# 1
# Wittgenstein's Debt to Plato

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## 1.

We know that Wittgenstein read a few of Plato's dialogues. And as he quotes some passages from these works, we even know something about the translations he used. The best-known quotation is a lengthy passage from the *Theaetetus* accorded a prominent place in *Philosophical Investigations* (§46). But there are further quotations and allusions in Wittgenstein's manuscripts and recurrent references to certain Platonic themes, as for example the idea of learning as a kind of remembering.[1]

In the first two sections of the present chapter I shall discuss two of these Platonic themes and the ways in which Wittgenstein deals with them. These discussions will show that in neither of these cases would it be justified to speak of a specific philosophical debt that Wittgenstein owed to Plato. The question discussed in my third section, however, may give us reasons for speaking of such indebtedness. This is the question of Platonic dialogue and its relation to Wittgensteinian dialogue. The debt, though, is not incurred by following in Plato's footsteps but by learning through criticizing his technique of writing dialogue.

## 2.

Waismann, in his account of conversations with Wittgenstein, reports a comment made by the latter on Schlick's recently published book *Fragen der Ethik*. Wittgenstein's words are worth quoting in full, also because this passage has come to claim a certain amount of attention on the part of scholars interested in this sort of question.

> Schlick says that in theological ethics there used to be two conceptions of the essence of the good: according to the shallower

interpretation the good is good because it is what God wants; according to the profounder interpretation God wants the good because it is good. I think that the first interpretation is the profounder one: what God commands, that is good. For it cuts off the way to any explanation 'why' it is good, while the second interpretation is the shallow, rationalist one, which proceeds 'as if' you could give reasons for what is good.

The first conception says clearly that the essence of the good has nothing to do with facts and hence cannot be explained by any proposition. If there is any proposition expressing precisely what I think, it is the proposition 'What God commands, that is good.'[2]

There are various things that could, or should, be said about this passage, and I shall proceed to say some of them presently. But first I want to make the connection with Plato, which is my reason for mentioning this comment of Wittgenstein's in the first place. The connection I have in mind has been noticed by James Klagge, who makes it explicit in his paper *Das erlösende Wort*.[3]

As Klagge points out, there is a striking similarity between Wittgenstein's comment on Schlick and certain things said by the Platonic Socrates when, in the *Euthyphro*, he asks whether the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious or whether it is pious because it is loved by the gods (10a). Euthyphro, to whom the question is addressed, fails to understand it. After a few more or less illuminating explanations Socrates returns to his original question, but now he asks it in a somewhat different form: 'Is it [the pious] being loved then because it is pious, or for some other reason?'[4] Euthypro's answer ('For no other reason') allows Socrates to introduce a contrast between piety and being loved by the gods that enables him to develop his argument.

It is not this argument, however, which is of interest in this context, but the move made by Socrates in reformulating his question in a way that makes Euthyphro end up in his dilemma. As Klagge observes, this reformulation is 'clearly a trick question, for it builds in the presupposition that it [the pious] is being loved *for some reason or other*'. Had Euthyphro noticed the cunning behind the question, he might have replied in Wittgensteinian style and said, 'For no reason at all, Socrates'. In this case, Socrates would have found it more difficult to exploit his concealed presupposition. This is, as Klagge notes, 'the hidden assumption that many of us would accept – that the gods act for reasons, that commands can be justified'.

There is, as Klagge also underlines, an interesting connection here with Wittgenstein's view that explanations must come to an end, which in its early form recommends the idea held by the 'ancients', who according to Wittgenstein were more clear-headed than the 'modern conception' in acknowledging a terminus and did not pretend that everything is, or can be, explained.[5] But before saying something about this connection, I want to look more closely at the specifically Platonic, or Socratic, 'trick question' identified by Klagge.

In the *Euthyphro*, the 'trick' consists in smuggling in an unwarranted assumption about reasons. There is nothing exactly corresponding to this in the passage quoted from Waismann's account of conversations with Wittgenstein, who (as Klagge says) there expresses a view strikingly similar to that articulated by Euthyphro when he claims that 'the pious is what all the gods love' (9e): 'If there is any proposition expressing precisely what I think, it is the proposition "What God commands, that is good"'.[6]

Wittgenstein does not smuggle in any concealed presuppositions, but he plays a trick on his audience nonetheless. This does not involve a trick question; it involves a trick *answer*. The first point to remember is this, that the whole passage is qualified by the opening remark, which states that what follows is a comment on Schlick's presentation of a view in theological ethics. In point of fact, this is a double qualification which serves to remove Wittgenstein's own words from their ostensible target. And if we consider (as we ought to) that in spite of the undoubted authenticity of Waismann's report the words used by him are words that were not *written down* by Wittgenstein, we cannot help concluding that there is no clear answer to the question of whether Wittgenstein is simply expressing his own view or a view he might hold if he were Schlick or someone interested in defending views in theological ethics.

This qualification, or double qualification, tends to be forgotten by readers who find the end of our quotation particularly instructive or appealing. But even if we ignore this point, the last sentence remains tricky. For it does *not* say that the good is what God commands; it says that words to this effect would express what Wittgenstein has in mind if there were words suited to expressing his ideas. In view of the explicit *Tractatus*-style warning[7] contained in the sentence preceding the last one ('...nothing to do with facts...cannot be explained by any proposition') we should presumably conclude that there are no words that could express what he has in mind, and hence that the dictum 'What God commands, that is good' does not serve to state a view held by

Wittgenstein. Maybe one might wish to claim that these words gesture at something that cannot be expressed meaningfully, but that seems to be a reading which risks coming too close to a misunderstanding of the drift of Wittgenstein's actual words.

All we *can* affirm, I suppose, is that the attitude of a person who says things along the lines sketched by Schlick in specifying the 'shallower' view is more to Wittgenstein's taste than the attitude of someone who talks like a representative of the 'profounder' interpretation. His preference, however, may well be connected with the other point mentioned by Klagge, viz. Wittgenstein's approval of the outlook of the ancients, who recognized a clear terminus, in contrast to the modern scientific view, according to which everything is explained through laws of nature. That is, the divine-command view would be more agreeable to Wittgenstein because it shares certain features with the terminus-of-explanation view of the ancients.[8]

What features would those be? There seems to be a difficulty here. After all, the moderns seem to recognize a clear terminus as well: only in their opinion the terminus would not be God or Fate but the laws of nature. These laws look like a sufficiently respectable terminus, but Wittgenstein does not accept this for the reason that 'the modern system tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained'. Evidently, by Wittgenstein's lights an adequate 'terminus' would be one that does not suggest this. It would be an endpoint which does not pretend to explain everything, and perhaps it would not purport to explain anything at all.

So, the decisive point seems to be this. A position that pretends to be able to explain everything is objectionable because it upholds a view which is bound to involve illusion: it deludes itself or hoodwinks others into expecting results that will never be forthcoming. A variant of this position would be one which claims to be able to explain, not everything, but everything worth explaining. This would be objectionable for the reason that it is characterized by arrogance, by having an exaggerated opinion of its own powers and a disdainful attitude towards the achievements of others. It would err through purporting to be able to lay down the law on what is worth explaining and what is not.

This stands in contrast to an attitude of the kind attributed to the ancients and, by extension, to holders of the divine-command view, who do not claim to be able to explain everything, nor to have the right or the power to decide what is worth explaining. This renunciation of arrogance need not have anything to do with bashfulness or self-effacing modesty. As a matter of fact, even certain forms of

regarding the gods as the ultimate repository of explanatory power are not necessarily free from arrogance. And the arrogance can come in various ways – for instance by way of regarding oneself as destined to be in cahoots with the gods or by suggesting that one is more qualified than others are to divine where the powers of man must remain ineffective and the exclusive area of divine competence and authority begins.

These considerations are surely not sufficient as an exhaustive account of what Wittgenstein wishes to express in *Tractatus* 6.371–2 and other passages on the limits of explanation. In particular, what has not been mentioned is the idea that there may be conceptual reasons for thinking that something should count as an explanation only if a terminus of explanation is somehow provided for or envisaged. But enough may have been said to indicate that there tends to be a certain similarity of attitude between those who approve[9] of the divine-command view (as opposed to the notion that the good is given independently of divine grace and a possible object of unaided human knowledge) and those who make explicit gestures towards acknowledging the limits of our powers of explanation.

**3.**

I should now like to discuss a passage which has been published in the first part of the collection *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. This passage contains an explicit reference to Plato as well as several allusions to Platonic thoughts. Neither the explicit reference nor the allusions are easy to understand, and I have gained the impression that people tend to misread this material. A full discussion would require more space than one section of a chapter; but I hope that the following observations are sufficient to indicate fruitful questions and instructive ways of reading Wittgenstein's remarks.

The following quotation is the central part of the passage I have in mind:

> 71. When one says: 'This shape consists of these shapes' – one is thinking of the shape as a fine drawing, a fine frame of this shape, on which, as it were, things which have this shape are stretched (compare Plato's conception of properties as ingredients of a thing).

> 72. This shape consists of these shapes. You have shown the essential property of this shape. – You have shown me a new *picture*.

