup>5</sup> (3) as in the *Tractatus*, so in the *Philosophical Investigations*, it is in the philosophical method that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is to be sought and, again, it is there, in the philosophical method, that his fundamental ethical inspiration is made manifest.<sup>6</sup>

## I.

As a guide and point of reference for my observations, I would like to take a remark now published in *Culture and Value*. The first three paragraphs of this remark, dated 27 August 1937, read as follows:

3 As we know, the image of the toolbox [*Werkzeugkasten*] appears in *PI*: I, §11.

4 This is what Wittgenstein suggests to Ludwig von Ficker, at least as far as his first work is concerned, when he remarks that “the point [not the argument] of the book is ethical” (undated letter of 10 November 1919 in L. Wittgenstein, “Letters to Ludwig von Ficker”, edited by A. Janik, translated by B. Gillette, in *Wittgenstein. Sources and Perspectives*, edited by C. G. Luckhardt, Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1979, p. 94, letter 23). As I shall attempt to show, this indication can be extended to Wittgenstein’s entire philosophy.

5 One could also say: seeing the world “aright” (*T*: 6.54) is part and parcel of living “rightly” (*CV*: p. 31); “aright” and “rightly” translate the same German term, “richtig”.

6 Two considerations: (1) I am aware that there is nothing original about my insistence on the ethical inspiration of Wittgenstein’s philosophy; I only hope to make it a little more clear how that inspiration shapes (in the details, so to speak) his philosophical method; (2) I am not at all satisfied with the expression “ethical inspiration,” which I find somewhat misleading, but I have not been able to find a better one.



Slept a bit better. Vivid dreams. A bit depressed; weather & state of health. / The solution of the problem you see in life is a way of living which makes what is problematic disappear. / The fact that life is problematic means that your life does not fit life's shape. So you must change your life, & once it fits the shape, what is problematic will disappear (*CV*: p. 31).<sup>7</sup>

This is a complex and difficult remark, which calls for a variety of comments. The first thing that must be emphasized is its close and evident similarity to one of the more evocative propositions of the *Tractatus*, prop. 6.521:

The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem. / (Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?).<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, there are a number of differences between the two. The 1937 formulation, for example, seems less impersonal than the one in the *Tractatus*: the "problem of life" of the earlier version has become the "problem you see in life"; and, unlike the proposition from the *Tractatus*, the 1937 remark gives us (what appears to be) a diagnosis ("The fact that life is problematic means that your life does not fit life's shape") and (what appears to be) a therapy or a prescription ("[...] you must change your life, & once it fits the shape, what is problematic will disappear"). But, as we shall see, the affinities definitely prevail over the differences, especially if prop. 6.521 is read in the context of the other remarks of the *Notebooks 1914-1916* in which it first appears. In any case, it is noteworthy how, in the approximately twenty years that go from the composition of the *Tractatus* to the drafting of manuscript 118,<sup>9</sup> very little has changed for Wittgenstein, on this point at least.

7 The original German reads as follows: "Die Lösung des Problems, das Du im Leben siehst, ist eine Art zu leben, die das Problemhafte zum Verschwinden bringt. / Daß das Leben problematisch ist, heißt, daß Dein Leben nicht in die Form des Lebens paßt. Du mußt dann Dein Leben verändern, & paßt, es in die Form, dann verschwindet das Problematische."

8 The original German reads as follows: "Die Lösung des Problems des Lebens merkt man am Verschwinden dieses Problems. / (Ist nicht dies der Grund, warum Menschen, denen der Sinn des Lebens nach langen Zweifeln klar wurden, warum diese dann nicht sagen konnten, worin dieser Sinn bestand?)."

9 This is the number, according to the cataloguing done by von Wright, of the manuscript in which the remark we are commenting on appears.

The second consideration regards the ethical valence of our remark. As a matter of fact, we find in it no explicit use of the term “ethics” or of its direct derivatives (the adverb “ethically” or the adjective “ethical”), but a reading of the *Notebooks 1914-1916* and of the *Tractatus* will easily convince us that, for Wittgenstein, ethics is essentially concerned with the solution of the problem of life. In the *Tractatus*, and after the *Tractatus*, the solution of the problem of life is, indeed, the ethical task or commitment par excellence, as is explicitly shown by a group of remarks of the *Notebooks 1914-1916* from which prop. 6.521 will be drawn.<sup>10</sup> Here Wittgenstein not only poses the same question he will pose anew twenty years later – “But is it possible for one so to live that life stops being problematic?” – but, as he will do once again in 1937, he also indicates the essential feature of a life so lived. Quoting approvingly an observation of Dostoevsky’s – “the man who is happy is fulfilling the purpose [*Zweck*] of existence” – Wittgenstein noted in fact that “again we could say that the man is fulfilling the purpose of existence<sup>11</sup> who no longer needs to have any purpose except to live.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, who is content [*befriedigt*]” (*NB*: p. 73). Although it is formulated differently, the 1937 remark is substantially the same as that original indication: the problematic life, the life that does not “fit life’s shape,” is the life that, in conflict with itself, is unable to recognize in itself its own end. But how does this conflict within life itself arise and thrive? How can life become reconciled with itself?

The particular use that, here and elsewhere, Wittgenstein makes of the adjective-used-as-a-noun “the problematic”, of the adjective “problematic”, and of the noun “problem”, calls for a third and fuller comment. As we have seen, a life that is problematic is one that does not find its end in itself; such a life is, for this very reason, incomplete (and unfulfilled); therefore the commitment “so to live that life stops being problematic” is ethical. Now, it is right here that we find direct manifestation of the correspondence between ethical task and philosophical method that, as we remarked earlier, characterizes Wittgenstein’s entire philosophy. What Wittgenstein’s philosophical method aims at is in fact, as we shall see, precisely this: the vanishing of the problematic;<sup>13</sup> namely, those “[t]houghts at peace” [*Friede*

10 I refer to the remarks dated 6 July 1916.

11 Which is to say, according to equivalent formulations: who solves the problem of life; who finds the sense of life; who stops living his life as problematic.

12 The man, in other words, for whom the end [*Zweck*] of life is life itself.

13 An example contained in a remark in *Culture and Value* specifies precisely the relation that holds, for Wittgenstein, between the problematic and philosophical method: “I could imagine someone admiring trees, & also the shadows, or reflec-

in den Gedanken] which, as he will note on 4 March 1944, "is the goal someone who philosophizes longs for" (*CV*, p. 50).<sup>14</sup> But can the philosopher ever be granted this peace? And is such a thing truly to be hoped for?

For this knot of questions, §524 of the *Philosophical Investigations* is of particular significance. Here Wittgenstein writes:

Don't take it as a matter of course, but as a remarkable fact, that pictures and fictitious narratives give us pleasure, absorb us. / ("Don't take it as a matter of course"—that means: puzzle over this [*Wundere dich darüber*], as you do over some other things which disturb you. Then what is problematic [*das Problematische*] will disappear [*wird [...] verschwinden*], by your accepting the one fact as you do the other.) (*PI*: I, §524).<sup>15</sup>

Robert Fogelin has quite rightly drawn attention to this section, maintaining that the procedure Wittgenstein describes in his parenthetical remark "is just the reverse of explanation." Fogelin carefully illustrates the point:

In an explanation we often try to remove the strangeness of something by showing how it is derived from (or fits in with) things that are not strange. Wittgenstein suggests that instead we should be struck with the strangeness of the familiar and in this way the original case will lose its exceptional character. Thus instead of eliminating the contrast between the strange and the obvious by making everything obvious, Wittgenstein would have us eliminate this contrast by recognizing that everything is strange.<sup>16</sup>

As the context makes clear, Fogelin has no sympathy for this sort of "commitment to inexplicability,"<sup>17</sup> which he considers frustrating, to say the

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tions of trees, which he mistakes for trees. But if he should once tell himself that these [they] are not after all trees & if it becomes a problem for him what they are, or what relation they have to trees, then his admiration [*Bewunderung*] will have suffered a rupture, that will now need healing" (*CV*: p. 65).

14 See also *PI*: I, §133: "The real discovery is the one [...] that gives philosophy peace [*zur Ruhe bringt*]."

15 The original German reads as follows: "Sieh es nicht als selbstverständlich an, sondern als ein merkwürdiges Faktum, daß uns Bilder und erdichtete Erzählungen Vergnügen bereiten; unsern Geist beschäftigen. / ("Sieh es nicht als selbstverständlich an" – das heißt: Wundere dich darüber so, wie über anderes, was nicht beunruhigt. Dann wird das Problematische verschwinden, indem du die eine Tatsache so wir die andere hinnimmst)."

16 R. J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, London & New York: Routledge, second edition 1987, p. 209.

17 *Ibid.*

least,<sup>18</sup> and, even if he recognizes its pervasive and persistent influence,<sup>19</sup> he absolutely never sees its fundamental ethical inspiration.

Much more could be said about Fogelin's reading. In particular, about the fact that he seems to transform an evident notation of method<sup>20</sup> into a sort of metaphysical intuition, or of metaphysical commitment (of a vaguely nihilistic tenor) "to the inexplicability of things" and "to the brute multiplicity of the phenomena of the world."<sup>21</sup> But there is nothing in Wittgenstein's texts that would appear to justify this move: his philosophical method is ethically oriented, not metaphysically grounded. Moreover, Wittgenstein never doubts that science explains in the sense in which science explains—that is, through the reduction of natural phenomena "to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws" (*BIB*: p. 18). What he intends to oppose is not, in fact, science, but rather those philosophers who "are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does" (*BIB*: p. 18). It is to this philosophy, which mimes or copies science, that Wittgenstein objects, since "it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything" (*BIB*: p. 18). But if this cannot be our task, it is not because all explanation is, as such, impossible. Philosophy, as Wittgenstein understands it, is not heir to the (perhaps metaphysically sanctioned) failure of science. If such were the case, it would nonetheless be "beside" or on the same plane as science, while Wittgenstein had always been convinced that, if philosophy "is" somewhere, it "is above or below the natural sciences, not beside them" (*T*: 4.111b).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, none of the observations in §524 intend to sanction as useless or impossible an explanation – for example, a neurophysiological or psychological explanation – of the fact that pictures give us pleasure.<sup>23</sup> The concern Wittgenstein

18 As he observes, in Wittgenstein's texts "we are continually denied explanation just where we want it – told that the story is over before it gets interesting" (*ivi.*, p. 210).

19 *Ibid.*

20 The use of the imperative mood confirms this. See, in this regard, also the following remark: "Let yourself be *struck* [*auffallen*] by the existence of such a thing as our language-game of confessing the motive of my action" (*PI*: II, xi, p. 236).

21 Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

22 This second paragraph in parentheses of prop. 4.111 ("(Das Wort 'Philosophie' muß etwas bedeuten, was über oder unter, aber nicht neben den Naturwissenschaften steht)") already appeared in the *Notes on Logic* of 1913: "The word 'philosophy' ought always to designate something over or under but not beside, the natural sciences" (*NB*: p. 106).

23 Obviously, not everything that is affirmed in the name of science is part of science and of its explanations; often or sometimes what we have, for Wittgenstein, is bad philosophy disguised as science. This is how he would probably see a declara-

expresses here is quite different: namely, that in wishing to explain *why* pictures give us pleasure, we forget *that* pictures give us pleasure.<sup>24</sup> Here we have the root of Wittgenstein's philosophical method and of his fundamental maxim: "Let yourself be *struck* by..." (*PI*: II, xi, p. 236).

Obviously, it is not a question of being astonished by the fact that pictures give us pleasure.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, it is a matter of investigating, closely and in detail, the concept of pleasure that is at work here, asking ourselves, for example, what place it occupies and how it is incorporated in human life, "in all of the situations and reactions which constitute human life" (*RPP*: II, §16); to what phenomena and "kinds of human behavior" it refers (*RPP*: II, §77); but also whether it refers exclusively to phenomena of human life.<sup>26</sup> For example, what would we say about a puppy that wags its tail in front of Vermeer's *View of Delft*: does it take pleasure? If not, why not? Or if so, why so? Or would we say it most certainly takes pleasure, but not in the picture. And does "in front of" have the same meaning in "the puppy is in front of the *View of Delft*" and in "my friend Paul is in front of the *View of Delft*"? And when Paul tells me about the pleasure Vermeer's picture gave him, is he using the same concept as when he tells me about his pleasure during a swim in the open sea? How can I decide? Where should I look? Or should I ask Paul himself?

It is in this manner, with similar questions and observations, that Wittgenstein's philosophical method unfolds: its objective, we could say with a certain grandiloquence, is that of "clarifying" life with life. As he remarks, not without irony, in the *Blue Book*, a work of philosophy is, from this viewpoint, radically different from a "treatise on pomology" that finds its "standard" "in nature" (*BIB*: p. 19); but, by the same token, it is also radi-

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tion such as the following: "My approach is dictated by a truth that I believe to be axiomatic – that all human activity is dictated by the organization and laws of the brain; that, therefore, there can be no real theory of art and aesthetics unless neurobiologically based" (S. Zeki, "Neural concept formation and art: Dante, Michelangelo, Wagner," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 9/3, 2002, p. 54).

- 24 In this respect, Wittgenstein shares the anti-naturalism that is typical of the phenomenological tradition.
- 25 Or by the other manifold facts of life. The expression "facts of life" [*Tatsachen des Lebens*] appears in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*: "What has to be accepted, the given, —it might be said— are facts of living [variant: "forms of life"]" (*RPP*: I, §630). In the corresponding passage of the *Philosophical Investigations* we find only the expression "forms of life" (*PI*: II, xi, p. 238).
- 26 "'Human beings think, grasshoppers don't.' This means something like: the concept 'thinking' refers to human life, not to that of grasshoppers" (*RPP*: II, §23).

cally different from many treatises that, under other names (ontology or naturalism, for example), aspire to be treatises on pomology.

Let us investigate the point more closely. Again, in the *Blue Book*, and in the context we have just evoked, Wittgenstein asks what makes it so difficult to follow his method or his line of investigation, in which “[i]nstead of giving any kind of general answer” [to questions of the form “What is...?”; or “What are...?”], he proposes to us “to look closely at particular cases” (*BIB*: p. 16). His celebrated response is that the difficulty lies precisely in “our craving for generality” (*BIB*: p. 17), which is the “resultant” of at least four “tendencies,” one of them being “our preoccupation with the method of science,” i.e., with “the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws; and, in mathematics, of unifying the treatment of different topics by using a generalization” (*BIB*: pp. 17-18). It is at this point that he observes that “[i]nstead of ‘craving for generality’ I could also have said ‘the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case’” (*BIB*: p. 18); he then goes on to specify that “[t]he contempt for what seems the less general case in logic springs from the idea that it is incomplete” (*BIB*: p. 19).

A good example of this attitude is represented by Socrates, who, as Wittgenstein observes a few lines later with an implicit reference to Plato’s *Theaetetus*, “[w]hen [he] asks the question, ‘what is knowledge?’ he does not even regard it as a preliminary answer to enumerate cases of knowledge” (*BIB*: p. 20). But here it is worthwhile to note – also to underscore the radicality of Wittgenstein’s philosophical method – the great variety of this attitude’s incarnations. It is to be found, for example (but this is truly just an example), in all those philosophies of history according to which “what a thing is is decided by its future, by what it becomes”;<sup>27</sup> or in those metaphysics of the origin for which what a thing is is decided by what it has been. For the former what counts is the thing’s destination; for the latter, its provenance; for both, the thing, separated from its provenance or from its destination, bears a “mark of incompleteness” (*BIB*: p. 19). It is for this reason that, with the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, it could be said that metaphysicians of the origin and philosophers of history are never “in the present” (*T*: 6.4311b), but always “in time” (*NB*: p. 74),<sup>28</sup> even when the

27 W. Pannenberg, *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Gesammelte Aufsätze. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967, p. 234.

28 “But is it possible for one so to live that life stops being problematic? That one is living in eternity and not in time?” (*NB*: p. 74); “If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, the eternal life belongs to those who live in the present” (*T*: 6.4311b).

origin to which they look back is before all time, and the future to which they look forward is beyond all time.

Wittgenstein's (let us say) anti-Socratic attitude can be better illustrated with reference to one of the many examples of his imaginary anthropology. Let us imagine, then, a tribe whose members only calculate orally in the decimal system, so that, without realizing it, they make many mistakes, since they repeat or omit many digits. A traveler records these calculations with a tape recorder and then teaches the natives to do written calculation, showing them how many mistakes they made when they limited themselves to calculating orally. Well, Wittgenstein wonders, "[w]ould these people now have to admit that they had not really calculated before? That they had merely been groping about, whereas now they walk?" (*RFM*: III, §81). The answer is that nothing forces them to admit this, even if, obviously, nothing keeps them from beginning to view their previous calculations with the same attitude as the traveler. To the traveler who is trying to get them to admit that, as long as they only calculated orally, theirs was not calculation but only a semblance of calculation, they might object that things actually went better before, since writing is only "dead stuff" that limits their intuition; or they might rebut that spirit cannot be captured with a machine; or that, if the tape recorder demonstrates that they repeated a digit, "well, that will have been right." And if the traveler should remark that experience teaches that "mechanical" means of calculating are more reliable than our memory so that, if we use them, we are "smoother," they could very well ask him why in the world they should rely on experience, or how are they to know that the machine is more reliable than memory. And as far as "smoothness" is concerned, why in the world should that be our ideal? Why must our ideal be "to have everything wrapped in cellophane"? (*RFM*: III, §81).

But, we might wonder in our turn, what shall we say if the tribe – convinced by the traveler and his tape recorder – abandons its old way of calculating? At least in this case wouldn't we have to admit that the old way of calculating was, in the judgment of the tribe itself, an irregular and capricious way of calculating? As a matter of fact, what we could say is that this tribe now calculates in the same way as the traveler does and that, like the traveler, it now rejects its ancient mode of calculation as irregular and capricious. Tribe and traveler now calculate in the same way; for example, that which is a mistake for one is now a mistake for the others as well. But this by no means shows that the previous way of calculating was not a calculation, or was only an incomplete and rudimentary calculation; a quasi-calculation, so to speak. That which can be said is that this tribe has



now banished such calculation and that this banishment is part of (delimits) their present calculating.

The lesson we can draw from this example (which is also, for its part, a good example of Wittgenstein's philosophical method) had already been anticipated by Wittgenstein himself, a few paragraphs earlier, in relation to another, perhaps even more difficult, example. Let us imagine a game that

is such that whoever begins can always win by a particular simple trick. But this has not been realized;—so it is a game. Now someone draws our attention to it;—and it stops being a game (*RFM*: III, §77).

What would the metaphysician say at this point?<sup>29</sup> He would say that, revealing the trick, we discover that what we have been playing was not a game at all (it seemed to be a game, but actually wasn't) and that therefore, and properly speaking, up to now we have not been playing. But Wittgenstein's philosophical method stems precisely from the rejection of this conclusion: if it stops being a game, it is not because we have discovered that it wasn't a game; *simply* we no longer play it. And by no longer playing it we show something not about the essence of the game, but about our life and about the place that games and playing occupy in it.<sup>30</sup>

I want to say: “and it stops being a game” [*und es hört auf ein Spiel sein*]—not: “and we now see that it wasn't a game” [*und wir sehen nun, daß kein Spiel war*] (*RFM*: III, §77).

## II.

Let us return to our 1937 remark for a fourth and further comment. As we recall, in the second paragraph Wittgenstein observed that “[t]he fact that life is problematic means that your life does not fit life's shape.” This is a remark that can be understood in a number of ways. A (generally) sociopolitical reading would have it that Wittgenstein is referring to the conflict which, for various and diverse reasons, can arise between our life (our

29 The use of the term “metaphysical” poses a number of problems. Here I use it to refer, in general or generically, to that attitude according to which, if we do not know what a calculation is, in itself or in its essence, then we can never be certain that what we call “calculation” is truly a calculation.

30 For example, once the trick has been discovered someone could react this way: “What a great game! And so relaxing! Everyone has the certainty that, when it's their turn to begin, they'll win.”



actions and behaviors, et cetera) and the customs, institutions and values of our community. As we know, it can be very painful to bear this conflict and very difficult to endure it, even in those cases in which it stems from the conscious rejection of a way of life that is judged to be narrow, unjust, and so forth. The point is that, if we no longer recognize ourselves in others, we also have to renounce their recognition. Now, if this were the correct or at least plausible reading of our remark, we would find it a sort of call for social conformism and political conservatism.

But there is a second way of reading this remark. According to this second reading, which we could call (again, generically) "metaphysical," Wittgenstein is referring to the conflict there may be between our life and the form (in the singular and with the definite article) of life. In this perspective, that which in my life constitutes "the problem" vanishes when my life (let us say, my empirical life) comes to correspond to its form or essence; i.e., when it becomes what it must (metaphysically) be. Obviously, on the basis of a reading of this sort Wittgenstein is to be counted, without much hesitation, among the – more or less faithful – glossators of Plato.

However, neither the sociopolitical nor the metaphysical reading is convincing. For example, as regards the first reading, nothing that Wittgenstein said, here or elsewhere, suggests that for him a conformist or submissive life can be any less problematic than an insubordinate or rebellious one. Conformism can be just as painful and difficult to endure as conflict. Moreover, are not individual rebellion or collective revolt also ways of reacting to a (social, political, etc.) conformism experienced painfully and with intolerance?

What is more, there are a number of observations of Wittgenstein that, both in the letter and in the spirit, belie this kind of reading. I refer, for example, to a curious critical remark on Frank Ramsey, now in *Culture and Value*. Here Wittgenstein describes Ramsey as "a bourgeois thinker" [*ein bürgerlicher Denker*] – that is, a thinker, as Marx might put it, who tends to mistake the historical for the natural. What interested Ramsey, as Wittgenstein notes, was

how *this* state might reasonable be organized. The idea that this state might not be the only possible one partly disquieted [*beunruhigte*] him and partly bored him. He wanted to get down as quickly as possible to reflecting on the foundations – of *this* state. This was what he was good at & what really interested him (*CV*: p. 24).

Now, both the tone, the context, and the conclusion<sup>31</sup> of this remark are clearly critical and show how Wittgenstein not only felt altogether extraneous to the bourgeois spirit represented – at least as he saw it – by Ramsey, but also held it to be in conflict with the spirit that ought to animate philosophy:

(The philosopher is not a citizen [*Bürger*] of any community of ideas. That is what makes him a philosopher.) (Z: §455).

As regards the second reading, which I have called “metaphysical,” the difficulties are even more evident: the distinction between “real” and “ideal” to which it has recourse is in fact, as we shall see, one of the main targets of criticism of Wittgenstein’s philosophical method.

Fortunately, there is also a third and more advisable reading: namely, the form of life is life itself. In this sense, as in long-ago 1916, the life that does not fit life’s shape is the life that does not find its end in itself. It is precisely this that can be said of the conformist, for whom the end is not in life, but rather in living like others do. It is in this respect that the sociopolitical reading distorts Wittgenstein’s basic intention; but also the metaphysical reading distorts it, and perhaps even more. For Wittgenstein, in fact, calling upon the ideal does nothing but express and manifest diffidence or suspicion<sup>32</sup> with regard to the real (to actual life). This is perhaps why we can imagine that he would have reacted to the metaphysical reading with the same expression of surprise with which, at the beginning of the *Philosophical Remarks*, he reacted to the idea that logic ought to be “concerned with an ‘ideal’ language and not with *ours*”:

It would be odd if the human race had been speaking all this time without ever putting together a genuine proposition (*PR*: §3)

Indeed, that which, for Wittgenstein, makes life problematic is not its difference from a (presumed) ideal but, rather, precisely the evocation of an ideal to which it ought to correspond. Such an ideal, as Wittgenstein insists on many occasions, is in fact an illusion: either it is something so pure that

31 “[R]eal philosophical reflection disquieted him until he put its result (if it had one) on one side as trivial” (*CV*: p. 24).

32 Or resentment, very much in a Nietzschean sense.

it becomes "vacuous [*etwas Leerem*]" (*PI*: I, §107)<sup>33</sup> or it is only an aspect or a part of the real disguised as (or deceitfully elevated to) an ideal.

That the form of life be life itself does not mean, however, that Wittgenstein sides or sympathizes with a metaphysics of life of more or less Schopenhauerian descent. Here as elsewhere, Wittgenstein shuns all hypostatization. The life of which he speaks is not, so to speak, the "subject" of our existences, but is (*simply*, we might say) our life. Life – that which we have to accept – consists, precisely, in the facts of life; for example,

the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g. *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affair thus and so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colors, take an interest in others' feelings (*RPP*: I, §630).

So, accepted, yes, but not in that bourgeois spirit with which he re-proached Ramsey; the acceptance is a move of the philosophical method, not a way of impressing the seal of the transcendental on our life. On this I must insist, in opposition to many widespread readings of Wittgenstein's work, especially of his post-*Tractatus* philosophy. As one of these readings would have it, for example, the principle that guides Wittgenstein's philosophy could be formulated as follows: it is only in everyday [*alltägliche*] language, i.e., on the basis of their everyday use, that words have sense or meaning (see *PI*: I, §§116-117); from this it follows that, to avoid nonsense, words must be used as they are used everyday. It is up to the philosophical method to describe with care and in detail this everyday use, especially in relation to certain words by which philosophy is, so to speak, obsessed (such as "knowledge," "being," "object," "I," "proposition/sentence," "name" (*PI*: I, §116). But however widespread, this image is – to say the least – misleading. What Wittgenstein suggests, both in the sections considered and in many others, is in fact something quite different: if we look to the ordinary use it is not to discover *the* meaning, but rather to explore the ways (or some of the ways) in which we give (or fail to give, or are under the illusion that we give) a meaning. As we read in the *Blue Book*, "a word hasn't got a meaning given to it, as it were, by a power independent of us." No: "A word has the meaning someone has given to it" (*BIB*: p. 28). This is also a way of recognizing how that which we call "giving

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33 Here the images Wittgenstein uses at the end of the same section of the *Philosophical Investigations* apply perfectly: "We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction, and so, in a certain sense, the conditions are ideal; but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk; so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!" (*PI*: I, §107).

a meaning” belongs to the (and intersects with other) facts of our life, occupying very different places in it. With regard to his own experience and in reference to a passage from St. Paul,<sup>34</sup> Wittgenstein notes, for example, that he cannot call Jesus “Lord,” because he cannot “utter the word ‘Lord’ meaningfully [*mit Sinn*]”; to do so he would in fact have to change his life radically, to live “*quite differently*” (*CV*: p. 38).

### III.

Up to now we have dwelled upon the first three paragraphs of the 1937 remark; but that remark includes another three – in many respects surprising – paragraphs. The fourth and the fifth make explicit an objection that Wittgenstein takes very seriously:

But don’t we have the feeling that someone who doesn’t see a problem there is blind to something important, indeed to what is most important of all? / Wouldn’t I like to say he is living aimlessly—just blindly like a mole as it were; & if he could only see [look up], he would see the problem? (*CV*: p. 31).<sup>35</sup>

The preoccupation Wittgenstein expresses here has little need of comment: isn’t seeing the problem truly the most important thing of all? Isn’t it in fact precisely this seeing that makes us fully human, distinguishing us from animals and plants? And, so, isn’t blindness to the problem of life a fundamental blindness toward ourselves? And doesn’t this apply all the more and with greater intensity when it is philosophy that comes into play? Suffice it to think, just for the sake of example, of Heidegger’s characterization of philosophical “reflection” [*Besinnung*] as “the courage to make the truth of our own presuppositions and the realm of our own goals into the things that most deserve to be called in question.”<sup>36</sup> From this point of view, isn’t not seeing the problem the sign of a radical lack of courage?

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34 I Corinthians, 12, 3.

35 By “doesn’t see a problem there” Wittgenstein means “doesn’t see a problem in life.” The original German reads as follows: “Aber haben wir nicht das Gefühl, daß der, welcher nicht darin ein Problem sieht für etwas Wichtiges, ja das Wichtigste, blind ist? / Möchte ich nicht sagen, der lebe so dahin – eben blind, gleichsam wie ein Maulwurf; & wenn er bloß sehen [aufschauen] könnte, so sähe er das Problem?”

36 M. Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by W. Lovitt, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977, p. 116.

Wittgenstein, as we said, takes this kind of objection seriously and, in the last part of the remark, he seeks to come to terms with it through a reformulation of the second paragraph. That paragraph read as follows:

The solution of the problem you see in life is a way of living which makes what is problematic disappear.

Now Wittgenstein reformulates it, correcting it in this way:

Or shouldn't I say: someone who lives rightly does not experience the problem as *sorrow*, hence not after all as a problem, but rather as joy, that is, so to speak, a bright halo round his life, not a murky background (*CV*: p. 31).<sup>37</sup>

The indication is by no means perspicuous. But on the basis of the reading presented here, I propose to interpret it this way: experiencing the problem as joy means experiencing it as part and parcel of our life; experiencing it as sorrow means feeling that its solution demands that our life be set aside. In short, it means feeling that our life is only a life "in quotes."

This is the background that explains the profoundly antireductionist inspiration of Wittgenstein's philosophical method, as it manifests itself—to give but one example—in the few, but intense pages of his lessons on aesthetics in which he speaks of the enormous attraction that explanations of the form "this is really only this" or "this is *really* this" hold for us (*LE*: pp. 24 and 27), and of our constant tendency "to reduce things to other things." For example, "excited by finding that it's sometimes concomitance, we wish to say it's all *really* concomitance" (*LE*: p. 7, note 3). Obviously, there are many circumstances in which explanations of this type and form have no reductionist accent. The mother who, confronted with the crying and screaming of her child, reacts by observing that this crying and screaming is really only caprice, is certainly not being reductionist. That mother has good reason for saying so and she can even verify her statement: if the crying and screaming burst out in front of a toy store, it is quite sufficient to enter the store to make it turn, magically, into excitement and smiles. In any event, here the mother can say that the crying and screaming are really only caprice precisely because she knows that, in other circumstances, such is *not* the case. By contrast, that mother would be reductionist if she were to

37 The original German reads as follows: "Oder soll ich nicht sagen: daß wer richtig lebt, das Problem nicht als Traurigkeit, also doch nicht problematisch empfindet, sondern vielmehr als eine Freude; also gleichsam als einen lichten Aether um sein Leben, nicht als einen fraglichen Hintergrund."

maintain that the crying and screaming, really, are *only and always* caprice. But – to say the least – wouldn't it be imprudent for her child's health if she should stick rigorously and without exception to this "theory"? Sure, at times the crying and screaming are really only caprice. But is this *always* so? A good mother is able to tell when there is cause for concern ("perhaps the child is crying and screaming because he has a fever or because he has a toothache") and when, on the contrary, it would be best to leave him, simply, to his caprice. This means, among other things, being a good mother.

But the cases in which "this is really only this" is pronounced with a reductionist accent or spirit are quite another matter. As is his custom, Wittgenstein illustrates the point with a number of examples. He ironically makes the butt of one example a student of his, present at the lecture, Theodor Redpath,<sup>38</sup> some of whose notes, moreover, make up part of the text of these lectures. Thus, Wittgenstein remarks, someone might claim that

If we boil Redpath at 200° C. all that is left when the water vapor is gone is some ashes, etc. This is all Redpath really is.

His lapidary comment is that, "[s]aying this might have a certain charm, but would be misleading to say the least" (*LE*: p. 24).

We ask ourselves, for example, what does the term "really" mean here, or how is it used? Does it perhaps mean "despite the appearance"? But what is Redpath's "appearance"? If Wittgenstein had asked his students "Who is Redpath?", he would probably have had a great variety of answers. Redpath was simultaneously many things, of different kinds: a human being, a student, a student of Wittgenstein's, a British subject, a male, a pleasant (or unpleasant) person, a good (or a bad) speaker, et cetera, et cetera. Was he all these things only in appearance? Was his reality elsewhere, in that little bit of ash that was left after he'd been boiled at 200° C.<sup>39</sup> If this is what one wants to claim, then the effect is that of removing Redpath from his life; of rendering his life a semblance of life; a life – as we said – "in quotes." To face our life, we have to give it up: this, perhaps, is the sorrow of reductionism.

For his part, Wittgenstein invites us to ask ourselves what place this claim occupies in the life of one who makes it, and what mark it leaves on

38 On Redpath's relationship with Wittgenstein see T. Redpath, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Student's Memory*, London: Duckworth, 1990.

39 Obviously, here the actual reference is to the different forms of reductionism and of eliminativism that characterize contemporary philosophy, in particular broad sectors of analytic ontology and of philosophy of mind.

that person's life. For example, we might suppose that such a claim ("Redpath, really, is only a bit of ash") is made by someone a bit disgusted by a certain "humanistic" emphasis on the greatness and dignity of man. "You see – such a one might say – in the end we are nothing other than a bit of ash. Ultimately, what else is left of us?" This kind of claim, then, might be an underscoring of "human scantiness", based on divergent objectives and backgrounds. In a religious perspective, for example (but, again, it is just an example), it could be used to make us remember our state of creatures marked by sin: "Without God we are nothing; we are only a bit of ash." Isn't this more or less the formula used in the Christian ceremony of Ash Wednesday? Or, in another domain, that we have faith in and trust in science alone. I could go on, but I think that the point to which I wanted to draw your attention is sufficiently clear: with these and with other similar questions that Wittgenstein's philosophical method has posed, we have brought the reductionist formula – "this is really only this" – back into our life, restoring it to what it has always been: a fact of our life.





CECILIA ROFENA

## MISLEADING ANALOGIES AND LIFE OF FORMS

A strange analogy could arise from the fact that the eyepiece of even the most gigantic telescope mustn't be any bigger than our eyes.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

1.

In identifying a number of the meanings of the metaphor of darkness in the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* “in the darkness of this time” (*in der Finsternis dieser Zeit*), I wish to make some remarks on the analysis of “misleading analogies” (*irreführenden Analogien*)<sup>1</sup> as a point of intersection between the ethical and political dimensions of Wittgenstein’s philosophical inquiry. Three interdependent aspects of the image of darkness weave together this link: (1) darkness of grammar (“misleading analogies”); (2) darkness of attitude (“resistances of the will”); and (3) darkness of culture (“mythology in the forms of our language”). In his *Blue Book* Wittgenstein singles out a use of the term associated with an indication of method, criticising the “craving for generality” which can direct philosophical inquiry: “philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness” (BB p. 18). This outlook must be compared with the new anthropological and morphological outlook of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

1 The term “misleading analogies” (*irreführenden Analogien*) appears in section 87 of *The Big Typescript*: “Philosophy points out the misleading analogies in the use of our language” (*Die Philosophie zeigt die irreführenden Analogien im Gebrauch unserer Sprache auf*). See *The Big Typescript TS 213*, German-English Scholars’ Edition, ed. and transl. by C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 302e (henceforth abbreviated to BT).

“Complete darkness” and “complete clarity” (PI § 133)<sup>2</sup> are extremes which seem to admit no middle way, in either the work or in the person; in reality the method of the *Philosophical Investigations* constructs “intermediate cases” (*Zwischengliedern*, PI §§ 122, 161) which make it possible to distinguish between different levels of darkness in philosophical confusions: “The thought working its way towards the light” (CV p. 47e, 1946).<sup>3</sup> By following the steps of linguistic analysis, it is possible to understand how the passage through darkness is a necessary condition for achieving new degrees of perspicuity; a necessary but not sufficient condition, as every possible clarity still depends on the limits of the will for clarity, and the limits of the will are ethically valuable.

From the nineteen-thirties onward, obstacles to clear vision – that which “never reduces anything to anything” – become the subject of a new analysis, the task of which is to identify *unclarity* in modes of expression. The method sheds new light on the question of the relationship between subjectivity and language. A view from the ethico-political perspective may show us the paths Wittgenstein chooses in order to escape those specific forms of darkness which I would define using the terms “repetition”<sup>4</sup> and “imitation”, as opposed to the clarity of the appropriate expression in different circumstances of communication. I shall focus exclusively on the darkness of the “empty forms”<sup>5</sup> – “ineptness [*Ungerechtigkeit*] or emptiness [*Leere*] in our assertions” (PI § 131) – as an effect of the action of “misleading analogies”.

The exercise of linguistic clarity, in its individual and social aspects, inevitably has ethical and political consequences in at least a twofold sense: (1) because language is a social activity by its very nature, one which may be confronted and negotiated in the variety of forms of communication

2 “For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear” (PI § 133). Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations, The German Text, with a Revised English Translation*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001<sup>3</sup>), henceforth abbreviated to PI.

3 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright (ed.), translated by P. Winch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), henceforth abbreviated to CV.

4 Stanley Cavell has analyzed the nature of this repetition as “exile of words” in his *Declining Decline. Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture*. See *This Yet Unapproachable America: Lecture after Emerson After Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), pp. 35ff.

5 In light of the question of the fullness of meaning see also the idea of “the life-with-the-concept” in C. Diamond, *Loosing Your Concepts*, in “Ethics”, vol. 98, No. 2, Jan. 1988, p. 266.