> It is as if *God* had constructed them like that. *So we are employing a simile*. The *shape* becomes an ethereal entity which has this shape; it is as if it had been constructed like this once and for all (by whoever put the essential properties into things). For if the shape is to be a thing consisting of parts, then the pattern-maker who made the shape is he who also made light and dark, colour and hardness, etc. (Imagine someone asking: 'The shape…is made up of these parts; who made it? You?')[10]

These remarks come from a typescript based on manuscripts written in Norway in the autumn of 1937. Thus they form part of Wittgenstein's first sustained effort at putting together what became the *Philosophical Investigations*. A few years later he removed this part (containing mostly reflections on vaguely 'mathematical' themes) from the projected *Investigations* and later still replaced it by his remarks on rule-following and privacy. To have a rough idea of the development of this material is important for the reason that it can assist the reader trying to understand these remarks to be aware of the vicinity of the quoted passage to thoughts developed and emphasized in the first third of the *Investigations* (up to §188 or so).

Let us begin our examination by having a look at §71. The sentence quoted here as well as in §72 ('Diese Form besteht aus diesen Formen' – 'This shape consists of these shapes') refers back to examples used in previous remarks. There the discussion is devoted to certain figures which can more or less surprisingly be used to illustrate or facilitate proofs that may gain in persuasiveness if these or similar figures are drawn on. Thus the 'shape' mentioned in the quoted sentence is a geometrical figure, regarding which it is pointed out that it can be put together by assembling certain other figures in a specific way.

In the English translation, the Platonic provenance of this idea might have been rendered more conspicuous by using the word 'form' (in Wittgenstein's German the word 'Form' is used throughout the quoted passage[11]). Or maybe one could have used three words and capitals to bring out some of the force of Wittgenstein's remark: '…"This figure consists of these figures" – one is thinking of the Form as a fine drawing, a fine frame of this form, on which, as it were, things which have this shape are stretched…'. But perhaps it does not matter as long as the reader notices that the 'frame' is a kind of prototype of which the other shapes are (mere) copies. Of course, this idea of a prototype or *Urbild* is one of the most fundamental notions of Platonic theories. It is a staple

of the thought of many authors Wittgenstein was familiar with and plays a role in various parts of his writings.[12]

The explicit reference to Plato was added in a revised manuscript version (MS 117, p. 91) written not much later than the original manuscript entry of 8 September 1937 (MS 118, p. 71r). It can be a little puzzling as one may be unsure about what aspect of Plato's conception of properties Wittgenstein wants to draw our attention to. Perhaps one will think of certain passages in the *Theaetetus*, like for example 182a, where Plato introduces the notion of a 'quality'. But as a matter of fact the allusion can be clarified if we glance at lecture notes taken by Alice Ambrose in 1932–33. There, in §31, we read apropos the word 'good':

> Plato's talk of looking for the essence of things was very like talk of looking for the *ingredients* in a mixture, as though qualities were ingredients of things. But to speak of a mixture, say of red and green colors, is not like speaking of a mixture of a paint which has red and green paints as ingredients.[13]

So, what Wittgenstein seems to have in mind is not so much a specifically Platonic view of properties but rather a certain way of analysing – decomposing – terms in order to arrive at their ultimate constituents. This is an approach discussed in the context of the story told in an early part of the *Investigations* about simples, names, atomistic theories and exemplified by the famous quotation (§46) from the *Theaetetus* (201e–202b), where Plato's 'primary elements' are compared to Russell's 'individuals' and the 'objects' of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

This reading fits various aspects of §72 of *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (partly quoted above), and in particular the remark 'For if the shape is to be a thing consisting of parts': here it is made explicit that we are dealing with a kind of decomposition into (ultimate) elements. On the other hand, there is an apparent difficulty about the connection between §§71 and 72: while the former draws on a certain aspect of the theory of forms, viz. the relation between the form as prototype and its instances as copies, the latter brings in the notion of analysis as decomposition into ultimate elements. These two conceptions do not seem obviously related. So why does Wittgenstein invite us to compare the one idea with the other? And in what way can we see the two remarks as related?

Some readers may overlook the fact that they are meant to be related, and the English translation does not help them to see this. For while the

*Werkmeister* who is said to *make* the shape is obviously the demiurge – the master craftsman of the *Timaeus* who created the world – and hence none other than the *God* mentioned in the first sentence of the second paragraph of §72, it is not clear where Anscombe's 'pattern-maker' springs from, nor do we know why his powers should be supposed to include the making of light and darkness.

In fact, the answer to our questions can be seen to lie in this, that Wittgenstein invites us to see, or come to see, the connection between those two Platonic thoughts (prototype, on the one hand, and search for essence through decomposition, on the other) by way of going to the bottom of the images involved in these thoughts. Seeing the form (or shape) as prototype allows us to elevate it to a level where the whole formed by it becomes a supernatural thing whose parts are not like slices of bread, for example, which might be either thick or thin; they are like pieces of a divine jigsaw puzzle which are not only unbreakable but also form a kind of super-adamantine stencil in virtue of which everything of a specific kind has the outlines it does have.

The form needs to be elevated in the way indicated for the crucial step to become feasible, viz. the step of turning the form into a thing consisting of parts, as Wittgenstein describes it ('wird die Form zum Ding, das aus Teilen besteht'). For 'grammatical' reasons, as it were, this is a step which requires an agent who takes it. This cannot be a lesser agent than the demiurge or master craftsman, who has created all the essential elements making up a world: light and darkness, colour and hardness, geometrical forms, etc. The 'grammatical' reason is expressed in the consideration that whatever is composite involves composition, and hence someone who performs the act of composition. But as the last sentence of the quoted passage implies, someone like 'you' cannot do it because 'you' are not able to create essences: forms which for internal (or supernatural) reasons are guaranteed to be perpetually selfsame.

Of course, if the 'grammatical' argument is put like this, it is so obviously invalid that it borders on a joke:[14] there is, for instance, plainly no reason to assume that composition, or compositeness, requires the intervention of an agent who performs the act of composition. But we must remember what we tend to forget too easily, namely the critical fact that all the moves described are made within the framework of a simile, a picture,[15] which derives whatever persuasiveness it may possess from interpreting the judgment 'This shape consists of these shapes' as an insight gained through your showing me that its content is an

essential feature of this shape: it forms part of the essence of this shape that its composition involves these other shapes.

But what is the point of confronting us with these Platonic images? As the two lines of §73 seem to indicate, this Platonic way of thinking involves an intolerable confusion of levels: 'I could also have said: it is not the property of an object that is ever "essential", but rather the mark of a concept'. What is here expressed in succinct Fregean terms[16] could be regarded as a refutation of the whole approach favoured by the Platonist. But this might be a hasty reading of Wittgenstein's remark. Both the last paragraph of §72 and the whole of §73 are prefaced by rather cautious qualifications: 'Und ich will sagen…', 'Ich hätte auch sagen können…': 'And I want to say…', 'I could also have said…'.

The first of these expressions may express an urge, perhaps a temptation. That is, there may be reasons *not* to say what one feels like saying. One reason may be that expressions like 'the proof has taught me' could be read in ways that are not, or not entirely, dependent on the continued effectiveness of the simile introduced earlier: there may be possibilities of explaining the import of such expressions which do not require the framing picture. Another reason may be that there is no obvious way of avoiding the use of such expressions and the Platonic terms in which they have been read.

There is yet a third possible reason, and that seems to me the most promising, the most helpful one. This is the reason that this (Platonic) way of talking comes very *naturally* to us. If we look at the matter from this perspective, our point of view will be shifted. For in this case we are not primarily wondering whether there is anything misleading or confused about these expressions; but we are interested in finding out and reporting what their use amounts to. We want to know after all what comes naturally to people, since that may help us to gain a better understanding of human nature. Should our investigation persuade us to look for possible corrections, these will not be corrections of *mistakes* but corrections in the sense in which one's eyesight can be corrected by putting on glasses or one's posture corrected by wearing insoles. These are corrections that help to restore human nature. But we should be reluctant to insist on 'corrections' that 'improve' on human nature by suppressing what comes naturally to it. So, if in certain circumstances people find it natural to express themselves in Platonic terms, we may hesitate to try to talk them out of responding to their inclinations.[17]

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Comments like the quoted one in Fregean terms (§73) seem to amount to a pat reaction to our Platonic images – a reaction which ought to suffice to get rid of these images and their power. But it is their very patness which renders such comments inadequate (we must not forget that both in his manuscript and in the last version of these remarks Wittgenstein continues to explore the idea of properties of the essence of a form or shape: the exhortation to respect distinctions like that between the conceptual – marks of concepts – and the material – properties of objects – does not *silence* the voice of human inclinations). Of course you are free to point out that the other person is confusing levels of discourse. But, first of all, it is you – not him – who has laid down the relevant distinction between levels as well as the rule that they are not to be mixed up. Secondly and more interestingly, the other person may reply that he is quite aware of what you call a distinction between levels of discourse. He feels, however, that a particularly effective way of bringing out what he wishes to say involves confusing, or what seems to be confusing, such levels.