(rules of agreement and disagreement); (2) because the subject's relationship with her/his own linguistic articulation of experience can always be evaluated, criticized and improved in terms of expression and knowledge, with effects on the order of possible actions.

At this point I would like to approach the issue by restricting myself to a specific angle, that is, the question of the philosopher as a knower of men (*Menschenkenner*), "one that has better knowledge of mankind" (PI II, xi, p. 193), a topic that I wish to link to the idea of philosophy as a practice of freedom. My aim is to show a technical connection between the analysis of apparent analogies and the description of the "surroundings of a way of acting" (*Die Umgebung einer Handlungsweise*) (RF p. 147),<sup>6</sup> which Wittgenstein outlines in his considerations on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. This type of description stems from a comparison between the method of science and morphological-anthropological analysis, by way of contrast with the work of Frazer.

By heuristically reversing the term *Lebensformen* to *Formensleben*, life of forms, I wish to emphasise the idea of the analysis of the "life of forms"; indeed, I am concerned with understanding the passage from the ethical to the political in linguistic analysis which identifies the obstacles of the repetition of "empty forms".<sup>7</sup> The linguistic forms, becoming rigid, may substitute the freedom to choose between alternative conceptual possibilities.<sup>8</sup> A central point of the anti-dogmatic and anti-reductionist nature of Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis is its attention to misunderstanding, in the specific sense of superimposing influential images on possibilities of expression and communication. Misunderstanding as a lack of self-awareness of one's linguistic

6 Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, J.C. Klagge and A. Nordmann (eds.), (Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), henceforth abbreviated to RF.

7 "Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language". PI § 90.

8 The meaning of this possibility should not be confused with the relativism of any other possible alternative. In contrast, it should be borne in mind that Wittgenstein calls attention to criteria for correct understanding in relation to the context (the *proper* description), to substitutable models of the adequacy of language choice, precisely as occurs in value experience context. The illocutionary force would thus appear to extend to the force of linguistic expression in general. As summed up by Hilary Putnam, we may recognise here the sign of an "occasion-sensitive semanticism". See H. Putnam, *Skepticism and Occasion-sensitive Semantics* (chapter 30), *Philosophy in an Age of Science*, (Cambridge-Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

acts, recognisable in semantic behaviour. Starting from this meaning, a focus on misleading analogies enables us to reformulate a number of questions that show the ethico-political nature of this philosophical focus: (1) When can we say that an expression is “appropriate” in relation to the degree of understanding of the situation? (2) When does an expression belong to us and respond to the context in which it is uttered? (3) How do forms inherited from the history of language use influence us? (4) On the basis of which criteria are we willing to make a style of expression ours? Here it is useful to raise such questions in relation to the fact that they all share an ethical paradox at their origin: “misleading analogies” do not exist as long as we are aware of them, as long as we notice them. With a transposition to the consequences of the practice we might say that nobody – no culture, no language, no theory – can speak in our place, at the risk of transforming our assertions into empty forms, devoid of the relation of understanding between the subject and the world. Forms which mimic correctness of meaning may take the place of the authentic relation of understanding, by excluding doubt and constructing fictitious philosophical certainties.

“Grammar is the description of language. But it doesn’t tell us whether someone understands it, or whether a command in this language is obeyed”. (BT § 44, p. 146e). Philosophy “leaves everything as it is” (PI § 124) as no change in one’s way of thinking can be delegated to and projected upon the method that governs language, separated from the context of real forms of communication and action (a projective identification which effaces any difficulty of disagreement and conflict with oneself or with others). We must be able to modify our perception of language use through constant evaluation of expressive our capacity. For example, we may learn to replace models of description when they are no longer adequate, recognising the value of the model as one that can be criticized and revoked, without making it become a new darkness:

For we can avoid ineptness [*Ungerechtigkeit*] or emptiness [*Leere*] in our assertions only by presenting the model [*Vorbild*] as what it is, an object of comparison [*Vergleichsobjekt*] – as, so to speak, a measuring-rod; not as a preconceived idea [*Vorurteil*] to which reality must correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy.) (PI § 131)

The distinction between appropriate and misleading analogies is modelled upon the physiognomy of obstacles to clear vision (*übersehen*). What we cannot see, despite the fact that it is right before our eyes, becomes the subject of linguistic analysis. In § 89 of *The Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein writes: “The aspects of language that are philosophically most im-

portant are hidden behind their simplicity and ordinariness. (One is unable to notice the importance because it is always (openly) before one's eyes)" (BT p. 309e). In philosophy everything is in front of us, yet *elucidations* (*Erläuterungen*)<sup>9</sup> are necessary in order to free our sight of the darkness which, despite our best intentions, remains protected by theory and by its expectations. Analysis which takes account of the role of linguistic utterances as actions must identify the conditions of freedom of language practice. This is why, in order to correct a philosophical error one intervenes upon the analogy which guides language use and which may engender illusions of meaning.<sup>10</sup> The cure is a new analogy, a new word (the liberating word) and the treatments may vary according to the different cases. "Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem" (PI § 133). When an error is noticed in the way in which something is conceived, attention is drawn to "an analogy, according to which one had been thinking, but which one did not recognize as an analogy" (BT § 87, p. 302e). No misleading analogies exist "in essence"; rather, misunderstandings are recognized through comparisons between forms and modes of expression. As Wittgenstein writes in section 110 of his *Philosophical Investigations*: "Language (or thought) is something unique' – this proves to be a superstition (not a mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions. And now the impressiveness retreats to these illusions, to the problems".

An error is not understood to be the result of the lack of correctness with respect to a formal model or to a paradigm of linguistic coherence: the incidental expression "not a mistake!" indicates a refusal of a single (reductionist) descriptive model, which Wittgenstein had already criticized at the time of the *Blue Book*. An error is not a deviation from a rule of grammar, but is the consequence of the subject's language choices, her/his self-deceptions and resistances of the will: it becomes illusion, "supersti-

9 In this essay I do not tackle the extensive discussion of the problems of the "Erläuterungen" in the *Tractatus*, regarding which the reader is referred to the interpretation of the "resolute readers" of *The New Wittgenstein*, and in particular to the essays by C. Diamond and J. Conant, *On reading the Tractatus resolutely*, in M. Kölbel and B. Weiss (eds.), *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance* (London: Routledge, 2004) and J. Conant, *The Method of the Tractatus*, in E. Reck (ed.), *From Frege to Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

10 "Hallucination of sense" according to Stanley Cavell. As his analysis of scepticism in Wittgenstein has shown, an error does not have the meaning that is ascribed to it by a traditional epistemology, it is neither the result of a cognitive-perceptive deficit nor of the defect of ambiguity in natural language. See S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 221.

tion” engendered by grammatical confusions and lies at the level of modes of expression<sup>11</sup> and of propositional contexts.

The field of aesthetics and of values or, more generally, of belief, brings together those semantic behaviours in which Wittgenstein holds that it is possible to achieve a form of extreme clarity/awareness, such as the objectivity of the observation of subjective aspects of language which are retrieved by linguistic analysis. Analogy plays an ambivalent role, as it is subject and a tool of analysis: it may be recognized as a source of grammatical obscurity, or, from a methodological perspective, it may become the means of clarification (as in the analogy of language as a game) for the discovery of as-yet unknown connections and, thus, of new differences. In a preliminary exploration of the occurrences of the term “analogy”, a distinction found in a passage from the *Blue Book* may act as a guide:

When we say that by our method we try to counteract the misleading effect of certain analogies, it is important that you should understand that the idea of an analogy being misleading is nothing sharply defined. No sharp boundary can be drawn round the cases in which we should say that a man was misled by an analogy. The use of expressions constructed on analogical patterns stresses analogies between cases often far apart. And by doing this these expressions may be extremely useful. It is, in most cases, impossible to show an exact point where an analogy begins to mislead us. Every particular notation stresses some particular point of view. If, e.g., we call our investigations “philosophy”, this title, on the one hand, seems appropriate, on the other hand it certainly has misled people. (BB p. 28)<sup>12</sup>

The use of analogically-constructed expressions corrects the misleading effect of forms of expression and improves that analytical practice which has direct consequences on the awareness of our language choices.<sup>13</sup> As

11 I discuss the question of the specific form of disagreement in the analysis of aesthetic judgments – in which Wittgenstein reclaims a strong sense of exactitude and criteria, as opposed to a concept of relative truth – in C. Rofena, *A regola d'arte: Wittgenstein e la grammatica dell'errore*, in L. Perissinotto (ed.), *Un filosofo senza trampoli. Saggi su Wittgenstein* (Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2010), pp. 95-119.

12 Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, ed. R. Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), abbreviated to BB.

13 The line of inquiry of this reading follows the perspective set out by Hilary Putnam in his discussion of the prominent characteristics of Jewish philosophy in relation to experience. “Words only have meaning in the stream of life”: this quotation from Wittgenstein’s *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* refers to the ethical meaning of the notion of “internal relations” as an inseparable relationship between concepts and actions, in the web of interpersonal, intersubjective human relationships.

Wittgenstein writes: “The cases in which particularly we wish to say that someone is misled by a form of expression are those in which we would say: ‘He wouldn’t talk as he does if he were aware of this difference in the grammar of such-and-such words, or if he were aware of this other possibility of expression’ and so on” (BB p. 28). This conclusion leads us to Austin’s criterion of “what we should say when”, yet for Wittgenstein the method of analysis must not “enumerate actual usages of words, but rather deliberately invent new ones, some of them because of their absurd appearance” (BB p. 28). It must show differences. The treatment, therefore, which could be defined as homeopathic, genetically reconstructs the origin of a conceptual confusion, paying attention to the form of expressions in relation to the rules of use. First of all we must ask ourselves how and when an analogy can cause confusion and what ethico-political consequences arise from this confusion. If we were aware of another possibility of expression, would we really be able to act differently? Or is the risk of remaining trapped in conventions and convictions stronger than any linguistic analysis and awareness?

In his notes to *The Big Typescript* Wittgenstein deals extensively with the question of false analogy<sup>14</sup> which conditions the use of language and its correct understanding: “Philosophy points out the misleading analogies in the use of our language” we read in § 87.<sup>15</sup> With a reference to Lichtenberg,

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The proof of the link between the orders of discourse which we choose to sustain and the effects which words have on our own and other people’s lives is perfectly exemplified in Franz Rosenzweig’s “new thinking” (as “speaking thinking”), alongside the analysis of the second Wittgenstein. The two images in question are of a radical ethico-political point of view towards which philosophical analysis must newly develop its purposes and energy. See H. Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein* (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 30-33.

- 14 The homologous and interrelated concepts of “false analogy” and “false thought”, contrasting with “*gewisse*” and “*richtige analogie*” (proper analysis), are found in *The Big Typescript*, as are the following formulations: “dealing with a false analogy”; “failure of an analogy”; “adopting a mode of speaking from an analogy”; “misleading formulations of a problem”.
- 15 Philosophy’s transition from logical form to the new “geography” of linguistic practices had already been outlined at the time of the drafting of *The Big Typescript* and, in my view, this shift must be traced to the idea of a “mythology” which has become crystallized in the language: “The mythology in the forms of our language ((Paul Ernst))”, one reads at the beginning of section 93. The name of Paul Ernst, cited in the *Preface* (1918) to the *Tractatus*, is linked to the idea of a semantic stratification of language which depends on the history of language usage. The error of philosophers, and the darkness of the resistances of the will, depend on a “mythology” of forms (not connected to conventions and independent of our will) in



the nature of grammatical problems refers to the weight of language habits and images crystallized in the language itself:<sup>16</sup>

You ask why grammatical problems are so tough and seemingly ineradicable. – Because they are connected with the oldest thought habits, i.e. with the oldest images that are engraved into our language itself ((Lichtenberg)) (BT § 90, p. 311e)

In this note one finds the first appearance of the theme of being prisoners of images, which subsequently is formulated explicitly in section 115 of the *Philosophical Investigations*: “A picture [*Bild*] held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (PI § 115). I would like to focus here on a specific aspect of this “imprisonment” which can be identified in *The Big Typescript*: the idea of a “mythology” of images that are stratified in the forms of language. “An entire mythology is laid down in our language”, one reads in *The Big Typescript* (BT § 93, p. 317e).<sup>17</sup> This form of darkness derives from the roots and the historical legacy of linguistic contexts: “the oldest images that are engraved into our language itself”.

Once more drawing attention to misleading analogies in the light of this additional meaning, we can see how language use demands that one work upon oneself, which presupposes a twofold exercise of clarity: (1) acknowledgment of images inherited in learning the language and in the conventions of forms of culture; (2) seeking ways to dissolve nonsenses and access the meaning in communicative practice. Yet how is this task expressed? The analysis of analogies leads to a form of grammatical investigation which must recognise misunderstandings “caused, amongst other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of our language”. These misunderstandings can be removed “by substituting one form of expression

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which we can remain trapped as a result of our conceptual system. We construct new images commencing from the customs that we are led to forget when we adopt the perspective of philosophical abstraction. Darkness thus has two poles of tension: on the one hand the shadow cast by our expectations and by theoretical choices, and on the other the shadow cast by a form of culture, the latter of which is the darkness and opacity that we cannot overlook without misunderstanding the function of language.

16 See BT § 91: “We don’t encounter philosophical problems at all in practical life (as we do, for example, those of natural sciences). We encounter them only when we are guided not by practical purposes in forming our sentences, but by certain analogies within language”, BT p. 314e.

17 The expression is a quotation taken from Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human II, The Wanderer and His Shadow*, § 11.



for another” (PI § 90).<sup>18</sup> “This may be called an ‘analysis’ of our forms of expression, for the process is sometimes like one of taking a thing apart” (PI § 90).

The difficulty lies in the capacity to perceive similarities and differences, noting the difference as one is able to see a new aspect (*das Bemerken eines Aspekts*): Wittgenstein, through the image of the drawing, discusses the question at the beginning of section xi in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is not a case of learning a technique, as in calculus, but rather of recognizing aspects to which one might be insensitive. Wittgenstein’s example is the one of learning “to get a ‘nose’ for something” (PI II, xi, p. 194e). The capacity in question is a subjective one which impacts the possibility of understanding the meaning. This “attention to attention”, one might say, plays a central role in observations on the philosophy of psychology and in correcting the idea of private language. In a note from 1948-1949 we read: “But visual *perception* is also dependent on the will, after all! If I look more closely then I see something different and I can produce the other visual impression at will. To be sure, this does not make the impression an aspect – but isn’t it, too, subject to my will?”<sup>19</sup> Neither is perception generated automatically by available evidence, but instead depends on the will and is conditioned by its resistances. This observation might be set alongside the Stoic notion of *kataleptic phantasia*. Based on the Stoic doctrine of assent it is possible to clarify the role of the will and its resistances in language. The Stoic doctrine distinguishes between involuntary representation and *kataleptic* representation or “apprehension”, “where assent is removed, so is understanding” (Sextus Empiricus, *Adversos Mathematicos*, VIII, 397-398).<sup>20</sup> The theme of the will in Wittgenstein – a Schopenhauerian legacy – is directly connected to the question of darkness and clarity. The will is not understood in its ordinary sense of the faculty of the motives and causes of action. In the *Tractatus*, for example, we do not find a guide of conduct; rather the will is conceived as the apex

18 A comparable process by substitution is also outlined in Wittgenstein’s remarks on *The Golden Bough* as a criterion for explaining custom and ritual as rules handed down as remnants of cultural heritage. We will see how this process of substitution solves the problem of the correct understanding of religious belief by shedding light on an ethical and political aspect of description, bound up with the aesthetic function of the ritual action.

19 Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology. Volume I. Preliminary Studies for Part II of “Philosophical Investigations”*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982) § 453, p. 61e (abbreviated LW).

20 See A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy, Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (London: Duckworth, 2001<sup>2</sup>), ch. IV, pp. 126ff.

of a vision that must approximate the best representation of the world: “then he will see the world aright [*dann sieht er die Welt richtig*]” (TLP 6.54).<sup>21</sup> The will is not thematized as the cause of action, the centre of motives and moral representations, according to the traditional philosophical conception, but rather as the capacity to see and as character: it influences the notion of “model”, insofar as it is a filter of a single perspective of the way of grasping and expressing the meaning. Here a specifically ethico-political distinction emerges which Wittgenstein very likely derives from John Henry Newman and his *Grammar of Assent*.<sup>22</sup> Newman distinguishes between “notional assent” and “real assent”, between abstract adherence to a statement, such as in the case of a mathematical proposition, and adherence to a statement that can transform our life by guiding our actions. Thus the expressive content of a statement, gesture or ritual reveals that attitude of the subject which is expressed through given semantic behaviour. The forms of discourse that we decide to sustain *show* our motivation. Within this framework of reference we must also read attention to misleading analogies. Here I wish to call attention to the shift from the question of meaning (*Bedeutung*) to the question of the “meaningful” (*Bedeutsam*). Annotating and commenting a passage from Tolstoy’s *What Is Art?*,<sup>23</sup> on the meaning of what is meaningful and on the difficulty of understanding it, Wittgenstein speaks of “the antithesis between understanding the subject and what most people want to see. Because of this the very things that are most obvious can become the most difficult to understand. What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will” (BT § 86 p. 300e). Identifying illusions of meaning, attention to the question of understanding as a “reaction” of the subject drilled in a specific semantic behaviour, cannot take on automatisms where there are no causal or dualistic relationships between language and the world, but relationships of expression and individual actions in relation to activities to be deciphered. This perspective explains why philosophical errors are qualified by Wittgenstein with terms such as “deceit”, “illusion”, “temptation” and “superstition”. At its center, philosophy does not deal with problems of correctness, coherence and the disciplining of language, but rather with clarity and perspicuity in the dif-

21 L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness (eds.), (London: Routledge, 2001), henceforth abbreviated to TLP.

22 J.H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1874).

23 “In order to define any human activity, it is necessary to understand its sense and importance”, see L.N. Tolstoy (1897), *What Is Art?* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1996), pp. 45-46.

ferent uses of language, understood as possibilities of action and ways of articulating reality.

The idea of “perspicuous representation”, which appears for the first time in a comment on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, belongs to the process of illumination that must pass through the stages of shadow of the will in order to achieve the clarity of grammar:<sup>24</sup>

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions.’ Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases*.

The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a “Weltanschauung?”) (PI § 122)

2.

The subjective dimension cannot be excluded from the method of analysis as it has semantic effects, just as we must not disregard the expression of a face. It is interesting to see how this attention is bound up with the theme which Wittgenstein introduced in the second part of his *Philosophical Investigations*: the “expert judgement”. In Kantian terms we can speak of a “capacity of judgement” (*Urteilkraft*) which must be improved, not of a technique in which one has been educated, as in “calculating-rules”:

Is there such a thing as ‘expert judgement’ about the genuineness of expression of feeling? – Even here, there are those whose judgement is ‘better’ and those whose judgement is ‘worse’.

Correcter prognoses will generally issue from the judgements of those with better knowledge of mankind.

Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through ‘experience’. – Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right tip. – this is what ‘learning’ and ‘teaching’ are like here. – What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not

24 See BT § 86: “Difficulties of philosophy not the intellectual difficulties of the sciences, but the difficulties of a change of attitude. Resistances of the will must be overcome”. “As is frequently the case with work in architecture, work on philosophy is actually closest to working on oneself. On one’s own understanding. On the way one sees things. (And on what one demands of them)”, BT p. 300e.

form a system, and only experienced people can apply them rightly. Unlike calculating-rules. (PI II, xi, p. 193)

Why does Wittgenstein insist on this difference? We do not learn a technique, but rather correct judgements and prognoses. We learn to judge better. There is no external, infallible method; rather there are transformations in our way of perceiving (*erkennen*) which one learns from experience. Behind this example lies a specific literary figure: Father Zossima in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, a major source for Wittgenstein. Indeed, Zossima embodies this "expert judgement", representing that peculiar form of understanding others, which is the result of the experience of listening to the most diverse confessions – a form of knowledge born of the guided understanding of correct analogies. Zossima is capable of gaining an understanding of people and what is troubling them from their facial expression:

It was said that so many people had for years past come to confess their sins to Father Zossima and to entreat him for words of advice and healing, that he had acquired the keenest intuition and could tell from an unknown face what a new-comer wanted, and what was the suffering on his conscience. He sometimes astounded and almost alarmed his visitors by his knowledge of their secrets before they had spoken a word.<sup>25</sup>

Analogies between tales and stories are clues to comparable resemblances, on the basis of which correct judgements can be formed, once our attention is prepared to recognise the difference, sharpening our capacity to grasp aspects. It is important to note that this example chosen by Wittgenstein, as an example of a perfect capacity to see, has a precise methodological function in semantic analysis: the illustration of situations of perfect attention – such as the clarity of Zossima's gaze – show, *a contrario*, those states of darkness that require attention to be exercised anew and a new analysis that is not only pragmatic but physiognomic.

Recalling the problem of ambiguity and uncertainty of motivation, in 1946 Wittgenstein refers to a religious perspective which dispels any doubt concerning the relationship between action and intention:

Understanding oneself properly is difficult, because an action to which one might be prompted by good, generous motives is something one may also be doing out of cowardice or indifference. Certainly, one may be acting in such

25 F. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by C. Garnett (London-Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952) Book I, ch. V, *Elders*, p. 26.

and such a way out of genuine love, but equally well out of deceitfulness, or a cold heart. Just as not all gentleness is a form of goodness. And only if I were able to submerge myself in religion could these doubts be stilled. Because only religion would have the power to destroy vanity and penetrate all the nooks and crannies. (CV p. 48e)

The many passages in which Wittgenstein reflects upon the difficulties in understanding the expression of a face, representing it in a portrait, imitating its smile, shifting the emphasis onto the semantic importance of those clues that make up so-called “imponderable evidence” (*unwägbar Evidenz*) on which, in communication between speakers, correct understanding may depend:<sup>26</sup>

Imponderable evidence includes subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone. [*Zur unwägbar Evidenz gehören die Feinheiten des Blicks, der Gebärde, des Tons*]

I may recognize a genuine loving look, distinguish it from a pretended one (and here there can, of course, be a ‘ponderable’ confirmation of my judgment). But I may be quite incapable of describing the difference. And this not because the languages I know have no words for it. For why not introduce new words? – If I were a very talented painter I might conceivably represent the genuine and the simulated glance in pictures.

Ask yourself: How does a man learn to get a ‘nose’ for something? And how can this nose be used? (PI II, xi, p. 194e)

Wittgenstein insists on the capacity to distinguish between genuine and simulated glances, which is confirmed by a biographical episode. During a walk in the Rosro area, in western Ireland, Wittgenstein, in Drury’s company, came across a young girl sitting in front of a cottage. Drury describes how Wittgenstein asked him to observe the expression on the girl’s face, considering his inattentiveness a grave oversight.<sup>27</sup>

In Wittgenstein’s comments on Frazer we find a similar attention which corresponds to an emphasis on the meaning of that element which eludes the “report”<sup>28</sup> – a history of actions – and which can instead be captured

26 This topic is linked to the problem of “meaning blindness”, regarding which the reader is referred to J. Schulte, *Experience and Expression. Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Psychology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 68ff.

27 See M. O’C. Drury, *Conversations with Wittgenstein*, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein. Personal Recollections*, R. Rhees (ed.), (Lanham-Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1981), p. 126.

28 “When I speak of the inner nature of the practice, I mean all circumstances under which it is carried out and which are not included in a report of such a

by describing the character of the people taking part in the ritual. This character is shown in their expressions, in their gestures, in all of those external details that are observable and recognisable and which belong to a language of gestures (*Gebärdensprache*).<sup>29</sup> Here I would suggest that this aspect represents an initial objection to the prejudice of a “private language” that is imponderable and impermeable to communication. While a biographical inaccessibility of the subject’s choices as moral agent is inevitable, rendering ingenuous the claim to be able to attribute a belief as the “motive” for an ancient ritual,<sup>30</sup> it is nonetheless possible to recognise linguistic and gestural forms, visible in the survivals and archaisms of our language. This attitude is opposed to the misunderstanding which arises when a religious action is reduced to a single meaning to the borderline case of being reduced to nonsense, as an extreme modality of disagreement or of the impossibility of translation between cultural forms:

If someone who believes in God looks round and asks “Where does everything I see come from?”, “Where does all this come from?”, he is *not* craving for a (causal) explanation; and his question gets its point from being the expression of a certain craving. He is, namely, expressing an attitude to all explanations. – But how is this manifested in his life? [...] Actually I should like to say that in this case too the *words* you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, so much as the difference they make at various points in your life. (CV p. 85e, 1950)

The capacity to identify the importance of the differences that words introduce into action is the correct way of analysing them; the way of establishing a non-relative meaning for them is to identify the expressive content that shows why we accept a specific form of description of reality,

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festival, since they consist not so much in specific actions which characterize the festival as in what one might call the spirit of the festival; such things as would be included in one’s description, for example, of the kind of people who take part in it, their behaviour at other times, that is, their character; the kind of games which they otherwise play. And one would then see that the sinister quality lies in the character of these people themselves”, RF p. 145.

29 In den alten Riten haben wir den Gebrauch einer äußerst ausgebildeten Gebärdensprache. Und wenn ich in Frazer lese, so möchte ich auf Schritt und Tritt sagen: Alle diese Prozesse, diese Wandlungen der Bedeutung, *haben wir noch in unserer Wortsprache vor uns*. Wenn das, was sich in der letzten Garbe verbirgt, der Kornwolf” genannt wird, aber auch diese Garbe selbst, und auch der Mann der sie bindet, so erkennen wir hierin einen uns wohlbekannten sprachlichen Vorgang. (RF p. 135)

30 “Everything is carried out *in language*”, BT § 81, p. 283e.

assigning a given value and choosing a mode of expression. This characteristic of linguistic analysis focuses on the context of expressions against the background of an ethical form: according to comparable criteria of appropriateness, we can always judge the reasons that support our convictions and beliefs, without our judgement becoming fossilized in a disagreement that fixes the error of nonsense or confirms empty forms of repetition of social and cultural conventions, as coherence in relation to institutional rules. In a note from 1937 we find the connection between appropriate form of expression and sense, validity and effectiveness of words, and understanding:

In religion every level of devoutness must have its appropriate form of expression which has no sense at a lower level. [*In der Religion müßte es so sein, daß jeder Stufe der Religiosität eine Art des Ausdrucks entspräche, die auf einer niedrigeren Stufe keinen Sinn hat*]. This doctrine, which means something at a higher level, is null and void for someone who is still at the lower level; he *can* only understand it *wrongly* and so these words are not valid for such a person. (CV p. 32e)

As we know from his *Lecture on Ethics*, Wittgenstein insists on the importance of *attitude*: an ethical action is not recognized from its object, but from the specific quality of its consequences. An ethical concept is not grasped in the same way as an object placed in front of us is grasped. Just as there is a way of seeing the world *sub specie aeterni*, so a fact becomes *sub specie morale* on the basis of the attitude held towards it and which is expressed in the specific quality of the choice of linguistic expressions. We are before a resumption of the importance of subjectivity and the propositional contexts excluded from the *Tractatus*, an opening up to the value of choice and of decision in linguistic understanding. Ethics is rediscovered in the *letter* of forms, understood as that subjective, individual element to which Wittgenstein would dedicate renewed attention in his observations on the philosophy of psychology. Thus Wittgenstein writes: “For how does the complaint ‘I’m in pain’ differ from the mere announcement? By its intent, of course. And possibly that will also come out in the tone” (LW § 37, p. 6e). Wittgenstein extends the bounds of semantics beyond the pragmatic notion of use (*Gebrauch*) to recapture the subjective, individual aspects in semantics. The distinction between appropriate and misleading analogies dissolves the statute relating to the truth of assertions, as the degree of adequacy can always be measured once the most suitable criterion or model within the communicative context has been chosen. In this perspective we can interpret Wittgenstein’s interest in the circumstances that generate ethical and religious expressions in the rituals



described in *The Golden Bough*. His remarks on the correct understanding of ritual help us to understand how we can make out luminous traces of the *perspicuous representation* (*übersichtliche Darstellung*) in the glance which cuts through the darkness of the ethical and religious symbols of rituals.

As Wittgenstein reads Frazer, the features of a new “purely descriptive” strategy take shape, with fruitful consequences for his considerations on the philosophy of psychology and criticism of the idea of private language, which will lead to a new clarification of the uses of psychological concepts.<sup>31</sup> This new descriptive method is distinguished from the “mere scientific description” which at the time of the *Lecture on Ethics* was already no longer applicable as an explanation of ethical and religious expressions. At the same time the features of an alternative physiognomy to the “objective” ethics of value are outlined, an “ethics of linguistic forms” which elsewhere I have suggested be called morphological ethics<sup>32</sup> and which requires a form of “thick description”, to use Gilbert Ryle’s notion as re-prise from Clifford Geertz. This description, as Wittgenstein’s remarks on *The Golden Bough* show, must create a connection with our thoughts and feelings: it uses ethical and psychological instruments in semantic analysis.

This description is morphological and physiognomic; it reinstates the importance of observation of concrete cases, reclaiming the signs of expression – gesture, tone of voice, glance – which provide accessible, public proof of the intention that governs a type of behaviour. Wittgenstein reincorporates into semantics those not strictly linguistic features that are bound up with the context of the circumstances of life: a physiognomy of the life of forms. A regime of inaccessible, private language is no longer recognized. Establishing a relation between analysis of the expression of the face and expression of ritual thus enables us to better articulate this conception in terms of its explicitly ethical and political root.

This interest in the anthropological aspects of aesthetic and religious experience, such as the rediscovery of the role of the face in dialogue or the value of the anthropological limit in the conditions of the utterance, combines semantics and pragmatics: showing the relationship between clarification of misleading analogies and the difficulty of describing ritual allows

31 “No psychological process can symbolize better than signs on paper. [...] Here we are being misled by a false analogy with a mechanism that uses a different mean, and can therefore explain a particular movement. As when we say: This movement can’t be explained by the meshing of cog wheels alone”, BT § 64, p. 221e.

32 See C. Rofena, *Wittgenstein e l’errore di Frazer. Etica morfologica ed estetica antropologica* (Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2011).



us to reformulate the idea of “forms of life” in the light of the conceptual extension of the idea of “forms of life” as “life of forms”.<sup>33</sup> The chiasmus of the *Lebensformen–Formensleben* heuristic inversion draws attention to the ethico-political consequences of conceptual confusions, avoiding attributing to the “form of life” the epistemological status of a structure of rules which underpin language beyond incidental language use, in which we must always reckon with obstacles to understanding and clarity which are not the result of the violation of grammatical rules. The expression “life of forms” allows us to refer on the one hand to contexts, to practices actually put into play, by evaluating obstacles to the correct observation of concrete situations while, on the other, focusing attention on the vitality of uses of linguistic forms that shows the role of decision in linguistic expression, the vitality of the choice between equally possible and therefore more or less effective and coherent alternatives.<sup>34</sup>

The connection between ethical and logical thought for Wittgenstein is expressed by means of the accent placed on the resistances of the will as impediments to correcting one’s point of view:

The change is as decisive as, for example, that from the alchemical to the chemical way of thinking. The new way of thinking is what is so hard to establish. Once the new way of thinking has been established, the old problems vanish; indeed they become hard to recapture. For they go with our way of expressing ourselves and, if we clothe ourselves in a new form of expression, the old problems are discarded along with the old garment. (CV p. 48e, 1946)

The liberation from darkness cast by images and by the individual resistances of the will is tightly bound up with the question of freedom; with that form of freedom which is an experience of the sense that the truth has for us, insofar as it is the result of clarity in relation to oneself and

33 The heuristic concept of “life of forms” does not exclude meanings derived from the code of art, of religion and of the language of metaphysics. It includes all of those different, manifold activities that characterise the language of the ordinary and of everyday life in its broadest sense which has been brought to light by the philosophical analyses of Stanley Cavell and Gordon Baker. For a detailed discussion of the distinction between the idea of “live and dead signs” see J. Schulte, “*The life of the sign*”. *Wittgenstein on reading a poem*, in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, editors J. Gibson-W. Huemer (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 146-164.

34 Take, for example, Wittgenstein’s reference to the “choice of words” and to how important it is to find the right word – “*das ertlönde worte*” – a quality which concerns the philosophical method directly, when Wittgenstein concludes that in philosophy only one should only versify “*dichten*”. See CV p. 24e (1933-34).

to others, against unconscious illusions of sense. As truth reacquires its ethical nature, so error becomes a matter of inner clarity, of conscious self-representation in relation to one's own descriptive models and images that have become crystallized in the language. The question of freedom, in the two lectures of 1939 transcribed by Yorick Smythies and collected under the title *The Freedom of the Will*,<sup>35</sup> is introduced in terms of the influence of image-analogies "given a certain attitude". The initial statement of intent assigns a precise task to philosophy:

I want to impress on you that given a certain attitude, you may be, for reasons unknown, compelled to look at it in a certain way. A certain image can force itself upon you. Imagine, for instance, that you are not free; or that you are compelled. *Must* you look at looking for something in this way? No. But it is one of the most important facts of human life that such impressions sometimes force themselves on you. (LFW p. 435)

Freeing the use of concepts from the pressure of images that have become crystallized in language habits is an aspect of searching that characterizes the whole of Wittgenstein's thought, as Gordon Baker's most recent work illustrates;<sup>36</sup> it is present in his remarks on Frazer, which reveal that difference in the method which sees "language games" not as determinate constraints on meaning – founded naturalistically in a *Lebensform* – but as models for comparison which show the revocability of forms of expression and therefore the possibility of a use which is not compromised by confusions and illusory limits.<sup>37</sup>

The tool of philosophical analysis comes to resemble a spectrograph that measures degrees of light and darkness. From an ethico-political perspec-

35 *Lectures on Freedom of the Will. Notes by Yorick Smythies in Philosophical Occasions*, J. C. Klagge - A. Nordmann (eds.), translated by J. Beversluis (Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), pp. 427-444 (henceforth abbreviated to LFW).

36 G. Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method. Neglected Aspects* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); G. Baker, *Wittgenstein on Metaphysical/Everyday Use*, in "The Philosophical Quarterly", n. 52, 2002, pp. 289-302; see also the critical response of H. Putnam, *Metaphysical/Everyday Use: A Note on a Late Paper by Gordon Baker*, in G. Kahane - E. Kanterian - O. Kuusela, *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters. Essays in Memory of Gordon Baker* (London-New York: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 169-173.

37 The problem of the limit of action must be recognized by distinguishing at least two aspects: the limit set by the conditions of a form of life or the limit that is determined by ourselves. By taking on Stanley Cavell's perspective we will insist upon the capacity to be the subjects of our own actions precisely through the recognition of the limit.

tive we must understand whether the effects of “*Erläuterungen*” may correspond to situations of better understanding in linguistic practice, conditions which reduce disagreement and incomprehension between speakers. Incomprehension is not the result of a natural ambiguity in ordinary language, rendered obscure by innate imprecisions which must be corrected by the *calculus universalis* of ideography. Rather, it is a defect in the attitude that allows itself to be misled by a false analogy and inappropriately extends an image, as if there were one single model which restricts use, making a *Bild* of a *Vorstellung*. In grammar there is no direct or indirect knowledge that can constitute the term of comparison and verification of our concepts (BT, p. 135e). Only in formalized languages do logical form and grammatical form correspond to each other, and Frege’s principle of compositionality holds. The later Wittgenstein shifts the focus to the level of use, where secondary meanings count (*Wandlungen der Bedeutung*):<sup>38</sup> figurative uses, tone and “colouring”, using the distinction introduced by Frege in *Sense and Reference*.

## 3.

In a note dated 1931 and subsequently included in *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein writes: “I ought to be no more than a mirror, in which my reader can see his own thinking with all its deformities so that, helped in this way, he can put it right” (CV p. 18e). Here we see Lichtenberg’s motto which Wittgenstein also finds as the epigraph to the third part of Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Crumbs*: “Such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out” (*Solche Werke sind Spiegel: wenn ein Affe hinein gukt, kan kein Apostel heraus sehen*).<sup>39</sup> “Deformity” is a type of darkness that can be ascribed to an apparent analogy, to an “internal relation” of which one is unaware or to a mythology of forms.<sup>40</sup>

38 “And when I read Frazer I continually would like to say: We still have all these processes, these changes of meaning [*Wandlungen der Bedeutung*], before us in our verbal language. When what hides in the last sheaf of corn is called the ‘Corn-wolf’, but also this sheaf itself as well as the man that binds it, we recognize herein a familiar linguistic occurrence”, RF, p. 135.

39 G.C. Lichtenberg, *Über Physiognomik, wider die Physiognomen*, (Göttingen: Johann Christian Dieterich, 1778), p. 59.

40 PI § 132: “To this end we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook. This may make it look as if we saw it as our task to reform language.”