At this point, I do not want to continue this argument. But I want to point out that Platonic images are recognized by Wittgenstein as particularly impressive ways of illustrating certain notions of necessity and essence. Even if it is acknowledged that our favourite theories and distinctions are not really compatible with what these images suggest, nor with the way in which they suggest this, it will be difficult to establish the claim that according to Wittgenstein *nothing* is suggested by these images – that in his view they are completely empty. If Platonic pictures and similes were truly *nichtssagend*, we could not even understand them as being about necessity and essence (rather than some other subject matter). To be sure, one might reply that it is indeed impossible to understand them as being about these matters, and that this is so for the simple reason that the words 'necessity' and 'essence' are meaningless – at any rate if one attempts to use them in the way suggested by the Platonist. But if one wishes to give a radical reply along these lines, it will first of all become difficult to continue the conversation, and secondly it will prove an extremely tough job to show that this reply is in agreement with Wittgenstein's philosophical project. I for my part do not think it likely that Wittgenstein would have been in sympathy with the radical reply.

A related set of illustrations can be found in various passages of the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* where Wittgenstein speaks of the 'natural history' of numbers. See for example IV, §11, p. 229: 'Arithmetic as the natural history (mineralogy) of numbers. But *who*

talks like this about it? Our whole thinking is penetrated with this idea'. Again, remarks of this type are too readily interpreted as attempts at *refuting* the conception so characterized.

**4.**

As I observed above, it is difficult to find passages in Wittgenstein's writings that show any clear signs of indebtedness to Plato. In particular, it is hard to locate signs of a *specific* kind of debt. Where do we find a remark which is characteristic of Wittgenstein's way of thinking and at the same time an insight originating in Plato's dialogues? One will be hard put to discover anything falling under this description. Of course, we can find parallels and certain Platonic motifs that are in some way discussed or unfolded by Wittgenstein. But none of this would be enough to speak of a real debt.

There is one aspect of Wittgenstein's writings, however, which may really owe a good deal to reflections on a particular feature of Plato's work. What I have in mind is a feature, not of Plato's doctrines, but rather of his way of arranging and presenting his material – something one may want to regard as part of his *style*. On the other hand, it is not easy, perhaps even impossible, to separate style from something one would be satisfied to call the 'content' of the writing of our two authors. In short, my claim is that the *Investigations* in particular (in contrast to manuscript notes and posthumous publications based on manuscripts) may owe something to choices made in deliberate opposition to Plato's technique of writing dialogue.

Let us take our start from the following longish entry in a notebook of 1931 – a time when a number of Wittgenstein's quotations from or comments on Plato were first written down:

> Imagine you are taking a walk together with another person, and you are deep in conversation. In the course of this conversation you would sometimes slow down and sometimes accelerate your pace, again and again coming to a halt at various points. As these interruptions of your walk are immediate outcomes of the life of the conversation, a listener will find them quite natural. Now let's suppose that only the substance of the conversation is reproduced by someone (who may be translating it into another language), and in order to do so it would be necessary to walk the same path, marking the spots where the first time round pauses were made. These enforced interruptions of your walk, though originally they helped

the flow of the conversation, will now be perceived as *extremely* disruptive. Similarly with the translation of the Platonic dialogues into dialogue form. Only once, in the original course of the conversation, the affirmative and negative responses were natural and helpful resting points. In the translation they are agonizing, irritating slowdowns.[18]

Quite generally speaking, this is a very perceptive observation about the differences between an ordinary conversation and its course, on the one hand, and our attempts at giving a faithful account of this exchange. What Wittgenstein's analogy helps to bring out vividly is the fact that a natural development can be very different from a successful representation of this development. We all know that an accomplished playwright will never simply *imitate* a certain style of talking if he wishes to get a specific mood or attitude across. If, for example, he wants to indicate a character's doubt and indecision, he will not content himself with demanding much hemming and hawing; rather than prescribing long pauses and extended stammerings, he will for instance use certain words in a certain order to help create an impression of hesitation and incertitude. Even, or especially, a film will not straightforwardly show an actor's long silences, false starts and inarticulate noises to achieve this sort of effect; it will, quite apart from the actor's acting and speaking, use light, colour and perspective as well as music to make us see what we are meant to perceive.

So one lesson we can learn by looking at Plato's dialogues through Wittgenstein's eyes is this: if you aim at a dialogue which is more than just an ascription of portions of text to named speakers, you will have to do something that goes beyond producing or reproducing words that were spoken or might have been spoken in the course of a conversation which clarified certain points of view and rendered some lines of argument perspicuous. But what could Plato, or some other author, have done to write better dialogues? We shall come to this question presently. But first we shall have to note that Wittgenstein's remark introduces a subject which many would regard as strictly speaking non-philosophical.

To be sure, the observation on the gap between a natural real conversation and a successful representation of such a conversation can be regarded as an aesthetic and hence as a philosophical one. But when it comes to talking about the technical aspects of how such a representation can actually be achieved, we are speaking of the ins and outs

of a more or less artistic trade – for example that of a film director or a playwright. So it seems that we have left the realm of philosophy and entered that of the arts. Could it be that Wittgenstein thinks that philosophers ought to develop their artistic talents in order to produce better philosophy? Or does he believe that no clear boundary lines can be drawn between philosophy and artistic considerations?

As a matter of fact, I think that the right answer to both questions is a qualified 'yes'. As regards the first question, the qualification concerns the generality of question and answer. In all likelihood Wittgenstein does not wish to tell other philosophers how to do their job.[19] So what he might want to agree to is a claim to the effect that *he himself* should do his artistic best as a writer to articulate his ideas in such a way that expression and content do not come apart. And as regards the second question, he would probably consent to the statement that in certain cases there is no point in trying to prise artistic from philosophical considerations.

Now it may look as if we had strayed quite far from the course indicated by our original question about a possible debt Wittgenstein may owe to Plato. But in reality, I think, these reflections are quite pertinent to that question. The problem of whether and how to write dialogue is obviously not an accidental one in the context of comparisons with Plato. And as Wittgenstein's comparison has taken its start from a well-circumscribed dissatisfaction with the quality of Plato's writing of dialogue, questions of the technique of writing cannot be ignored. What one may continue to wonder about is the extent to which it is possible to succeed in amalgamating, or preventing from coming apart, concerns about the style of writing and concerns about philosophical content.

There are doubtless a number of points where these concerns can be seen to meet or overlap, but as we cannot consider them all, I shall here concentrate on one question. This is a question connected with the problem of how to talk about philosophy in a general way while at the same time respecting Wittgenstein's criticisms of 'our craving for generality' and 'the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case'.[20] It is obvious, I think, that Wittgenstein wishes to make observations on certain typical features of philosophy. There is also surely nothing clearly incorrect in saying that he criticizes some of these typical features, nor in saying that he recommends certain procedures that are relevant to such features. But there is a difference between describing and illustrating *typical* features and making *general* claims about a supposed discipline or area of interest. And this difference is

important if one wishes to do justice to Wittgenstein's remarks on the nature and practice of philosophy.

The idea of capturing the typical features of a given person, for instance, can be illustrated by thinking of the work of a cartoonist. He will not try to give us an exact picture of the represented person (where 'exactness' is measured by reference to most standard methods of projection). He will deliberately exaggerate certain characteristics while ignoring a great number of other aspects. So, what would be a fault in a normal portrait may be a virtue in a successful cartoon. In a similar way (and this case is perhaps even more instructive) an accomplished cartoonist may be able to get across the idea of a 'typical so-and-so', where the place of 'so-and-so' can be filled by terms like 'football-player', 'hooligan', 'professor', 'poet' and so on. If he is a *very* accomplished cartoonist, he may even succeed in giving us a picture of an absolutely ordinary person.

As the cartoon example shows, it is possible to capture the typical features of something without reproducing features that are actually given in this combination or to this extent. While exaggeration may be an indispensable tool of the cartoonist's trade, it need not be part of other people's repertoire who try to capture in their own fashion what is typical. After all, the example of the cartoonist was only meant to help make the idea plausible.

If I am right in thinking that, in some of his remarks, Wittgenstein strives to encapsulate typical features of the practice of philosophy in a single vignette drawn with a few strokes of a skilled pencil, then it is likely that he is not in the business of making general statements about philosophy as a discipline or drawing 'realistic' portraits of individual philosophers (while some of his specific criticisms presuppose that at least occasionally he assumes the role of portraitist, the job of large-scale landscape-painting does not seem to appeal to him at all).

To use Wittgenstein's own terms: what he tries to capture are typical *Gedankenbewegungen* – moves of thought. What he means by that can be either of two things. He may want to characterise a feature typical of one man, e.g. himself, or he may wish to describe what is typical, and hence as it were in the nature, of a certain activity or practice, e.g. of the Platonic style of doing philosophy. A related image he uses from time to time is that of the standard or normal position taken by a gymnast about to do one of his exercises in the course of which he will take other positions that are, as one might say, 'derived' from the normal position. Looked at in this way, the normal position is a typical one; it can represent the man and his activity.[21]

Against the background of Wittgenstein's own images of moves, or movements, of thought and normal positions, these considerations may serve to give the analogy with a walk used in our initial quotation a particular degree of aptness. The application of these images and our considerations is not a straightforward matter, however; it requires some interpretation, and this may involve various speculative and controversial steps.