“An entire mythology is laid down in our language” (*In unserer Sprache ist eine ganze Mythologie niedergelegt*), we read in § 93 of *The Big Typescript*: this mythology cannot be eradicated from the language of any *Begriffsschrift*; it is “before” us as the language of rituals is “before” us; this is why “we must plough through the whole of language” (*Wir müssen die Ganze Sprache durchpflügen*, BT § 92), bringing to light once again a history of uses. Darkness is an attention deficit on the part of the speaker who allows her/himself to be led by an analogy or who inappropriately (dogmatically) extends an image to other contexts. In this regard, in the section entitled *Methode der Philosophie* in *The Big Typescript* the idea of the surface available to “sight”, yet still dark, confused, and difficult to bring into focus, appears. We must pay attention to what eludes us *because* it is constantly before our eyes. A stratified grammar in our language, like the ruins of an ancient city, resurfaces amid the recent buildings in the new spaces inhabited by logic and by the sciences; grammar is the trace of a history which language has built over time by extending the domains of art, ethics, and religion. It constitutes the nature of the uses in practices, “implicit in practices”,<sup>41</sup> to use Robert Brandom’s terms. The expression “life of forms” again shows the opacity of linguistic contexts: analysis does not seek the explanation of the meaning in the order of practices which have fossilized into rules that are given once and for all or conventionally imposed. The virtue of the new method of the *Philosophical Investigations* is inventing analogies, artfully created in order to demonstrate alternative possibilities, simplified or primitive language games: “It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words” (PI § 5).

Darkness and clarity alternate in the variety and vitality of analogies, in a life of signs that can also generate “the irritating nature of grammatical darkness” (BT p. 11). In section 90 of *The Big Typescript*, entitled *Philosophie. Die Klärung des Sprachgebrauches. Fallen der Sprache*, Wittgenstein insists on the voluntary nature of the renunciation of darkness in terms of a kind of extrication (*Herausreissen*):

But of course this language developed as it did because human beings had – and have – the tendency to think in this way [*weil Menschen die Neigung hatten und haben – so zu denken*]. Therefore extricating [*Herausreissen*] them only with those who live in an instinctive state of dissatisfaction with language

41 R. Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge-Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 23.

[*Umbefriedigung mit*] (in an instinctive state of rebellion against language [*in einer instinktiven Auflehnung gegen*]). Not with those who, following all of their instincts, live within the very herd that has created this language as its proper expression [*Nicht bei denen, die ihrem ganzen Instinkt nach in der Herde leben, die diese Sprache als ihren eigentliche Ausdruck geschaffen hat*]. (BT § 90)

The problem of the instinctive rebellion calls into question the capacity of the language speaker to break free from the darkness of linguistic and conceptual habit by her/his own efforts. It is a necessary but difficult extrication. It is thus that our way of seeing –, i. e., the form through which we filter experience and the model that we apply – regains an importance and a role in philosophical analysis. The conditions of the subject must be analysed and clarified. It is a reversal of the motto of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “de nobis ipsis silemus”.

## 4.

Section 90 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, with regard to the misunderstandings caused by misleading analogies concerning forms of expression, contains a summary of this method “by substitution”: misunderstandings can be removed “by substituting one form of expression for another” (PI § 90).<sup>42</sup> In the remarks on *The Golden Bough* the correct description uses the technique of poetic substitution, placing a metaphor “side by side” with the fact to be interpreted. Wittgenstein invites us to adopt the literary perspective of the narrator who operates through a metaphorical description; in Frazer’s rituals the form of the custom or usage is clarified through the most appropriate (proper) analogy:

If a narrator places the priest-king of Nemi and “the majesty of death” side by side, he realizes that they are the same. The life of the priest-king shows what is meant by that phrase [*“Wenn man mit jener Erzählungen vom Priesterkönig von Nemi das Wort ‘die Majestät des Todes’ zusammenstellt, so sieht man, daß die beiden Eins sind. Das Leben des Priesterkönig stellt das dar, was mit jene Wort, gemeint ist*]. (RF p. 123)

42 A comparable process by substitution is outlined in the remarks on *The Golden Bough* as a criterion for the explanation of custom and of ritual. We will see how this process of substitution solves the problem of the correct understanding of religious belief by shedding light on an ethical and aesthetic aspect of the description.

“The life of the priest-king shows what is meant by that phrase (*Das Leben des Priesterkönig stellt das dar, was mit jene Wort gemeint ist*)”.<sup>43</sup> In this context, the specific meaning of the verb *darstellen*, considered together with the locution “*zum Ausdruck bringen*” (“to bring to expression”), which supplements its meaning, shifts the “centre of gravity” of the observation from the event to the participant in the ritual: “the one who is struck” by the majesty of death is now at the centre of philosophical attention. “Character” has theoretical precedence, and thus an “explanation” based on the empirical causality of facts, as in the supposition that magic controls nature, is a reductionist explanation of the “this-is-nothing-other-than” type. *He who* brings to expression “*durch so ein Leben*”, through a particular stream of life, is by contrast the Archimedian point of the explanation. In the *Last Writings* Wittgenstein speaks of “pathological” or expressive information, with regard to attachment to words or one’s own name.<sup>44</sup> In the remarks on Frazer the subjective character takes the name of “tendency” (*Neigung*), and indicates an “irreducible singularity” as well as a universally human element. Of this “I” we can begin to speak in psychological and anthropological terms,<sup>45</sup> against the interdiction of the *Tractatus*. The description that Wittgenstein now proposes is not only mor-

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- 43 “Someone who is affected by the majesty of death can give expression to this through such a life. – This, of course, is also no explanation, but merely substitutes one symbol for another. Or: one ceremony for another [*Wer von der Majestät des Todes ergriffen ist kann dies durch so ein Leben zum Ausdruck bringen. – Dies ist natürlich auch keine Erklärung, sondern setzt nur ein Symbol für ein anderes. Oder: eine Zeremonie für eine andere*]”. RF p. 123.
- 44 “‘Schubert’ – It’s as if the name were an adjective. Neither can one say: ‘Look at the things that ‘fit’. For example, the name fits the bearer. An addition, after all, would be an extension; and an extension is just what is *not* found here. For one doesn’t say that something is a ‘fit’, if *actually* it is not fit at all. As if one were merely expanding the concept. Rather we are dealing here more or less with an *illusion* (*Täuschung*), a mirage (*Spiegelung*). We think we see something that isn’t there. But this is true *only more or less*. We know very well that the name ‘Schubert’ does not stand in a relationship of fitting to its bearer and to Schubert’s works; and yet we are under a compulsion to express ourselves in this way”, LW § 69, p. 11e; “In the sense in which we are using it, the sentence ‘The name... fits ...’ doesn’t tell us anything about the name or its bearer. It is a pathological statement about the speaker. – One doesn’t teach a child that this name fits the bearer”. LW § 73, p. 12e.
- 45 See *Tractatus* 5.641: “Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way. What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that ‘the world is my world’. The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world – not a part of it”.

phological but also analogical. The rule of succession of the priest of Nemi is interpreted as a symbol and knowledge of death is described by means of a poetic expression: the majesty of death, “*die Majestät des Todes*”. The association has a literary form and observes the figurative mode of construction of a poem: rather than use an explanation of a historico-genetic or psychological nature, Wittgenstein restores the symbolic value of the ineluctable facts of our experience by connecting them to the aesthetic value of descriptions of art, as ways of giving meaning to the facts of existence. The most important part of the description therefore consists in the continuity of the connection that can be established between symbolic forms, once their meaning within a culture has been understood. Through the analogy of similarities reconstructed on the basis of knowledge of people and their history, and in the darkness of the expression of cultural forms we recognise how deeply the stratification of layers of thoughts and feelings run. We recognise a “past” through what we know, writes Wittgenstein. The life of linguistic forms is “before us” and is learnt in an “experience with people” (RF p. 149), as in Zossima’s capacity for judgement. Darkness, therefore, as the depth and stratification of the history of culture:

Can’t I be horrified by the thought that the cake with the knobs has at one time served to select by lot the sacrificial victim? Doesn’t the *thought* have something terrible about this? – Yes, but what I see in those stories is nevertheless acquired through the evidence, including such evidence as does not appear to be directly connected with them, – through the thoughts of man and his past, through all the strange things I see, and have seen and heard about, in myself and others” (*durch den Gedanken an den Menschen und seine Vergangenheit, durch all das Seltsame, das ich in mir un in den Andern sehe, gesehen und gehört habe*) (RF p. 151).

The sense of custom cannot be reduced to the error of “nonsense” as if in the evolutionary framework of the ideology of *The Golden Bough*: “No opinion serves as the foundation for a religious symbol. And only an opinion can involve an error” (RF p. 123); “I believe that the characteristic feature of primitive man is that he does not act from opinions (contrary to Frazer)” (RF p. 137).<sup>46</sup> Wittgenstein proposes a different description in which the role of the will is central (a “do-as-if” belonging specifically to the ritual).<sup>47</sup> In the case of understanding the contexts of religion, ethics and

46 “An error arises only when magic is interpreted scientifically”, RF p. 125.

47 I discuss the subject of ritual pretence at greater length in my article *Per un metodo compositivo: Wittgenstein e l’immaginazione poetica*, “Il Pensiero” XLVII – 2008/2, pp. 81-102.



art symbols become alive and vital, as in the case of the performative truth of the pretences and of the “do-as-if” (*tun als ob*) of ritual. In the notion of “king-priest” Wittgenstein reads a “do-as-if” rather than the description of a “see-how” of the interpretation. The perspective of interpretation opened by Wittgenstein, as Frank Cioffi claims,<sup>48</sup> does not limit itself to specifying a way of interpreting cultures different from our own, but is a new way of looking at our conceptual practices, “an attempt at self-clarification”. Thus self-clarification comes about in the acknowledgment of the expressive character that belongs to aesthetic and ethical judgements as it does to the performative contexts of religion.<sup>49</sup> Ethico-political agreements take precedence over epistemic disagreements.

## 5.

The reference to *Lebensformen* does not concern the theoretical foundation, the “hard rock” against which the spade of linguistic analysis bends, finding the legitimacy of and justification for specific natural or artificial linguistic forms.<sup>50</sup> Rather, it constitutes the methodological reference to the context of action and to the making explicit of the ways in which concepts are chosen; this focus on the rules of linguistic action acknowledges a certain desire to “bring to expression” and “give shape to” experience according to forms which are individual and collective values at the same time,

48 In correcting the interpretation offered by Rush Rhees, Frank Cioffi insists on the fact that Wittgenstein’s remarks on Frazer have no hermeneutic value if applied to anthropology, showing the ingenuity of Wittgenstein’s interpretation controverted by a much more sophisticated anthropological practice. The remarks contain neither a coherent theory of magic nor a contribution to the anthropology of religion or an understanding of primitive practices and “should not be read for the light they shed on ritual practices”. See F. Cioffi, *Wittgenstein on Making Homeopathic Magic Clear* in R. Gaita (ed.), *Value and Understanding* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990), p. 69.

49 F. Cioffi, *Op. cit.*, p. 198: “This suggests to me that the kind of remark which Wittgenstein thinks aesthetic puzzlement calls for is one of which, though it may seem to be describing or explaining a certain past state of mind, is really prolonging an experience in a particular direction”.

50 “Grammatical rules are not those (it goes without saying: empirical) rules in accordance with which language has to be construed to fulfil its purpose. In order to have a particular effect. Rather they are the description of *how* language does it – whatever it does. That is, grammar doesn’t describe the way language takes effect but only the game of language, the linguistic actions”. See addition to section 44 of *The Big Typescript* (BT p. 145e).



within a form of life. Thus this important shift from the nature of concepts to the political effects of conceptions must be noted.<sup>51</sup> As Wittgenstein noted in 1946: “Concepts *may* alleviate mischief or they may make it worse; foster it or check it” (CV p. 55e).

In a note written in 1929 Wittgenstein speculates about the primitive form of “language play” as a reaction; an origin out of which more complex forms of language grow, understood in the sense of refinement of action; quoting Goethe he writes: “Language – I want to say – is a refinement. ‘In the beginning was the deed’ ” (CV p. 31e, 1937). The term “life of forms” underscores precisely this aspect and allows us to clarify a concept drawn from the interpretation of Frazer’s rituals: the notion of “addition of temperament” (*Temperamentszusatz*). Wittgenstein introduces the term in order to correct the explanation of the Beltane ritual. We must ask ourselves together with Wittgenstein: what is missing from a search for the resemblances between rituals and between their historical survivals? What is missing is that part of observation that connects facts with our thoughts and feelings. This attitude runs counter to the estrangement of subjective and qualitative observation data required by the scientific perspective. When he comments on the rituals described by Frazer, Wittgenstein sees “a multiplicity of faces with common features which continually emerges here and there. And one would like to draw lines connecting these common ingredients. But the one part of our account would still be missing, namely, that which brings this picture into connection with our own feelings and thoughts. This part gives the account its depth” (RF p. 143). The strategy in question is the opposite of the estranging perspective of science which, by suspending the subjective qualities of experience, favours a causal type of explanation: in Frazer’s case a utilitarian one. In contrast, the proximity of a cultural legacy can and must be acknowledged wherever its origin is more obscure and where a reaction in the observer emerges: “Indeed, if Frazer’s explanations did not in the final analysis appeal to a tendency in ourselves, they would not really be explanations.” (RF p. 127). Thus Wittgenstein corrects the analogy of the explanation: “as it has come down to us, the Beltane Festival is indeed a play, and is similar to children playing robbers. But surely not.” (RF p. 149). The analogy is discounted because the resemblance does not yield the uncanny feeling produced by the custom. The comparison with play does not capture the reality of the effect

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51 The relation between concept and conceptions is noticed and discussed at length in G. Baker’s essay *Wittgenstein: Concept or Conceptions?*, “The Harvard Review of Philosophy”, IX, 2001, pp. 7-23.

engendered in us and which is encapsulated in the form of the festival, without the need to unearth any empirical causality that might lie behind it. It is not any particular meaning arising from an interpretation but simply the way in which that form presents itself to us which provokes our reaction, as we are ready to welcome it with an “addition of temperament” (RF p. 149). If a similar story were to be staged at the theatre, the same sensation would not be preserved intact, as “what takes place still has an addition of temperament which the mere dramatic presentation does not have” (*was geschieht, noch immer einen Temperamentszusatz, den die bloße schauer-spielerische Darstellung nicht hat*) (RF p. 149 – MS 143).

It is the historical nature of the custom that needs to be recognized and reconstructed: the fact that that custom belonged to a past form of life, and that it is preserved in the memory of a tradition, must guide the explanation as if the custom belonged to a personal experience of ours. The disquieting effect consists in the possibility that the behaviour symbolized in the ritual might come back to life, as happens in the cultural inheritance. Wittgenstein is referring to an addition of “temperament” which we must take to understand the quality of intense emotional participation in and “vividness” of the ritual. I would suggest translating the German term “*Temperament*” with a synonym taken from the musical context of agogics: “*Lebhaft*” (indicating the manner of expression), in this case a particular emphasis and power, dictated by the connection which is established with the historical and cultural custom. This is the nature of our reaction when confronted by Frazer’s narrations. Interpreting primitive rituals according to the category of the uncanny is a reference to a well-known, familiar element, since it is found within a culture<sup>52</sup> that must be recognized rather than excluded by means of an evolutionistic explanation.

Wittgenstein counters Frazer’s evolutionary hypothesis of progress from religion to the science of Ethnology with a genealogical enquiry which allows a sort of philosophical acknowledgement (of one’s own philosophical forefathers) by reconstructing contexts of belonging and not limits of disagreement and nonsense. Thus there is nothing which is hidden, but rather a story that can be told and brought to the surface of the life of forms and newly-recognisable contexts. The darkness of cultural forms reacquires the character of the familiarity of belonging.

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52 Here the accent is on the nature of the subjective reaction, analysed by Freud in his essay *Das Unheimliche*, of the disquieting experience as a return of the familiar “heimliche”.

6.

The aporetic nature of Wittgenstein's thinking consists in its attention to the obstacle, to the conceptual limit that can generate philosophical aporia. The darkness of expressive forms and human behaviour has several levels or different degrees of a "life of forms" which embraces the possibility of habits of experience which do not belong to the subject, which are not her/his "own": the importance of the relational context of linguistic practices identifies the analysis as a philosophy of the interlocutor which draws attention to modes of expression in relation to the effectiveness of communicative situations. In a passage from the diaries known as *Denkbewegungen*<sup>53</sup> we find a note which links the ethical perspective to political will and which confirms Wittgenstein's concern with the ethico-political effects of recognising misleading analogies. On 6th May 1931 Wittgenstein wrote:

In life too, as in philosophy, apparent analogies (*scheinbare Analogien*) mislead us (with regard to what the other does or can do). And here too there is only one way to counter this seduction: to listen to the silent voices (*die leisen Stimmen*) which tell us that things here are not as they are there.<sup>54</sup>

The pages of the diary written from 1930 to 1932 have a significant philosophical quality from our perspective. In them Wittgenstein records observations on the sense of justice and on consideration for others, on self-awareness and on learning a culture. As a common thread, the question of ethics returns insofar as it constitutes rigorous self-observation:<sup>55</sup> a theme which Wittgenstein inherits from the concept of *Selbstbeobachtung* in Schopenhauer. We can deduce a question from these notes: when are our

53 The *Tagebücher 1930-1932/1936-1937* contain Wittgenstein's notes from 26<sup>th</sup> April 1930 to 28<sup>th</sup> January 1932, and a number of annotations made in Skjolden from 19<sup>th</sup> November 1936 to 30<sup>th</sup> April 1937, some parts of which are in code. See *Denkbewegungen* (Innsbruck: Haymon-Verlag, 1997).

54 "Wie in der Philosophie verleiten uns auch in Leben "scheinbare Analogien" (zu dem was der Andere tut oder tun darf). Und auch hier, gibt es nur ein Mittel gegen diese Verführung: auf die leisen Stimmen horchen die uns sagen, das es sich hier doch nicht so verhält wie dort". See *Denkbewegungen*, p. 48.

55 In order to underscore the importance of the origin of the will in terms of "conscience", the following line from Petrarch might be cited: "Fia ogni coscienza, o chiara o fosca / dinanzi a tutto il mondo aperta e nuda", *I trionfi, Rime stravaganti, Codice degli abbozzi*, V. Pacca and L. Paolino (eds.) (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), p. 532. See S. Cavell, *Cities of Words. Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*, (Cambridge-Mass: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2004) p. 4.

expressions truly our own? One answer might be: when they are not lifeless forms, fossilized in language removed from every use, and when we do not get caught up in the misleading analogies of an idealized language. It is always possible to distinguish appropriate, proper expressions that fit with the degree of expression and understanding of the images of the discourse. Images are then no longer obstacles but elements of a perspicuous vision or useful analogies; no longer errors but potentially different, alternative uses to be gauged and evaluated. Therefore we can refer to and summarize the meanings of the term “darkness” from a twofold perspective: the ethical perspective of the will, involved in different situations of practice, and the epistemological perspective of the different models through which we choose to describe and articulate our experience.

It is helpful, in this regard, to trace a line of continuity between Wittgenstein’s “untimely” judgement on his own age – “in the darkness of this time” (*in der Finsternis dieser Zeit*)<sup>56</sup> – and that work upon oneself which he identified as the most appropriate task for philosophical analysis. His view of contemporaneity indeed is the counterpart of philosophy’s focus on examining the role and responsibility of the subject in knowledge. Wittgenstein’s aporetic relationship with his own period becomes a way of putting the solidity of consolidated habits of thought to the test. It is in this context that his critique of metaphysics and examination of an image of science that can mask the state of health of our age are born: “Our civilization is characterized by the word ‘progress’. Progress in its form rather than making progress being one of its features.” (CV p. 7e, *Sketch for a Foreword*, 1930). Behind the expression “*in der Finsternis dieser Zeit*” we can read Lichtenberg’s exhortation contained in the motto “Never live in your time!”. Analysis of the subject, the need to overcome her/his weaknesses, sustains the critique of one’s own time.

It is worth insisting – as interpreters of the so-called *New Wittgenstein* have done – on the philosophical importance which the transformation of the reader has, taking literally his observations on the “form of life” as “problem of life” (TLP 6.521a). What is at stake, in fact, is the awareness

56 See G. von Wright, *Wittgenstein in Relation to His Times*, in B. F. McGuinness (ed.), *Wittgenstein and His Times* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982); S. Cavell, *The Investigations as a Depiction of Our Times*, in *Declining Decline. Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture, This Yet Unapproachable America: Lecture after Emerson After Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989) pp. 52 ff.; J. Bouveresse, “*The Darkness of This Time*”: *Wittgenstein and the Modern World*, in *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, A. Phillips Griffiths (ed.), suppl. “Philosophy”, Royal Institute of Philosophy, 1991, pp. 11-40.

(authenticity?) of the subject who must take all of the necessary steps in order to free her/himself of the “empty forms” of conceptual confusions and resistances of the will. Practices of freedom are expressed in the fact that one must be able to abandon an expression as meaningless, when the shell of its form is not sustained by the fullness of what has meaning for us, of what cannot be given up as it is important and meaningful (*bedeutsam*).

Wittgenstein was able to find an example in Lecture VIII of James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, “The divided self, and the process of its unification” where one finds the tale of a “counter-conversion” taken from Tolstoy's *Confession*. It is the tale of a man who stops praying in the face of his brother's astonished, incredulous question: “Do you still continue to do this?” Tolstoy comments: “This was because his brother's words had done nothing but show him that the place in which he supposed his religion dwelled had long been empty, and that the sentences that he uttered, the signs of the cross and bows that he made while praying *were actions bereft of an inner sense*. Once he had understood their absurdity, he could not keep them up a moment longer”.<sup>57</sup> It is this “inner sense” that expresses the meaning of the vitality of the forms of expression that we make our own, while we construct possible orders of discourse which articulate or transform our life. A “doing-as-if” has revealed itself to be devoid of the sense that seemed to justify it. The capacity of judgement exercised upon one's own expressions has turned a way of seeing and acting upside down.

Tolstoy's tale shows us how a misleading analogy, an empty form, was recognized and abandoned. We can always fall into the darkness of what is familiar and close at hand: forms of expression, like our actions, can be emptied of their content, and be left devoid of life, empty schemes which we apply with no connection to our own thoughts and feelings, just as the form of our civilization may give the illusion of progress, without possessing the property of making progress. With regard to language acts we must be able to maintain that “complete clarity” to which Wittgenstein refers throughout the entire course of his philosophical experience and which is exemplified by the capacity to observe the countenance of others, paying attention to the expression on their face. Images can become a prison of prejudices, confusions and errors which condition our language behaviour, obscuring the understanding of others. As Wittgenstein writes: “What is

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57 W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in *The Works of William James: Essays in Psychology*, F.H. Burkhardt, F. Bowers, I. K. Skrupskelis (eds.), volume 13 (Cambridge-Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 148.

important about depicting anomalies precisely? If you cannot do it, that shows you do not know your way around the concepts” (CV p. 72e, 1948).

Emerging from this darkness is not possible by means of a method which is external to our thinking: nobody can exercise this clarity of thought in our place. Lifeless forms – which have no connection with our own thoughts and feelings and which seem to act independently of us – are the subject of a philosophical analysis which is sustained by a profound ethical and political motivation.

MARCO BASTIANELLI

## WITTGENSTEIN AND THE MYTHOLOGY IN THE FORMS OF LANGUAGE<sup>1</sup>

A picture that is firmly rooted in us may indeed be compared to superstition, but it may be said too that we always have to reach some sort of firm ground, be it a picture, or not, so that a picture at the root of all our thinking is to be respected and not treated as a superstition.

MS 138, 32b: 20.5.1949 (CV, p. 95)

### 1. *Philosophy, picture and/or mythology.*

In the above quotation a tension emerges, which runs through Wittgenstein's whole work: in the one hand, the pictures (*Bilder*) deriving from the forms of language are the source of the philosophical confusions; on the other hand, there is in these pictures something deep, in so far as the practice of language takes place on the background of them, so that they cannot be simply treated as superstitions.

Nonetheless, the idea that philosophical activity aims at cleansing our reason from a mythology inherent in the forms of language has become a kind of distinctive character of all Wittgenstein's thought. After all, this conviction is supported by well known passages, where Wittgenstein states that "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (*PI* §109), or that "in philosophy one is in constant danger of producing a myth of symbolism, or a myth of mental processes"

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1 What I try to argue in this paper is the result of a research that has been published in my (Bastianelli 2010). I would like to thank Juliet Floyd, who was the first, in a seminar on the inexpressible in Wittgenstein, who made me aware of the importance of the references to Paul Ernst in Wittgenstein; I would also express my gratitude to the *Paul Ernst Gesellschaft*, in particular to Horst Thomé, Hildegard Blanke and Ralf Gnosa, for their precious scientific and human support. Last, but not least, a special thank to Luigi Perissinotto, who gave me the opportunity to discuss some aspects of these investigations in a beautiful symposium in Venice.

(Z, §211). The same idea is expressed, in an attractive fairy-tale language, on July the 3<sup>rd</sup> 1931: “Compare the solution of philosophical problems with the fairy tale gift that seems magical in the enchanted castle and if it is looked at in daylight is nothing but an ordinary bit of iron (or something of the sort)” (*MS* 153a, 35v; *CV*, p. 13). At last, in the §93 of the *Big Typescript*, commenting on Frazer, he connects myths with the pictures which causes philosophical mistakes: “The scapegoat, on whom one lays one’s sin, and who runs out into the desert with it – a false picture [*ein falsches Bild*], similar to those that cause errors in philosophy”.

This kind of claims, diffused more or less in all Wittgenstein’s work but particularly after the 1930s, has given credit to the idea of a negative, if not skeptical or pessimistic thought.

Jacques Bouveresse, for example, who has been among the firsts to investigate the relation between language and myth in Wittgenstein, argues that, according to the Austrian philosopher, philosophy is a

purely negative enterprise: it results in a kind of a permanent struggle, with no certain victory, against the dangerous fascination exerted by a certain number of magic words, of ritual formulas, of accounts and theories, which are based on the mere eagerness for a multitude to accept and defend them, in brief against a whole erudite mythology which is characteristic of our rationalist societies. (Bouveresse 1973, p. 7)

Bouveresse is nevertheless well aware that Wittgenstein was sensitive with the same vigor “to the science as far as it creates a mythology and to mythology as far as it pretends to be a science” (Bouveresse 1973: p. 232). Therefore, he concludes, “philosophy is for Wittgenstein an anti-mythology; but it does not at all mean that it is a scientific critique to mythology” (Bouveresse 1973: p. 221). If philosophy cleanses reason from myths, but without being a de-mythization, what then does its positive achievement, if there is any, amount to?

The link between philosophy and mythology, as I said, emerges explicitly in Wittgenstein’s works after the 1930s, and in particular during his reading of the first volume of Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. The English anthropologist represents to Wittgenstein an example of an attempt at giving a scientific explanation of myths. Therefore, he considers him a typical representative of contemporary culture, in so far as he tends to explain ritual and mythical expressions through the scientific picture of the world, making them appear “as mistakes” (*GB*, p. 119). A myth, on the contrary, for a people is not a mere description of facts, but arises from deep needs of human soul and, in this sense, “no *opinion* serves as the foundation” (*GB*,



p. 123) for it, because what we have here is *not* an error, since “an error arises only when magic is interpreted scientifically” (*GB*, p. 125).

From his reflections on myths Wittgenstein seems to get the fundamental teaching that language should be considered in relation to the concrete forms of life, because the symbolic expression is more akin to a rite (i.e. to the sympathetic participation in an experience), than to a system of descriptions or a theory. Language can also be conceived of as a repository of a comprehensive world-picture (*Weltbild*), which is a background or a condition for the very elaboration of opinions and theories. As a matter of fact, in the same period Wittgenstein states that “our language is an embodiment of ancient myths. And the ritual of the ancient myths was a language” (*MS* 110, 256; 2.7.1931).<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, the *perspicuous* view of language involved in Wittgenstein’s ethnologic method<sup>3</sup> does not amount to a relativistic presentation of common circumstances; it is rather a way of seeing deep analogies and differences, where one is misguided by resemblances on the surface.

What I have been saying seems to reveal an ambiguity in Wittgenstein’s attitude towards myths: on the one hand, he thinks that there is an unavoidable tendency of human mind to elaborate a “mythology of symbolism”; on the other hand, he becomes aware of the deep link between language and world. As Wittgenstein writes in the remarks on Frazer, in fact, “magic is always based on the idea of symbolism and language” (*GB*, p. 125), because it involves an exercise of imagination, which is not merely the elaboration of “a painted portrait or plastic model”, but is like “a complicated pattern made up of heterogeneous elements: words and pictures” (*GB*, p. 131). For this reason, myth has a character of depth and, in order to understand it, “we must plow through the whole of language” (*GB*, p. 131).

This ambiguity, after all, emerges clearly in the following remarks, which unfortunately were not included in the typescript of the remarks on Frazer: “I now believe that it would be right to begin my books with remarks about metaphysics as a kind of magic [...]. The depth of magic should be preserved. [...] For, back then, when I began talking about the

2 This remark is in the manuscript, but it was not included in the typescript (see Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein on Language and Ritual*, in *Wittgenstein and His Times*, ed. by B.F. McGuinness, Blackwell, Oxford 1982, p. 69).

3 At this proposal, on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1940, Wittgenstein asks: “If we use the ethnological approach does that mean we are saying philosophy is ethnology?”. And the answer is: “No it only means we are taking up our position far outside, in order to see the things *more objectively*” (*MS* 162b 67r; *CV*, p. 45).

‘world’ (and not about this tree or table), what else did I want but to keep something higher spellbound in my words?” (*GB*, 117-118).

The reference is to a series of well known statements on *seeing* and *way of seeing* the world and the language, which one can find in all Wittgenstein’s work – both before and after the 1930s –, and which involve the difficult theme of nonsense.

In the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, for instance, the Mystical is the *view of the world as a “limited whole”* (*TLP*, 6.45), and the logic itself, in order to be understood, requires the experience *that something is*: this is however not properly an experience, because it does not concern how the world is, but the fact *that it is* (*TLP*, 5.552). And the outcome of the book itself is described as climbing up a ladder, at the top of which one “will see the world aright” (*TLP*, 6.54). If the *Tractatus* is a work of philosophy, or at least an example of philosophical activity, then its aim is also to let the reader achieve a *picture* or a *right way of seeing* the world.

In the *Lecture on Ethics*, that is one of the fundamental writings of the transition period, the being given of the world to the “experience” is an example of the ethical experience *par excellence*: “I believe the best way of describing it is to say that when I have it *I wonder at the existence of the world*. And I am then inclined to use such phrases as ‘how extraordinary that anything should exist’ or ‘how extraordinary that the world should exist’” (*LE*, p. 8). This way of speaking is nonetheless improper, because, “if I say ‘I wonder at the existence of the world’ I am misusing language” (*LE*, p. 8), because “it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing” (*LE*, p. 9).

The same point can be found in the conversations with the members of the Vienna Circle recorded by Waismann. On 17<sup>th</sup> December 1930, Wittgenstein revealingly admits: “The facts of the matter are of no importance for me. But what men mean when they say “*the world is there*” is something I have at heart” (*WVC*, p. 118).

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, moreover, the notion of *picture* is used in the more precise sense of way of seeing *language* and, as such, it concerns the perspective of the *Tractatus* itself. This one, writes namely Wittgenstein, was based on a certain “picture (*Bild*)” of language, that “held us captive”, and out of which “we could not get outside”, because “it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (*PI* §115). But also in this case the picture concerns the world, because, according to the language games view, language must be investigated in the light of the notion of *forms of life*. As Wittgenstein writes in §241, men “agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in

form of life” (*PI* §241). *Plowing through the whole of language*, therefore, at a certain point must have an end, because “I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do’” (*PI* §217).

What Wittgenstein seems also to suggest is that the philosophical problems don’t arise from reality, but from the *way of seeing* it, from the picture in which we consider it. In this sense, Wittgenstein writes in the *Big Typescript*, philosophical activity does not provide a new *explanation* of facts, but it aims at changing the way of seeing them; that is why, “work on philosophy is actually closer to working on oneself. On one’s own understanding. *On the way one sees things*. (And on what one demands of them)” (*BT*, 86.3; my emphasis).

The centrality of the theme of picture is eventually explicitly asserted in *On Certainty*, in the light of the more comprehensive notion of *Weltbild*, world-picture. This means the picture of the world, understood as “the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false” (*OC*, §94). And, with clear allusion to the whole development of his thought, Wittgenstein concludes: “The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology” (*OC*, §95).

Now, if we would not take into account these particular uses of the word *picture*, we would be lead to think that, according to Wittgenstein, the philosophical problems arise from the misunderstanding of language and, *at the same time*, that the philosophical activity aims at removing this misunderstanding through an investigation of the language itself. It would then seem that philosophy were, at the same time, the patient and the therapy, the judge and the defendant; but this conclusion would give rise to a not unimportant question: if philosophy, as patient or defendant, is seduced or bewitched by language, how is it possible that, as therapy or judge, it is not subjected to the same risk?

Behind this question, in my opinion, there is a kind of transcendental dialectic, unavoidable in so far as it depends on the forms of language but revealing a deep tension; on this dialectic one should reflect, in order to avoid the risk of a sterile self-reference of language to itself or, which is worst, of an aporetic outcome due to the too small limits of nonsense.

Moving from these considerations, I will try to develop the idea that philosophical activity, in making the source of philosophical confusions and the conditions of possibility of language clear, must be already placed, in a certain way, *beyond* the language. This *being placed beyond*, however, does not imply that philosophy trespasses a limit which is drawn once and for all, but that it concerns the perspicuous view of our usual *pictures* of

the world and the language. And I think that, in order to achieve this perspicuous view, the philosophical activity itself must be practiced against the background of a picture of the world, which is more comprehensive of the one subjected to investigation. The problem of nonsense, under this point of view, seems to arise – at least in part – because one cannot speak of a more comprehensive picture in the light of a less comprehensive one.

But it is not merely a question of pictures and meta-pictures, because this would lead us to an unfruitful infinite regress. Here one is faced with the problem of *nonsense*, and in order to understand it properly, one must take into account that, according to Wittgenstein, there is an original “experience” of the world, that is given to us as a whole, as it emerges from the above mentioned passages. As he writes in the *Tractatus*, however, it is not the world that is given to the knowing subject, but to the subject of the will (*TLP*, 5.631). And since he thinks that “the will seems always to have to relate to an idea”, then it is “an attitude of the subject to the world” and the “the subject is the willing subject” (*NB*, 4.11.16). In this sense, the assertion “the world is there” must not be understood as an empirical statement, but as concerning the question of the *sense* of the world as a whole (*NB*, 11.6.16). That “the world is *given* me”, means indeed that “my will enters into the world completely from outside as into something that is already there” (*NB*, 8.7.16); and this *being given of the world* gives rise to a problem, because “the world is independent of my will” (*TLP*, 6.373) and, “even if all that we wish for were to happen, still this would only be a favour granted by the fate, so to speak: for there is no *logical* connexion between the will and the world, which would guarantee it” (*TLP*, 6.374).

It is therefore in this wider sense of the term *picture*, i.e. as a picture of the world (*Weltbild*), that, in my opinion, the investigation on the ambivalence of the analogy between philosophy and mythology should be intended. The underestimation of this ambivalence has been the mistake of interpretations that *certainly* have considered Wittgenstein one of the most influential philosophers of the XXth Century, *but* mostly because of a series of antimetaphysical prohibitions than for effective positive contributions.

In what follows I will try to examine the positive aspects of the analogy between philosophy and mythology, focusing in particular on the notions of picture and world-picture. To this purpose it is to notice that, if talking about myths in Wittgenstein the reference to Frazer is familiar and amply investigated, nonetheless he represents only a negative pole, namely the example of a wrong attitude towards myths; but it is less known that in Wittgenstein’s works one can find also a positive pole, which can be ex-

amined in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the above sketched ambivalence of the relation between philosophy and mythology. I am talking of the German writer and philosopher Paul Ernst, whose name occurs perhaps surprisingly, but often in relation to Frazer. With regard to this, it is important to notice that the above mentioned §93 of the *Big Typescript* (written on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1932) – in which Wittgenstein discusses some consequences of Frazer’s attitude – has the title “The Mythology in the Forms of our Language. (Paul Ernst)”. The fact that Ernst’s name appears in the title seems to me very significant, and it deserves attentive consideration. As I will try to show, Wittgenstein shares with Ernst a certain spiritual kinship and could have influenced him even beyond the quoted references.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. *Wittgenstein and Paul Ernst.*

Interestingly, Ernst’s name appears already in a remark written some months before – 8<sup>th</sup> November 1930 –, in which Wittgenstein writes: “One could say that philosophy cleanses thought of a misleading mythology. (Paul Ernst)”. Here too the reference to Ernst appears in parenthesis, but this time Wittgenstein is more precise, because he provides the indication of the “*Vorwort* [sic] *zu den Grimmschen Märchen*” (MS 109, 211). The remind is indeed, as we shall see, to the *Nachwort*, the afterword that Ernst wrote in 1910 for his edition of the Grimm’s *Märchen* (Ernst 1910: vol. 3, pp. 271-314).