It has been pointed out above that we are dealing with two different situations: the original conversation-cum-walk, on the one hand, and a description or representation of the original event, on the other. Moreover, we are told that a description in terms of a 'realistic' system of representation would fail to do justice to what occurred in the original situation. A faithful reproduction of the interruptions, for example, would be '*extremely* disruptive', as Wittgenstein says. And this is one of the implied criticisms of Plato's dialogical style: reproducing the interruptions in this form gives them too much weight; it tends to lend them a meaning which they never had and which may distort the significance of what was said and of the words used to capture what was said.

There are at least two ways of conceiving of the original conversation. On the one hand, we may be dealing with an emblematic event which really took place and gained a particular sort of significance in the light of what happened or was thought about it later. On the other hand, we may be speaking of any one of a great or indefinite number of events constituting actions in accord with a certain practice. In the terms of Wittgenstein's example this could be spelled out as follows. (1) There may have been a real conversation between Socrates and another person which was impressive because it changed the doctrine or doctrines associated with Socrates in important respects or gave them a particularly memorable articulation. (2) There were many conversations in the relevant style, and they all contributed to the doctrine we have in mind. Giving a description of *one* such conversation would thus be a kind of idealization: a paradigm that was never realised in quite this form but serves better than any 'realistic' account to give us an idea of what these conversations were like.

Both cases are possible, and there seems to be no need to decide which alternative Wittgenstein had in mind. His actual words seem to indicate a case of kind (1), but it is not necessarily so, because his own telling of his story may involve an element of idealization: our conversations used to go like *this*. So, the 'translation' mentioned by Wittgenstein may either be a rearrangement of what happened on one specific occasion

or of what happened in an unspecified number of similar cases. Either of these sorts of event may be meant by Wittgenstein's phrase 'Platonic dialogues' – they were the conversations that took place, perhaps exactly in this form or perhaps more or less like this. But it is only in a real conversation ('Only once, in the original course of the conversation, ...') that certain occurrences play a helpful role. And what Wittgenstein has in mind here includes, not only interruptions and all kinds of encouraging gestures, but also responses of the kind known as contributions from Socrates' interlocutors.

Strangely enough, although these responses have often been held to be a particularly 'unrealistic' feature of Plato's dialogue, in a real conversation they might have been useful contributions, as Wittgenstein suggests. But in the 'translation into dialogue form', that is, in the description of a real (or arbitrary or imaginary) conversation, these interjections interrupt and disrupt what was said: a report of a conversation is something entirely different from what is reported. If we use the term 'esoteric' to refer to the real conversation or conversations and the term 'exoteric' for the written and published version of those conversations, the result of our considerations is clearly this: a successful exoteric representation of the esoteric teaching needs to be written in a way which does not imitate or mirror all the outstanding features of the esoteric version. On the contrary, in order to be 'faithful', it may well have to introduce elements that were not present in the original (esoteric) situation while leaving out of account elements that were not only present but of special importance or salience in the context of the esoteric teaching.

The quotation about the Platonic dialogues which I have been discussing here exemplifies a certain type of reflection Wittgenstein must have indulged in more than once. The specifically stylistic questions are a matter I shall briefly return to presently. But there is another aspect that I shall even more briefly mention now. The distinction between esoteric and exoteric versions and performances fits a difference we know a good deal about through Wittgenstein's extant manuscripts, on the one hand, and various lecture notes taken by his pupils, on the other. In addition, there are a number of dictations which can be seen as filling places somewhere between Wittgenstein's written work and his oral presentations. If one looks at versions of roughly the same material, one will notice remarkable differences in style and content. Of course, this is not surprising, but we tend to overlook it for the simple reason that both manuscripts and lecture notes are accessible in book

form. Moreover, at various stages of transmission Wittgenstein's pupils naturally tried to give their notes a shape that was more presentable than the raw stuff actually jotted down in their notebooks. This may increase their legibility, but at the same time it not only reduces their documentary value; it also tends to give a misleading impression of what Wittgenstein was doing. For he seems to have tried hard to make ideas and arguments palatable or convincing in ways that he would have judged too direct, too bold or too conventional in his writing. And the worst way of trying to come to terms with this difference would be to comment that he was saying the same sort of thing in different ways. That you cannot say the same thing in different ways is one of the few dogmas, or perhaps the only dogma, that Wittgenstein strongly believed in.

There is another important matter which comes into view if one thinks about our quotation on Platonic dialogues. Who are the people figuring in the situation of the original conversation and in its 'translation' into dialogue form? We have seen that a radically realistic representation of the original conversation would be counter-productive in the sense that it would not only tax our patience but also distort the picture to an intolerable degree. On the other hand, a picture which gave us a convincing and possibly quite authentic idea of that conversation would probably not be a realistic one in terms of a standard system of projection. So there seems to be a kind of dilemma between straightforward (one–one or not very complex) forms of depiction and credible but not straightforward (complex or strongly conventional) pictures.

We seem to be facing a dilemma because we are dealing with a historical figure or event, on the one hand, and *its* description, on the other. But how can it be a faithful description, if it not only leaves out things that were important in the real situation but also introduces elements that are wildly exaggerated or additions to the historical process? In the context of our considerations, there is no point in discussing this question in a general way. But Wittgenstein's remark suggests a certain way of understanding the matter which should not be overlooked. What he may be read as suggesting is that any 'translation' of a real conversation (or other kinds of event) involves introducing questions like 'What's the relation between the historical Socrates and the picture we are given here?' – that is, every such translation involves creating a kind of tension between historical circumstances and their description. It is only in the light of this tension (and not in a putative

situation where the tension would be absent) that we can perceive a description of historical events as more or less authentic, faithful and convincing. So, we know no way of getting around this dialectic between unrepeatable real event and its representation. One method of keeping the tension, and hence the question of success or failure of our representation, in focus is by paying particular attention to the stylistic means employed in constructing the picture.

Even a fairly superficial look at the lines given to supposed speakers in the *Investigations* will show that there are a number of problems in attributing these lines. If your model of a dialogue is something like Lear talking to Cordelia or Faust addressing Mephisto, then you will be hard put to find something truly resembling these dramatic exchanges. Commentators have noticed that there is such a thing as a problem of 'Who's speaking?', but this question is asked against the background of expecting to find clearly distinguishable and attributable parts.[22] But this expectation is frustrated again and again in the course of reading the *Investigations*, and a reconstruction of the text in terms of separating the roles of Wittgenstein (speaking for himself) and his interlocutor or opponent (voicing the ideas of sundry schools of thought or the perplexed notions of the layman) will yield generalized results only at the cost of using a good deal of force.

But worse is yet to come if you expect to be able to reconstruct parts of the *Investigations* in terms of dialogical structure. As Jane Heal has noticed and spelled out in her article on Wittgenstein and dialogue,[23] the problem of attributing given lines of apparent dialogue is not the only one. There is an even more disturbing problem which arises when you notice that in some cases it is not clear, and perhaps impossible to decide, whether or not there is a change of speaker at all.

And this is the point: our two difficulties: (1) about the attribution of words, and (2) the identification of changes of speaker are not meant to be resolvable. Their arising is part and parcel of a way of writing which, superficially, looks like dialogue but turns out to be such only up to a point. This style is based on the insight that if you want to succeed in giving the impression of a real conversation, you should *not* follow Plato's example in leaving no doubt about the identity of speakers and changes of speaker. Of course, there is ordinary dialogue to be found in the *Investigations*, but as often as not the questions 'Who's talking?' and 'Is that the same speaker talking?' will soon arise. And these identity-questions can reveal themselves as being part of the philosophical question teasing us, also because some of the possible answers or counter-questions can, on reflection, look quite upsetting. For example: does it matter? Could it be both of them?

Of course, the most interesting response to these difficulties would be the question of whether it is myself speaking. This thought would naturally imply further queries about the advisability of reconsidering previous other-attributions in the light of the possibility of changing them into self-attributions. To be sure, causing recognition of myself in another's speech is one the oldest moves in the game of philosophy and quite obviously compatible with aims Plato may have had in writing his dialogues. From this perspective, the *Investigations* could be seen as an improvement on Plato's achievement – an improvement whose technical, stylistic side is discussed in our initial quotation. It would also fit some (but probably only *some*) of the things said by Cavell in underlining the confessional streak in the book, which is played out by the 'antagonists in Wittgenstein's dialogues [...t]he voice of temptation and the voice of correctness'.[24]

In particular, it would fit two hints hidden away in the paper by Jane Heal mentioned above. First, she considers the potential aptness, in the context of discussing Wittgensteinian dialogue, of the Platonic image that 'thinking is, in some sense, the soul talking to herself'.[25] Second, in a footnote she refers to a remark of Wittgenstein made towards the end of December 1948, which has been printed in the collection *Culture and Value*: 'Almost the whole time I am writing conversations with myself. Things I say to myself tête-à-tête'.[26] This sounds nice, but it is not quite what Wittgenstein wrote. If we use this translation and try to bring it in accord with Wittgenstein's German, we should get something like '...conversations with myself [= *Selbstgespräche*] with myself'. Of course, that will not do. One might improve on this by substituting 'soliloquies' for 'conversations': 'Practically everything I write are soliloquies addressed to myself' or something along these lines. That would have the advantage of bringing out the literary, or stylistic, ambition expressed by this remark: the writing of *Selbstgespräche* is a different enterprise from an actual *Selbstgespräch*.

But to be sure, it is possible to write conversations, soliloquies, *Selbstgespräche* without addressing anyone in particular or with a specific audience in mind. His audience, Wittgenstein says in the remark just quoted, is none other than himself. What goes without saying is that, should the addressee find his voice, the soliloquy will be transformed into a dialogue.

## Notes

1. For a collection of quotations from and allusions to Plato's works as well as some comments on these quotations and allusions, see H. Biesenbach

(2011) *Anspielungen und Zitate im Werk Ludwig Wittgensteins,* no. 22 (Bergen: Publications from the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen), pp. 303–310.

2. B. McGuinness (ed.) (1979) *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann*, trans. by J. Schulte and B. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 115. The German text can be found in the third volume of the *Werkausgabe* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), same pagination: 'Schlick sagt, es gab in der theologischen Ethik zwei Auffassungen vom Wesen des Guten: nach der flacheren Deutung ist das Gute deshalb gut, weil Gott es will; nach der tieferen Deutung will Gott das Gute deshalb, weil es gut ist. Ich meine, daß die erste Auffassung die tiefere ist: gut ist, was Gott befiehlt. Denn sie schneidet den Weg einer jeden Erklärung, "warum" es gut ist, ab, während gerade die zweite Auffassung die flache, die rationalistische ist, die so tut, "als ob" das, was gut ist, noch begründet werden könnte./ Die erste Auffassung sagt klar, daß das Wesen des Guten nichts mit den Tatsachen zu tun hat und daher durch keinen Satz erklärt werden kann. Wenn es einen Satz gibt, der gerade das ausdrückt, was ich meine, so ist es der Satz: Gut ist, was Gott befiehlt'.

   This passage was quoted at recent workshops on Wittgenstein's ethics and related questions held in Venice and Chicago. See, for example, Michael Kremer's contribution 'The Whole Meaning of a Book of Nonsense' (to appear in Michael Beany [ed.], *Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy*). The Schlick passage can be found in the reprint of his *Fragen der Ethik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984, p. 61. See also the editor's foot-note 79 in *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, p. 115.

3. Printed as chapter 10 of Klagge's book; see J. C. Klagge (2011) *Wittgenstein in Exile* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), p. 131.

4. The trans. is by G. Grube and J. Cooper, quoted in J. C. Klagge *Wittgenstein in Exile*.

5. L. Wittgenstein (1922) *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 6.371–2.

6. Perhaps it would be better to translate this sentence as follows: 'If there is any sentence expressing precisely what I think, it is the dictum "What God commands, that is good"'.

7. Cf. the relevant passages in L. Wittgenstein (1993) 'Lecture on Ethics' in J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann (eds) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett), pp. 37–44.

8. I am doubtful, however, about an additional point made by Klagge in relating a remark from Wittgenstein's personal diary on the page opposite the entry used in *Tractatus* 6.371–2 to the entire Weltanschauung of the moderns. In my view, it is less clear than Klagge thinks that this Weltanschauung is derivable from or directly connected with the *falsche Lebensauffassung* mentioned in the personal diary. This difference may be a consequence of Klagge's acceptance of an emendation of Wittgenstein's actual words. He reads: 'From time to time I despair. This is the fault [Schuld] of a false view of life.' What Wittgenstein wrote is 'Das ist die Schule der falschen Lebensauffassung' ('This [the despair] is the school – or training-ground – of the erroneous view of life'). But even if Klagge's reading were the correct one, the connection between the two remarks would be far from obvious.

PROOF

9. Perhaps it will not be amiss to emphasize that *approving* such a view is a completely different matter from actually *holding* it.

10. L. Wittgenstein (1978) *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd edition (Oxford: Blackwell). The German text can be found in volume 6 of the Suhrkamp *Werkausgabe*: '71. Wenn man sagt: "Diese Form besteht aus diesen Formen" – so denkt man sich die Form als eine feine Zeichnung, ein feines Gestell von dieser Form, auf das gleichsam die Dinge gespannt sind, die diese Form haben. (Vergleiche: Platos Auffassung der Eigenschaften als Ingredientien eines Dings.) 72. "Diese Form besteht aus diesen Formen. Du hast mir eine wesentliche Eigenschaft dieser Form gezeigt." – Du hast mir ein neues *Bild* gezeigt. Es ist, als hätte *Gott* sie so zusammengesetzt. – *Wir bedienen uns also eines Gleichnisses*. Die *Form* wird zum ätherischen Wesen, welches diese Form hat; es ist, als wäre sie ein für allemal so zusammengesetzt worden (von dem, der die wesentlichen Eigenschaften in die Dinge gelegt hat). Denn, wird die Form zum Ding, das aus Teilen besteht, so ist der Werkmeister der Form der, der auch Licht und Dunkelheit, Farbe und Härte, etc., gemacht hat. (Denke, jemand fragte: "Die Form...ist aus diesen Teilen zusammengesetzt; wer hat sie zusammenge-setzt? Du?")

11. Sometimes Wittgenstein uses the word 'Form', at other times he uses 'Gestalt'. It might have been preferable to imitate his use of these words by consistently rendering 'Form' as 'form' and 'Gestalt' as 'shape'.

12. For parallels with Goethe, who in many respects was a 'Platonic' thinker, see my paper J. Schulte (1990) 'Chor und Gesetz: Zur 'morphologischen Methode' bei Goethe und Wittgenstein' in J. Schulte *Chor und Gesetz: Wittgenstein im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), pp. 11–42.

13. A. Ambrose (ed.) (1979) *Wittgenstein's Lectures 1932–1935: From the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret Macdonald* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 34. Cf. L. Wittgenstein (1969) *Blue Book* (*The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd edition [Oxford: Blackwell]), p. 17, for a related passage which is clearly inspired by the same sort of criticism of Plato's thought, even though Plato is not mentioned: 'The idea of a general concept being a common property of its particular instances connects up with other primitive, too simple, ideas of the structure of language. It is comparable to the idea that *properties* are *ingredients* of the things which have the properties; e.g. that beauty is an ingredient of all beautiful things as alcohol is of beer and wine, and that we therefore could have pure beauty, unadulterated by anything that is beautiful.'

  The 'Platonic' approach is placed in a polemic context in the so-called 'Diktat für Schlick', which was probably compiled by Waismann [see J. Schulte (2011) 'Waismann as Spokesman for Wittgenstein' in B. McGuinness *Friedrich Waismann: Causality and Logical Positivism* (Dordrecht etc.: Springer)]. According to this source, Wittgenstein said: 'I can characterize my standpoint no better than by saying that it is the antithetical standpoint to the one occupied by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. For if I were asked what knowledge is [i.e., the question of the *Theaetetus*], I would enumerate instances of knowledge and add the words "and similar things". There is no shared constituent to be discovered in them since none exists' (G. Baker [ed.], *The Voices of Wittgenstein: The Vienna Circle*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 33).

14. For 'grammatical' jokes, cf. §97 (99) of the so-called *Frühfassung* of the *Investigations*: *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Kritisch-genetische Edition (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), pp. 280–281.

15. The importance of the continued effectiveness of the framing simile, or picture, is underlined in the last paragraph of §72: 'And I want to say: when one uses the expression, "the proof has taught me – shown [or perhaps rather: persuaded] me – that this is the case", one is still using this simile.'

    It is not clear that the translation 'using this simile' is the most fortunate choice of words. Wittgenstein's 'ist man noch immer in jenem Gleichnis' seems to mean that one is implicitly relying on the simile – the moves one makes are all moves inside the framework of this simile.

16. For the distinction between *Eigenschaften eines Gegenstands* and *Merkmalen eines Begriffs*, see G. Frege (1884) *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, trans. by J. L. Austin, *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (Oxford: Blackwell), §53; G. Frege (1984) 'Über Begriff und Gegenstand', trans. by P. T. Geach, 'On Concept and Object', in B. McGuinness *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic and Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 182–194.

17. These brief observations on what is involved in the relevant sort of 'corrections' need to be taken into account if one wishes to make an attempt at clarifying the important but elusive notion of Wittgensteinian 'therapy'.

18. MS [manuscript] 153a, pp. 117v–199r; MS 111, pp. 192 ff. The (somewhat) later entry in MS 111 was copied from MS 153a on 13 September 1931 or a little later. The earlier manuscript passage is quoted in H. Biesenbach *Anspielungen und Zitate im Werk Ludwig Wittgensteins*, p. 310. The text of Wittgenstein's manuscripts can be found in L. Wittgenstein (2000) *Wittgenstein's Nachlass. Text and Facsimile Version. Bergen Electronic Edition* (Oxford: OUP). A slightly edited version of the German text runs as follows: 'Denke dir, du gingest mit jemand spazieren, und zwar in einem Gespräch. Du würdest dann, wie das Gespräch vor sich geht, bald langsamer, bald schneller gehen und da und dort immer wieder stehnbleiben. Der, welcher das Gespräch mit anhört, wird diese Pausen im Gehen ganz natürlich finden, da sie ja auch unmittelbar aus dem Leben des Gespräches hervorgehen. Nehmen wir nun an, das Gespräch würde nur dem Sinn nach von jemandem wiedergegeben (etwa in eine andere Sprache übersetzt) und man müßte dazu auch wieder den gleichen Weg gehen, und es wären die Stellen bezeichnet, an denen damals geruht wurde, so würden diese erzwungenen Pausen im Gehen jetzt als *äußerst* störend wirken, die doch früher dem Gespräche geholfen haben. So verhält es sich mit der Übersetzung der Platonischen Dialoge in Dialogform. Nur in dem ursprünglichen einzigen Gang des Gespräches waren die bejahenden und verneinenden Antworten natürliche und helfende Ruhepunkte. In der Übersetzung sind es qualvolle, störende Aufenthalte'.