Now, in order to understand the reason of this reference, it is to remember that, in this period, Wittgenstein takes the source of philosophical problems to be not in the misunderstanding of the logic of language (as in the *Tractatus*), but in the grammar, namely in the very form of certain words, that misguides our intellect and seduces us by a sort of magic influence. In this sense Wittgenstein writes: “As long as there is still a verb ‘to be’ that looks as though it functions in the same way as “to eat” and ‘to drink’, as long as we still have the adjectives ‘identical’, ‘true’, ‘false’, ‘possible’, as long as we continue to talk of a river of time & an expanse of space, etc., etc., people will keep stumbling over the same cryptic difficulties and staring at something that no explanation seems capable of clearing up” (MS 111, 133: 24.8.1931; *CV*, p. 22).<sup>5</sup>

4 For a more detailed discussion of this subject and the relevant bibliography, see (Bastianelli, 2010).

5 This idea is well expressed in the *Blue Book*: “The questions ‘What is length?’, ‘What is meaning?’, ‘What is the number one?’ etc., produce in us a mental

Now then, this is the very idea that we find in §93 of the *Big Typescript*: “The primitive forms of our language – noun, adjective and verb – show the simple picture to whose form language tries to reduce everything”. Hence, the philosophical problems, in this analogy with myths, are originated by a kind of magical power exerted by certain forms of language on us. This is the first way, essentially negative, in which Wittgenstein understands the relation between philosophy and mythology: philosophy cleanses thought from the confusions originated by language.

In this sense, if the reference to Ernst in §93 appears only in the title, it is instead explicit in a remark dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 1936, in which Wittgenstein applies the same idea to a particular case:

When we say ‘According to the *sense* of the order, after ‘90’ one ought to write ‘91’’: here one thinks of the sense as a shadow which hurries ahead, and which, in a shadowy way [*in schattenhafter Weise*], performs all the transitions in advance. – But if the transitions were performed in shadowy way, that shadow would now mediate between the shadowy transitions and the real ones? If the mere words of the order could not perform the transitions in advance, then no mental act accompanying those words could make it either. In philosophy there are everywhere such shadowy structures [*Gebilde*]. The idea of them is forced upon us as an elucidation of a misunderstood (or not understood) grammatical form. (They are products of a not understood logic of language [*Sie sind die Erzeugnisse einer unverständenen Sprachlogik*] (Paul Ernst)). The sense of the proposition appears to us as shadow of its performance, the sense of the rule as shadow of the relevant action, the power as shadow of the doing, the possibility as shadow of the reality (*MS 115, 260*).<sup>6</sup>

It is very elucidating to notice that, in the quoted passages, Ernst’s name appears both in relation to the mythology and to the misunderstanding of the logic of language. In this last regard, it must be added that the reference to Ernst are not limited to the 1930s. In a quite surprising way, in fact, his name and the indication of the *Nachwort* appear also in relation to the

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cramp. We feel that we can’t point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (*We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it.*)” (*BIB*, p. 1; my emphasis).

- 6 My translation. See also *BrB*, p. 35: “There are several origins to this idea of a shadow. One of them is this: we say ‘Surely two sentences of different languages can have the same sense’; and we argue, ‘therefore the sense is not the same as the sentence’, and ask the question ‘What is the sense?’ *And we make of ‘it’ a shadowy being, one of the many which we create when we wish to give meaning to substantives to which no material objects correspond*” (my emphasis).

*Tractatus*. In a remark dated 20<sup>th</sup> June 1931, referring to a book he wanted to publish, Wittgenstein states: “If my book is ever published, tribute must be paid in the preface to Paul Ernst’s preface [sic] to Grimm’s Fairy Tales, which I already should have mentioned in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* as the source of the expression ‘misunderstanding of the logic of our language’”.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of this passage is clear, since it connects the theme of the “mythology in the forms of language” to Wittgenstein’s best known thesis, namely that the way in which philosophical problems are posed (their *Fragestellung*) depends on a “misunderstanding of the logic of language” (*TLP*, Pref.); and this makes us suppose, that the two notions are linked by the same line of thought).

Of course, it could be objected that it is a declaration written many years after the publication of the *Tractatus* and that, therefore, its importance should not be exaggerated. Nonetheless, the reference should not appear extrinsic, because there are good reasons to think that Wittgenstein knew at least Ernst’s *Nachwort* already at the time of the *Tractatus*.

In this work, in fact, there is an unexpected mention of the Grimm’s fairy-tales. Wittgenstein uses it in order to clarify the relation of isomorphism between language and world, the well known idea that a proposition can be a picture of a fact because they share the same logical form. In this sense, he makes some musical examples (“A gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound-waves”), he adds that in the isomorphism it is “like the two youths in the fairy-tale, their two horses, and their lilies” (*TLP*, 4.014).

Well, the allusion is to the fairy-tale *Die Goldkinder*, which is published as number 85 in the first volume of the edition by Paul Ernst; as a matter of fact, according to the reconstruction provided by Brian McGuinness, Wittgenstein could know Ernst’s edition already when he was in Cambridge, because “Russell’s library has a copy of the relevant edition of the tales, probably one of Wittgenstein’s pre-First War books, which Russell bought” (McGuinness 1988: p. 252, fn. 49).

But there are also other reasons to think that Wittgenstein knew Ernst’s *Work* already at the time of the *Tractatus*. When in 1916 he enjoyed as volunteer the First World War, he went to Olmütz, in Moravia, where he got acquainted with Paul Engelmann. Through Engelmann he entered a group

7 “Wenn mein Buch je veröffentlicht wird, so muß in seiner Vorrede der Vorrede Paul Ernsts zu den Grimmschen Märchen gedacht werden, die ich schon in der *Logisch-Philosophischen Abhandlung* als Quelle des Ausdrucks „Mißverstehen der Sprachlogik“ hätte erwähnen müssen” (*MS* 110, 184: 20.6.1931).



of young intellectuals “all aspiring to devote themselves to the arts or to the things of the mind” (McGuinness 1988: p. 248). To the group belonged also Max Zweig, who at that time, according to Engelmann’s memories, “came under the influence of the eminent critic and philosopher Paul Ernst and his theory of the strict art forms of the drama and the *Novelle*, a theory that firmly pointed the way in a time of chaos” (Engelmann 1967: p. 65). And McGuinness confirms that Zweig “was a great admirer and follower of Paul Ernst” and that “Groag recalled his being much talked about at Olmütz” (McGuinness 1988: p. 252, n. 9).

Thus, McGuinness concludes, “it seems likely that it was during this time that Wittgenstein read or reflected on the *Nachwort* to the Grimm’s fairy tales by Paul Ernst, which influenced him so powerfully with his account of how language misleads us [...]” (McGuinness 1988: p. 251). Ernst was therefore a frequent argument of discussion in Olmütz, together with Tolstoy and Dostoevskij, of whom Wittgenstein used to recall the passages “that came closest to his ideal of religion” (McGuinness 1988: p. 249).

Lastly there is even someone who supposes that Wittgenstein could have read Ernst’s *Nachwort* in 1904, when it was published in “Die Zeit”, a newspaper regularly bought by his family (Hübscher 1985: p. 136). I cannot ascertain this supposition, but the question is in my opinion not decisive, since there is, as we have seen, more interesting evidence. What is to be made clear, rather, is in which sense Wittgenstein refers to Ernst’s *Nachwort* also in relation to the misunderstanding of the logic of language.

### 3. Wittgenstein, Ernst and the misunderstanding of the logic of language

It is preliminarily to remark that, though Wittgenstein recalls the *Nachwort* as the source of the expression “misunderstanding of the logic of our language”, in Ernst’s text this expression does not occur. What he means is quite surely the result of a combination of two phrases, that the German poet uses in order to clarify the origin of myths: he states that this origins can be found, among other reasons, in the “interpretation of a misunderstood tendency of language [*aus der Deutung einer missverstandenen Tendenz der Sprache*]” (Ernst 1910: p. 273) or “when later ages no longer understood the logic of the language of the past [*indem eine spätere Zeit die Sprachlogik der Vergangenheit nicht mehr verstand*]” (Ernst 1910: p. 308).



In fact, according to Ernst, the origin of the fairy tales, of the sagas and of the stories of all the peoples must be found “in the general laws of logic and of association of ideas” (Ernst 1910: p. 272). This logic, he argues, depends on the fact that man, differently than animals, does not merely and only live in the natural world, but, already in the ancient times, “creates his own world”. This human world, however, appears to be “fully in contrast with the external experience”. Nevertheless man “doesn’t bend and say ‘So is the experience’, but he commands ‘So must be the experience’; and just because he ran into all sorts of chaos, into senseless and insoluble, he developed more and more” (Ernst 1910: p. 275). Thus, in attempting at giving a sense to the experience, man builds always new pictures of the world and expresses them through language, so that “the picture is brought to speech and the word is used at its place”.<sup>8</sup> For the old myths, Ernst concludes, “not the observation is decisive [...] but the logical derivation from word and concept” (Ernst 1910: p. 274).

Understanding a picture is nevertheless possible only because “it must have been perceived by everybody on the basis of the ordinary experience” (Ernst 1910: p. 274). Therefore, when the circumstances of life change, other men no longer understand the pictures and the language of the previous generations. Ernst summarizes the whole process as follows:

A problem, that with the actual experience is unsolvable, can be solved through the invention of a rationalizing story. As time goes by, in these stories new insolvable problems appear and a new invention comes closer to reality; in the next epoch the critique of reality becomes once again stronger and a new rationalization comes, unless the whole story is abandoned as meaningless or absurd (Ernst 1910: p. 308).

What must have struck Wittgenstein, in my opinion, is the idea that the misunderstanding of language has to do with a “process of rationalization”, by means of which a people can give sense to reality and understand the stories of its ancestors or of other men. But this process occurs when there is a break in the experience, namely when something in the original link between man and world seems no longer to work.

In fact, analogous ideas can be found in Wittgenstein’s remarks on Frazer, that were written at a time when Wittgenstein was undoubtedly re-reading or at least just thinking back to Ernst. The Viennese philosopher thinks that myths arise from the link to language and life and, in this sense, on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1931, commenting on an example by Frazer, he writes that the

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8 Ivi, p. 299.

reason why certain human communities put the oak into their stories “was not a trivial reason, for really there can have been no *reason*”, but simply “the fact that they and the oak were united in a community of life” (*GB*, p. 139). Myths and rites, however, don’t arise properly from this union, but when it is broken, for some particular reason or event. So, Wittgenstein argues, “one could say that it was not their union (the oak and the man) that has given rise to these rites, but in a certain sense their separation. For the awakening of the intellect occurs with a separation from the original *soil*, the original basis of life” (*GB*, p. 139). Therefore, he concludes, “the characteristic feature of the awakening mind of man is precisely the fact that a phenomenon comes to have meaning for him” (*GB*, p. 129).

As a consequence, as he writes in the same period, in order to understand myths, one doesn’t need a scientific explanation, because “in order to marvel human beings – and perhaps peoples – have to wake up”, while “science is a way of sending them off to sleep again” (*MS* 109, 200: 5.11.1930; *CV*, p. 7). Science, in fact, gives us the illusion that everything is explainable and that the world is governed by fully knowable and predictable laws, while on the contrary no scientific knowledge will protect men against the fear of natural events; hence, Wittgenstein concludes, “the *spirit* in which science is carried on nowadays is not compatible with fear of this kind” (*MS* 109, 200: 5.11.1930; *CV*, p. 7). After all, exemplifies Wittgenstein, “how could fire or the similarity of fire to the sun have failed to make an impression on the awakening mind of man? But perhaps not ‘because he can’t explain it’ (the foolish superstition of our time) – for will an ‘explanation’ make it less impressive?” (*GB*, 129).

To be true, according to Ernst there is a certain analogy between the rationalizing activity of science and that of myths, because in both cases “for a given fact one looks for an explanation, a theory”. The difference, by the way, lies in the different role of the imagination, because “today the first thought of the listener is whether the story can be true, who tells it and which is his purpose – in brief, today the critique is immediately woken up, without the innocence of ancient times” (Ernst 1910: pp. 301-302).

We are here spontaneously reminded to Wittgenstein’s remarks in the *Tractatus*, in which he confronts the modern and the ancient conceptions of the world: “The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanation of natural phenomena” (*TLP* 6.371); for this reason “people today stop at laws of nature, treating them as something inviolable, just as God and Fate were treated in past ages. And in fact both are right and both wrong: though the view of the ancients is clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged

terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained" (TLP 6.372), converting thus science into a sort of bad mythology.

As we have seen in §93 of the *Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein mentions Ernst in relation to the illusions arising from certain forms of our language. But this theme is not explicitly treated in the *Nachwort*, even if Ernst deals with it in many passages in other works. The problem of language occupies a central place in all Ernst's work and, as in the case of Wittgenstein, also for him the possibility of misunderstanding depends on the very functioning of language. This point is made by Ernst in several works, but it is very clearly expressed in the paper *Der Fetischcharakter des Wortes* (1930), where he declares that our thought tends to attribute to the words a "character of fetish". And this tendency emerges particularly clear in the case of substantives, because, after having denoted an internal experience through a name, one is led to think, by the very grammatical form of the substantive, that it denotes always a real entity, an object (Ernst 1930).

An example of this process can be found in a paper of some years before, *Eine Wortgeschichte* (1924), where Ernst traces the history of the word "conscience". On his opinion, "when something – internal or external – for some reason becomes important to man, then he builds a word in order to express it" (Ernst 1924: p. 399); but the word is only a linguistic form of internal processes and such a reduction, therefore, involves that "we have to think with language", breaking also the continuous flux of phenomena (Ernst 1924: p. 400). In fact, he concludes, when something internal is referred to with a word, then "this word becomes for us its form" and, at this point, "the spontaneity and vitality of the first thought linked to the sentiment are lost, because a grammatical thought (*ein grammatikalischer Gedanke*) has taken their place".<sup>9</sup> Thus, as it happens in the case of the word "conscience", "a thing is foisted; and one can see that one day thinkers could come and say 'There is no such thing'. And it does not exist. One has followed a general direction of language (*man ist einer allgemeinen Richtung der Sprache gefolgt*)" (Ernst 1924: p. 401).

For that reason, as Ernst argues some time before, since men cannot think but according to the laws of language, they are "locked up (*eingesperrt*) within the limits of their reason", because "they can think only in accordance with the forms of reason: they must think things, things which are causally linked to one another in space and time".<sup>10</sup>

9 Ivi, p. 419.

10 P. Ernst, *Von Gott*, in Id., *Grundlagen der neuen Gesellschaft*, cit., p. 14.

I have no elements to establish if Wittgenstein knew other works by Ernst besides the *Nachwort*, even if, considered the circulation of his works in German culture after the 1920s, this cannot be excluded.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, even if we consider only the *Nachwort*, we can discover a certain number of affinities, which justify the idea that Ernst had a deep and enduring impact on Wittgenstein, at least from Olmütz to the 1930s.

McGuinness, in particular, believes that Wittgenstein has taken from Ernst the idea that philosophical problems arise from a misunderstanding of the logic of language, “graphic modes of expression and metaphors being taken literally” (McGuinness 1988: pp. 251-252). I think that this conclusion solves only a part of the question, because, as Juliet Floyd points out, the analogy cannot be limited to this. In fact, “a closer look at Ernst’s *Nachwort* suggests a view of the evolution of language more complicated than one that can be understood through the distinction between literal and nonliteral (poetic or metaphorical) language, the critique of myth by reality, or reality by myth, alone” (Floyd 2007: pp. 188-189).

Floyd correctly points out that Wittgenstein does not write that the misunderstanding of the logic of language is the origin of the philosophical problems, but of their *Fragestellung*, namely of the way they are formulated. Therefore, according to her, “Ernst’s idea seems to have been that there are specific forms of language belonging to different eras, hence a variety of *Fragestellungen*, and therefore a variety of different misunderstandings of *Sprachlogik*”. In this way, she concludes, on Ernst’ view, “intellectual, poetic, and spiritual progress [...] require us to get past the need to critique our means of expression when they do not stand up to a comparison with reality and to appreciate how modern science itself (Ernst mentions Darwin’s theory of evolution) may play a mythological role as well” (Floyd 2007: p. 189).

Hacker and Baker extend the discussion to all Wittgenstein’s thought and, more precisely, they think that especially three ideas in Ernst’s *Nachwort* could have influenced Wittgenstein: firstly, the conviction that “myths,

11 At this regard, I would like to notice, that the name of Ernst occurs also in a remark written by Wittgenstein on 1<sup>st</sup> January and repeated on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1931: “That one person disdains the other, even if unconsciously (Paul Ernst) means: it can be made clear to the one who disdains by presenting him with a particular situation which never occurred in reality (and probably never will occur) and he must admit that he would then act like this and that – and through this express his disdain” (MT, p. 91). Even if I cannot establish to which of Ernst’s works this quotation refers, I take it however as an important remark, because one cannot find such an idea in the *Nachwort*. Therefore, it is plausible that Wittgenstein knew also other works of the German writer.

folk-tales and fairy-tales are a repository of mankind's moral beliefs", because "they express a world-picture and a fundamental belief in a moral world-order", through the poetic imagination; secondly, the idea that, given the analogical character of mythical tales, one needs to distinguish "the nature of understanding myth from scientific or historical explanation"; thirdly, the belief "that now that science (and cognition) is no longer one with religion and poetry, the creative myth-making powers of mankind are split up", but that in spite of this "science itself creates for itself a great mythology" (Baker, Hacker 2005: pp. 314-315).

As a consequence, it seems to me that between Wittgenstein and Ernst one can find more analogies and affinities than what the mere negative reference to the logical or grammatical misunderstandings suggests. Limiting the investigation to this negative pole, in fact, one could at best make clear what myths for Wittgenstein *are not*; in order to try to understand the positive aspects of the analogy between philosophy and mythology, one should rather deepen Hacker and Baker's suggestions. And at this proposal it is to me important to continue the reading of the *Nachwort*; for in this way emerges clearly that the source of myths and fairy-tales does not rest on a primitive attempt at providing a scientific explanation of facts, but on an original need of a moral world-order. As I will try to show in the next sections, this is the positive pole of the analogy between philosophy and mythology, in so far as philosophical activity concerns the picture of the world as a whole (*Weltbild*).

#### 4. *Wittgenstein and Ernst: tragedy, religion and the sense of the world.*

According to Ernst, myths do not arise from the mere need for a people to explain events that seem to them unintelligible but that, on further development, can be explained through scientific inquiry; this is a second order need: what characterizes them deeply is their being "expression" and "means of formation [*Bildungsmittel*]" of a people, since they "contain our ethics" and "show what is common to all mankind, both in ethics and imagination" (Ernst 1910: p. 271). In other words, "the purpose of art is not the representation of what surrounds men – this is only its means –, but what men desire", namely "the moral world order" (Ernst 1910: p. 311). Myths, therefore, are built in order to satisfy a deep moral need, so that their elaboration follows not only a "logical form" but a "moral form" or, better, "an unshakable belief in a moral world order" (Ernst 1910: p. 311). The moral picture of the world, however, is "a struggle and a process

through sensory means”, because the moral ideal constantly collides with the reality of the world.

Because of this deep link between mythic picture of the world and the moral sense, Ernst concludes, for the ancient peoples “poetry, science and religion were one” (Ernst 1910: p. 310), while today they are “separated” (Ernst 1910: p. 296). Nevertheless, even today there are poets, who are able to create new mythical subjects. Tolstoy and Dostoevskij, for example, wrote new stories, where the struggle between the moral ideal and the reality is newly represented: “Tolstoy is a creative spirit who creates a new world according to his ideal, an ethical ideal. As soon as the ethical ideal collides with reality, then it appears always as foolishness” (Ernst 1910: p. 312). And, in the same way, “Dostoyevsky’s Raskolnikov is a new subject, that was created by a poet, in order to represent the struggle of human pride against the divine laws” (Ernst 1910: p. 314).

Now, there is little doubt that, reading these pages, Wittgenstein could have found himself in full consonance with Ernst. As I have recalled, it seems quite certain that in Olmütz he had the opportunity to discuss Ernst’s ideas; at this regard there is a very interesting document, which can confirm it. On the basis of such evidence, one can reasonably believe that Ernst was the object of Wittgenstein’s discussions not only in relation to the problem of the “misunderstanding of the logic of language”, but also as to ethical and religious matters.

The document I am talking about is a letter from the 1920s by Wittgenstein’s sister Hermine. She writes that the moral dimension of existence can be characterized by a “feeling for good” and a “non-feeling for God”. According to her, even Tolstoy, before the conversion, “was at this level, he was just a very decent man”; but religion is an even higher level, in which there are “the feeling for God and the contact with the heavenly powers, which are one and the same”. Referring then evidently to a previous declaration of her brother, she adds: “You were right that this contact is essential, because the negation and abandonment of earthly things, which I take for the essential, are only the consequence of this contact or of the longing for it. And in the very moment when man can talk of God within himself, then he can testify to us this contact, and he distinguishes himself from other men”. And this, Hermine continues, is exactly what happened to Tolstoy who, in the moment of conversion, felt the “breaking out of the joint forces of desire and dissatisfaction, and he felt God”.

But what is particularly interesting in our context is the conclusion, because it shows that Paul Ernst was discussed also in relation to ethical and religious themes: “Certainly in our time religion, ethics and science could

not be one, since religion was for it completely out of interest (not simply separated, as Ernst thinks)". The reference here is clearly to the already mentioned passages of the *Nachwort*.

But this idea was already expressed by Ernst in an important work of 1898, in which he criticizes the realistic and positivistic philosophy that lies at the basis of the German naturalistic movement, which he joined in his youth. According to him, the forms of art inspired by the positivistic sociology and science cannot be really effective, since they base themselves only on reason; but "the realm of pure reason is but a very little part of our soul", and only in our times it is considered as the most important one; on the contrary, "in the ancient times men knew that the really important spheres of mankind, [...] i.e. religion, arts and ethics, arise from quite different forces of our souls" (Ernst 1898: p. 31). For this reason, if one looks always and only at the empirical conditions of every action, then "no moral is possible" (Ernst 1898: p. 33).

In particular, Ernst believes that the modern world-picture is not morally oriented, because men are represented as bound only to the natural order, without considering their interiority as a free motive for their actions: "In the place of obligations we have put the nerves, in the place of duties the knowledge; of men we think the same as of animals, because the animal does not recognize nor longing to any eternal value, but underlies the mere natural necessity". In this way, he concludes, "we lost religion, morality and art" (Ernst 1898: p. 39).

In an autobiographical paper, then, Ernst remembers that, at that time, "came clear to him that the important things, namely the moral struggles, cannot be represented by being too close to nature",<sup>12</sup> because art, in order to be moral and high, must not picture reality, but grasp the very element out of which values arise. Naturalism "lacked the necessity", but not the natural necessity, rather the necessity against which the will struggles. This one, therefore, "is the common root of the ethical, of the aesthetical and maybe also of the religious".<sup>13</sup> After all, Ernst remembers, at that time he felt himself as "a pupil of Tolstoy", whose moral precept "Do not resist evil" had on him a deep impact.<sup>14</sup>

Thus around 1900, in search for an art that could be instrument of purification and means of expression for the moral ideal, he adhered to the

12 P. Ernst, *Bemerkungen über mich selbst*, cit., p. 20.

13 *Ibid.* The same idea is expressed in 1926: "Religion, art and ethics arise in man from the same root" (P. Ernst, *Dichtung und Sittlichkeit*, in Id., *Der Weg zur Form*, cit., p. 435).

14 Id., *Bemerkungen über mich selbst*, cit. p. 25.



German *Neuklassik* movement. It developed in particular between 1903 and 1910, and it was only in some general aspects connected with the *Weimarer Klassik*, because it focused in particular on the concept of *form*. For its members, most of which young people like Ernst who came from the delusion of Naturalism, the purpose of art is to rediscover and express the eternal values of spirit; and according to them, the spirit is embodied in the eternal forms of art, that for this reason express needs which are “out of time, like the propositions of mathematics”, and such that time “has an influence only on the material”, namely on the contents which from time to time are represented.<sup>15</sup>

Each *form* is also eternal and peculiar, and the artist must grasp and embody it in the time he lives into. The most perfect form of art, in this sense, according to Ernst is the classical tragedy, because it expresses the struggle between will and necessity, opening man to the moral dimension of existence. The real tragedy, he argues, can take place only in a well defined picture of the world: “The core of the tragic is for the poet the contact point of two necessities; in the middle there is the tragic hero, to whom those two necessities appear in the form of a struggle within his soul, that he has to fight; carrying out this battle, the hero deploys his higher forces, in so far as he follows one necessity and is annihilated by the other”.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that tragedy has a definite form, however, is also its limit, because it can express only what fits the form of conflict. Tragedy, in other words, cannot bring human soul to its higher grade: according to Ernst it is only the expression of desperation, because it is the struggle between the human will and the necessity of a fate that it does not understand. But already in 1912 Ernst argues that, if the best that human will can achieve is the ethic, which is expressed in the tragic feeling, nonetheless “there is something even higher of human will, namely the will of God, and something higher than ethics, namely religion”.<sup>17</sup> The tragic, therefore, is only “the expression of the desperation toward God and toward God’s world”,<sup>18</sup> because it can only tell the struggle between human and divine will, which is a struggle between a supposed freedom and a necessity. In Ernst’s opinion, however, the passage through the tragic is necessary, because “only the man who despairs of the world can find God”.<sup>19</sup> The tragic, he concludes,

15 Id., *Meroe*, in *Ein Credo* (1912), p. 174.

16 Id., *Die Möglichkeit der klassischen Tragödie* (1904), in Id., *Der Weg zur Form*, cit., p. 121.

17 Id., *Vom Weg meiner Dichtung* (1912), in Id., *Ein Credo* (1935), cit., p. 29.

18 Id., *Der deutsche Gott* (1915), in Id., *Ein Credo* (1935), cit., p. 234.

19 *Ibid.*



is also “the initial stage of the religious”, because it gives rise to the feeling of the “absolute dependence on God”.<sup>20</sup>

The religious feeling arises when the human will is reconciled with the necessity, in so far as he sees it not as the blind fate, but as the God’s will. Only God, therefore, can save man from desperation and tragedy; thus, Ernst concludes, “Christianity has inherited the ancient tragedy”.<sup>21</sup>

Is it possible not to think, reading these statements, to the passionate pages of the notebooks written by Wittgenstein during the First World War? During those days, constantly suspended between life and death, he experiments the opposition between his will and the facts of the world ruled by the logical necessity. In this condition he starts reading the *Gospel* by Tolstoy, which has a deep influence on him, in so far as it shows him a possible solution to the tragedy of life: “I constantly repeat to myself Tolstoy’s words: “Man is *powerless* in the flesh, but *free* in the spirit” (*GTB* 12.9.14).

Exactly like Ernst, thus, Wittgenstein understands that the tragic picture of the world, even if it is a necessary step, causes in the man the constant tendency to desperation. But desperation is only the expression of the tragic, not its solution, and, as such, it is “the school of the false view of life” (*GTB* 6.5.16). In order to avoid this outcome and heal the dualism of tragedy, he repeatedly recommends himself to live “in inner peace” or “as pleases God”, because “*only* in this way it is possible to carry on life” (*GTB* 6.5.16).

The tragic feeling express also an opposition between the subject’s will and the world that is given to him as an independent whole: “I feel that I am not independent from the world, and therefore I must fear it [...] even if nothing bad happens to me” (*GTB* 9.11.14).<sup>22</sup> In its most radical form, this opposition seems to involve two wills, because, according to Wittgenstein, when we face the facts “we have the feeling of being dependent on an alien will” (*NB* 8.7.16).

Perceiving this contrast, we tend to call this alien will as “fate” or as “the will – which is independent of our will” or, simply, as “God” (*NB* 8.7.16). But at this point we have a struggle against two kinds of “god-

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Id.*, *Mein dichterisches Erlebnis*, cit., p. 23.

22 Some years later, in the *Lecture on Ethics*, Wittgenstein recalls these moments in order to clarify his notion of absolute value or “absolute good”. As experience *par excellence* he mentions that of “feeling *absolutely* safe”, namely “the state of mind in which one is inclined to say ‘I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens’” (*LE*, p. 8).

heads”, namely “the world and my independent I”. In order to avoid desperation and live happily, one has to accept the dependence and live “in agreement with the world”, i.e. “in agreement with that alien will on which I appear dependent” (NB 8.7.16). The I that, according to Tolstoy’s precept, does not resist evil, can tell: “I am doing the will of God” (NB 8.7.16). And thus, Wittgenstein concludes, “to believe in God means to see that life has a meaning” (NB 8.7.16).

### 5. Forms of language and picture of the world

On the basis of what has been said above, it seems to me that Wittgenstein was trying to reconcile the strict necessity of logic with the similarly strict urgency of the tragic feeling, out of which the problem of the sense of life originates. At this regard, the modern scientific picture of the world is not the only target of Wittgenstein’s criticism: searching for a connection between the logical necessity, the clarification of language and the mystical feeling of the world as a whole, he aims also at avoiding a certain sentimental attitude, which is taken very often in contrast to science. In avoiding the all pervasive scientific culture, in fact, one is tempted to find refuge in bare emotions, in the psychological subjectivity, which can be even solipsistic. Well, the *Tractatus* and all Wittgenstein’s philosophy want also to contrast this false alternative,<sup>23</sup> and it is this very view that, in my opinion, Wittgenstein and Ernst share.

As we have seen, for Ernst too religion, in its proper form, has a spiritual character, in so far as it is a pure emotional experience; but, in a most precise sense, the religious feeling is the embodiment of an eternal and, so to speak, objective need. For according to him “God, soul, freedom, immortality” are “forms” that, even if not through reason, “come necessarily to men when there are feelings that, through those forms, find their own expression”.<sup>24</sup> Grasping those forms is then possible only through the feel-

23 This idea seems to be confirmed by Engelmann, who writes: “In the first decades of the twentieth century a wave of irrationalism and glorification of sentiment – the very views against which the *Tractatus* is directed in the first place – had introduced a new variety of nonsense by plunging from one nonsense into the opposite kind. Their watchword was: ‘Get rid of reason which has caused our misfortune. Let us seek salvation in feeling without reason!’ But it is not a question of head *or* heart, reason *or* emotion: the watchword must be reason *with* emotion, head *with* heart” (Engelmann 1967: pp. 88-89).

24 P. Ernst, *Idealismus und Positivismus*, cit., p. 280.

ing (*Gefühl*), because to the feeling alone “can be opened the doors” of the world of ideas.<sup>25</sup>

It is for this reason that the problems of language and of the limits of language arise: since in fact “the feeling is not graspable, while the expression is graspable”, the feeling disappears while the expression remains, so that one tends to confuse the expression with the feeling.<sup>26</sup> Language, in other words, gives a form to something that, in its deep essence, is not reducible to the linguistic form, even if it requires this form in order to be expressed and understood. In the case of religion this explains the need for a doctrine, because the religion conceived as pure experience and feeling cannot understand itself – or understands itself falsely – since it remains without form. Religious experience, therefore, “yearns for a rational or poetic experience”, even if, when it finds it, the feeling “becomes static and is something different from what it was at the beginning”.<sup>27</sup>

Ernst takes also religious tales and doctrines as a kind of myths, namely as “thoughts and stories” that the religious feeling “needed, in order to be communicated”.<sup>28</sup> In particular, the traditional representation of God provided by the Church was “mythic and figurative”, in so far as its purpose was “to express something that for us men remains inexpressible”.<sup>29</sup> At the present time, in which there is “a spiritual domination of science”, one is accustomed to answer all the questions through the means of thought, so that in religious life “the myth is rejected and the thought dominates almost alone”.<sup>30</sup>

Now, according to Ernst, the work of constant “re-formation” of language is the proper task of the poet. Using an image that reminds to Wittgenstein’s famous tool-box (*PI* §11), he writes:

I am a craftsman. My tool is language. I have hammers, chisels, drills, burins. I keep them polished and tidy, hanging in my workshop. I use each tool as it should be used. When I work as I learned to do from my teachers and through my efforts and thoughts, then figures emerge from the stone. Throughout my life I have created many of these figures. They are my world and in the future they will also be the world of others. All men today are living in worlds created by the poets of the past.<sup>31</sup>

25 *Ibid.*

26 P. Ernst, *Der deutsche Gott (1915)*, cit., p. 233.

27 *Ivi*, p. 231.

28 *Ivi*, p. 232.

29 *Id.*, *Jugenderinnerungen*, cit., p. 275.

30 *Id.*, *Der Sinn des Christentums (1930)*, in *Id.*, *Ein Credo (1935)*, cit., p. 249.

31 *Id.*, *Der gefrorene Fluss*, in *Id.*, *Erdachte Gespräche*, cit., p. 232.

But what is more interesting, in his opinion, is that with the born of each poet a new “picture of the world (*Weltbild*)” is generated, to express which “there are no words”, so that one can only “hint at it”.<sup>32</sup> And when a poet “succeeds in picturing contents which in a generation remain not expressed or inexpressible”, then “he has created something”.<sup>33</sup> Generations of poets have therefore worked “with the purpose of understanding and giving form to a world in always better way”.<sup>34</sup>

Ernst talks of the work of formation as a real spiritual force. In the paper *Die formbildende Kraft* (1918), he points out that the *process of formation*, namely the translation of a feeling into a form (mythic and linguistic), is a “self spread of the idea in the form of the intuition of time”, a process that occurs “whenever the idea appears in the history”.<sup>35</sup> To this purpose, nonetheless, we can use only “auxiliary concepts and representations (*Hilfsbegriffe und Hilfsvorstellungen*)”.<sup>36</sup> The form of representation (*die Darstellungsform*) is therefore a translation from the feeling of the original experience to the form that best fits it in a given historical period.

The ultimate effect of poetry is thus “providing men with their world-picture (*Weltbild*)”, which is “determined through morality and religion”. But while this world-picture is for the poet “passionate experience”, for all other men it “can be only handed down doctrine”.<sup>37</sup> Even the philosopher, in his attempt to understand it, is prisoner of the form, since he can make only a “half step” beyond “the curtain that the language and his representative faculty hung in front of him”.<sup>38</sup> The modern scientific picture of the world sets then “a difficult task” for the poet and the philosopher, because it “forces them to think beyond the words and the propositional forms”.<sup>39</sup>

But the moral and religious concepts which determine the *Weltbild* reveal themselves to the rational thinking as contradictory. Myths instead give form to such concepts without requiring their rational explanation or demonstration, but tracing them back to the very fundament of life on which they rest. In this way, a new world is created “to which one must be-

32 Id., *Jünglingsjahre*, cit., p. 90.

33 Id., *Sprache und Dichtung* (1918), in Id., *Tagebuch eines Dichters*, cit., p. 62.

34 Id., *Dichtung als Schöpfung* (1926), in Id., *Ein Credo* (1935), cit., 295.

35 Id., *Die formbildende Kraft*, cit., p. 328.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Id., *Dichtung und Sittlichkeit* (1925), in: *Der Weg zur Form* (1928), S. 449.

38 Id., *Idealismus und Positivismus*, cit., p. 278.

39 Id., *Einleitung*, in Id., *Der Zusammenbruch des deutschen Idealismus*, cit., p. 10.

lieve” and which is expressed in “a myth, a fairy-tale, by which men want to represent what is not representable, to think what is not thinkable”.<sup>40</sup>

Also for Wittgenstein the core of religion and ethics is not in doctrines or theories, but in the original experience underlying them. As such, even if they are facts in the life of a person, nonetheless they cannot be expressed by a mere description of facts. In this sense, in 1937 Wittgenstein writes that

Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life. For ‘recognition of sin’ is an actual occurrence and so is despair and so is redemption through faith. Those who speak of it [...], are simply describing what has happened to them; whatever gloss someone may want to put on it! (*MS* 118, 56r c: 4.9.1937; *CV*, p. 32).

And in 1946 he clearly expresses his skepticism about a merely intellectual approach to the problem of religious belief, because, he writes, “Christianity says, I believe, that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your life. (Or the direction of your life)” (*MS* 132, 167: 11.10.1946; *CV*, p. 61).

Faith, like ethics in general, is the dimension of life, in which man has to do with the sense of his own existence. Therefore, one cannot be simply convinced by a doctrine, because, Wittgenstein concludes, here “you have to be seized and turned around by something”, and “once turned round, you must stay turned round” (*MS* 132, 167: 11.10.1946; *CV*, p. 61). And in 1949 he drastically points out that, “if Christianity is the truth, then all the philosophy about it is false” (*MS* 169, 58v: 1949; *CV*, p. 89).<sup>41</sup>

If then in the *Tractatus* the investigation on the logical essence of language results in the declaration of the insufficiency of language as to the questions concerning the sense of human existence, the revaluation, after the 1930s, of the essential link between language and forms of life seems to make it possible to give, in a certain way, a sense to the nonsense. At this regard, in 1937 Wittgenstein admits: “In religion it must be the case that corresponding to every level of devoutness there is a form of expression that has no sense at a lower level” (*MS* 120, 8: 20.11.1937; *CV*, p. 37).

40 Id., *Von Gott*, in Id., *Grundlagen der neuen Gesellschaft*, cit., p. 24.

41 Of this attitude we can find some interesting evidence in the conversations with the friend Drury, who recalls that Wittgenstein took the symbols of Catholicism as “wonderful beyond words”, but that he considered offensive “any attempt at to make it into a philosophical system” (conversation with M.O’C. Drury in Rhee 1983, p. 117).

But we could extend this thought even to the philosophical activity, in so far as, since it is a clarification of language, certain combinations of words, which appear as nonsense from a certain point of view, can have a sense if considered in the context of a more comprehensive *Weltbild*. For example, in 1937 Wittgenstein writes:

Election by grace: It is only permissible to write like this out of the most frightful suffering – and then it means something quite different. But for this reason it is not permissible for anyone to cite it as truth, unless he himself says it in torment. – It simply isn't a theory. – Or as one might also say: if this is truth, it is not the truth it appears at first glance to express. It's less a theory than a sigh, or a cry (*MS* 118, 117v: 24.9.1937; *CV*, p. 34).

Thus, as he concludes in the same years, an ethical proposition “is a personal act. Not a statement of fact” (6.5.31; *MT*, p. 85).

These remarks are connected, in my opinion, with the change in Wittgenstein's picture of language. For language progressively is no more considered as one uniform domain, made of “tacit conventions”, that are “enormously complicated” and that disguise a logical form (*TLP* 4.002), rather as a set of different activities, strictly connected to one another in different forms of life. But what is interesting to stress, in this context, is that the very notion of “form of life” involves an original relation between language (and subject) and world. On this relation rests the idea that speaking a language involves having a world-picture, which is not at all a description of facts, or the totality of the descriptions of facts, but the condition or the background of every possible description.

The purpose of the philosophical activity, therefore, is to reveal the false pictures caused by our language and, in doing so, to understand and change our *Weltbild*. In a certain sense, this was also the outcome of the *Tractatus*, in so far as it brings the reader to “see the world aright”; and this idea seems to be confirmed by a remarks of Wittgenstein's on May the 6<sup>th</sup> 1930: “16 years ago when I had the thought that the law of causality is insignificant in itself and that there is a way of regarding the world which does not bear it in mind, I felt the beginning of a New Era” (6.5.1930; *MT*, p. 29).

But in fact, since the *Weltbild* is the background of the philosophical activity itself, changing it cannot be simply a question of changing one's opinions, but requires a change in the very form of life. After all, Wittgenstein writes, “another life shifts completely different images into the foreground, necessitates completely different images”, but “that does not mean that through the other life one will necessarily change one's opinions”. What is essential rather is that “if one lives differently, one speaks

differently. With a new life one learns new language games” (4.2.1937; *MT*, p. 169).

Well, this changing concerns first of all one’s world-picture, the way each one of us sees his life: in a remark written around 1944, Wittgenstein writes that “the revolutionary will be the one who can revolutionize himself” (*MS* 165, 204: ca. 1944; *CV*, p. 51); in my opinion, these words could be understood in the sense that, only when we are clear about ourselves, we can see the world differently and, in a certain way, we change the world itself.<sup>42</sup> The necessity of operating a personal change, before than a collective one, is an essential character of Wittgenstein’s thought, and it is very akin to Ernst’s attitude.

Given the strict link between language and forms of life, therefore, the personal change must have also external consequences, because, as Wittgenstein writes in 1937, “the solution of the problem you see in life is a way of living which makes what is problematic disappear. The fact that life is problematic means that your life does not fit life’s shape. So you must change your life, and once it fits the shape, what is problematic will disappear” (*MS* 118, 17r c: 27.8.1937; *CV*, p. 31). This means that, if the philosophical activity results in a personal change, then this involves also a change in the form of life; and this last change concerns the single man *and* his language; and therefore the language as a whole. The way of seeing the world, the new picture of it, is also a change in the *Weltbild* on which our language rests. After all, it is in these years that Wittgenstein writes the well known remarks against the contemporary culture. Our *Zivilisation*, he points out, “is characterized by the word progress”; and in my opinion is very important to notice that this means that progress is not a propriety of our civilization, but “its form” (*MS* 109, 204: 6-7.11.1930; *CV*, p. 9). Here of course Wittgenstein is writing under the influence of Spengler; but these remarks are perfectly comparable to Ernst’s view. After all, both Spengler and Ernst are influential examples of the “conservative revolution” typical of the German culture of that time.<sup>43</sup> At this regard, I would incidentally

42 “The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy” (*TLP* 6.43).

43 This apparently paradox expression has been used probably for the first time by H. von Hofmannstahl (see *Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation*, Rede, gehalten im Auditorium Maximum der Universität München am 10. Januar 1927, Verlag der Bremer Presse, München 1927, p. 31; now in Id., *Gesammelte Werke in 10 Einzelbänden. Reden und Aufsätze 1-3*, hrsg. von B. Schoeller, S. Fischer, Frankfurt a. M. 1980, Bd. III, pp. 24-41). In general, it reminds to the ideas circulating in German culture between the Republic of Weimar and the Nazi age. These ideas were shared by many prominent writers and philosophers, among



suggest that reading Wittgenstein in this context could be a solution to the question of his alleged conservatism.<sup>44</sup>

The problem of the modern culture, according to Wittgenstein, is that it does not take into account the problem of the sense of life or, in other words, the “spirit”. He argues that today the spirit is not immediately evident, because, as he writes on October the 8<sup>th</sup> 1930, “in the metropolitan civilization the spirit can only huddle in some corner”, because it does not allow to express it in its forms. But the spirit “is not for instance atavistic and superfluous but hovers above the ashes of culture as an (eternal) witness – as if an avenger of the deity”. And using words that remind to Ernst, he concludes: it is “as if it were awaiting a new incarnation (in a new culture)” (8.10.1930; *MT*, p. 55).

The fact that Wittgenstein’s ideas are very close to Ernst’s ones is even more surprising in relation to the consequences that he draws from the relation between language and *Weltbild*. In 1946, with the image of language as a clothing, already used in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein gives emphasis to the strict link between modes of expression and philosophical problems: he argues that, once “the new way of thinking” is established, “the old problems disappear”, because “they are embedded in the way we express ourselves; and if we clothe ourselves in a new form of expression, the old problems are discarded along with the old garment” (*MS* 131, 48: 15.8.1946; *CV*, p. 55). In this sense, he concludes in another passage, “the sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and it was possible for the sickness of philosophical problems to get cured only through a changed mode of thought, not through a medicine invented by an individual” (*RFM*, p. 57).

The long trail of these considerations can be found at last in *On Certainty*, in the remarks on the *Weltbild* as a kind of mythology that have been already quoted at the beginning of this paper.

The transformations of this world-picture involve also the language and the form of life to which it belongs. Here, I think, we can find a process that is analogous to the one described by Ernst in the *Nachwort*: the old pictures, which seemed to be stable and fixed once and for all, suddenly are put in question or abandoned, and other ones progressively take their place.

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which Oswald Spengler, Thomas Mann, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (it seems that Wittgenstein read Schopenhauer in his edition), Stefan George, Ernst Jünger and, for some aspects, Martin Heidegger).

44 On this point see J.C. Nyíri, *Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back*, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, ed. By S. Shanker, Croom Helm, London 1986, vol. 4, pp. 44-45.



Wittgenstein writes in fact that “it might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid” (*OC* §96).

Therefore, even if “an entire mythology is laid down in our language” (*BT* §93), nonetheless “the mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift” (*OC* §97), so that the philosophical activity reveals the old myths, but is constantly faced with new ones.

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JEAN-PIERRE COMETTI

## WITTGENSTEIN'S PRAGMATISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

### Language Games, Rules and Social Interactions

So I am trying to say something that sounds like pragmatism.  
L. Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>

Wittgenstein's pragmatism has already attracted attention of commentators, as well as the meaning of his work for social sciences. The book that Peter Winch wrote on this topic has even much influenced philosophers as Karl-Otto Apel or Jürgen Habermas at the time they were investigating critical thought and its own resources.<sup>2</sup> Both questions can be considered as related, because it is mainly on this level that Wittgenstein's thought "sounds like pragmatism", and also because its relation to pragmatism may well be the best way for characterizing it. Of course this "pragmatism" can be viewed from several angles. For instance it has been asked if and to what extent Wittgenstein was influenced by Peirce or by James via Ramsey. From an other point of view, some pragmatist thinkers as Rorty have seen him as the main architect of the anti-essentialism and the anti-representationalism which are the pillars of the pragmatist trend coming from Dewey's philosophy. But what I intend to suggest is somewhat different.

Pragmatism does not possess the only virtues attributed to it by those who undertook to bring philosophy back to earth. Its efforts have combined with the way other thinkers as Nietzsche or deconstructionists have undermined metaphysics and traditional *Weltanschauungen*. But Pragmatism is also and mainly a social-and-political-oriented philosophy at least under

1 L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1969, § 122.

2 See Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Routledge, London and New York, 1958, and also Nygel Pleasants, *Wittgenstein and the idea of a Critical Social Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 1999.

two respects: a) it throws a new light on social links and ways of action that constitute them; b) it makes democracy the main question of philosophy. In Dewey's work, both questions are closely related to inquiry and to its applications in the large field of situations implying values and practical ways of solving problems. Democracy is implied, not exactly as referring to the type of government that this word usually designates, but as the way of discussing and deciding that requires from individuals they take commitments in situations of action and interaction. *Prima facie*, these aspects of pragmatism are beyond any connection with Wittgenstein's philosophy. We do find in his writings some scarce notes on related topics, but he never really deals with them – in any case directly – and his main concerns are not exactly these. But there is at least a point on the basis of which we can see his philosophy otherwise, and probably take it as a contribution to a sociological, anthropological, and even political questioning. This point concentrates first on his investigations on language, on the way he deals with the problem of rules, and on the consequences that can be drawn from them. In other words what is interesting lies in these *consequences* rather than in the question of whether Wittgenstein was or not a pragmatist thinker.

### 1. *Interaction and cooperation in language games*

One feature that pragmatism and Wittgenstein's philosophy clearly share, beyond any other comparison, is what makes language and meaning public ways of dealing with things and with the world. From the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations* until remarks concerning rules and up the end of the first part, Wittgenstein's analyzes are clearly oriented towards this assumption. This public dimension of our language and our actions is concretely involved in the agents' actions and interactions, in their "transactions" – as Dewey call them — **between them and with their environment**. The very notion of "language game", so often commented because of the role it plays in the so called second philosophy of Wittgenstein, is the way social interactions take place inside of his questioning on language; it is the cornerstone of Wittgenstein's pragmatism.<sup>3</sup>

Parts of the book where this notion appears for the first time are enough to testify such a fact. Think of the well known builders appearing in these parts of *Investigations*; they do not share only words; they join the action

3 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2009, §§ 2-10.

to the word, and these actions are so connected with their words that there would be no point to think this words make sense apart of this articulation. It is the role they play in what we can call a “pragmatic situation” and what they perform that give its very meaning to the sounds they make. In these pages, as we know, Wittgenstein’s differs from philosophies which more or less ascribe to the only language the condition and the source of its sense – whatsoever in respect of its deep structures or in respect of some linguistic idealism. This way of dealing with language is a pragmatic one in that it locates conditions of meaning in process of cooperation lying on coordinated actions (interactions or transactions), that are connected with resources of interlocution oriented by common purposes (implicitly or explicitly) acknowledged as such. Moreover, these conditions are such as they can be immediately related to the normative dimension of what is at stake in such situations, because of their social character. More accurately, the normative dimension of “language games” depends on the fact that the ways by which they play their part are interlinked with rules and the commitments they imply. So language games appear as micro devices of action and communication within which each agent plays a role inseparable of the role the other agents are playing, that is to say of the whole set of interactions. Nevertheless the more significant point does not consist in this normative dimension as such – otherwise it could be considered as an expression of some coercive durkheimian principle. What is important is rather that the rules involved in language games are absolutely *immanent*, or in other words that these games are the games they are *when* they are working and because of what they help *doing*. They mobilize resources for related ends that give them in turn their meaning.

When Wittgenstein highlight that language is a tool, or when he draws attention to games that do not work any more – games which seem to be “in holidays” – the criterium to which he appeals is exactly the same as the one implied in the “pragmatist maxim”: a difference should *make* the difference. Otherwise we face with “wheels that turn empty”. In Wittgensten’s *Philosophical Investigations*, this last point has a therapeutical range; it allows us to identify the cases where language is inappropriately or accidentally dissociated from any context or any situation connected to a common action, like the one in which builders are committed. We may nevertheless think that such a judgment does not restrict itself to a therapeutical or metaphilosophical issue. To look it more closely, the idea of “language game” opens an interactionnist way of thinking, the very way that Dewey

and Mead have introduced in social philosophy and sociology. Let us pay attention to this point by turning now to Dewey's *Experience and Nature*.<sup>4</sup>

In chapter V of his book, Dewey approaches the question of language on the basis of his continuist conception of social interactions. From his point of view, social interactions are continuous with natural conditions of life, i.e. with interactions between organisms and their environment. At first glance the limits between human experience as such – considered as the play of interactions constituting what he call “experience” – and the natural ways of interacting with environment are not very clear.<sup>5</sup> For a better understanding of what is at stake here, we should pay attention to “meanings”. The question of meaning is crucial, not only because it is involved in any action or practice which is not directly and exclusively related to some vital process, but because it is the key of the actions we can conceive as social ways of doing, i.e. as “transactions” and forms of cooperation that derive from natural processes and define a situation of communication. That is what Dewey suggests in this passage (we can hear in it some wittgensteinian sound).

The heart of language is not “expression” of something antecedent, much less expression of antecedent thought. It is communication; the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership. To fail to understand is to fail to come into agreement in action; to misunderstand is to set up action at cross purposes. Take speech as behavioristically as you will, including the elimination of all private mental states, and it remains true that it is markedly distinguished from the signaling acts of animals. Meaning is not indeed a psychic existence; it is primarily a property of behavior, and secondarily a property of objects.<sup>6</sup>

If there is something remarkable in Dewey's investigations, it is the fact that he does not postulate at all the possibility of some instance of meaning inherent to sensory experience – unlike other philosophers in any romantic way. For him the language is the corner stone of meaning, and meanings are the touchstone of experience, which while emerging from nature gives it a new scope. But language does not miraculously supervene on inter-

4 John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, George Allen & Unwin, LTD, London, 1929.

5 See Richard Galle's remarks in “The Naturalism of The naturalism of John Dewey”, in Molly Cochran, *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

6 J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, cit., chap. 5, p. 179.

actions belonging to common experience, it is both their condition and their effect. It is this link, this indissociability, that ties human experience to language and language to actions and interactions, in accordance with Wittgenstein's language games and with his conception of rules, as I would like now to show it. Dewey is very closed to Wittgenstein in this respect: meaning depends of language, but it depends on *uses*, occurring in a shared experience, so that that language appears indifferently as the condition of such an experience and this experience as the condition of language.

## 2. *Language and rules*

A main point in this discussion consists in concerns about normativity. Like "experience", in the sense Dewey gave it, "language games" involve a normative dimension, itself involved in the very notion of meaning. This point, Dewey highlights it also in the chapter already quoted: meanings as well as language imply norms, because of the rules they suppose, in relation with the social games which they are associated with. Mastering a language is like mastering the rules of a game. The builders' words in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, the actions they perform, can only play their role – in the situation described – as they enter into interactions or forms of coordination related with some rules. But it does not mean that these rules can be dissociated from this game and have an independant existence. Like every rule, they only exist in their applications.

There is an extensive literature on this question. The various commentaries are mainly concentrated on the applicability conditions of rules and on private language problem. What is not ever taken into account – or not enough highlighted – consists in the social roots of rules, that is to say what links them to the variety of situations and ways of interaction they are part of. Of course it is relevant to ask how a rule relates to its applications; and it is also relevant to claim that such a relation cannot depends on some interpretation; but it is still more relevant to emphasize that if it is so, it is because no rule can neither be dissociated from its applications nor be considered as taking its power from inside it. At any time, we should remind us that the power of rules cannot be considered as an intrinsic property. Rules cannot be dissociated from the actions to which they are related. It is because of these actions as social actions that rules can be considered as norms for action.

Peter Winch has rightly emphasized the importance of Wittgenstein's analysis of rules for social sciences. It is what led him to oppose what



he considered as an unfortunate “naturalization”, and to draw anew a line between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. I do not intend to discuss Winch’s positions, but I must observe how this border – as familiar as it is – is precisely something we’d better drop, as it was suggested by pragmatist thinkers. For getting rid of such idea, the best way is to assume that no rule is conceivable apart from its applications. This way is the best way we have for freeing us from perplexities generated by the usual conception of rules. These perplexities are rooted in the conception of rule as something autonomous. This is a point that Robert Brandom clarifies in his investigations on rules, but it is mainly a point which takes a special meaning for the consequences of language games in the field of social philosophy.

As Dewey and Wittgenstein showed, the assumption of autonomous status of rules is an expression of our tendency to objectivize – and to ontologize – the outcomes of our analysis, investigations, and ways of talking about things. When something, first involved as implicit in some action or piece of language, takes an explicit status giving it the meaning of a rule, this (explicit) rule is immediately conceived as prior to its applications and we tend to conceive it as *a priori*. Let me observe that Wittgenstein’s builders, though they are following rules, are not following rules that need to be explicated, no more that they are supposed to have such rules in mind, as if they were to represent them for applying them. In *Über Gewissheit*, Wittgenstein observes: “In the language game, can he say that he knows that these are building stones?”. “No, but he knows it”.<sup>7</sup> To know it is to be able to use the right word, and this means here mastering rules, that is to say this language game. The rule here exists *implicitly*, before to exist *explicitly*, i.e. before to be *explicated*.

What is shown by this example is consistent with what a plain reflexion on language helps easily to conceive. If rules application should depend on any knowing or some previous and independent representation, we should enter into a circle, because each rule would ask for a rule for being applied.<sup>8</sup> This circle<sup>9</sup> – the rules circle – like the paradox of rules – derives from the occultation of the social character of rules: the way by which social forms of cooperation relate each other. If actions could take some meaning and can be performed without any relation to some social context, rules could be dissociated from actions, and so we might perhaps give our rules a dif-

7 L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, cit., § 396.

8 Cf. R. Brandom, “Wittgenstein’s Pragmatism about Norms”, in *Making it Explicit*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1994, p. 21.

9 Which is not without relation with the so called “Hermeneutic circle”.



ferent status: a mental status, for instance, even a platonic one. But we would have actions on one side and rules on the other side. What is implied for interactions or actions coordination, including for language, helps us to understand that it is at this level that rules are generated or that it is there they have their core. The autonomy of rules is only apparent; it is the other face of a division that only retains the outcome of explicitation processes. The philosophy of language games is here consistent with Dewey's pragmatism, and with Brandom's pragmatist inferentialism. Rules are the core of this agreement, and they are the best testimony of Wittgenstein's pragmatism. They afford the basis of a social philosophy that meets the social philosophy of pragmatism.

### 3. *Is Wittgenstein's philosophy a social philosophy?*

The significance of pragmatism for social philosophy and sociology is illustrated by G. H. Mead's influence on the so called "Chicago School". Hans Joas has highlighted it more recently.<sup>10</sup> What is interesting and original in this approach is the concern for "situations" and the part played by actors in social processes. Such a concern is one of the things that distinguish pragmatism from trends stemming from european thought, particularly the French tradition of Comte and Durkheim. Let us see what are the differences, in order to discern what makes Wittgenstein close to this way of seeing. Three points are worth noting: 1) what is meaningful in the concepts of interaction and situation; 2) the importance of language, as highlighted by Mead; 3) the integration of the actor's perspective.

The part played by interactions – corresponding to what is implied by the concept of "language game" – entails two consequences. Epistemologically speaking, the attention to interactions gives birth to a type of description focusing on their modalities and on what is at stake in the contexts they define, as opposed to an approach in terms of structures. This way of doing leads to a pragmatic redefinition of the social life contrasting with different forms of structuralism, and with all ways of reification of rules.

As I have suggested, and as it is clear enough both in Dewey and in Wittgenstein, language is involved in every interaction related to social life and social acting. In Mead, in connection with Wittgenstein and the question of private language, the Self is considered as the specific product

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10 Cf. Hans Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.

of this feature of social action. It might be that this dimension of Mead's thought is related to the influence of Hegel's philosophy, but it concords with a reconception of interiority which is close to Wittgenstein's analysis, opening on an externalist philosophy of mind equally close to pragmatist's approach of this kind of problem.

In more than one sociological theory that we are used to consider as relevant, consciousness is taken as an effect or even a reflection of processes happening on an other stage, as when Hegel suggests that «Men are doing their history, but they do not know what». Philosophy and social sciences coming from pragmatism are opposed to this assumption. Actors beliefs are part of what characterizes any situation, because no situation can be defined apart from the means and the ends that give it its place and its meaning in social process, in relation to what it generates as opportunities of thoughts and decisions in such or such circumstances. This insistence on what is really occurring in situations whose actors' beliefs and hopes are part of corresponds to Wittgenstein's suggestions about rules, especially as he deals with rules in terms of applications. Norms must be first conceived "in action", *actually* and not *virtually*. As Wittgenstein suggested, as soon as we deal with *reasons* — and not with *causes* — the relevant question is «Why». To put it another way, for an interactionist philosophy or sociology, the way which actors interact or cooperate in any situation requires to take into account what they do and what they think, i.e. what they say. Our descriptions cannot refer to rules or structures conceived as the determining background from which actions can be defined and whose they would be instances or actualisations.

The same consequences apply to language games in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Language games can be read as a criticism of misunderstandings which sociology and anthropology have favored by taking rules as autonomous principles inside systems or structures of normativity. Dewey and Wittgenstein have perfectly identified the way this kind of misunderstanding are generated and misleads us: this way goes from the antecedent to the consequent and from the consequent to the antecedent, confusing what our investigations permits us to describe and what reality is. This is what we call taking the cause for the effect and the effect for the cause. The criticism we can find in Wittgenstein about mathematics – at least for the conception against which he spoke: the "formalism" – applies also to social sciences when they give an ontological status to rules or concepts they use for describing human beings' ways of doing and believing.

#### 4. *The question of criticism*

Up to now, I tried to emphasize the reasons why Wittgenstein's philosophy can be read as offering an original way of dealing with social practices. Such a question would require further explanations and justifications, but I will confine myself to approach a last important point about the critical scope of his thought. Neither structure nor collective consciousness, Wittgenstein's philosophy sketches a critical conception of social sciences designed to rehabilitate actions, actors and agents, and able to give us a better understanding of what is at stake in such sciences.

The first contribution that Wittgenstein provides to such an understanding appears in his work with what he called "Grammar". The meaning of this concept can be compared to what Peirce called the "pragmatist method"; it throws a new light on language, and particularly on some practices – statements – whose power consists in producing pictures "making no difference" (Peirce) and "taking us captive" (Wittgenstein). It is well known that for Wittgenstein "philosophical problems" are rooted in such ways of using language. Wittgenstein focused his attention on these problems, but it does not mean that the numerous misunderstandings which they are kneaded are own to the only philosophy. Though he did not showed himself specially interested in Social sciences (apart in Frazer's *Golden Bough*), his writings draw a path for considering otherwise our ways of conceiving society and social action. Reading Wittgenstein is a good mean of understanding what we presuppose when using concepts, and also to understand that the main point is to pay attention to their consequences on our ways of living. The criticism of "intellectualism" in Dewey, is another way to remain vigilant against mythologies that keep us captives in intellectual life.

Of course, the criticism of language can be extended to discourses and vocabularies which are not restricted to intellectual life. This criticism is also required where discourses refer to social or political situations, in relation with the role which our "vocabularies" play in them. It seems to me all the more necessary that what we call now "communication" or "mediatisation" has become a centerpiece of policies governing the public life. John Dewey showed the bad consequences of the dualisms around which traditional philosophy was built, but the same dualisms are also actual in our ways of representing the world and ourselves. Moreover, our modes of reasoning (in philosophy as well as in social sciences) tend to separate every idea, every concept or representation from the conditions where they take their meaning and their range. One of the outcome is to obscure the alternatives that we could taking into account in our ways of reasoning and

doing, instead of yielding to a feeling of necessity – if not of fatality – in considering everything under the restricted light of only two possibilities. Such an approach amounts to “obstruct the paths of inquiry”, as Peirce said, or to ignore that there are always much more than only two possibilities. It is clear that our intellectual habits and our vocabularies yield social and political consequences, and that the first task of social sciences would be to free us from what subjugates our minds and deprives them of alternatives ways of reasoning. In his famous “Theses on Feuerbach”, Marx wrote: “Philosophers have only interpreted the world, we should now change it”. For Wittgenstein and for Dewey, our problems are first practical problems and they find also their resolution in practical situations. Like for Marx it is all the more important that the present is always a path to the future, and that a good solution is one that do not mortgage the future.

MODESTO M. GÓMEZ ALONSO

“IS GOD BOUND BY OUR KNOWLEDGE?”  
 (ON CERTAINTY, 436):  
 THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION FOR THE LACK  
 OF FOUNDATIONS

In one of his many indispensable publications on Wittgenstein’s last collection of notes, Avrum Stroll pointed out that *On Certainty* matters because it is “the most important contribution to the theory of knowledge since *The Critique of Pure Reason*”.<sup>1</sup> There is something *deeply true* in this assessment. However, it would be wise to take it with a pinch of salt. On one side, the problems generated by Gettier cases have given such a renewed impetus to epistemology in contemporary analytic philosophy that it might be sensible to reconsider the value of Wittgenstein’s suggestions in the light of recent developments. On the other side, general agreement on the enormous significance of *On Certainty* is redressed by an equally general disagreement on its contents. After all, almost every significant contribution to debates in analytic epistemology written in the last four decades has been disinterred by one or another scholar from this fascinating work in progress. In this sense, it seems that caution and freedom from overemphasis should be specially recommended to the interpreters.

I’m not trying to play down Wittgenstein’s achievements. Far from it, my objective is to underline that *On Certainty* is a *work in progress*, and hence that it seems unlikely that Wittgenstein were in full control of the material he was working on, namely, that he were fully aware of the far-reaching consequences of the perspectives he brought to the centre stage of epistemological enquiry.<sup>2</sup> I would like to shed some light on two of these perspectives, perspectives which, in my opinion, constitute the most solid *leading-threads* in order to make sense of Wittgenstein’s enigmatic

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- 1 A. Stroll, 2005, “Why *On Certainty* Matters”, in: D. Moyal-Sharrock; W. H. Brenner (eds.), 2005, *Readings of Wittgenstein’s On Certainty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2007), p. 33.
- 2 “[I believe it might interest a philosopher, one who can think himself, to read my notes. For even if I hit the mark only rarely, he would recognize what targets I have been ceaselessly aiming at.]” L. Wittgenstein, 1969, *On Certainty* (Malden / Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2004), p. 50. [Thereafter, *OC* and number of paragraph]

last work. These two tendencies are ultimately *irreconcilable*. The first one points to a *negative demonstration of the deliverances of reason* which emphasizes that, since there are some thoughts which we cannot get outside of, it makes no sense either to bring reason to the dock or to attempt to validate reason from a skyhook beyond the normative framework, which stresses the role played in *On Certainty* by the so-called “hinge-propositions”, and which underlines that, although rational principles that play a foundational role at one stage may be superseded or revised as a result of rational criticism at a later stage,<sup>3</sup> “hinge-propositions” are constituent parts of a rational picture of the world. This tendency explains the anti-skeptical remarks along *On Certainty*. However, some remarks point to a quite different direction. They suggest a *phenomenological* or *anti-epistemic* construction of the framework which emphasizes the *fragility* of our knowledge, the possibility of a divorce between meaning and truth, the *opacity* of our system of beliefs to reason, the existence of that which Allan Janik called “imponderable knowledge”,<sup>4</sup> and the truth hidden in skepticism.<sup>5</sup> This tendency hints at *the requirement of a positive demonstration of the validity of reason and of the intrinsic order and unity of the world*, one which underlines that experience has a rational basis, but that reason cannot exhaust experience. In my opinion, this tendency is closely related to the *circumspect or mitigated rationalism* which the late Wittgenstein’s scholar Gordon Baker attributed to Descartes’ project,<sup>6</sup> and points to a *religious foundation* for the lack of foundations which, according to Norman Malcolm,<sup>7</sup> is essential to the right understanding of Wittgenstein’s approach to philosophy.

I’ll divide this paper into four parts. First, I’ll provide an *outline* of *On Certainty*’s deflationary readings, those proposed by social theorists of

3 “And the bank (*sic.*) of the river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited.” *OC*, § 99.

4 Cf. A. Janik, 2006, *Assembling Reminders. Studies in the Genesis of Wittgenstein’s Concept of Philosophy* (Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press), pp. 199-204.

5 “What is odd is that in such a case I always feel like saying (although it is wrong): ‘I Know that – so far as one can know such a thing.’ That is incorrect, but something right is hidden behind it.” *OC*, § 623.

6 Cf. G. Baker; K. Morris, 1996, *Descartes’ Dualism* (London / New York: Routledge 2002).

7 Cf. N. Malcolm, 1993, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1995).

justification such as David Bloor<sup>8</sup> and by naturalists such as Peter Strawson.<sup>9</sup> All them agree in the main thesis: *On Certainty* deploys anti-skeptical strategies whose goal is to demonstrate that the epistemological project (the project of defending our beliefs in the *arena of reflection*) is either pointless and idle or straightforward nonsensical. According to these readings, some of them deeply related to extreme forms of *alethic relativism*,<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein *deflates* the concept of "truth", analyzing it in more primitive notions, such as "meaning", "action", "form of life" or "community of life, language and culture". In second place, I'll indicate how the extraordinary interest which Wittgenstein shows in *global skeptical scenarios* points to the reintroduction and *partial (or methodological) rehabilitation* both of Cartesian skepticism and of a certain kind of epistemological enterprise in contemporary philosophy, and thereby, how he is neither a full-blooded relativist nor a partisan of a radically non-epistemic conception of truth. In third place, I'll point out certain *textual and argumentative* limitations of a "davidsonian" or *framework* approach<sup>11</sup> to *On Certainty*. Finally, I'll attempt to clarify what means to talk about a *religious foundation for the lack of foundations*, contrasting one of the threads running through some of *On Certainty*'s remarks with those epistemological approaches predominant in the English-speaking philosophical world.

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8 Cf. D. Bloor, 1997, *Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions* (London / New York: Routledge 2002).

9 Cf. P. F. Strawson, 1985, *Scepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (London / New York: Routledge 2008).

10 Cf. M. Williams, 2004, "Wittgenstein's Refutation of Idealism", in: D. McManus (ed.), 2004, *Wittgenstein and Scepticism* (London / New York: Routledge), pp. 76-96. According to Williams, Wittgenstein's view of skepticism is close to Carnap's: skepticism is not idle, but *nonsensical*; it is absurd to raise the question if our basic beliefs (those which cannot be either refuted or verified) are in agreement with the world; skeptics and epistemologists are guilty of the *category mistake* of conflating rules and propositions, ascribing to the former a cognitive and factual content exclusive of the latter. In this respect, Wittgenstein's stance could be labeled as "internal realism" or "internalism".

11 Cf. D. Moyal-Sharrock, 2005, *Understanding Wittgenstein's On Certainty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2007).

1.

The intellectual strength of deflationary readings of *On Certainty* is, at first sight, difficult to gainsay. It departs from one of the clearest (and philosophically more thought-provoking) Wittgenstein's remarks: "I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language)."<sup>12</sup>

Anyone familiar with Wittgenstein could recognize at once two *leitmotifs* of his late thought: (i) his *distrust* of *second order observations* grounded in a misleading *surface grammar* (philosophers are prone to judge that if something seems a proposition is in fact a proposition, ignoring the role played by those elements in ordinary language); and, (ii) the *extension of the normative* beyond the scope defined by the principle of non-contradiction, a point which in the early thirties smoothed the way for a radical turnabout from the *Tractatus*' conception of logic.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, what in the context of *On Certainty* is novel are the so-called "propositions" included in the realm of logic: particular judgments such as "I'm in Venice", "I have two hands", or, after checking twenty times a simple arithmetical performance, "This calculation is correct"; and general "reports" as "There is an external world", "The earth exists" or "Physical objects continue to exist when unperceived". These are (among others) the hinge-propositions:<sup>14</sup> norms of enquiry, assumptions channeling all empirical evidence, non-inferential beliefs, rules of representation which make our cognitive categories possible. But, insofar as they are rules defining the epistemic game they are not movements *in* the game, and thus, they lack *factual content*. Norms are neither grounded in evidence nor (true or false) pictures of a state of affairs. Because of their *prescriptive* and *modal* nature, they cannot be *descriptions* with a truth-value.

In order to understand the implications for epistemology of this extension of the normative, a comparison with the theoretical framework which seems its target (the Cartesian classification of *beliefs* according to the criterion of *resistance to skepticism*) is apposite.

In Descartes' *First Meditation* there are *three kinds of beliefs* which require *three different forms of doubt*: (i) Doubts regarding *empirical propo-*

12 *OC*, § 401.

13 Cf. J. Medina, 2002, *The Unity of Wittgenstein's Philosophy. Necessity, Intelligibility and Normativity* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press).

14 Cf. *OC*, §§ 341, 343, 655.



sitions are imaginable, easily produced and removed and seriously considered by the individual who, doubting that  $p$ , actually vacillates between affirmation and denial, incapable of believing *while doubting*. I could doubt that the thing I'm pointing to is a bird, because I didn't check it, ruling out the possibility of an automaton which behaves like a bird and looks a bird. I don't know if I'm really the person I think I am because I never excluded the possibility of a mix-up at the hospital. I could doubt that the thing I see through the telescope is truly a planet, because the same data agree with alternative explanations: an artificial structure or a shallow surface. All these doubts make sense for a while (or under conditions fixed by a narrative), but after checking the bird, travelling to the planet or visiting the hospital for several DNA tests they are spurious. (ii) Doubts regarding *a belief which we are strongly inclined to affirm but whose falsehood is imaginable* are different in nature. In such a case, reasons for doubt are *too remote*, and thus, because we don't take them seriously enough, it is possible to conciliate our belief that  $p$  and the fact that we have doubts about  $p$ : we are not infallible concerning  $p$ . Anyway, because the will is not forced by the understanding to affirm these propositions, they are not compulsions. This is the place reserved by Descartes for particular perceptual propositions stated in unbeatable circumstances ("I'm sitting here, by the table, reading this paper") and for general beliefs concerning the existence of the external world, beliefs which only might be false *under global hypotheses such as the dream scenario*. (iii) Finally, *intuitions* (including the *Cogito*, arithmetic truths and the laws of logic), namely, simple and evident truths whose falsehood is inconceivable and which are identified by our common incapacity to raise *object-level doubts* concerning them (I do not have any idea what it would be like for two plus three to be more than five or for a thing to be and not to be at the same time and place), cannot be coherently denied, questioned or doubted.

In contrast to Descartes, Wittgenstein deletes the second group, regarding those strong beliefs whose falsehood is seemingly imaginable as akin to *intuitions*, that is to say, to Cartesian thoughts, thoughts that we cannot attempt to doubt without immediately discovering the doubt to be *unintelligible*. At first sight, and owing to the fact that it is easy to raise the dream scenario or the brain in the vat hypothesis and still keeping unscathed our internal experiences and our capacity of judgment, this thesis seems highly counter-intuitive. This notwithstanding, Wittgenstein invites us to try, not to *imagine* a radical doubt, but to take that doubt at face value. It is just then and there, moving from the *illusion of doubt* to its *reality*, when we discover that, since, once started, philosophical skepticism cannot be halted, since

if I couldn't know that I'm in this room then I neither could be certain of the meaning of my words or of the fact that I'm entertaining the belief that I'm in this room,<sup>15</sup> global scenarios bring about *infectious doubts*, doubts which, capable to damaging the foundations of our cognitive building, affect our capacity of thinking *as a whole*. In other words, hinge-propositions belong to our frame of reference. They are general laws describing observable thinking habits, *principles of inference* which, like Cartesian intuitions, are universal preconditions or norms for rational thought in general, *compulsions* which are logically and psychologically imperative.