19. I am aware of the fact that some commentators believe that Wittgenstein did have such prescriptive intentions.

20. L. Wittgenstein, *Blue Book*, pp. 17–18.

21. Cf. FF §97 (99), p. 281. As it happens, this is the same remark as the one referred to above in the context of grammatical jokes. Cf. MS 113, p. 30v for a slightly different but related use of the term *Grundstellung*.

22. See E. von Savigny (1994) *Wittgensteins 'Philosophische Untersuchungen'. Ein Kommentar für Leser*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann), introduction.
23. J. Heal (1995) 'Wittgenstein and Dialogue' in T. Smiley (ed.) *Philosophical dialogues: Plato, Hume, Wittgenstein,* Dawes Hicks Lectures on Philosophy, Proceedings of the British Academy 85 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 63–83. Cf. A. Pichler (2004) *Wittgensteins Philosophische Untersuchungen: Vom Buch zum Album* (Amsterdam: Rodopi), chapter 3.
24. S. Cavell (2002) 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy' in S. Cavell *Must We Mean What We Say?* Updated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 71.
25. J. Heal, 'Wittgenstein and Dialogue', p. 69. She does not mention Plato, but the source of the image is perhaps too well-known to merit explicit identification. Cf. *Sophist*, 263e; *Theaetetus*, 189e.
26. L. Wittgenstein (1998) *Culture and Value*, Revised Edition (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 88. 'Ich schreibe beinahe immer Selbstgespräche mit mir selbst. Sachen, die ich mir unter vier Augen sage'. The older translation (1980), quoted by Heal, runs as follows: 'Nearly all my writings are private conversations with myself. Things that I say to myself tête à tête'.

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# 2
# Wittgenstein Reads Plato

*Wolfgang Kienzler*

Wittgenstein reads Plato – the only philosopher he reads.[1]

The word 'Plato' has as many sounds as the pentacle has corners.[2]

Why should I wish to call our present activity philosophy, when we also call Plato's activity philosophy?[3]

## 1. Introduction

Wittgenstein read Plato. While Frege and Russell were obviously more important for his philosophical development, and although Plato is not mentioned in the well-known 1931 list of the authors who influenced him,[4] Wittgenstein's written work contains more quotations from Plato than from any other philosopher.

This chapter will investigate the sources Wittgenstein used (2), and give an outline of the use he made of them (3). Furthermore the translations he worked with are discussed (4), and two page references he gives examined (5). Separate case studies concern three quotes from *Theaetetus* (6 – 8) and one from *Charmides* (9). Finally, some general observations are given (10).

## 2. The sources

The list of Plato's dialogues Wittgenstein is known to have read or which he alludes to is surprisingly long – at least by his standards.[5]

He explicitly mentions four dialogues: *Theaetetus*,[6] *Cratylus*,[7] *Charmides*,[8] and *Philebus*.[9] In addition, he mentions the myth of the souls choosing a body for their future life from the *Republic*.[10] The idea that the nature of philosophy is in important ways similar to Plato's

theory of recollection, or anamnesis, could be found in *Meno*, or a number of other dialogues. Of course, the fact that he, too, knew these very well-known things in no way proves anything about Wittgenstein actually reading Plato.[11] But the fact remains that Wittgenstein was familiar with much of Plato's main ideas in general and apparently with some of his written work in particular.[12]

From oral sources we can add the comparison of Socrates with a monster like Typhon from *Phaedrus*,[13] the description of Socrates as 'outwardly a monster and beauty all within' from the *Symposium*,[14] and also the idea that philosophers should be kings, from the *Republic*.[15] In addition, Drury reports of an exchange about the Parmenides, being 'among the most profound of Plato's writings'.[16] From his conversations with Wittgenstein, Bouwsma further mentions *Laches*, 'the one on courage'[17] and *Euthydemus* and *Protagoras*.[18]

In addition we find some speculations about the source of the Theory of Forms, comments on the way a dialogue comes out when it is written down, and the idea that Wittgenstein could describe his own way of doing philosophy best in contrasting it with the one Socrates is using in Plato's dialogues.[19]

## 3. The uses in outline

Most actual quotes from Plato first appear in Manuscript 111 written in 1931 when Wittgenstein was very much aware that he was moving towards a new style of doing philosophy:[20] on p. 13 he quotes from *Cratylus*, on p. 14 from *Theaetetus*, on p. 15 he mentions *Philebus*, on p. 16 he refers (most probably) to *Cratylus* again (about the proposition consisting of nouns and verbs),[21] on p. 20 he again quotes from *Theaetetus*, on p. 26 he alludes to it again about the nature of knowledge, and on p. 31 about simples being impossible to describe, on p. 55 he critically remarks that when reading the Socratic dialogues one has a feeling 'like [one is] wasting time',[22] on p. 69 he rejects a general definition of knowledge, and on pp. 74 and 81 he quotes twice from *Charmides* (without mentioning the source), and finally on p. 133 he makes fun of a remark stating that we are 'no nearer to the meaning of "reality" than Plato got', and on p. 192 he discusses the style of the written-down dialogue as artificial.

It seems quite clear that Wittgenstein considered at that time that he could possibly begin his book with some passages from Plato, in order to illustrate a seemingly natural way of doing philosophy before introducing his own approach. The way some of the quotes are carefully copied down suggests that he did not engage with the content

expressed there but rather that he wanted to use these quotes later when assembling his material for his book.[23] The last passage on questions of writing philosophy reflects on Wittgenstein's own thoughts about the eventual design of his book. While we know of no attempts to literally write dialogues, it has often been remarked that Wittgenstein's style of doing philosophy incorporates many dialogue-type elements, and that one of his main aims in philosophy is to highlight the contrast between traditional ways of doing philosophy and his own different style of doing it.[24]

While the plan of using Plato to begin the book was not carried out, quite a number of these passages survive into the *Big Typescript*, and from there into the *Philosophical Grammar*.[25] However, they occur very much at random and do not combine to give that book a 'Platonic flavour'. The pages are: 25 (*Cratylus* on nouns and verbs), 40 (*Cratylus* quoted), 54 (*Theaetetus* on what is knowledge), 217 (*Theaetetus* 189a), 223 (*Philebus* on hope), 248 (*Charmides* on speaking Greek), 363 (*Theaetetus* 189b), 424 (no nearer to Reality…), 434 (Plato on object and complex).

On the way to the *Investigations*, two new quotes were added and one of them later deleted, so that the final version contains just two references to Plato, one of them quite prominently in §46, the other one far in the back at §518. As will be seen, they come from different sources and thus do not 'communicate'.

## 4. German translations of Plato used

Wittgenstein did not know Greek and he read Plato in German translation. There are no indications whatsoever that Wittgenstein regretted not having learned Greek or that he believed that it was important to read Plato in the original.[26] He seemed entirely convinced that he could grasp the basic points from the translations. This contrasts with Wittgenstein's way of handling Latin texts. He is known to have read St. Augustine in a Latin edition and he even quoted Augustine in the original without supplying a translation (see L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §436) and he also prepared his own translation of the passage at the beginning of the *Investigations*.

His 1931 quotes are from the Schleiermacher translation (discussed below) while the *Theaetetus* passage in the *Investigations* is from a translation by Preisendanz. It has been said that at the time of his death Wittgenstein owned a complete five-volume set of the edition that quote came from.[27] This information cannot be entirely correct because the edition in question is neither complete

(although announced as a 'Gesamtausgabe') nor does it consist of five volumes. This edition has some features that merit some interest.

Eugen Diederichs had founded his publishing company in 1896 in Florence. From 1904 to 1948 he was located in Jena and specialized in a wide range of titles from the fine arts, literature and criticism as well as philosophy, leaning heavily on contemporary Weltanschauung and 'Life-Philosophy' (Lebensphilosophie). The program aimed primarily at contemporary non-academic bourgeois readers. From 1903 an edition of Plato's works began to appear, alongside translations of Aristotle and the Presocratics.[28] Diederichs also published early German translations of Kierkegaard's and of Bergson's[29] works, some of which Wittgenstein may have read. The overall style of Diederichs was just the kind of aestheticist, precious pseudo-philosophy aimed at bourgeois readers that Wittgenstein deeply detested.[30] Still, he owned and obviously used the Plato volumes.

The Plato edition was a corporate effort by three translators, with Karl Preisendanz contributing four volumes. The edition was part of a larger program intended to produce editions of the most important philosophical works from antiquity in a manner attractive and accessible to the modern reader.