If this were the whole story about Wittgenstein and skepticism the yarn wouldn't be too impressive. In fact, and in spite of appearances, one couldn't help to think that Wittgenstein's strategy: (i) it leaves the intelligibility (or, at least, the relevance and the *point*) of radical skepticism unchallenged, (ii) it is useless to refute global scenarios, and, (iii) due to the fact that the interrelation between the truth and the meaning of our basic beliefs, instead of warranting truth, could be read as *undermining meaning*, it extends the *scope* of skepticism to introspective knowledge, creating a "skeptical paradox" as uncomfortable as the one pointed by Kripke regarding "rule-following". The main problem of this procedure is that, apart from the funny ring of saying that "I have two hands" doesn't state a *real fact*, there is nothing which could prevent a norm to be also a statement, that is, there is nothing which could demonstrate that principles and propositions are *exclusive categories*. Wittgensteinian philosophers raise doubts over global scenarios because they generate intransigent disagreement, namely, because they cannot be refuted. But intransigent disagreement is an indicator of "no fact of the matter" only in cases where if it were a fact of the matter it would be detectable, a condition which, insofar as they show that if it were a fact of the matter it would be undetectable, so forbidding the deduction from the last fact to the negation of the antecedent of the conditional, is not met by global scenarios. In other words: (i) principles of inference must have a truth-value; (ii) they can be (at least, preliminarily) questioned and validated.

In order to clarify my point, I would like to pay attention to the two main features of Cartesian global scenarios: (i) Unlike Pyrrhonian procedures (as those deployed by Robert Fogelin in *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge*

15 "If, therefore, I doubt or am uncertain about this being my hand (in whatever sense), why not in that case about the meaning of these words as well?" OC, § 456.

and Justification),<sup>16</sup> which are based in the use of *unchecked but checkable defeators* which question a claim because *it is not grounded enough* but which don't question *what counts as evidence in order to solve the question we accidentally cannot solve*, global scenarios defeat our claims *defeating whatever evidence we could give* to defend them in the arena of reflection and thereby *defeating the very notion of evidence, which, paradoxically, lacks evidence*. What they question is our cognitive system *as a whole*. This means that the Cartesian skeptic doesn't say that we don't have such and such experiences which *would remove* our doubts, but that there is *no experience* capable to remove them. The dream argument is, in this sense, a good example of global scenario. If this argument provides a reason for doubt the present experience, then, because if I may be dreaming now I may be dreaming at any time, it provides also a reason to doubt whatever experience we appeal to in order to rule out that possibility (I could be dreaming of shaking my head or pinching my face as means to settle the question whether I'm fast sleep or awake). (ii) Global scenarios can be employed to raise *meta-level doubts*, that is to say, to cast rational doubts over intuitions, rules and principles of inference. Severing the link between thought and reality, they prompt the questions "Why should one trust in intuitions?", "Are our rational minds reliable instruments for the detection of truth?", "Could our compulsions be false to God or to an angel? Otherwise: Could they be false from the perspective of a pure enquirer or from a point of view from nowhere?" It is enough to remember the Cartesian scenario of the Demon to show that these "metaphysical", "remote" and "theoretical" possibilities are sufficient to questioning the epistemic authority of our intuitions without compromising their psychological power, namely, without compromising the empirical fact that they are unshakeable convictions. Global scenarios are, in this sense, the natural gangway towards the problem of the *validation of reason*, a conundrum which, grounded in the conceptual relation between truth and meaning (if my beliefs could be massively false I couldn't ascribe beliefs even to myself; if my rational operations could be massively defective I couldn't think at all), the skeptic, defending that there could be concept-independent possibilities inconsistent with those that our ideas give us access to, and rejecting a skyhook from independent reality to thought, prevents us to answer.

What I mean is: (i) that the consequence of Wittgenstein's gambit is not the rejection of skepticism, but the affirmation of the equivalence between

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16 Cf. R. J. Fogelin, 1994, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 192-204.

a *coherent* and a *total* skepticism (hence its target is external world skepticism, not hyperbolic skepticism); (ii) that, making of hinge-propositions regular members of the class of intuitions, Wittgenstein doesn't spare them the skeptical threat; and, (iii) that, though skeptical doubts, insofar as they take for granted the principles that they undermine, are *unstable*, there is something close to a truth hidden in skepticism, and hence there is a sense in which makes sense to tackle skepticism at face value and, of course, to answer it.

These are unacceptable results according to the deflationary readers of *On Certainty*. They propose to supplement this picture, adding a new step. The skeptical challenge can be presented as a conditional argument:

*If meaning (and the authority of the deliverances of reason) depend on correspondence with reality* (first skeptical premise)

*And this condition cannot be fulfilled* (second skeptical premise)

*Meaning and thought are doubtful* (skeptical conclusion)

*But meaning is indubitable* (Wittgenstein's premise, which rejects the consequence of the conditional and which is expressed as the thesis that meaning is a *primitive fact*)

Therefore:

1) *Either correspondence between meaning and reality can be warranted* (rejection of the second skeptical premise: this conclusion expresses the goal of the epistemological project)

2) *Or meaning takes care of itself, that is, there is neither a truth nor a reality independent of meaning (all concepts are human-relative)* (rejection of the first skeptical premise which entails alethic relativism)

According to the relativist interpretation of *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein endorses the second conclusion. For two reasons: (i) Because, in agreement with skepticism, he thinks that it makes no sense the attempt to warrant thought *from the outside*, namely, to evaluate our rules from an external point of view without taking those rules for granted. At each stage of our epistemic enquiry there will be thoughts which cannot be the object of an external understanding that does not also employ them. In this respect, Wittgenstein would endorse the skeptical attack to neutral epistemic intermediaries (the given), to the possibility of access to an absolute (concept and language independent) reality and to the project of a metaphysical validation of reason. (ii) Because, insofar as total skepticism is the natural destiny of epistemology, we are confronted by a *dilemma*: either an extreme skepticism nourished by the concepts of

“non-mediated reality” and “truth as correspondence with the world”, or a relativism which, rejecting those notions and pointing out that there is only truth and reality *according to* and *in relation with* grammar, dissolves the skeptical question undermining the sense of its presuppositions. Relativism is the only option against skepticism, which means that there is only one intelligible alternative.

I will finish this point with three remarks: (i) According to this reading, Wittgenstein uses skepticism as a *ladder-language* with which we reach an *enlightened perspective* where there is no place for skeptical conundrums. Therefore, skepticism is, in a certain sense, a valuable tool: it erodes epistemology and it (indirectly) shows that the *autonomy of grammar* (the last word of our cognitive framework) is the only escape from the unpleasant consequences of the thesis according to which there is a conceptual relation between meaning and truth. (ii) Due to the facts that (at least several) hinges are universal and immutable (they are preconditions for rational thought) and that Wittgenstein accepts the existence of beliefs which are true in all perspectives (in the deflected sense of “true according to *some* point of view”), Wittgenstein’s relativism is not open to two crushing objections: Davidson’s reduction to absurdity of conceptual relativism and Plato’s charge to relativism of being self-refuting. (iii) Anyway, if this interpretation is right, Wittgenstein was a full-fledge relativist and we are under the sway of an extreme form of linguistic idealism.

2.

A fault which may be observed in the majority of philosophical disputes is that they are *dilemma-prone*, that is to say, that they demand a fundamental decision between two extreme positions, a compelling decision which we cannot evade without exposure to shallowness. They have the form “either/or”. They don’t tolerate compromises. The disputants cannot accept that truth could lie midway between the two positions. To this general feature the discussion between the relativist and the metaphysician is not an exception. This suggests that, like in many different cases, these two equally implausible positions gain momentum exploiting the blunders made by the other contender.

Are we forced to choose between relativism and the skeptical conclusions of epistemology? Borrowing from Davidson: Are we caught between

a false answer to the skeptic, and no answer?<sup>17</sup> Going to the point of this paper: Did Wittgenstein, who thought that the ultimate source of philosophical disquiet was an internal conflict between what the philosopher feels he *has to say* in agreement with an imperative (and seemingly unavoidable) preconception and the desperate toil of conforming everything to this compulsive comparison, and who described the goal of his philosophy as achieving liberation from “deep disquietudes”<sup>18</sup> generated by these forced choices, make a decision?

Wittgenstein found many faults in the epistemological enterprise. Specifically, he accused epistemologists of dealing with nuclear beliefs as if they were empirical propositions whose uncertainty can be solved appealing to ordinary procedures,<sup>19</sup> and of believing that, since the foundations of thought must be grounded, there is something more fundamental than those foundations, something which we could think of without presupposing our frame of reference. But these caveats didn’t commit him to relativism. As a matter of fact, and insofar as we discover objective reason by discovering that we run up against certain fixed limits when we inquire whether our beliefs are essentially perspectival, they led him in an opposite direction.

It is significant that in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein didn’t write that hinge-propositions are true *relative to* the frame of reference, but that “(their unqualified) *truth* belongs to our frame of reference.”<sup>20</sup> Closer to our topic: commenting his remark “If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false”,<sup>21</sup> he explicitly stated that “If someone asked us ‘But is that *true*?’ we might say ‘yes’ to him; and if he demanded grounds we might say ‘I can’t give you any grounds...’”,<sup>22</sup> showing in this way that, though hinge-propositions, insofar as they are ungrounded and it makes no sense to give evidences for or against them (any evidence would be weaker than that which is being grounded), don’t enter in the language-game of

17 Cf. D. Davidson, 1983, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge”, in: D. Davidson, 2006, *The Essential Davidson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 232.

18 L. Wittgenstein, 1953, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell 2001), § 111.

19 “For it is not true that a mistake merely gets more and more improbable as we pass from the planet to my own hand. No: at some point it has ceased to be conceivable. This is already suggested by the following: if it were not so, it would also be conceivable that we should be wrong in *every* statement about physical objects; that any we ever make are mistaken.” *OC*, § 54.

20 *OC*, § 83.

21 *OC*, § 205.

22 *OC*, § 206.

truth, they are true notwithstanding (in the sense according to which truth depends on how the world is).

There are many paragraphs where Wittgenstein states the conceptual connection between doubts regarding the external world and doubts concerning meaning and rules of enquiry<sup>23</sup>, thus linking meaning and correspondence with reality. There are as many remarks where he says that (i) our fundamental beliefs are beyond justification; (ii) it is preposterous to try to throw a bridge from reality to language; and (iii) skepticism is nonsensical. Is it possible to conciliate these (apparently) contradictory tendencies, one leading to relativism, another to epistemology?

In my opinion, the answer is affirmative. In order to demonstrate this point it is enough to remember (i) that *there are reasons which are not a form of evidence*; (ii) that there is a sense of "justification" according to which "to ground our beliefs" is not to trying to garner new and better support for nuclear propositions, but to *subtract* grounds for doubt, that is to say, where "justification" means "to defend our beliefs against *our philosophical opinions*"; and (iii) that skepticism can be labeled as "nonsensical" only after working oneself into a position from which global hypotheses *no longer make sense*, namely, once, facing skepticism at face value, we reflect on the conditions that could make this position possible.

What I'm trying to say is that Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical strategy rests on two correlated facts: (i) the ultimate and unquestionable nature of meaning; and (ii) the discovery (which reflection on skepticism makes possible) that meaning and truth are *mutually and internally dependent* primitive concepts and, in consequence, that they *stand or fall together*. Meaning warrants truth, as it were, *automatically* (without requiring a second and metaphysical warrant). But, since reasoning produces belief, and belief is always belief in the truth of what is believed, truth is indispensable for meaning. Meaning without truth is empty. Truth without meaning is blind.

When skepticism becomes extreme (and thus coherent), it also becomes *self-refuting*. Due to the fact that, questioning the deliverances of reason, skepticism also brings to question its very *intelligibility*, the extension of skepticism implies its annihilation. In other words: in order to demonstrate that nothing can be known, the skeptic has to rely on the capacity of reason for raising *insurmountable scenarios* which, providing conclusive reasons to doubt in any occasion, question that our minds are reliable instruments for the detection of truth. But, since any considerations against the objective validity of a type of reasoning are inevitably attempts to offer reasons

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23 Cf. *OC*, §§ 383, 671, 676.



against it, and these must be rationally assessed, skepticism is a contradictory position. These very scenarios *question the reliability of reason for raising them*. They *cast doubts upon themselves*. This is why Wittgenstein's procedure entitles us to conclude that *the only order of reality is the order that our grammar gives us access to*, and hence that *meta-level doubts are as senseless as object-level doubts*. Obviously, this strategy is analogous to the one deployed by Moore in "Proof of an External World", and, like the latter, it could be accused of begging the question. Nonetheless, it is enough to remember that skepticism must be rational in order to be effective, and that it undermines the very conditions which make it intelligible, to appeasing this qualm.

In agreement with relativism, Wittgenstein defends that there is not an "absolute truth", if for "absolute" we understand an "intelligible foundation of thought" and an "independent order of possibilities that could be inconsistent with grammar". Nonetheless, far from distinguishing between absolute and relative truth there is for Wittgenstein only truth of one kind, *unqualified truth* or truth *simpliciter*. In agreement with epistemology, Wittgenstein resists the drive to reduce the notion of "truth" to epistemic concepts (verification, warranted assertion, agreement...). Nonetheless, he doesn't sever truth from meaning, falling into the traps of a full-fledge metaphysics. Wittgenstein justifies our basic beliefs showing that they are groundless. He supports them demonstrating both that they are the *last word* and that they couldn't be the last word without being intrinsically veridical. In this respect, for Wittgenstein the very question "Why should one trust the laws of thought?" seems to make little sense.

Wittgenstein, like Descartes, extended scepticism in order to refute it. He granted its widest scope to this position only in order to deflate its meaning. If this is not a real *breakthrough* in epistemology, what would be?

In short, Wittgenstein accused extreme forms of skepticism and relativism of reducing all necessities to necessities *de dicto* (conventional or linguistic necessities), something at odds with the existence of simple and evident truths whose falsehood is inconceivable, and which implies to dissolve any fundamental distinction between sense and nonsense (an attitude analogous to the one taken by the Red Queen when in *Through the Looking-Glass* she says to Alice that "When you say 'hill', I could show you hills in comparison with which you'd call that a valley"),<sup>24</sup> and of

24 L. Carroll, 1872, *Through the Looking-Glass*, in: L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* (London: Penguin Books 1998), p. 140.



creating something akin to the reversal of Moore's Paradox: if to say that I believe that  $p$  is only a remark on a psychological fact about me, one could believe something and still remain uncommitted to the truth of that which he believes, a conclusion which goes against the grammar of believing and which entails treating our own thoughts as if they were the thoughts of someone else, someone thinking thoughts within us. This is why his procedure is a negative demonstration of the rational framework. That people who really reject the basic laws of thought (and not just pretend to reject them) obliterate any significant difference between asserting something and denying it. They deprive themselves of meaning, opting either for silence or for madness. For them, the difference between what is and what is not rational has been abolished. And so, the threat of madness makes sense of our decision to stand before the abyss.<sup>25</sup>

As far as it goes, Wittgenstein's strategy could be described as a paradigmatic sample of "rational therapy". It is therapy, because problems are not solved, but *dissolved*. But it is also rational, because it involves reflection and it avoids the lure of an external court of appeal, such as "ordinary language", "common sense" or "natural and unshakeable compulsions". It is apposite to mention that, unlike those deflationary approaches to philosophy characteristic of the last century which are incapable of making sense of the dangerous attraction of philosophical questions, Wittgenstein takes a point of view *internal to philosophy*, that is to say that his proposal is a *therapy from philosophers, for philosophers and with philosophers* which, avoiding facing philosophy as a spectacle for a critical and detached spectator, takes epistemic questions seriously enough, and so captures the intimacy between the thinker and his topics.

### 3.

I am not entirely happy with the reliability of this procedure. Neither am I in full agreement with the "framework reading"<sup>26</sup> of *On Certainty*. This interpretation is supported by many remarks scattered across the text, in particular, by Wittgenstein's way of dealing with the dream argument.<sup>27</sup> However, there are other paragraphs which point to a *higher level of scrutiny*. What I have in mind are three kinds of remarks:

25 *OC*, § 370.

26 A label coined by Danièle Moyal-Sharrock for describing her own position. Cf. D. Moyal-Sharrock; W. H. Brenner (eds.), 2005, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

27 Cf. *OC*, §§ 383, 671, 676.

(i) Texts concerning the *ultimate contingency of nomological principles* where Wittgenstein, making use of a strong religious language (“Is God bound by our knowledge?”<sup>28</sup> “The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing”<sup>29</sup> “But as soon as I say this sentence [*I know*] outside its context, it appears in a false light. For then it is as if I wanted to insist that there are things that I *know*. God himself can’t say anything to me about them”<sup>30</sup>),<sup>30</sup> makes clear that we are unable to discern the ultimate basis of the fundamental logical principles in accordance with which the universe is structured, and that, if “rationalism” is defined as the view that the basis for our *nuclear beliefs* is, in principle, transparently accessible to human reason, he diverges substantially from the rationalist paradigm. In this sense, reality is not bound by our way of making sense of reality, and *possibility* is not equivalent to *conceivability*.

(ii) Texts which, stating that *a doubt is not necessary even when it is possible*,<sup>31</sup> that nobody knows a thing insofar as a *metaphysical overemphasis* is given to the meaning of “to know”,<sup>32</sup> and that one has the right to say that he is sure even if he could be wrong,<sup>33</sup> point to the intelligibility of *radical skepticism*, to the distinction between the conditions which must be satisfied in order to be true that *I know* and the conditions which make true that *I know that I know* (this distinction is analogous to Sosa’s difference between *apt belief* and *safe belief*),<sup>34</sup> and to the project to conciliate the *right to belief* and the *right to doubt*. In this sense, Wittgenstein considers that epistemology and ordinary cognitive procedures are different language-games, each one independent but genuine.

(iii) Texts which, remarking that the end of reasons is not “a kind of *seeing* on our part”, but “our *acting*”<sup>35</sup>, reject the ultra-rationalist (and davidsonian) project of subsuming experience within reason, namely, the project of construing every appearance, higher-level as well as lower-level, epistemically. Ancient skeptics made the mistake of thinking that it is possible to divest oneself entirely of one’s humanity, to detach oneself from the person (namely, oneself) who is convinced by an argument or who enter-

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28 *OC*, § 436.

29 *OC*, § 166.

30 *OC*, § 554.

31 *OC*, § 392.

32 *OC*, § 407.

33 *OC*, § 549.

34 Cf. E. Sosa, 2007, *A Virtue Epistemology. Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 22-28.

35 *OC*, § 204.

tains such and such beliefs. This is why they attempted to construe judgments and arguments as *appearances* devoid of objective or rational force (an analogous conception is implicit in the relativist vision of rationality). Paradoxically, the procedure of making of "hinge-beliefs" constituent elements of our rational framework makes the *opposite mistake*, preventing those *steppings back* that are the essence of philosophy, that is, the natural attitude of wrenching ourselves out of our surroundings and of placing under rational scrutiny our "natural" beliefs, and substituting the reflective enterprise of running up against the last foundations of intellectual understanding for the *intimate and animal*<sup>36</sup> connection with our everyday beliefs. Ancient skepticism had *no center*. Contemporary ultra-rationalism is too centered. Wittgenstein's appeal to ungrounded actions is equivalent to the thesis that, since *experience is opaque to reason*, epistemological arguments cannot give us access to the realm of value, the deepest aspect of a world which otherwise would be a mere algorithm.

Surprisingly, if one wants to look for parallels between Wittgenstein's view of the contingency of nomological principles and more familiar views closer to the history of philosophy, my preference is for the Cartesian doctrine of the *creation of eternal truths*. If truth, modality and goodness have no other basis than the groundless and free decision by which God decreed them, then there is no independent rational justification to be given for them. That Descartes and Wittgenstein seem to have shared certain intuitions about the appropriate ways of thinking on God and the role He is made to play in ultra-rationalist explanations appears from some remarks of the latter in a discussion about theological ethics which sheds light on Wittgenstein's insistence (in *On Certainty*) on the end of reasons. Wittgenstein is reported to have made the following remarks against the rationalists represented by Schlick, who held that there is a reason for why God wants the good:

(a)ccording to the shallow interpretation the good is good because God wants it; according to the deeper interpretation God wants the good because it is good. I think it is the first conception that is the deeper one: good is what God commands. For it cuts off any explanation as to 'why' it is good. To say: 'It is good, because God commands it' is, Wittgenstein adds, 'the right expression for the lack of foundation'.<sup>37</sup>

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36 OC, § 475.

37 F. Waismann, 1967, *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 115.

In any case, the perspective opened by these remarks is at odds with the negative demonstration of the validity of our framework. Let's consider some of its consequences:

(i) To point out that our laws of thought are groundless entails accepting both that God could have created other laws (incomprehensible from our perspective), and that an *unbridgeable gap* between reason and reality, that is, between meaning and truth, is possible. According to this point of view, and since we can imagine ourselves thinking and speaking "in contradiction to (the) world",<sup>38</sup> the question "Why should one trust the laws of thought?" makes sense.

(ii) If reason cannot make sense of experience, then is there a sense according to which we can detach ourselves from our conception of the world and still preserve our capacity of judgment. In this respect, Wittgenstein overstated the link between hinges and rationality. One thing is to say that the epistemological perspective deprives us of the *intimate dimension* which distinguishes our experience of the world from abstract thought, namely, that, since the epistemologist sees his experiences *from the outside*, treating his own sensations as if they were the sensations of someone else, he is making of the second-person common world a riddle or puzzle, something strange, alien, uninformative and insignificant; and quite another to state that he lacks a perspective. Because it is *possible*, rational detachment is a threat to the meaning of our lives. Madness is equivalent to splendid isolation. To be faithful to the irreducible character of experience implies acknowledging the division between two kinds of sense: sense from the outside and sense from the inside. The tension between these two primitive standpoints explains both our discomfort in epistemology and our incapacity to get rid of it.

(iii) Wittgenstein is raising the *skeptical problem* at a higher level and under different (and stricter) conditions. As a matter of fact, he is raising two related questions: (a) Is it possible to construe the laws of thought epistemically without making of them something necessary? (b) How to make sense of the *dual nature* of human beings, of the fact that we can divorce ourselves from our beliefs and still feel that we are intimately related to them, when close connection is *unintelligible* from a rational point of view and when detachment seems impossible from the common sense perspective? That is to say: how is it possible for a being to entertain beliefs and to be rational?

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38 OC, § 595.

The contingency of rational principles and the skeptical thesis according to which there are *paradoxes internal to reason* which, showing that rationality is self-refuting and that its deliverances could be *non-epistemic* in character, undermine its authority, hold the first question. The irreducible and non-epistemic character of our beliefs and the requirement of making some sense of them from the outside, hold the second question. They can be neither *repressed* nor *answered* appealing to the last authority of the logical framework. Moreover, they point to the *same kind of answer*: a procedure capable of validating reason and experience without making of the laws of thought the *criterion* of the endless possible worlds, that is to say, a strategy capable of providing a rational basis to experience without exhausting experience, and so without falling into the ultra-rationalist ideal of reducing the universe to a mathematical formula.

In a nutshell: what is required is a *ground for groundlessness* capable to preserve this groundlessness and still to make veridical our fundamental convictions, a point which, reached by reason, could be the ground which makes sense of the creative, irreducible and indeterminate aspects of reality. Brute facts, because of their contingency, are not candidates for the role of self-grounded ground. Nomological principles from which each and every detail of the world could be deduced are *incompatible with contingency*. The conciliation of experience and rationality, of contingency and necessity, is only possible in *God*, a being who makes sense of an *iterative conception of modality* according to which necessary truths about contingently existing beings are only contingently necessary, but necessary truths about necessarily existing beings are necessarily necessary.

Since God can be *touched by reason*, but not fully grasped, He is the point where reasons come to an end *in agreement with reason*, that is to say, where, since it is reason itself which comes to conclude that there are aspects of the world which are not understandable, the limits of reason are not its *limitations*, and so the thirst for more reasons is quenched, but not repressed. Since God, although rational in a sense, is not bound by our particular way of thinking, everything which is conceivable it is also possible, but the possible is not reduced to the conceivable. Since He is the only object whose demonstration is capable to break without circularity the *balance of judgments* brought about by skeptical scenarios which undermine the authority of reason (while after the *Cogito* the skeptic could coherently point to the Demon Scenario for balancing judgments, he couldn't do the same after the demonstration of God, since *at that stage* this option is not a possibility; in other words, unlike the case of the *Cogito*, where the skeptic can give his assent both to the *Cogito* argument and to the skeptical pos-

sibility, he cannot assent to the demonstration of God without rejecting his previous arguments: this is the reason why if the proofs of God are hypothetically valid they are, from an absolute point of view, correct), his demonstration is irreplaceable in epistemology.

God is the right expression for *the foundation of the lack of foundation*. Reasons come to an end only when reason touches something which cannot be grasped. Groundlessness has to be grounded in order to avoid arbitrariness and wishful thinking. In a famous remark published in *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein wrote:

The honest religious thinker is like a tightrope walker. It almost looks as though he were walking on nothing but air. His support is the slenderest imaginable. And yet is possible to walk on it.<sup>39</sup>

In my opinion, in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein groped for something which could make sense on how is possible to walk on the tightropes of *religion* and *reason*. Paradoxically, he suggested that these two domains are deeply related, that they *support each other*: the proper object of worship is the guarantee of a reason capable to validate this very object, and so of self-validation.

This is why I think that Avrum Stroll was right: because it points to a pre-kantian mode of thinking, one which avoids the calamitous result which came from the misleading Kantian attack on the illusory ideals of classical metaphysics: *irrationality*; *On Certainty* is the most important contribution to epistemology since *The critique of pure reason*. In other words: the deepest value of *On Certainty* is that it leaves us at the very entrance to the Cartesian project, a project which, misunderstood by the “official doctrine”, was rehabilitated by a Wittgenstein’s disciple: Norman Malcolm,<sup>40</sup> by a Wittgenstein’s scholar: Gordon Baker, and by one of the most conspicuous epistemologist in the contemporary philosophical landscape: Ernest Sosa. This project makes sense of the limits of reason by means of the most rigorous use of reason. It is the paradigmatic example of a *circumspect rationalism*.

39 L. Wittgenstein, 1977, *Culture and Value* (Malden / Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2006), p. 84.

40 N. Malcolm, 1960, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments”, in: A. Plantinga (ed.), 1965, *The Ontological Argument. From St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books), pp. 136-159.

4.

I would like to put an end to this paper listing the main interpretative results of this religious account of *On Certainty*:

(i) Since, in relation to hinge-propositions, Wittgenstein explores with a new thoroughness his constant interest in the *sureness of our language-games*, there is a deep *continuity* between *On Certainty* and Wittgenstein's earlier concerns. In this respect, the basic problems he is dealing with are: What would it be for our language-games to have grounds? What would the grounds be? But if there are no grounds, aren't the language-games arbitrary? We seem to have nothing but words, when what we need is the sureness of a link, a reliable foundation, between our words and the world. How is that need to be satisfied? Some have thought it necessary to show that the language-games are determined by the structure of the world, and that there is some kind of pre-established harmony between them. But what of that harmony itself? Does it, in turn, need to be grounded in a sure foundation?

(ii) Wittgenstein underlines that we don't stand in any *epistemological* relation to our world-picture (our experiences). He states that language makes sense if living makes sense, rescuing us for thinking of ourselves as externally related to our being in our world. In this sense, we are rescued from a false transcendentalism, one according to which the meaning of our lives can be subsumed within reason, and human experiences are intelligible in abstraction from nature. However, one thing is to try to ground experience *in* reason, and quite another to try to ground experience *through* reason. In this respect, Wittgenstein is waging a war in two fronts: against those who think that we must be content with a groundless trust, and that we can repress our hunger for foundations; and against those who dictate our framework to the world. Wittgenstein pointed to a *middle ground*, to a procedure according to which, since the transcendental use of reason reaches a foundation for the harmony between language and world from which it is deduced that the world could have been otherwise and that every fact has a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* condition, our experiences are both groundless and grounded. Thus, the relation to our being in our world is *internal* and *veridical*.

(iii) Between the classical style of theology which makes of God an abstract being with a unrestricted freedom, a being capable of *suspending the laws of nature at any moment* through particular decrees ("miracles"), a position which, underlining the *essential contingency of every phenomenon*, was the source of extreme empiricism, and a style of theology ex-

emplified in certain aspects by Aquinas and Descartes, which states that, though nomological facts are the product of a creative act, God cannot change them once instituted, Wittgenstein opted for the second approach.

(iv) Is Wittgenstein closer to *Platonism* or to *naturalism*? Is the unspeakable *beyond* or *below* reason? Are our basic beliefs associated with what is above the reason, or with the region of instinct that is below it? No one familiar with Wittgenstein's ethical and religious concerns, with his distinction between the order of causes and the order of reasons, with his description of philosophical problems as problems where "what has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will",<sup>41</sup> or with his extreme dislike of our Time, can have doubts on the answer. But, it is our "dark time", infatuated with spontaneity and primitivism, which spawns Wittgenstein's interpreters.

With all famous philosophers, but especially with some of them, what they say or think is one thing and what they somehow cause many others to say or think that they think is another. Wittgenstein is one of these I don't know if lucky or unlucky thinkers.

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41 L. Wittgenstein, 1933, "Philosophy", in: L. Wittgenstein, 1993, *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951* (Indianapolis / Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company), p. 161.



BEGOÑA RAMÓN CÁMARA<sup>1</sup>

*EPÉKEINA TÊS OUSÍAS:*  
WITTGENSTEIN AND THE PLATONIC IDEA  
OF THE GOOD

It is necessary ... to bear in mind this one truth:  
that no evil can come to a good man.

Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 41c–d

The task that is dealt with on these pages is to examine the connection between a certain aspect of the moral and religious thought of two men, Plato and Wittgenstein, who are distant in time but very kindred in their moral temperament and mystical sentiment. I will particularly try to show that the conception of God in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is a survival of one of the most distinctive attributes of the Platonic Idea of the Good. And I will lastly review some of the practical consequences derived from this conception of God in Plato and Wittgenstein's ethics. We should bear in mind that, within the mystical trend of the Platonic tradition, the principal good of man consists, even in this life, in some kind of approach to God – in whichever way that assimilation might be understood: as imitation, contemplation, or absorption –, according to that passage in the *Theaetetus* referring to the escape to the world of the gods from the evils associated with mortal nature and prevailing in this world. That escape, says Socrates, consists in becoming as similar to the deity as possible, and

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it is reached by way of intelligence, righteousness, and piety (176a–b).<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the conception of the divine attributes is also a theory about the nature of the ultimate value, and the conception of God is equivalent to a definition of the objective of human life. This pretentious and demanding ideal of moral perfection survives in the work of Wittgenstein.

All the Greek schools that take Socrates as the master in the art of living agree that the essence of the good, even in everyday human experience, lies in the self-sufficiency and independency of the individual, in self-restraint and in the liberation from all the dependences that might jeopardize the freedom of the individual. The character of that ideal cynic, Diogenes – who neither needed nor wanted anything that other men might offer him – the ataraxia of the Epicureans, or the apathia of the Stoics, may serve as examples. Likewise, in Plato’s philosophy “the good” (*tò agathón*) has primarily the Socratic meaning of “sufficiency” and “independence”. The man who is good (*agathós*), in so far as he is good – suggests Socrates to Lysis and the other boys present at the palaestra of the sophist Micco –, is sufficient for himself; and the sufficient has no need of anything by virtue of his sufficiency and does not attach himself to anybody (*Lysis* 215a–b). A good man, it is said in the *Republic*, “is, most of all men, sufficient for himself in order to live well, and is distinguished from the other men in having the least need of anybody else” (*o toioûtos málista autòs autôi autárkēs pròs tò eû zên kai diapheróntōs tôn állōn hékista hetérou prosdeítai*; 387d–e). When Plato hypostatizes that term and turns it into the essence of the highest Idea, the word retains its Socratic meaning, but is now taken in an absolute sense. According to what is held in the *Philebus*, the nature of the good exceeds all others in that “whatever living being possesses the good for always and in all ways, has no further need of anything, but is perfectly satisfied” (*ói pareíē toút’ aei tôn zóion dià télous pántos kai pántēi, mēdenòs hetérou potē éti prosdeísthai, tò dē hikanòn teleótaton*

2 “But it is impossible that evils should be done away with, Theodorus – for there must always be something antagonistic to the good – and having no place among the gods, they necessarily hover about mortal nature and this earthly place. Therefore we ought to escape from here to there as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like him, is to become righteous, holy, and wise.” (*all’ out’ apolésthai tà kakà dynatón, ò Theódōre – hypenantíon gár ti tōi agathōi aei eínai anánkē – out’ en theoís autà hidrýsthai, tēn dē thnētēn phýsin kai tónde tôn tópon peripoleî ex anánkēs. diò kai peirásthai chrē enthēnde ekeîse pheúgein óti táchista. phygē dē homoiōsis theōi katà tò dynatón· homoiōsis dē díkaiōn kai hósion metá phronēseōs genésthai.*) Cf. also *Republic* 383c and 613a–b, *Phaedrus* 253a, *Timaeus* 90d, and *Laws* 715e–716d.

*échein*; 60b–c). Only God’s intellect has the attribute of self-sufficiency in an absolute and unconditional sense (22c). It is precisely the doctrine of the self-sufficiency of the Good what leads in that dialogue to the conclusion that, for man, the good cannot lie exclusively in a life surrendered to pleasure nor in a life consecrated to the intellect, since they both lack self-sufficiency, adequacy, and perfection (*steroménoin autarkeías kai tês tou hikanoû kai teléou dynámeōs*; 67a).

Plato introduces the transcendence of the Form of the Good in relation to the world in a strange and oracular passage of the *Republic* that has greatly influenced later generations of mystics, especially for the use that was made of it by Plotinus and Saint Augustine, who preserved for later mysticism the images and the dialectics with which Plato tries to express the unfathomable transcendence of his God.<sup>3</sup> In that passage Socrates notices that “the good is not essence, but something which still transcends essence in dignity and power” (*ouk ousías óntos tou agathou, all’ éti epékeina tês ousías presbeíai kai dynámei hyperéchontos*; 509b). The Idea of the Good is the complete opposite of the sensible world, and therefore its true nature is ineffable: its beauty is “indescribable” (*améchanon*; 509a), and in the strict sense not even the most universal of the categories assignable to the other Forms can be applied to it. Far from harmonizing with reality, that is to say, with any of the senses in which all the other things are real, it shows a “wonderful superiority” (*daimonías hyperbolês*; 509c).

This passage has several meanings in Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology, but the one most relevant to our objectives is clarified in a section of the *Symposium* that deals in some detail with the transcendental isolation which the Idea of Beauty enjoys. It must be taken into account that in Greek *kalón* and *agathón* are closely related, both in their meaning and in their idiomatic usage,<sup>4</sup> and that Plato’s ethics is basically esthetic in its conception. Therefore, what is said of the Idea of Beauty can easily be applied to the Idea of the Good.

In a certain moment of her discourse, Diotima tries to initiate Socrates in the most profound “mysteries of love”, those that involve “perfect initiation and contemplation” (*tà télea kai eoptiká*; 210a). This initiation consists, as it is well known, in ascending the ladder of love until reaching the contemplation of Beauty itself (*autò tò kalón*; 211d), in starting from the beautiful things of this world and, using them as if they were the rungs of

3 On this matter, see André-Jean Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon* (Paris: Vrin, 1936).

4 Cf., for example, *Symposium* 201b, 202b.

a ladder, to ascend until having, suddenly (*exaiphnēs*), the view of something that is “wondrously beautiful in its nature”. It is precisely for that why all the fatigues of the ascent are endured, and it is also – as it is said likewise of the vision of the Good in the *Republic* – what gives meaning to life, that is to say, what makes man happy and the only thing in which the soul can find rest.

This supreme Idea shares with all the other Forms the properties of eternity and immutability, but it has the peculiarity that it is absolutely transcendent. Beauty, says the prophetess, does not present itself as

a face or hands or any other part of the body, nor as a particular discourse or knowledge, nor as existing somewhere in another being – for example, in an animal, in the earth, in the sky or in any other thing –, but as itself and according to itself, being always of a singular form with itself (*autò kath'autoù meth'autoù monoeidès aei ón*), while all the other beautiful things partake of it in such a way that, although the other things come to being and perish, it grows neither greater nor less, and does not suffer anything. (210d–211a).

What Plato seems to mean with these words is that the Idea of Beauty cannot be considered – to follow his own metaphor – as a rung, not even as an end continuous with the ladder that leads to it, but, so to speak, as a springboard with which to give a final leap into a field that is beyond the world: to the Beauty that cannot be identified with any of the beautiful or good things that tend to it or that Beauty attracts; an absolute transcendence that Plato is careful to strengthen with a triple sameness (*autò, kath'autoù, meth'autoù*) and to secure for all eternity (*aei*) as a pure totality *with no conditions nor dependencies*.

Such a Parmenidean exaggeration in the formula with which Plato summarizes the climax of the dialectic process gives us a hint of something important: the dialectical ascent to such heights, to such conditions of absolute identity, is a moment of sudden dazzling of the soul in which there is no acting of reason any more, but only passion – which is defined in the *Phaedrus* as “divine madness” – and it makes it impossible to account in words for the essence of the Beautiful. Anything that might be heard or said in this regard would be just “noise”, weariness and cacophony that would disturb the “divine silence” and would force us to be quiet. Indeed, as the analysis of language made in the *Sophist* shows, “the most perfect way of obliterating all discourse is to separate each thing from all the others” (*teleōtātē pántōn lógōn estin aphánisis tò dialýein hékaston apò pántōn*; 259e). Let us remember, lastly, in this same sense, that the dialectics of the *Parmenides*, seduced by the ineffable, places the Idea of Oneness – another

name of the Good – in such a rigorous state of solitude and introversion, in a state in which it is itself and with itself – that is to say, in which it is “all and only (*hólon*) itself” –, that again the dialectical experience has to end up with the dissolution (*aphánisis*) of any possible word: it cannot be affirmed that the One is, nor that the One is not (166c). This is probably one of the reasons for the attraction that Wittgenstein felt for this work of Plato.

This otherworldly and ineffable Good of Plato soon becomes the distant and eternally lost in thought God of Aristotle, and the One, “opposed” to the world and indescribable, of the Neoplatonics, who followed Plato in assigning the Good a place beyond Being in their hypostatic hierarchies.<sup>5</sup> It is also one of the features of the God of most philosophical theologies of the Middle Ages and of many of the metaphysical systems and theologies of modern times, and – if I am not mistaken – the transcendent and ineffable God of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* should also be read in connection with this element of the Platonic tradition.

Let us remember for the moment a very significant consequence entailed by this element of Plato’s metaphysics and that leads us directly to the other divine feature – that of indifference – that is pointed out by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*. For Plato, the concept of “divinity” means, as can be deduced from the quoted passage of the *Philebus* and from many other sections of his dialogues, the being that is or that eternally possesses the good in its plenitude. We have also seen that he uses the word “good” in the sense of absolute self-sufficiency and that he shows that nothing in the sensible world must be identified with the divine essence. From this it is easily inferred that the existence of the whole sensible and temporal world with all its beings, that in no sense are really self-sufficient, do not add any new value to reality. The good is fully realized in God all at once; the sensible world does not increase it in any sense. From the divine point of view, the world lacks any value; it is only – to use the imagery of the *Republic* – a dark cave of inane shadows without any substance or worth. This consequence of Plato’s conception of the Good soon becomes manifest in Aristotle, whose theology is dominated by the sentiment of the indifference of God – the being who is “himself his own well-being” (*Eudemian Ethics* VII, 12, 1245b19) – towards the world. “It does not belong to the self-sufficient man,” writes Aristotle, “to need either useful friends, or friends to amuse him, or company, for he is sufficient company for himself. This is especially manifest in the case of God, for it is clear that, as he needs noth-

5 Plotinus, *Enneads*, II, 9, 1; V, 12; VI, 9; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, CXIX, CXXXIII, VIII; Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, I, 5; VIII, 2.

ing, he will not need a friend, and he will not have one nor anything else that a master needs" (VII, 12, 1244b6–10). And it is the historical source of the thesis, reasserted after Aristotle by so many philosophers and theologians, that God does not need the world and is indifferent to what happens in the world; a thesis to which Wittgenstein adheres firmly. Let us remember the way it is held in the *Tractatus*: "How the world is, is completely indifferent for what is higher" (*Wie die Welt ist, ist für das Höhere vollkommen gleichgültig*).<sup>6</sup> This piece of Plato's theology has survived through the centuries because it agrees with one of the varieties of religious experience, with that kind of religious imagination and sentiment which Wittgenstein shares and that cannot be satisfied but with the certainty of the exile from the natural world of the highest object of contemplation and of his sublime lack of interest even for the human beings who worship him.

It must be pointed out that in Wittgenstein's writings there are at least two other representations of God in which it is clearly difficult, if not truly impossible, to recognize the transcendent and impassible God of the *Tractatus*. On the one hand, we find – and this was probably the idea of the divine that carried in his thought the most weight – deep traces of the Jewish-Christian conception of a "terrible" God, a judge of men with authority to demand everything from a person at any time,<sup>7</sup> and of the related idea of a life lived within the horizon of a Last Judgement. In this regard we

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- 6 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with a new translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London–New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul–The Humanities Press, 1961), proposition 6.432.
- 7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, hrsg. von Ilse Somavilla (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1997), p. 80 (174); cf. also number 147, on page 70. When recording in the diary that he kept when he was a school teacher in Trattebach a strange experience that he had had the day before, Wittgenstein writes: "I suddenly felt my complete nothingness and saw that God could demand from me what he wills on the condition that my life would immediately become meaningless if I didn't obey (*Ich empfand auf einmal meine völlige Nichtigkeit und ich sah ein daß Gott von mir verlangen konnte was er wollte mit der Bedingung nämlich daß mein Leben sofort sinnlos würde wenn ich ungehorsam bin*)." (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Licht und Schatten. Ein nächtliches (Traum-)Erlebnis und ein Brief-Fragment*, hrsg. von Ilse Somavilla, Innsbruck: Haymon, 2004, p. 20.) See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen/Culture and Value*, ed. by G. H. Von Wright, revised second edition of the text by Alois Pichler with English translation by Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 99 (MS 175 56r: 15.3.1951), and the memoirs by Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: O.U.P., 2nd ed. 1984), and G. H. Von Wright, "Ludwig Wittgenstein, A Biographical Sketch", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4.

have, for example, the following testimony by Paul Engelmann: “ ‘When we meet again at the last judgement’ was a recurrent phrase with him, which he used in many a conversation at a particularly momentous point. He would pronounce the words with an indescribably inward-gazing look in his eyes, his head bowed, the picture of a man stirred to his depths.”<sup>8</sup> And, on the other hand, we find in Wittgenstein traces of a God that is love (*Liebe*). This divine attribute of “love” seems to be understood in terms similar to those which characterize the concept of God in primitive Christianity, his essence consisting in effusing love and alleviating the sufferings of his creatures, as Wittgenstein’s frequent questioning to God in some of his private notebooks, searching in him for the support and inner strength necessary to face “the soul’s illness” (*der seelischen Krankheit*), seem to indicate.<sup>9</sup> He might also understand him in the sense of a God that loves peace and concord among men.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the young Wittgenstein has at his disposal several gods under one name. But, at least in the *Tractatus*, he adopts the notion of self-sufficiency as an essential attribute of God, who is, like Plato’s Good, strictly transcendent to the world: “God does not reveal himself *in* the world (*Gott offenbart sich nicht in der Welt*).”<sup>11</sup> This property can also offer the clue to understand his rejection of the notion of a Creator, an idea totally alien to Wittgenstein.<sup>12</sup> Of a God that is with his back to the world in his absolute self-sufficiency it cannot be said coherently that the urge to create something is part of his essence, since that would contradict his independence and sovereignty. God cannot be linked to the world by causation nor in any other way. The God of Wittgenstein, then, as the God of Aristotle, is sterile and does not engender anything.

This concept of a God extramundane and indifferent to the world is the logical consequence of a pessimist ontology of contingency that, in the same *páthos* with which Plato condemns in the *Republic* the sensible world as a blind and irrational world of shadows, throws all possible value of the

8 Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein: with a Memoir*. Translated by L. Furtmüller and edited by B. F. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), p. 78.

9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, hrsg. und dokumentiert von Wilhelm Baum, Wien: Turia & Kant, 1991, entry of 6.8.1916. See also, for example, *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 31 (41).

10 Cf. *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entry of 7.3.1915.

11 Id., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 6.432.

12 Cf. Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, p. 59.



world overboard: “The sense of the world” – which we can call God – ,<sup>13</sup> says Wittgenstein,

must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists – and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *within* the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world.<sup>14</sup>

The “great problem” round which all his thinking turns – he writes in such an early time in his life as 1915 – is to know if there is an *a priori* order in the world, and if so, what does it consist of.<sup>15</sup> But in a life lived in space and time, hardly anything can be deduced from or reconciled with the postulate that existence is the manifestation and consequence of a set of “eternal” and “necessary” Ideas. The world just seems to consist of a hazardous collection of objects without any *raison d’être* that might support them. The world’s constitution is accidental and could be different from how it is,<sup>16</sup> or, to express it in the anthropological terms that were usual among theologians: in the world, Will precedes Intellect. Therefore, to this old metaphysical question a negative answer must be given, and here Wittgenstein stays diametrically opposed to the other great current of Platonic theology, the rationalistic tradition, that stems from the *Timaeus* and has been always averse to the belief in the ultimate irrationality of the world: “There is no order of things *a priori*” (*Es gibt keine Ordnung der Dinge a priori*), he declares.<sup>17</sup>

The acknowledgement of the arbitrary, fortuitous and hazardous character of the world does not entail for Wittgenstein the concept of a world in which the subject can choose from an infinity of possibilities. Unlike Aristotle’s ontology – to continue with the comparison – , whose contingent universe, just by reason of its hazardous character, opens to man the possibility of involving himself in it and trying to rationalize it, the concept of a contingent world leads Wittgenstein to the idea of a subject whose will

13 Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. by G. H. von Wright, G. E. M. Anscombe, an English translation by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), entry of 11.6.1916.

14 Id., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 6.41.

15 Id., *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 1.6.1915.

16 Id., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 5.634; *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 12.8.1916.

17 Id., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 5.634.



has no logical connection with the world<sup>18</sup> and who sails totally powerless in the “desolate, infinite grey sea of happenings” (*trostlosen, unendlichen grauen Meer des Geschehens*).<sup>19</sup> “I cannot bend,” he says, “the happenings of the world to my will: I am completely powerless.”<sup>20</sup> To state that the world lacks any support by the eternal and necessary order of the essences and their relations, is the metaphysical way of saying that the world can be an extremely precarious place, a place that is intellectually scarcely reliable, and emotionally unsteady and insecure. The general strategy followed by Wittgenstein’s ethics in order to make room for the happiness of the subject in such a “remarkable world”<sup>21</sup> goes back as far as Socrates. Wittgenstein, like him, distinguishes between those things which are within our power and those which are not, and rules out that the latter should enter into the definition of man’s happiness. As for Socrates and Plato, for Wittgenstein happiness is the privilege of the man who struggles to attain the wisdom that is goodness, and this is certainly within man’s power. Pondering the thought that we can do nothing for or against fate, he writes: “*Such is this life. How should I live, then, to succeed every moment? (So ist dies Leben. Wie muss ich also leben, um in jedem Augenblick zu bestehen?)* To live in the good and the beautiful until life ends by itself.” And in another place: “Do good and rejoice in your virtue (*Tue Gutes und freue dich über deine Tugend*) [...] Think of the goal of life (*das Ziel des Lebens*)”<sup>22</sup> The obstacles to happiness are not in the circumstances, however terrible they might be, but in the passions, that make us depend on the circumstances, while we forget that passions depend on us: “If life becomes hard to bear we think of improvements. But the most important & effective improvement, in our own attitude, hardly occurs to us, & we can decide on this only with the utmost difficulty.”<sup>23</sup> In that very moment in which we adopt the right attitude, we become immune to fate. Socrates drank the cup of hemlock, says Plato, “very gently” (*mála hileōs*; *Phaedo* 117b) and “without trembling or changing colour or expression” (*oudèn trésas oudè diaphtheiras*

18 Id., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 6.374.

19 *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entry of 13.12.1914.

20 *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 11.6.1916.

21 Letter to Russell dated November 28, 1921, in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Cambridge Letters. Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, ed. by B. McGuinness, G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 172.

22 Id., *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entries of 7.10.1914, 7.4.1916 and 28.5.1916, respectively. Cf. also Id., *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 75 (161).

23 Id., *Vermischte Bemerkungen/Culture and Value*, p. 60 (MS 132 136: 7.10.1946).

*oúte tou chrómatos oúte tou prosópu; ibid.*),<sup>24</sup> in his firm conviction that no harm can happen to a good man.<sup>25</sup> The death of Socrates is the fact that originates Platonism, and this same lively sentiment of inner freedom can be recognised in Wittgenstein's writings quite a few times. In his *Lecture on Ethics*, for example, one of the experiences that he evokes in order to show some of the characteristics of his concept of the "absolute good" is the experience of feeling absolutely safe.<sup>26</sup>

"In order to live happily," says Wittgenstein, "I must be in agreement with the world. And that is what 'being happy' means. I am then, so to speak, in agreement with that alien will on which I appear dependent. That is to say: 'I am doing the will of God'".<sup>27</sup> The disposition that this philosophy aims to provoke is evidently to say yes to everything and to suppress any emotional rebellion against the world. And the kind of soul's comfort that it offers is based on the human way of thinking and feeling that accepts and faces the misfortunes of life with a sublime resignation. The man who seeks to live with the highest possible degree of self-sufficiency, says Plato, is that who "makes the least lament and bears it most calmly when any such misfortune overtakes him" (*Republic* 387e). The best thing to do in life's calamities is

to keep calm ... and not to grieve, because it is not clear what is good or evil in such things, and it is of no advantage to take them hard, nor is anything human worthy of great concern (*oúte ti tôn anthrōpínōn áxion òn megálēs spoudēs*), and what in such cases should come to our aid as quickly as possible is checked by our grieving.

What we must do, he says, is

to deliberate about what has happened and, as in a game of dice, to set our affairs with reference to what the throw turns up, in the way that reason indicates would be the best, and not to do like children who hurt themselves, clapping one's hands to the stricken spot and wasting the time in wailing, but to

24 Crito says about his friend: "I have often thought throughout your whole life that you were of a happy disposition, and I think so more than ever in the present misfortune, since you bear it easily and calmly" (*kai pollákis mèn dē se kai próteron en pantì tōi bíōi eūdaimónisa tou trōpou, polù dē málista en tēi nyn parestósēi symphorāi, hōs raídíōs autēn kai prāiōs phéreis; Crito* 43b).

25 See *Apology* 30c–d and 41c–d, and *Gorgias* 527c–d.

26 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jan. 1965), p. 8. The other two experiences that he mentions in that lecture are wondering at the existence of the world and feeling guilty.

27 Id., *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 8.7.1916.

always accustom the soul to devote itself immediately to the curing and raising up of what is hurt and fallen, suppressing the lamentation with therapy.

On the other hand, concludes Socrates, “what leads us to the memories of our sufferings and to lamentations, never getting enough of them, shall we not say that it is something irrational and idle, and an associate of cowardice?” (*Rep.* 604b-e). When facing an adversity that cannot be avoided, “to reason well” is to submit: “Submit your heart and do not get angry because you must so suffer! This is the advice that I must give myself” (*Unterwirf dein Herz & sei nicht bö, dass du so leiden musst! Das ist der Rat, den ich mir geben soll.*)<sup>28</sup> To have faith is to fulfil bravely, as a good soldier and not as a deserter, the order of the inner voice: *kneel down!*<sup>29</sup>

That you want to argue with God means that you have a false concept of God, that you have fallen into superstition. You have a wrong concept of God when you get angry with fate. You must reorganize your concepts. Satisfaction with fate must be the first commandment of wisdom.<sup>30</sup>

The ultimate end at which the ethics of Plato and Wittgenstein aims, then, is the calmness and imperturbability of the soul. The most divine of lives, says Plato, is beyond joy and sorrow (*Philebus* 33b).<sup>31</sup> “My ideal”, says Wittgenstein, “is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them.”<sup>32</sup> And as regards the means to reach or approach the divine sufficiency, their agreement is not less perfect. Both philosophers agree that nothing favours self-sufficiency – “all resting in oneself” (*ganz in sich selbst ruhen*),<sup>33</sup> as Wittgenstein likes to say – more than cultivating solitude and indifference towards the world, ascetic discipline and self-command, and a life devoted to knowledge.

It is, in fact, a constant idea in Wittgenstein that the way to preserve the calm of the subject lies in cultivating in the highest possible degree

28 Id., *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 84 (183).

29 Cf. *Ibid.*, and the “night dream (-experience)”, in *Licht und Schatten. Ein nächtliches (Traum-)Erlebnis und ein Brief-Fragment*.

30 *Wenn Du mit Gott rechten willst, so heißt das, Du hast einen falschen Begriff von Gott, Du bist in einem Aberglauben. Du hast einen unrichtigen Begriff, wenn Du auf das Schicksal erzürnt bist. Du sollst Deine Begriffe umstellen. Zufriedenheit mit Deinem Schicksal müßte das erste Gebot der Weisheit sein. Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 96 (217–218).

31 Cf. the whole sections of *Philebus* 32e–33c and 53c–55c.

32 Id., *Vermischte Bemerkungen/Culture and Value*, p. 4 (MS 107 130 c: 1929).

33 Id., *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entry of 21.11.1914, for example.

the *contemptus mundi*. For him, the right attitude of the subject against the “absurdity” of the world is that “flight” of the soul “above” the world proclaimed by Plato in the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus* or the *Theaetetus* as the wise attitude par excellence which brings man closer to divine life. Human thoughts and affections must be taken away from their concern with worldly affairs: “I can only make myself independent of the world – and so in a certain sense master it – by renouncing any influence on happenings,” writes Wittgenstein.<sup>34</sup>

Their philosophies, therefore, ascribe a special value to the ideal of the cessation of desire or, perhaps more exactly, of the moderation of desires. It is an idea very dear to Plato that Wittgenstein also embraces. But before considering it in some detail, I will make a little digression. In spite of what has sometimes been said, that ideal shows that Wittgenstein’s concept of value is not related at all – it even stands in direct opposition – to the idea, held by Goethe and the German romantics, that life’s value lies in being “an endless search for an unattainable goal”, to the romantic idea that man is insatiable by nature and that the good lies precisely in there being no limit to the ambition of the will. Wittgenstein’s ethics is certainly a classical ethics, as classical as his aesthetics; therefore he cannot but reject the Faust ideal, since the representation of happiness is always connected, for him, for Schopenhauer and for any Platonic philosopher, with peace and the final resting of passions, with contentment and satisfaction. This is also shown in his concept of the essence of philosophical work and the ultimate

34 Id., *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 11.6.1916. In connection with the subject of “the view of the world from the heights” in Plato’s *Republic*, let us remember that the political zeal of the philosopher succumbs in that same dialogue to the tendency towards the disdainful seclusion in oneself of the old Heraclitus. The renunciation to any intervention in the world is announced in book VI: the man who has tasted the “sweetness and blessedness” of philosophy and perceives quite clearly the madness of the multitude, “remains quiet and minds his own affairs, as if, surprised by a storm, would stand aside under shelter of a wall to protect himself from the rain and the blast of dust; and seeing others filled full of lawlessness, is content if he may keep himself free from iniquity and impious deeds through his life here and to take his departure serene and content, full of fair hopes” (496c–e). And it is fulfilled in book IX, in which, after the failure of the descent to the cave in book VII, the political eagerness of the philosopher crashes into the most absolute political quietism. The Platonic philosopher will just do a solitary work on himself, acting “in his inner city, and intensely” (*en ge tēi heautoū pólei kai mála*), since nowhere on earth can be found a city adequate for him (592a–b). After all, “it makes no difference whether [the ideal city] exists somewhere or will ever exist” (592b), for what value can the things pertaining to human life have when measured with the yardstick of eternity?

end that it pursues, and it is, we must acknowledge, one of the senses in which his last words can be understood.

Going back to our point, we saw that Plato's and Wittgenstein's ethics is an ethics of non-desire. "Is only he happy – asks Wittgenstein – who does *not* will?" Surely, the commandment to love one's neighbour – he continues – implies willing, "but can one want and yet not be unhappy if the want does not attain fulfilment? (And this possibility always exists.)" And he concludes: "in a certain sense it seems that not wanting is the only good."<sup>35</sup> It is not simply the idea that the less we desire, the fewer frustrations and insatisfactions we will experience, but also and above all the idea that sensual life prevents living freely, that is to say, "living only for one's own spirit" (*nur dem eigenen Geist leben*).<sup>36</sup> That same day he writes on the encoded side of the notebook that fearing death, feeling that one cannot renounce the desire for existence because has taken a liking to it, is a "sin", a sign of an unreasonable life or, as he says on another page with a fine phrase, it is living in the school of a false conception of life.<sup>37</sup> And to live a life devoted to natural appetites and aversions – the life of a beast – blocks the possibility of attaining inner salvation and makes it impossible to think of a true life.<sup>38</sup> This thought is, as can be noticed, the axis around which turns the concept of the philosopher's life developed by Plato in the *Phaedo*. It is not necessary to present it in detail, but I will mention some of the central ideas of the dialogue, since they bring us closer to the third and final point of this essay: the liberation from the "misery" of the world and the feeling of happiness that theoretical life grants the philosopher. Philosophy is understood in the *Phaedo* as an exercise and training for death. As Socrates puts it: "All those who happen to pursue philosophy in the right way practise nothing but dying and being dead" (64a). The preparation for death implies a spiritual separation of soul and body: "it consists of separating, as far as possible, the soul from the body and getting the soul used to collecting and bringing itself together from all parts of the body, and living, as far as it can, both now and hereafter, alone by itself, freed from the body as from fetters" (67c–d). Only by satisfying the bodily desires in what is strictly necessary, and being indifferent to them in all the rest, can man escape the "prison" of the body – which is condemned in the dialogue as an evil mainly because it upsets and disrupts the activity of reason with "appetites, desires and fears, and all sorts of fancies and

35 Id., *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 29.7.1916.

36 Id., *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entry of 30.11.1914.

37 Ivi, entry of 6.5.1916.

38 Ivi, entry of 29.7.1916.

foolishness” (66c) – and freely pursue truth and wisdom. It is, in fact, a basic thesis of Plato’s ethics that the search for truth depends essentially on having a rigorous control of the body – on taming, as Wittgenstein says in terms quite similar to those used by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (230a), the “beast” (*Raubtier*) that inhabits in us<sup>39</sup> – without ever allowing the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational parts of soul “to bite and devour one another in their fight” (*Rep.* 589a). In Wittgenstein’s philosophy this demand of personal unity or full command of the irrational part of our nature is as fundamental as in Plato’s philosophy, since we can only devote to clarifying the foundations of logic when we “hear the voice of reason over the howls of the damned.”<sup>40</sup>

The dedication to logic – class logic in the case Plato, and formal logic in that of Wittgenstein – is for them shrouded in a religious aura that can be felt throughout their works. For Plato the exercise of dialectics is the practice by excellence of the *imitatio Dei*, insofar as it enables men to deal with philosophical problems from the highest possible level of generality. And it is also recurrent in Wittgenstein the idea that philosophy is a service to the divine, a devotion to the “spirit”,<sup>41</sup> as he often says, a service that is likewise understood as a raising of the thought towards the highest possible totality and universality in the philosophical analysis. Both philosophers experience their work as a grace for the value that thinking has in itself and for the natural enjoyment that the search of truth provides for man, but also because the dedication in Plato to knowing the totality of the essences within the whole of their logical relations, or the exercise in Wittgenstein of the clarification of the essence of the proposition and of the world,<sup>42</sup> allows the philosopher to move away from the purely particular and fleeting

39 Id., *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 103 (238).

40 Id., Letter to Russell dated January 1914, in *Cambridge Letters. Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, p. 69.

41 As it is observed in his *Geheime Tagebücher* and in other places of Wittgenstein’s personal writings. The term “spirit” (*Geist*) is connected in his work with several different uses or meanings. But in this context we must especially recall the sense which transmits the idea of *respect* and *enthusiasm* for the highest achievements of humanity in the fields of thought, art and religion, that bring man nearer the divine, something similar to what Greek philosophers understood by the term *paideía* (in one of its senses).

42 “My whole task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition. That is to say, in giving the nature of all facts, whose picture the proposition *is*. In giving the nature of all being. (And here Being does not mean existing – in that case it would be nonsensical.)” “My work has extended from the foundations of logic to the nature of the world.” *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entries of 22.1.1915 and 2.8.1916.

affairs of men, and by means of “winged” thought to become freed from the “misery” and “iniquity” of the world. “Surely” – exclaims Socrates,

the man whose mind is truly fixed on the [real] beings has no leisure to turn his eyes downward upon men’s affairs and, engaging in strife with them, to be filled with envy and ill-will; far from it, seeing that the things on which he fixes his gaze are always ordered in the same way, and that they neither wrong nor are wronged by one another, but all keep an order in agreement with reason, he tries to imitate them and assimilate himself to them. [...] The philosopher, then, consorting with that which is divine and ordered, becomes himself divine and orderly in the measure permitted to man. (*Republic* 500b-d).

The freedom and happiness of the philosopher always lie in contemplative life above active life, in that wonderful *bíos theoretikós*. In all this and in many other things, Wittgenstein – the man who saw himself as “an unhappy lover”, for not belonging to a tradition and wanting to have it,<sup>43</sup> and who thought that, if his name would remain, it would be “only as the *terminus ad quem* of the great Western philosophy. The same as, so to say, the name of that individual who burnt the Library of Alexandria”<sup>44</sup> – is, nevertheless, a perfect heir of the most classical nucleus of the European tradition and, in several important senses, a herald of Platonism in the twentieth century. I will close with a precious relic from his *Notebooks* that speaks for everything:

Suppose that man could not exercise his will, but had to suffer all the misery of this world, then what could make him happy? How can man be happy at all, since he cannot ward off the misery of this world? Through the life of knowledge. The good conscience is the happiness that the life of knowledge preserves. The life of knowledge is the life that is happy in spite of the misery of the world. The only life that is happy is the life that can renounce the amenities of the world. To it the amenities of the world are so many graces of fate.<sup>45</sup>

43 Id., *Vermischte Bemerkungen/Culture and Value*, p. 86 (MS 137 112b: 29.11.1948).

44 Id., *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 39 (64).

45 Id., *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 13.8.1916.





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WITTGENSTEIN ON WAR AND PEACE<sup>1</sup>

In the title of this essay there is an immediate echo of Leo Tolstoy's famous novel. However, before taking this Russian writer as the leitmotiv for my point of view, I will make some comments about the legitimacy of using the notes, letters, diaries, conversations and testimonies of the author of the *Tractatus* as a basis for reconstructing what he thought about this matter, since the texts by him that were published or intended to be published do not enable us to do so. Luigi Perissinotto has urged this caution concerning the use of private texts in the case of religion.<sup>2</sup> With regard to war and peace, or pacifism, the question is even thornier because we do not even have notes for his classes, or all the remarks about religion that he jotted down in *On Certainty*, for example.

All the same, I think it is legitimate to reconstruct Wittgenstein's thoughts about war by commenting on texts of this kind because, in the first place, I consider that philosophy is an authorial genre. To put it in the terms used by Michel Foucault in *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur*, I think that philosophy is a genre in which the "author function" is of fundamental importance – as in the case of literature – as opposed to those texts – scientific or administrative texts, for example – in which authorship is erased, silenced or concealed. This dichotomy, admittedly, has not always had the same content in the course of history, or even in our cultural tradition. However, the fact is that since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries scientific discourses have been accepted and appreciated for their own sake, whereas literary discourses are always associated with their author. What we find in the first case is a concatenation – deductive or of some other kind – of truths that can be demonstrated or re-demonstrated and that form a system in which there is no reference to authors (at most, they appear by giving

1 This article forms part of the work of the research project *Culture and Religion. Wittgenstein and the Counter-Enlightenment*, FFI 2008-00866 FISO.

2 See Perissinotto, L., *Croire sans preuve. Wittgenstein et la religion*, "Esprit", vol. 391, 2013, pp. 81-97.

their name to a theorem or a pathological symptom or an experiment, etc.). On the other hand, with any literary text, nowadays we ask: Who wrote it? When and how? What led him or her to do so? With what intention? And the reception of the text has depended – and still does, to a large extent – on the answers to such questions. Philosophy is a special case because, since classical antiquity, it has been a genre in which the importance of the author is absolute. Perhaps what became known as analytic philosophy of language was one of the points in which the emulation of scientific knowledge was such that its authorial nature was blurred by the prominence of certain blocks of themes. In general, however, the kind of questions that are posed with regard to literary texts are also valid for philosophical texts. At any rate, in the authorial mode of considering texts the biographical aspects of the author form a substantial part of his or her significant intentions and therefore – although not exhaustively – of the interpretation.

Secondly, however, I consider that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is completely in accordance with many of the assumptions underlying the authorial consideration of a text. There are many passages in which Wittgenstein considers philosophy as "work on oneself", as an exercise in self-understanding leading to a dimension that is both descriptive (one's way of seeing things) and valorative (what one expects of them).<sup>3</sup> Philosophy is a personal urgency so closely related to oneself that it can be compared to the discomfort of an itch (and we all have our itches). Therefore, philosophical reflection cannot be considered cumulatively, as an impersonal progress, like the constructive nature of scientific knowledge.<sup>4</sup> So the exercise of philosophy has to do with one's personal temperament, because that is what determines the similes, metaphors or parables that one selects and that distinguish certain philosophies from others,<sup>5</sup> and also the attitude that one adopts: precipitate or else patient and painstaking, in other words,

3 Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, Blackwell, Oxford 1998. [1931, #84] "Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one's own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)"

4 Ivi, [1950, #490] "Philosophy hasn't made any progress? – If someone scratches where it itches, do we have to see progress? Isn't it genuine scratching otherwise, or genuine itching? And can't this reaction to the irritation go on like this for a long time, before a cure for the itching is found?"

5 Ivi, [1931, #106] "If it is said on occasion that (someone's) philosophy is a matter of temperament, there is some truth in this. A preference for certain comparisons (*Gleichnisse*) is something we call a matter of temperament & far more disagreements rest on this than appears at first sight."

rigorous.<sup>6</sup> But it also depends on one's moral virtues and sensibility. In the 1930 Foreword to his book *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, Wittgenstein declares that he would like to say that the book is written to the glory of God. However, since such a statement would be misunderstood in our age, he explains that "It means the book is written in good will" and that in so far as it is not so written "but out of vanity, etc., the author would wish to see it condemned". The identification between book and author is such that he ends the foreword with an assurance that "He cannot free it of these impurities further than he himself is free of them".<sup>7</sup> So that, before attaining a more or less general understanding, a person who philosophises must concern himself with his own logical and moral mistakes, confusions, discomforts and uneasinesses.<sup>8</sup> Only in this way can the philosopher attempt to persuade some people to see things in another way, from another point of view, without any assurance of success.<sup>9</sup> Taking for granted that this personal activity of understanding, of oneself and of the world, will not be received universally, but only by those who have a certain cultural and moral, that is, existential rapport with the person who has practised it. In the oft-quoted "Sketch for a Foreword" for the *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, Wittgenstein considers the receivers of his book as a circle of "friends scattered throughout the four corners of the world". Now, the basis for this "friendship" is a "common sympathy"; in other words, his book will be understood by those who share his feeling against "the direction of European civilization", whose goals Wittgenstein says he does not understand. He deliberately emphasises that for him this common feeling does not constitute a judgement value, and he underlines the degree to which his personality forms part of his philosophy and its reception.<sup>10</sup> He does not consider this circle of recipients to be an elite, nor – once again – does he think that

6 Ivi, [1939, #179] "In philosophy the winner of the race is the one who can run most slowly. Or: the one who gets to the winning post last."

7 Id., *Philosophical Remarks*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1975, p. 7.

8 Id., *Culture and Value*, op. cit. [1944, #254] "The philosopher is someone who has to cure many diseases of the understanding in himself, before he can arrive at the notions of common sense." [1944, #252] "Thoughts at peace. That is the goal someone who philosophizes longs for."

9 Ivi, [1947, #356].

10 "This book is written for those who are in sympathy with the spirit in which it is written. This spirit is, I believe, different from that of the prevailing European and American civilization. The spirit of this civilization the expression of which is the industry, architecture, music, of present day fascism & socialism, is a spirit that is alien & uncongenial to the author. This is not a value judgement." Id., *Culture and Value*, op. cit. [1930, #29], p. 8.

they are better or worse than others; if he addresses himself to them it is because they share a cultural affinity, they share a familiarity, as immediate as it is diffuse, like the relationship sensed by “fellow countrymen”, in comparison with whom others are felt to be “foreign”.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, a very important part of the reception of this philosophical thinking and of the understanding of its dynamics – of a person’s particular “*Denkbewegungen*” – is bound up with the key features of his biography, with the tastes, fears and obsessions and with the spiritual life of the person who has experienced them. With regard to Wittgenstein’s constant worry about not being understood, Drury tells us that when he was working on the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein said to him: “It is impossible to say in my book one word about all that music has meant in my life. How then can I hope to be understood?”<sup>12</sup>

However, to understand Wittgenstein’s philosophical thinking it is necessary not only to refer to the biographical aspects and testimonies provided by his private writings. It is also necessary to include in his philosophy how he tackled matters that cannot be included in – if we use the usual academic headings – logic, epistemology, the philosophy of language, and so on. It is also necessary to include in his philosophy matters that have to do with both private and public life; in other words, how he thought about himself in relation to the political community. A letter that he wrote to Norman Malcolm clearly indicates this conception of philosophy, the central focus of which never ceased to be the search for the meaning of life – of *his* life – in the variety of manifestations that it adopted for someone so obsessively reflective about his identity. Malcolm tells us that in October 1939 he argued with Wittgenstein about a headline in the German press that accused England of having tried to kill Hitler with a bomb. Wittgenstein, who thought the headline looked plausible, became angry when Malcolm contradicted him and said he considered the British to be too “civilized and decent”, that such an act was too incompatible with the British “national character” for it to be true. The importance that Wittgenstein attributed to

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- 11 “If I say that my book is meant for only a small circle of people (if that can be called a circle) I do not mean to say that this circle is in my view the élite of mankind but it is the circle to which I turn (not because they are better or worse than the others but) because they form my cultural circle (*mein Kulturkreis*), as it were my fellow countrymen (*gleichsam die Menschen meines Vaterlandes*) in contrast to the others who are *foreign* to me.” (1931) Id., *Culture and Value*, op. cit., pp. 12–13.
- 12 Drury, M.O’C. “Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein”, in Rhees, R. (ed.) *Ludwig Wittgenstein. Personal Recollections*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981, p. 94.

this argument is shown by the fact that he came back to the matter in a letter five years later, confessing to Malcolm that whenever he thought about him he could not help thinking about that argument, because he had been shocked by his “primitiveness” and it had led him to think:

what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any ... journalist in the use of the DANGEROUS phrases such people use for their own ends. You see, I know that it's difficult to think *well* about ‘certainty’, ‘probability’, ‘perception’, etc. But it is, if possible, still more difficult to think, or *try* to think, really honestly about your life & other people lives. And the trouble is that thinking about these things is *not thrilling*, but often downright nasty. And when it's nasty then it's *most* important.<sup>13</sup>

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So much for the justification of approaching my theme by looking at private testimonies and texts. In this regard, however, I can already make one substantive statement about the matter that concerns me. Wittgenstein's reflection is neither political nor sociological; rather, he thinks of war as an especially important opportunity in his search for the meaning of life, considering it, therefore, from an ethical and religious viewpoint. This does not prevent his viewpoint from being free of the political implications that we might suggest now.

The fact that the young Wittgenstein considered the first great European war of the twentieth century as an opportunity for his spiritual development can be glimpsed in the testimony of his sister, Hermine. Despite the double hernia that would have exempted him from military service, Wittgenstein insisted on enlisting, not only to defend his country but also because he felt “an intense desire to take something difficult upon himself and to do something other than purely intellectual work.”<sup>14</sup> That he did not criticise or become disenchanted with this “war *Bildung*” is confirmed by the testimony provided by Brian McGuinness and Norman Malcolm, and also by Drury. Many years later, talking about his experience of war to a nephew whose viewpoint was of a pacifist hue, he said that “It saved my life; I

13 Wittgenstein, L. “Letter to Malcolm dated 16-11-44”, in Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Memoir*, . Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 93-94.

14 Wittgenstein, H. “My Brother Ludwig”, in Rhees, R. (ed.) *Ludwig Wittgenstein. Personal Recollections*, op. cit., p. 3.

don't know what I'd have done without it."<sup>15</sup> As for Malcolm, he reports that, when he complained in a letter at the end of the Second World War about the boredom of being mobilised in a warship, Wittgenstein replied that he had never been bored and he had not disliked his army service. Furthermore, in his letter of reply Wittgenstein compared war to a school. If a pupil says that school is boring it is because he is incapable of learning what is taught at school:

... I can't help believing that an enormous lot can be learnt about human beings in this war – *if* you keep your eyes open. And the better you are at thinking the more you'll get out of what you see. For thinking is *digesting*...but the fact remains that if you're bored a lot it means that your mental digestion isn't what it should be. I think a good remedy for this is sometimes opening your eyes wider.<sup>16</sup>

To help him to consider the fighting as an opportunity for learning about himself and others, he recommended that Malcolm should read Tolstoy's short story *Hadji Murat*, of which he says in a later letter "I hope you'll get a lot out of it, because there's a lot *in* it."<sup>17</sup> Lastly, I shall cite Drury's testimony. When Wittgenstein visited him in his quarters in 1940, at the beginning of the Second World War, Malcolm complained about his colonel's clinical incompetence. Drury says that Wittgenstein "gave him a lecture" on the importance of discipline and obedience to superiors in war.<sup>18</sup> Wittgenstein reminded him that nobody joins up in order to have a good time in the army and Drury says that his impression was that he was really speaking about his own experiences in the previous war.