In all, nine volumes eventually appeared: *Apology* and *Kriton*[31] (1908); *Parmenides* and *Philebus* (1910); *Timaeus*, *Critias* and Book X of *Laws* (1909) – all translated by Otto Kiefer; *Ion* and *Lysis* and *Charmides* (1905); *Symposium* (1903), *Phaedrus* (1904) and *Phaedo* (1906) (each issued separately and also all three as one volume) – all translated by Rudolf Kassner; *Euthyphro* and *Laches* and *Hippias minor* (1908); *Gorgias* and *Meno* (1908); *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus* (1910); *The Republic* (1909) – all translated by Karl Preisendanz.[32] Most volumes went through several printings and there were also special editions, gilded and bound in parchment. In 1925 the bulk of the edition was reprinted for the last time and except for a few individual items the edition has been out of print since that time.[33]

The professed idea underlying the translations was that they should be 'not scholarly, but artistic' ('nicht philologisch, sondern künstlerisch').[34] As an advertisement the following quote from a review by the Pester Lloyd, the German language newspaper published in Budapest, was placed in the back of some of the volumes:

> The German edition of Plato published by Eugen Diederichs is indeed a valuable good; enrichment of language, a truly classical style of

> German, the tender air of the Platonic dialogues, as well as the serene way of the Attic art of speech are each at their very height. When I read these dialogues a word from Kuno Fischer came to my mind: 'In hours of want and sufferings my soul longs for a Platonic dialogue for comfort'. [35]

The idea was that Plato's dialogues should be presented as if they had just now been written by a German author addressing the general German public.[36]

One feature of the books was that everything scholarly should be avoided:[37] 'The edition itself is a mere translation, there are no accompanying scholarly introductions'. The books were handsomely printed and partly for aesthetic reasons the standard Stephanus pagination was not given in the margin, although some of the larger volumes supplied it in a separate table in the back. The *Protagoras/ Theaetetus* and the *Republic* volumes complemented the table of correspondences with some notes in the back, so the non-scholarly principle was not strictly adhered to.

Curiously, Karl Preisendanz, born in 1883, actually was a young classical scholar who later went on to gather some renown, doing almost exclusively academic work.

There are two *Theaetetus* quotes taken from the Diederichs-Preisendanz edition. The note to *Philosophical Investigations* §46 indicating this was inserted by the editors in 1953 – apparently they knew that Wittgenstein owned that edition. This is further confirmed by Rush Rhees, one of the editors, reporting that Wittgenstein took a volume of *Phaedrus* from the shelf in his room to look up a particular passage.[38]

## 5. Some page references

Wittgenstein was rather careless or maybe indifferent regarding matters of giving exact references to the passages he quoted or alluded to – and he openly declared this in his Preface to the *Tractatus*.[39] There seems to be not a single page reference to the works of others in his entire works as far as he himself prepared them for publication. We find, however, an exact reference to his own *Tractatus* 4.5 in *Philosophical Investigations* §114, and the manuscripts contain a great number of exact references to other manuscripts and typescripts. In the process of his own philosophical work Wittgenstein worked with his own papers and he knew the purpose of page references but the

books of other authors were not something he wanted to direct his readers' attention to.

His way of treating passages from Plato are no exception. While Wittgenstein occasionally gives the title of a dialogue, there are no page numbers in any of the advanced typescripts posthumously published.

However, two seeming exceptions can be found in the Bergen Electronic Edition and they need to be discussed here.[40] The first example occurs in Ms 142 on page 114 (this sentence would, had it remained undeleted, have become the second sentence in *Philosophical Investigations* §114):[41] 'Wer etwas meint, meint doch etwas Seiendes'[42] (*Theätetus*).[43]

Inside the parentheses there is an insertion in very small letters reading 'S. 204'.[44] This refers to page (Seite) 204 of the Preisendanz translation where the passage occurs.

The next version of this remark in Ts 220, 87[45] does not repeat this reference. The use of the insertion seems therefore not to have been that Wittgenstein wanted to prepare a page reference for his readers, but rather that he wanted to have it for his own use only.[46] This fits with the unusually small size of the insertion which is strikingly different from usual additions or emendations of his texts.

The way he inserted the number thus indicates that Wittgenstein worked very carefully on his own material, but supplying references was just the sort of thing he did not wish to have in his finished manuscripts and typescripts. He knew that he could have given page numbers but rather choose not to do so.

Of course, this particular reference would have been of little use to his readers because only very few of them would have that edition available.[47] We do not know whether Wittgenstein was even aware of the existence of the standard Stephanus numbering.

There is, however, one other reference in his *Nachlass* giving just such Stephanus pages. This passage occurs in Ts 220, where he had discontinued giving the Preisendanz page number. On page 33, at the beginning of the quote and remark that later became *Philosophical Investigations* §46, there is a small note in the margin of the typescript reading '201d&sq'.[48] At first blush this seems to indicate that Wittgenstein did know and use the Stephanus pagination after all – but only if he wrote down that reference himself.

From the mere handwriting this can be neither confirmed nor refuted, although it seems very unlikely as the numeral 1 is written in a two-stroke style while Wittgenstein almost invariably used a

one-stroke style, even in Ts 220 itself.[49] There are, however, strong additional indications that Wittgenstein did not write down the reference himself. For one, the quote is taken from the Preisendanz translation, and this edition supplies Stephanus numbers only in a separate table at the back – but only in a very summary fashion, giving simply pages, without the customary letters indicating sections of the pages, used also in the reference discussed here. Wittgenstein could therefore not have taken the reference from the translation he used. Secondly, the Latin style of giving the reference used has no parallel in all of Wittgenstein's written work. There are furthermore no indications that Wittgenstein ever used another edition of Plato around 1937 when *Typescript* 220 was prepared. Finally, this reference would strikingly disagree with Wittgenstein's practice of simply using the Preisendanz pagination in Ms 142, and it would also disagree with his way of deleting rather than including particular references in further polishing his typescripts.[50]

We may therefore conclude that most probably Wittgenstein put down a page reference only once, and that he did this for his internal use only, whatever it may have been.

## 6. Some case studies: the first Preisendanz quote

In some respects the Diederichs translation matched well with Wittgenstein's way of working: he had no interest in scholarly details, and he felt free to use the text according to his own needs and intentions. This is evident from the fact that Wittgenstein changed the phrasing of the short sentence. Preisendanz had written:

S:    Und da soll, wer etwas meint, nicht die Meinung von *einem* Etwas haben?

Th:  Gewiß!

S:    Wer aber ein Etwas meint, meint dieser denn nicht etwas Seiendes?[51]

Wittgenstein combined the first part from Socrates' first question with the second part of his second question and changed the 'denn' to a 'doch' to make the result sound more concise. In this way he created from the material in Preisendanz (or Plato) a sentence that could have been found in the original but which actually is not there. This could illustrate the transition from saying 'etwas' (something) to using a noun and asking for some ethereal thing as the entity referred to: 'something

Real' or: 'something Being' (etwas Seiendes). This procedure contra-
dicts every scholarly standard but agrees well with the basic idea of
Diederichs (if possibly not with the intentions of Preisendanz).

Wittgenstein tried to reach two aims. For one he wanted something
that somebody else had said, or could have said, and which expressed
a certain attitude or train of thought that Wittgenstein found char-
acteristic. If it was expressed in a way that seemed not character-
istic enough, Wittgenstein felt free to make it more characteristic by
deleting everything superfluous, like contracting two sentences into
one. His second aim was to make the product sound good. He wanted
the quotation to run smoothly and succinctly and be expressed in
just the right manner. He never seemed to be troubled by the thought
that his rendering could distort the original thought of the passage
he transformed. Still, although it was expressed clearly, Wittgenstein
deleted the passage from the re-workings of his material after Ts 220.

## 7. *Investigations* §46

The second quote from *Theaetetus* is the one occurring famously at
*Philosophical Investigations* §46. It is first written down in Ms 142,
38–9. This early version still contains some material deleted after-
wards. Wittgenstein shortened the passage according to his own
purposes. In Ms 142 Wittgenstein at first carefully and neatly wrote
down the passage as printed, observing the spelling and punctua-
tion, omitting six lines of printed text in one place, indicating this
omission through a series of dots.[52] He then crossed out some of the
material he had originally copied, thus expanding the first omission
to nine lines and creating a second omission of about two lines of
text.

When he copied the quote into Ts 220, the text remained exactly
the same[53] as is true of Ts 239, 33, which is actually a copy of the same
original typescript containing many corrections and other changes by
Wittgenstein. In the final typescript, Ts 227, 38, one change in capi-
talization is introduced ('Etliche' for 'etliche' – 'several'). This follows
Wittgenstein's common practice but does not conform to twentieth
century spelling rules. One of many similar examples occurs in the
Preface: 'Ich möchte nicht mit meiner Schrift Andern das Denken
ersparen' ('I do not wish that my writing should spare Others the
trouble of thinking').[54] This change amounts to a minor adaption to
Wittgenstein's own way of expression, but all in all he did not interfere
with the details of his source.[55]

### 8. *Investigations* §518 and a companion quote

While the first *Theaetetus* quote discussed above was later omitted from Wittgenstein's book, there is another *Theaetetus* quote in the *Investigations* at *Philosophical Investigations* §518. Curiously this is a different version of the same original passage, and this time Wittgenstein did not contract the passage into one line.