Now, for Wittgenstein the search for the meaning of life, in relation to the war, pivots on two intensely felt subjective experiences: fear of death (which sometimes takes the form of fear of madness)<sup>19</sup> and the experience of obedience, of self-discipline. I shall relate these considerations to his experience of war, but I think that many of their elements remained ever

15 McGuinness, B. *Wittgenstein. A Life*, Duckworth, London, p. 204.

16 Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Memoir*, op. cit., p. 50.

17 Ivi, p. 117.

18 Drury, M.O'C., op. cit., p. 159.

19 "If in life we are surrounded by death, so too in the health of our understanding by madness." Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, [1944, #255], op. cit., p. 50. There are many biographies – and passages in Wittgenstein – that emphasise his constant fear of going mad.

afterwards, shaping the religious point of view from which he could not help considering any problem.<sup>20</sup>

So, soon after the war began, in the entry for 7.10.1914 in the so-called “secret diaries”, that is, the diary entries that were written in code, we read:

I don't yet understand how to do my duty simply because it is my duty, or to reserve my entire person for the life of the spirit. I may die in an hour, I may die in two hours, I may die in a month or not for a few years. I can't know and I can't do anything about it one way or the other: that's how life is. How then ought I to live in order to hold my own at that moment? To live amid the good and the beautiful until life stops of itself.<sup>21</sup>

In this entry there is a connection between the notion of “doing one's duty”, the feeling of the possibility of imminent death (and also of the anticipation of future death) and the idea of a good life, which is expressed here as living “amid the good and the beautiful”. This connection runs through all the secret diaries, with more or less emphasis. On 4 May 1916 he notes:

Tomorrow perhaps I shall be sent out, at my own request, to the observation post. Then and only then will the war *begin* for me. And – possibly – life too! *Perhaps nearness to death will bring light into my life.* May God enlighten me. I am a worm, but through God I become a man. God be with me. Amen.

Five days later he concludes emphatically: “It is only death that gives life its meaning.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus “nearness to death” provides an opportunity to examine the meaning of life, to succeed in glimpsing the beginning of a new life, a “resurrection” (the “beginning” of the war may be the beginning of “life”): “Now I should have the chance to be a decent human being, for I'm standing eye to eye with death”,<sup>23</sup> he says after his first experiences of combat. And this search for meaning has a religious dimension, it is bound up with God, with whose assistance he says he can transform himself from an animal to a human being. As in Tolstoy, incidentally, although I cannot go into that

20 “I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view”. Drury, M.O.C., op. cit., p. 94.

21 Wittgenstein, L. *Diarios secretos*, Edición de Wilhelm Baum. Madrid, Alianza Universidad, 1991, pp. 65–67.

22 Id., *Diarios secretos*, pp. 147–149.

23 Id., *Diarios secretos*, 15 September 1914, p. 55.

now.<sup>24</sup> I think that Wittgenstein never abandoned this connection between death, meaning and religious point of view which was forged in the war.

Moreover, for Wittgenstein as for Tolstoy, *fear* of death is the criterion for determining the mistakenness of the life one is leading or has led. And Wittgenstein was afraid of death.<sup>25</sup> On 6 May 1916 he notes: “In constant danger of death ... From time to time I become disheartened. This is the school of the false conception of life ...!”, and on 29 July of the same year he is even more explicit:

“Yesterday I was shot at. I was scared! I was afraid of death. I now have such a desire to live. And it is difficult to give up life when one enjoys it. This is precisely what ‘sin’ is, the reasoning life, a false view of life. From time to time I become an *animal*. Then I can think of nothing but eating, drinking, and sleeping. Terrible! And then suffer like an animal too, without the possibility of internal salvation. I am then at the mercy of my appetites and aversions. Then an authentic life is impossible.”<sup>26</sup>

Sin is seen here as pure inertia in living, instinctively clutching to life without worrying about what each individual can and must accomplish in it, in accordance with his stature. Years later he said to Malcolm that the measure of the greatness of a man is found in what his work demands of him,<sup>27</sup> and one has only to read his war diaries to perceive the torment produced in him by the question of having or not having the spiritual state of mind that would allow him to work. All the same, this “state of sin” has a psychological translation. In the same period as the entries just quoted, he says: “I am still living in sin, in other words, *unhappily*. I am in a *bad mood*, without *happiness*. I am living in *discord* with everything around me.”<sup>28</sup> So that putting himself in God’s hands, submitting to his will – “thy

24 I have discussed this in “Muerte y religión: del Tolstói maduro al joven Wittgenstein”, *Logos. Anales del seminario de Metafísica*, n.º. 45, 2012.

25 Much has been said to the effect that Wittgenstein himself declared after the war that he had joined up as a volunteer in order to seek death. For example, W. Baum, the editor of the secret diaries (*Geheime Tagebücher!*, Turia and Kant, Vienna, 1991), in a footnote to the entry for 15 April 1916 of the Spanish edition. However, I think that his confrontation with death has the religious and moral sense to which I have alluded; I believe that all the courageous acts that he performed, and his efforts to get sent to dangerous positions on the front (see H. Wittgenstein, “My Brother Ludwig”, art. cit., op. cit., p. 5), must be interpreted thus, not as an absence of fear.

26 Id., *Diarios secretos*, p. 155.

27 Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Memoir*, op. cit., p. 61.

28 Wittgenstein, L. *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 11 August 1916, p. 157.



will be done” is an expression repeated almost obsessively in the *Secret Diaries* – is a condition for inner peace and happiness. In response to the question “But how to arrive at *inner peace*?” he answers “ONLY if I lead a life pleasing to God! *Only* then is it possible to endure life”,<sup>29</sup> “May God improve me! Thus I shall also be more *contented*”,<sup>30</sup> “May God keep me in a *cheerful* state of mind!”<sup>31</sup>

This psychological concomitant of a good life, or, if you prefer, a life that is honest from an ethical point of view<sup>32</sup> or genuine from a religious point of view,<sup>33</sup> explains his rejection of nihilism in connection with his reading of a volume of Nietzsche’s works which included *The Antichrist*. Wittgenstein thinks that there is some truth in Nietzsche’s criticism of Christianity. And after saying that “Certainly, Christianity is the only sure way to happiness”, he asks why one should not spurn that happiness; and whether it would not be better to perish unhappy in a hopeless struggle against “the external world”.<sup>34</sup> For him, such a life is without meaning, but why not lead a meaningless life? Wittgenstein does not answer his own question about whether such a life would be *unworthy*, but he declares that that life would be unhappy *for him*, without *content* or *joy*. He thought a great deal about this question. Although he does not answer the question about why one should not lead a meaningless life at this point, he does so two years later in his *Notebooks (1914–1916)*. He says there that “again and again” he comes back to the idea that “simply the happy life is good, the unhappy bad” and that the further question of why one should live happily seems to him of itself “to be a tautological question; the happy life seems to be justified, of

29 Id., *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 6 May 1916, p. 149.

30 *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

31 Id., *Diarios secretos*, 6 August 1916, p. 157, my emphasis.

32 I think that it is from this perspective that we must interpret statement 6.422 in the *Tractatus*: “The first thought in setting up an ethical law of the form ‘thou shalt ...’ is: And what if I do not do it. But it is clear that ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the ordinary sense. This question as to the *consequences* of an action must therefore be irrelevant. At least *these consequences will not be events*. For there must be something right in that formulation of the question. There must be some sort of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but this must lie *in the action itself*. (And this is clear also that the reward must be something *acceptable*, and the punishment something *unacceptable*.)” My emphasis. Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Cosimo Inc., New York, 2009, pp.105–106.

33 “What is Good is Divine too. That, strangely enough, sums up my ethics.” [1929, #20] Id., *Culture and Value*, op. cit., p. 5.

34 Id., *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 8 December 1914, p. 109.

itself, it seems that it is the only right life”.<sup>35</sup> In any case, in 1914, in answer to the question “What must I do then so that my life will not be lost?” he replies “I must always be conscious of it – always conscious of the spirit”.<sup>36</sup>

Years later, at the start of the Second World War, Wittgenstein came back to the same idea but with a non-religious phraseology: the challenge in life is not the absence of fear, but mastering it in order to have a courageous attitude, on which a meaningful life depends:

*Not funk but funk conquered is what is worthy of admiration & makes life worth having been lived. Courage, not cleverness; not even inspiration, is the grain of mustard that grows up to be a great tree. To the extent there is courage, there is connection with life & death.*<sup>37</sup>

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But a courageous attitude also depends on strengthening the spirit (*Geist*) in order to live amid the good and the beautiful, the only way of “holding one’s own” against the fear inspired by death and the *animal life*, reduced to pure instinct that it encourages. To the extent that even dying loses its terrible quality. This is what he says in 1937, in perfect accord with his wartime meditations:

The horrible instant in an unblessed death must be the thought: ‘Oh if only I had... Now it’s too late.’ Oh if only I had lived right! And the blessed instant must be: ‘Now it is accomplished!’ But how must one have lived in order to tell oneself this! I think there must be degrees here too.<sup>38</sup>

At the height of the 1914–18 war, Wittgenstein would not have admitted “degrees”, his challenge was more radical and his ethical/religious demands less benevolent. This radicalness had to do with his spiritual transformation, for, from an ethical and even physical point of view, not losing his life depended on being “always conscious of the spirit”, on strengthening it.

Now it is not easy to disentangle the semantic field of the term “spirit”, practically absent from the writings intended for publication (it appears

35 Id., *Notebooks, 1914–1916*. University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 78.

36 Id., *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 8 December 1914, p. 109.

37 Id., *Culture and Value*, op. cit. [1940, #208], pp. 43–44. The sentence written in italics is in the original text.

38 Wittgenstein, L. “Movements of Thought: Diaries, 1930–1932, 1936–1937”, in James C. Klagge, Alfred Nordmann (eds.): *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Public and Private Occasions*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham (MA), 2003, p. 185 [176].

once in the *Philosophical Investigations*), whereas Wittgenstein uses it profusely in his private writings, especially in what has been known as the secret diaries and the *Notebooks (1914–1916)*, in *Movements of Thought: Diaries 1930–1932, 1936–1937* and in *Culture and Value*.<sup>39</sup> In one of its senses, “spirit” is the most radically characteristic nucleus of each person. On one occasion Wittgenstein summed it up as “character and will”.<sup>40</sup> But it also includes the creative potential, the intellectual virtues, moral sensibility, that in which I recognise myself most intimately and to which I always aspire; an ego ideal, if we were to express it in Freudian phraseology. All of which includes the particular cultural component (*Kultur*) in which I participate and in which I have been brought up and which, therefore, subsumes the canon of the great works of art, but also a certain idea of social organisation, at least in its more general features.<sup>41</sup>

For Wittgenstein, therefore, the “spirit” that must be strengthened and that must strengthen him and help him to live decently inasmuch as it involves a mastery of himself – of his “appetites and aversions”, his instincts and passions<sup>42</sup> – is invoked in very different ways, depending on whether he is alluding to its personal or transpersonal dimension. Sometimes he wishes it were stronger (“Oh, if only my spirit were stronger!!!”) so that it might help him in his weakness (“I am a weak person, but the spirit helps me”); sometimes it gives him the necessary manly courage to face danger (“Cowardly thoughts, frightened hesitations and womanish complaints don’t change the wretchedness, *They don’t make you free!*”);<sup>43</sup> the spirit is also where one takes refuge when physical penury and emotional malaise are pressing (then “one turns towards the spirit”, or it is “inside me countering my depressions”);<sup>44</sup> something that must be cultivated with total dedication, that makes him free because it disengages him from ex-

39 See Sanfélix, V. “Una filosofía del espíritu. Wittgenstein y la cuestión judía”, in Mariano Rodríguez (ed.), *La mente en sus máscaras*, Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, 2005.

40 “As I can infer my spirit (character, will) from my physiognomy, ...” Wittgenstein, L. *Notebooks, 1914–1916*, op. cit., entry for 15/10/1916, p. 229.

41 The text that follows continues the quotation in note 10: “Culture is like a great organization which assigns to each of its members his place, at which he can work in the spirit of the whole, and his strength can with a certain justice be measured by his success as understood within that whole.” “Sketch for a Foreword” to the *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, [1930, #29], op. cit., p. 39.

42 See note 26.

43 Wittgenstein, L. *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 20 February 1915, p. 127.

44 Id., *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 20 October 1914, p. 75.

ternal contingencies and shelters him (“So long as the spirit is alive! It is the safe harbour, set apart from the desolate, endless grey sea of events”).<sup>45</sup> Wittgenstein attributes a divine quality to the spirit because it is a condition of the good life: “To believe in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life,” he declares in the *Notebooks*,<sup>46</sup> a thoroughly Tolstoyan affirmation, to be sure.

The term “spirit” that appears in the war diaries certainly has a Tolstoyan affiliation. Wittgenstein himself says so the first time that “spirit” appears in the secret diaries, soon after he joined up. Fearing that he might not do his duty properly under fire, he said to himself: “Over and over again, inside myself, I repeat Tolstoy’s words: ‘Man is *weak* in the flesh but *free* in the spirit.’ Would that the spirit were in me!”<sup>47</sup> And four days later he emphasises that it is “only through it” that man is free.<sup>48</sup> And, indeed, in Tolstoy’s *The Gospel in Brief* – the famous book that Wittgenstein bought in a bookshop in Tarnów and carried around with him constantly – the subtitle of chapter I is “Man, the son of God, is weak in the flesh but free in the spirit” [*Der Mensch ist ein Sohn Gottes, ohnmächtig im Fleische und frei durch den Geist*].

The fact that Tolstoy was a lasting influence on Wittgenstein is beyond doubt and deserves a detailed study for which there is no space now. But that influence is due to a reading not only of *The Gospel in Brief* but also of his literary work, especially the popular tales and *Hadji Murat*, the reading of which he recommended throughout his life.<sup>49</sup> He told Drury that only two European writers had had anything important to say about religion in recent times: Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. He recommended the latter’s *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*, and Tolstoy’s traditional stories published in English as *Twenty-Three Tales*. When they met again Drury told him that he preferred Dostoyevsky to Tolstoy and Wittgenstein disagreed, declaring that Tolstoy’s short stories would always survive and that the one he liked best was “The Three Hermits”.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Malcolm insists that Wittgenstein did not like *Resurrection*, the great novel of Tol-

45 Id., *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 13 December 1914, p. 111.

46 Id., *Notebooks, 1914–1916*, op. cit., entry for 8/7/1916, p. 209.

47 Id., *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 12 September 1914, p. 53.

48 Id., *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., p. 55. My emphasis.

49 I have discussed Wittgenstein’s lifelong fixation with this novel by Tolstoy in “La virtud moral de las alegorías. Wittgenstein y *Hadji Murat*”, in Marrades, J. (ed.) *Wittgenstein. Arte y Filosofía*, Plaza y Valdés, Madrid, 2012.

50 Drury, M.O’C., op. cit., p. 100. However, Bertrand Russell’s impression in 1919 was the opposite: “But on the whole he likes Tolstoy less than Dostoewski (especially Karamazov).” Letter to Lady Ottoline 20/12/1919, in Brian McGuinness (ed.)

stoy's final period, but that he very much liked the short stories because he considered that Tolstoy's philosophy is "most true when it's *latent* in the story" (which was not the case with *Resurrection*). In Malcolm's case, the story he was commenting on was "How Much Land Does A Man Need?"<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Engelmann – who met Wittgenstein in 1916 when he was transferred to an officers' school in Olmütz after being promoted to sergeant and decorated with the Medal for Bravery – tells of their conversations about religion in which they talked about Tolstoy's story "Two Old Men". All this is true, but despite the fact that the notion of "spirit" in Wittgenstein has a Tolstoyan affiliation, and that they both attribute a divine quality to the spirit, and that Tolstoy's influence on Wittgenstein's religious thinking goes beyond the explicit, all this does not mean that there is a total coincidence between them; especially with regard to war, peace and pacifism, which is what we are talking about now.

Because the core of Tolstoy's religious thinking is that, going beyond all superstitious rituality, true religion can be summed up in the maxim that "loving God is simply loving one's fellow man", which is spelt out in five laws or commandments to confront and overcome the corresponding temptations. Five laws, three of which insist on the same point:

The first (Matt. v. 21–26), that man should not only do no murder, but not even be angry with his brother, should not consider any one worthless: 'Raca,' and if he has quarrelled with any one he should make it up with him before bringing his gift to God – i.e., before praying. [...] The fourth (Matt. 38–42), that man should not only not demand an eye for an eye, but when struck on one cheek should hold out the other, should forgive an offence and bear it humbly, and never refuse the service others demand of him. The fifth (Matt. 43–48), that man should not only not hate his enemy and not fight him, but love him, help him, serve him.<sup>52</sup>

This is the conclusion of *Resurrection*, in which Tolstoy refers to the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. And Tolstoy made this point of view a banner that he constantly displayed publicly. He expounded the doctrine of non-violent resistance to evil, resulting from his religious thinking, in many of his writings, such as *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, *What Is Religion?*, *The Slavery of Our Times*, and in many

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*Wittgenstein in Cambridge: Letters and Documents 1911–1951*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2012, p. 112.

51 Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Memoir*, op. cit., pp. 52 and 59.

52 Tolstoy, L. *Resurrection*, translated by Mrs Louise Maude. Pennsylvania State University, 2000, pp. 616–617.

articles of journalism or agitation, such as “Thou Shalt Not Kill” or “The False Doctrine of the State” and many others. His appeals for non-violence, for deserting the army, for not answering the call-up or for disobeying orders were so constant, and Tolstoy’s fame in this regard was so extensive, not only in Europe but further afield, that the adoption of non-violence by Ghandi – who contacted Tolstoy – was due to his reading of “A Letter to a Hindu”, written in 1908, in which the Russian writer recommended non-violence as a way of freeing India from British colonialism; and also to his reading of *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, a book in which Tolstoy set out to rescue all those who defended non-violence from oblivion.

It is impossible that Wittgenstein should not have known this aspect of Tolstoy and the central importance that he attributed to it in a morality that had an immediate political dimension. However, Wittgenstein was never a pacifist, as indicated by the testimonies already cited. He was certainly not a pacifist at the height of the 1914–18 war. In this respect, Engelmann’s recollections are enlightening. When they met in 1916, Engelmann had already abandoned the militaristic exhilaration that had swept the whole of Europe at the beginning of the war. He had even collaborated with an early pacifist, Karl Kraus, collecting newspaper cuttings so that the latter could write his play *The Last Days of Mankind*, which is possibly the work that formally best expresses the collapse of European order because of the absurdity of the war. As for Wittgenstein, Engelmann says that he had “a complete different opinion [from his own] ... He considered his obligation to go to the war as something that he had to fulfil in any circumstance”.<sup>53</sup>

Now it has to be said that there was not just one pacifism but various pacifisms of very different kinds. There were pacifisms such as that of the poet Siegfried Sassoon at a certain point,<sup>54</sup> which simply expressed his disagreement with the way in which the Allied General Staff was conducting the war without being bothered about the mass slaughter resulting from obsolete conceptions of war and clumsy strategic and tactical decisions. There were pacifisms that many people thought were simply a covert nationalist mobilisation, such as the cases of Barbusse and his novel *Le Feu* or, on the other side of the trench, Erich Maria Remarque and his *Im Westen nichts Neues*. There were also pacifisms whose rejection of the war sought a final class war, a long civil war that would wind through the whole of Europe and put an end to capitalism, the cause and reason of all wars; this

53 Engelmann, P. *Wittgenstein-Engelmann, Cartas, Encuentros, Recuerdos*, Pre-Textos, Valencia, 2009, p. 125.

54 Sassoon, S. *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Faber and Faber, London, 1974.

was the case with members of the left who had Bolshevik leanings, such as Ernst Friedrich and his famous illustrated book *War against War!* or the Walter Benjamin of *Einbahnstraße*. This kind of warlike pacifism, if you will forgive the oxymoron, prospered in the interwar period, as Stefan Zweig relates in his account of the failure of the *Clarté* project, a group intended to include writers and artists with the aim of opposing all enmity between nations. Apart from the immense difficulties brought about by the Treaty of Versailles, what killed off the project and made Zweig abandon it was Barbusse's move to the USSR after writing his novel *Le Feu*; he had become convinced that universal brotherhood could not be achieved by bourgeois democracies and he wanted to convert *Clarté* into "an instrument of class struggle".<sup>55</sup> But there were also pacifisms that made no concessions, such as those of Zweig himself or those descended from Tolstoy, to give two examples.

Now, Wittgenstein rejected even Engelmann's sophisticated pacifism. Engelmann felt antipathy for the pacifism that was displayed in neutral countries, in other words, countries that did not feel involved in the extreme situation being experienced by the combatants (and the populations engaged in war). He thought that those displays "would only be serious if they led to opposing war activity with an equally serious action, one that was equally dangerous personally". Therefore he agreed with the view of some British courts with regard to conscientious objectors: the accused should prove that throughout his life he had behaved in a way "that made it legitimate for him to place religious obligation above obligation to the State"; only in those circumstances was he allowed to perform "an (equally dangerous) service without weapons". Engelmann considered, therefore, that his subjective opposition to war did not excuse him from his "obligation" to the State. He also did not share the opinion maintained by one kind of pacifism that existed then (like Tolstoy's, incidentally); namely, that human life "is the greatest of all possible goods in any circumstance"; he "only felt that there are higher goods, but that it is forbidden to annihilate life for the sake of something less valuable than the supreme goods".<sup>56</sup> At any rate, in his notes he refers to war as "mass murder" and declares that after the stabilisation of the fronts in 1915 he realised that he "had to devote

55 Zweig, S. *The World of Yesterday*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln (NE), 1964, p. 306.

56 Engelmann, P., *Wittgenstein-Engelmann, Cartas, Encuentros, Recuerdos*, op. cit., pp. 124-125.



all my life to the service of a single thing = to try to shorten the duration of the mass murder”.<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to Engelmann, Wittgenstein argued that his obligation was to go to the war in any case. Engelmann adds that there was no possibility of any compromise between their respective points of view. But the interesting thing is how Wittgenstein considered his companion’s particular pacifism: it was an “honest” attitude because it derived from a profound conviction, even “more honest although no more meaningful” than that of a “militant pacifist” or that “of the martyrdom ... of a conscientious objector”.<sup>58</sup> Of Bertrand Russell he thought the same, it was an honest position – because of his conviction and because he had risked going to prison – but an inappropriate one. Ilse Somavilla cites the testimony, reported by Brian McGuinness, that Wittgenstein condemned Bertrand Russell’s attendance at a meeting for Peace and Freedom after the war. When Russell said to him “Well, I suppose you would rather establish a World Organization for War and Slavery,” Wittgenstein replied, “Yes, rather that, rather that!”<sup>59</sup> Somavilla comments that Wittgenstein did not consider that war was better than peace, but he thought the preaching of peace more insincere than the war. I do not believe that his rejection was just a question of sincerity or hypocrisy. Wittgenstein had no doubt, for example, about the sincerity of Engelmann’s desire for peace. What is more important, for an understanding of his disagreement, is the different perception that they had of what the duty of an honest man worthy of living a genuine life was. But “duty” is a concept that needs clarification here, because I think that in Wittgenstein generational elements are mixed with a very personal elaboration of an ethical and religious nature.

I shall dwell on this aspect that I have called “generational”. In an excellent book about the cultural history of what preceded the First World War, and about its development and what came afterwards, *Rites of Spring, The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, Modris Eksteins provides an analysis – based on personal diaries, private correspondence, etc. – of the differences between the use of the term *Duty* by the British and French combatants, on the one hand, and that of *Pflicht* – which is the word Wittgenstein uses in his war diaries – among the Austro-German soldiers. In one letter, after days of being in the mud, being bombarded, resisting the assaults of the French infantry, etc., a soldier called Gerhart Pastors writes:

57 Id., *Wittgenstein-Engelmann, Cartas, Encuentros, Recuerdos*, p. 203.

58 *Ibid.*

59 Loc. cit. note nº 1, p. 204



You become strong. This life sweeps away violently all weakness and sentimentality. You are put in chains, robbed of self-determination, practiced in suffering, practiced in self-restraint. But first and foremost: you turn inward. The only way you can tolerate this existence, these horrors, this murder, is if your spirit is planted in higher spheres. You are forced into self-contemplation, you have to come to terms with death. You reach, to find a counterweight for the ghastly reality, for that which is most noble and highest.<sup>60</sup>

This letter might have been written by Wittgenstein. Eksteins quotes numerous letters by soldiers written in the same vein which I cannot include here, but I will sum up what he concludes. The important thing in the notion of duty (*Pflicht*) for the Austro-German combatants was being ready to make a sacrifice, not the purpose of the sacrifice. The notion of *Pflicht* went beyond the defence of the fatherland because, among other reasons, there were many lands in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Above all, it had a powerful subjective element, made up of willpower and personal honour. An honour which requires that personal inspiration and initiative and temperament be put to the test. Therefore the will is the way of giving specific form to honour and it is experienced as a creative force. Another soldier wrote in a letter: "...the stronger [a person] he is, the more he obeys." As Eksteins says, concealed behind this notion of duty there is the metaphysical assumption that death regenerates, and that was the reason for the popularisation of the expression "*die heilige Pflicht*", "*sacred duty*." Quoting Eksteins: "Horror was turned into spiritual fulfillment. War became inner peace. Death, life."<sup>61</sup> Once again, this expression could be applied to Wittgenstein.

All Wittgenstein's war diaries show a connection between the possibility of immediate death, the notion of "doing one's duty (*Pflicht*)" and the ideal of a life lived amid the good and the beautiful. Ten days after he started reading Tolstoy's gospels, in the first entry in which he uses his reading of it, after the quotation "Man is *weak* in the flesh but *free* in the spirit" Wittgenstein goes on writing, "How shall I behave if they start shooting? I'm not afraid of being killed by a shot, but I *am* afraid of not doing my duty (*Pflicht*) properly. May God give me strength! Amen, Amen, Amen."<sup>62</sup>

Now, despite what has been said, I think that one can and cannot identify Wittgenstein with a generation at this point. Yes, in the sense that the

60 Eksteins, M. *Rites of Spring, The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, Anchor Book –Doubleday, New York, 1990. See pp. 193 ff.

61 *Ibid.*

62 Wittgenstein, L. *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 12 September 1914, p. 53.

combatants in the Great War had an experience that cannot be compared with any other and that, as Ilse Somavilla says with regard to Wittgenstein and Engelmann, “moved them very deeply and changed them for ever”.<sup>63</sup> Yes, in the sense that I have tried to show by commenting on the notions of duty, obedience and self-discipline. The more general conceptions of his youth undoubtedly had a family resemblance to those of many young combatants in his social environment. In another sense, however, Wittgenstein’s response is particular because of its religious configuration and its apolitical nature in a period – which, once again, has been considered by recent historiography as a European civil war – when it was not easy, and was certainly a minority reaction, to abstain from the political extremes that soon appeared in the post-war period.

Because, despite the situation in which he found himself, Wittgenstein thought that unhappiness came from an imbalance between himself and how life was, but at the same time he considered that it was his *duty* to acknowledge that it was not life that was to blame for this imbalance but how he was. It is evident that a different attitude would have been possible, such as that of his friend Engelmann and many others: devoting one’s energy to changing the circumstances of life as it is in order to rectify the imbalance that is the origin of unhappiness. For Wittgenstein, however, religiousness was, in fact, a recognition of that imbalance, which he always kept in sight as a spur to making moral demands on himself, without excusing his conduct because of external circumstances. He rejected the possibility of considering that the facts that circumscribed his life should be altered because it was in that given reality that it was his *duty* to show that his spirit (in a personal sense) measured up to the demands of the Spirit (in a different, transpersonal sense). Because the freedom that strength of spirit gives is for distancing oneself from the world and its contingencies (“A human being should not depend on chance. Neither on favourable nor on unfavourable chance”),<sup>64</sup> in order to make oneself independent not only of things but even more of people (“It is easier to be independent of things than of people. But one must also manage to achieve this!”).<sup>65</sup> The desire for a good life – always lived in a fragile, precarious equilibrium – consisted in doing one’s duty for duty’s sake without any utilitarian calculation, in

63 Somavilla, I. “Paul Engelmann y Ludwig Wittgenstein. Penas existenciales y búsqueda apasionada”, in Engelmann, P., op. cit., p. 309.

64 Wittgenstein, L. *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., p. 65.

65 Id., *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., p. 43.

doing things well and being indifferent<sup>66</sup> to the contingencies of the world in order to achieve peace of spirit and be able to work on logic (which, in turn, constitutes a contribution to the life of the spirit in so far as the spirit has a cultural objectification). All of which was foreshadowed when Wittgenstein said that in order to hold one's own in the vicissitudes of a life that could cease at any moment one had to live amid the good and the beautiful until life ended. For aesthetic and ethical consideration have to do with seeing an object or the world (respectively) *sub specie aeternitatis*, in other words, they consist in seeing from outside, not in being among them.<sup>67</sup>

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Wittgenstein's lack of historico-political perspicacity is not surprising. Engelmann described the moral demand that war made on him as the imperative of devoting his life to a single aim, "to try to shorten the duration of the mass murder". The expression "mass murder" is not innocuous. It reveals the grasp of a fundamental feature of technological warfare that appeared in the 1914–18 conflict and since then has not abandoned our age: the ability to kill *en masse* and from a distance as a result of the development of weapons that no longer point at individual bodies but sweep abstract spaces, annihilating everything that they contain, resources, cities, combatants and non-combatants. The Great War introduced what General Ludendorff called "total war". However, there is not a single entry or comment by Wittgenstein about this feature of contemporary warfare. "Mass murder" is an expression foreign to his way of referring to the war, because he continues to think of it in terms of the obsolete image of a duel, as a personal challenge that he has to measure up to. But a peculiar duel, because he embodies both duellists.

It is true that there are some notes and comments – after the Second World War – which express a socio-political consideration of the new nature of war. In 1945, just after the end of the fighting, he says quite plainly that the end of the war does not fill him with joy because he cannot help thinking that peace is only a truce, that it is a fabrication of propaganda to think that a future war could only break out because of those who are now defeated.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the distant, sceptical tone with which he refers to

66 "My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them." Id., *Culture and Value*, [1929, #16], op. cit., p. 4.

67 Cf. Id., *Notebooks, 1914–1916*, op. cit., entry for 7.10.1916, p. 227.

68 "Perhaps I ought to feel elated because the war is over. But I'm not. I can't help feeling certain that this peace is only a truce. And the pretence that the complete

the victory celebrations is significant.<sup>69</sup> In 1947 he notes that after infinite misery the progress of science and industry will succeed in shaping a world “in which to be sure peace is the last thing that will then find a home. For science & industry do decide wars, or so it seems.”<sup>70</sup> And it is precisely this conviction that explains his – only apparently – provocative remarks about the Atomic Bomb. Perhaps this is his most profound comment about the new nature of war, which, incidentally, had already appeared in the war in which he fought. In any case, it is not a comment with a pacifist sensibility. Not even in this context of extermination of the civilian population does he use any expression close to the “mass murder” used by his friend Engelmann in regard to the 1914 war. Wittgenstein speaks of the “hysterical fear” of people in general and describes those who “are making an outcry” or who are “now making speeches against the production of the bomb” as “philistines” and “dregs of the intelligentsia”.<sup>71</sup> We may suppose that at least part of those philistines includes the pacifist and disarmament movements that emerged after the apocalyptic end of the war in Asia. It is not that Wittgenstein was a defender of the Bomb, but he cannot resist the idea that there is something good in the fear and anguish inspired by the scenario ushered in by Hiroshima, which he considers “bitter medicine”. The pathology that this expeditious remedy had to cure was the uncritical confidence in science, the “bedazzlement” produced by “the idea of Great Progress”.<sup>72</sup> For “the bomb creates the prospect of the end, the destruction of a ghastly evil, of disgusting soapy water science”;<sup>73</sup> so that it does not seem to him foolish to think that “the scientific & technological age is the beginning of the end for humanity” and that the humanity that strives for the progress of scientific knowledge “is falling into a trap”.<sup>74</sup>

In other words, Wittgenstein’s criticism of the Bomb as a culmination and summing up of industry – governed by the far from altruistic principle of profit –, together with science and technology, all conceived in accord-

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stamping out of the ‘aggressors’ of this war will make this world a better place to live in, as a future war could, of course, only be started by them, stinks to high heaven &, in fact, promises a horrid future.” Wittgenstein, L. “Letter to N. Malcolm”, in Malcolm, N., op. cit., p. 117.

69 “Rhees ... is here & I see a good deal of him. – We’ve had two VJ [Victory over Japan] days & I think there was much more noise than real joy.” Id., “Letter to Norman Malcolm”, in Malcolm, N., op. cit., p. 116.

70 Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, [1947, #364], op. cit., p. 72.

71 Ivi, p. 56.

72 Ivi, p. 64.

73 Ivi, p. 56.

74 Ivi, p. 64.

ance with the abstract principle of accumulation,<sup>75</sup> is based on the well-known *Kultur/Zivilisation* opposition that developed in the German-speaking world during the nineteenth century. It is not possible to understand his criticism about this matter without referring to the famous draft foreword for *Philosophische Bemerkungen* and the related *Culture and Value* aphorisms that I cited earlier. It is noteworthy that Wittgenstein uses this opposition from 1929 almost until the 1950s; in other words, until a very late date, when this schema had already fallen into disuse. However, although it is true that the genesis of this conceptual opposition covers the whole of the nineteenth century – as studied meticulously by Norbert Elias in his well-known book *The Civilizing Process*<sup>76</sup> – it is no less true that it was reactivated powerfully, with a sense of defence of the cultural particularity of Germany, during the 1914 war. Practically the whole of the “cultural war” against France and England revolved around the defence of *Kultur* against *Zivilisation*. Examples are the so-called “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three”, *Aufruf an die Kulturwelt*, or Thomas Mann’s article “Gedanken im Krieg” (November 1914) and *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*; hundreds of other examples could be added.

I am not saying at all that Wittgenstein was a German nationalist. In fact, in his *Secret Diaries* he says, at the beginning of the conflict, that the thought that “the German race” – he declares himself to be “completely” German – was inevitably going to be beaten by the English, “the best race in the world”, “depresses me terribly”.<sup>77</sup> (Which is really rather curious, because Wittgenstein was fighting against the Russians on the east front, not against the British.) But I am saying that using that conceptual opposition

75 Ivi, p. 9: “Our civilization is characterized by the word progress. Progress is its form, it is not one of its properties that it makes progress. Typically it constructs. Its activity is to construct a more and more complicated structure. And even clarity is only a means to this end & not an end in itself.” This fragment begins an assertion by Wittgenstein that the typical scientist of this civilisation does not understand his “spirit”, in the same way that in the planned foreword for the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* he says that he views the direction of European civilization “without sympathy and without understanding for its goals, if indeed it has any”.

76 Elias, N. *The Civilizing Process*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1969 and 1972.

77 Wittgenstein, L. *Diarios secretos*, op. cit., 25 October 1914, p. 77. In 1940, when there was fear about the invasion of England and the *Blitzkrieg* was at its height, he confessed to Drury: “You have often heard me speak of my dislike of many features of English life. But now that England is in real danger; how I would hate to see her destroyed.” Drury, M.O.C., op. cit., p. 159.

and subscribing to one of its poles (*Kultur*) involved him in a conception of culture that declined in the 1930s.

Sensing that he was far from the feeling of the great movement of European and American civilisation, whose spirit (*Geist*) he found “uncongenial” (*unsympathisch*), Wittgenstein did not conceal what the cultural affiliation of his own feeling was:

I often wonder whether my cultural ideal is a new one, i.e. contemporary, or whether it comes from the time of Schumann. At least it strikes me as a continuation (*Fortsetzung*) of that ideal, though not the continuation that actually followed it then. That is to say, the second half of the 19th Century has been left out. This, I ought to say, has happened quite instinctively & and was not the result of reflection.<sup>78</sup>

Precisely for this reason, and despite his later socio-political comments about the war, I think that Wittgenstein never stopped thinking about it from the heroic perspective – Romantic in origin – with which he viewed it in his youth.

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78 Id., *Culture and Value*, [1929, #17], op. cit., p. 4.

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