S:    Und wer vorstellt, sollte nicht *etwas* vorstellen?
Th:  Notwendig.
S:    Und wer etwas vorstellt, nichts Wirkliches?
Th:  So scheint es.[56]

This seems a quite natural rendering in terms of being natural German, giving no reason to correct or contract the exchange. It is taken from the translation by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's translations of Plato, with the first volume published in 1805 have long been regarded as the leading standard translation of Plato into German. There have been numerous editions, some of which introduce various kinds of changes or 'improvements' into the original text.[57]

All of the quotes from Plato except for the two discussed above are taken from his translation. Wittgenstein used the Schleiermacher translation first, in his 1931 readings of Plato. When he used the Preisendanz version, probably around 1936–7, he seems not to have been aware of the fact that he had encountered a different version of the same passage – otherwise he maybe would not have taken the trouble to produce a version suited to his purposes. The earlier version had been through several steps of copying and placing: from Ms 111, 14 the quote went unchanged to 211, 9, then to *Big Typescript*, 217. From there it was copied into the *Philosophical Grammar* attempt (PG 164). This time the word 'etwas' in the first sentence was emphasized (as it had been in Schleiermacher's original). Around 1938, when he went over his older material in search for things that might still be of use to him, Wittgenstein extracted the passage from the *Big Typescript* into Ms 117, 132. This was very close to the time he introduced the other version into the early *Investigations* typescript. Actually both versions never did meet in one and the same typescript.

Around 1945, the quote was incorporated into Ts 228 (Bemerkungen I), §371 and finally into the *Philosophical Investigations*.

There exists a companion quote, namely the immediate continuation of the original text. Both were first copied in 1931:

S:    Wer also vorstellt, was nicht ist, der stellt nichts vor?
Th:  So scheint es.
S:    Wer aber nichts vorstellt, der wird gewiß überhaupt gar nicht vorstellen?
Th:  Offenbar, wie wir sehen.[58]

This quote first occurs in 111, 20 and is used in *Big Typescript* 363 and *Philosophical Grammar* 137 and is later transferred to Ts 228 (Bemerkungen I) §514 – Wittgenstein never united the two again and in the end he finally did not use this second part.

This quote is again copied very carefully, strictly following Schleiermacher's phrasing. It can also help to solve a minor puzzle about the first quote. There the last line differs from the original.

Schleiermacher had written 'So scheint es.' Wittgenstein's phrasing gives no difference in meaning to speak of, being just another version of voicing agreement. The deviation could have come from Wittgenstein's using a slightly modified version of the text, but it is much more probable that it comes from a simple slip on Wittgenstein's part. Apparently he mistook the 'so scheint es' from two lines down for the 'Ich gebe es zu'. In this case, Wittgenstein did not deliberately introduce a change but fell victim to a slight misreading or rather misplacing.

Considering the uses Wittgenstein made of this material, which originally was of the same piece, it is striking that he quite obviously was not interested in this original connection – nor would he have been, had somebody pointed it out to him. In the course of his own work he used them as three quite independent remarks, as he would have used some of his own remarks. He used them to perform three different tasks, in three different surroundings, and eventually only one remark was selected for the final version. This may seem troubling to scholarly minds, but Wittgenstein clearly saw nothing wrong with his way to proceed. His own aim was to have a few good illustrations of philosophical attitudes that were real and widespread, and if Plato himself should have happened not to hold the view illustrated by these quotes, there would still have been many others who did.

## 9. Something from *Charmides*

There are two quotations from *Charmides* in Ms 111, and they have an interesting history. This is the first one: 'Du weißt es und kannst hellenisch reden, also mußt du es auch sagen können' (*Charmides* 159a).

Schleiermacher had translated: 'Und dieses, fuhr ich fort, was du meinst, mußt du doch, da du hellenisch reden kannst, auch zu sagen wissen'.[59]

In this case Wittgenstein very much transforms and contracts his original until it approaches the quality of an aphorism. One might suspect him of using another source but for one his other *Charmides* quotation is from Schleiermacher, too, and secondly only Schleiermacher uses the term 'Hellenic' for 'Greek' in his translation.[60]

When it first appears, this line almost seems as if it had been invented by Wittgenstein, and it is only the unusual word 'Hellenic' that gives it away. There is also no obvious indication as to its origin. Only about five years later, when Wittgenstein uses the sentence in Ms 142, 61, the early *Investigations*, we find him introducing the addition 'Sokrates (im                )' to mark it as a quotation. By then Wittgenstein seemed to have forgotten where he had derived his sentence from – but he seemed to take it as a real quote, thus disregarding the quite heavy transformations he himself had introduced. When preparing Ts 220 he had the empty parenthesis copied, too, and only when he went over this typescript again to create Ts 239 from it he introduced a handwritten insertion, so that the hint read: 'Sokrates (im *Charmides*?)'.[61] The (small) question mark apparently was not intended to be part of the new version but should rather indicate that Wittgenstein was not quite certain about the origin of the quotation. He seems to have remembered something, but really not quite – and he was prepared to accept something as a quote which was largely of his own making.[62] Around the same time he had remembered the origin, Wittgenstein decided that it was not the right remark for his purposes after all and crossed it out – otherwise it would have become part of *Philosophical Investigations* §70.[63]

The second quote from *Charmides* is also quite unique. It is the longest quotation from Plato Wittgenstein ever preserved. The translation (as published in Zettel §454) begins thus:[64]

> What? He said, it be of no use? If wisdom[65] is the knowledge of knowledge and is prior to other knowledges, then it must also be prior to that knowledge which relates to the good and in that way be of use to us. – Does it make us healthy? I said, and not medicine? And similarly with the rest of the arts; does it direct their business, and not rather each of them their own?

After a while longer of talking back and forth the passage ends: 'So how can wisdom be useful if it does not bring any utility?'

The passage gives a very good example of the kind of discussion Wittgenstein found so tiring (if also funny) in Plato's dialogues. His version is on the whole very faithful, except that he simplified some phrases expressing agreement, especially towards the end. It seems, however, doubtful that this long quotation could really be of any use in Wittgenstein's book project. From its first appearance in Ms 111, 74 he had it copied into the early version of the *Big Typescript* (Ts 211, 44), but then, after he had taken all the trouble to put down the passage, he still did not transfer it into the *Big Typescript*. Eventually, many years later, when he collected Zettel around 1945, he put the cutout from Ts 211 as it was into this box. So maybe Wittgenstein had the idea that this exchange of argument might still come in useful, but nothing further happened.

## 10. Conclusion

Now, what can be said about Wittgenstein reading Plato? He did this in different ways. For one, there was a time in 1931 when he did some reading and selected passages that he wanted to use in his book-to-be written. When he tried to organize his material into a book in 1933–4, some of the Plato quotes were scattered across the *Big Typescript* as well as the *Philosophical Grammar* but played no very prominent role there. He saved some more quotes for future use – especially the long quote from *Charmides*. When he wrote the first version of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he added two more quotes from *Theaetetus*, the first one gaining some prominence as part of his critique of atomism. In conversation he confirmed the idea that when writing his *Tractatus* he himself 'had Plato's idea of finding the general idea lying behind all particular meanings of a word' (J. C. Klagge, A. Nordmann (eds) (2003) *Ludwig Wittgenstein. Public and Private Occasions* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield), p. 387), and as discussed above, the second *Theaetetus* quote was intended to illustrate this point.[66]

In all, the amount of reading that can be inferred from these traces is still fairly limited and restricted to the two years 1931 and 1936–7. From the way he used the material it is clear that he never returned to the original texts when reworking and rearranging the material.[67] He rather treated it very much like his own remarks; he moved them to the position where they would do the work he wanted done. Thus he used them like tools for his own purposes. His question was not: what did Plato try to convey with these quotes? But rather: how can I use them to make my own point clearer? He in no way claimed that

he conveyed Plato's meaning faithfully. Or was he? One of the remarks from 1931 seems to put forward a different claim:

> People say again and again that philosophy doesn't really progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. But the people who say this don't understand why this has been so. It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. As long as there continues to be a verb 'to be' that looks as if it functions in the same way as 'to eat' and 'to drink', as long we will still have the adjectives 'identical', 'true', 'false', 'possible', as long as we continue to talk of the river of time, of an expanse of space, etc. etc. people will keep stumbling over the same puzzling difficulties and find themselves staring at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up.
>
>   And what's more, this satisfies a longing for the transcendent, because in so far as people think they can see the 'limits of human understanding', they believe of course that they can see beyond these.
>
>   I read: '... philosophers are no nearer to the meaning of "Reality" than Plato got, ...'.[68] What a strange situation. How extraordinary that Plato could have got even as far as he did! Or that we could not get any further! Was it because Plato was so extremely clever? (*Culture and Value* 15/ Ms 111, 133).

These two remarks were written down in immediate succession. They discuss language as the main source of philosophical problems. Wittgenstein claims that language has 'remained the same', which is strictly speaking simply false. He ignores all differences between Greek, Latin, German and English. However, he points to the fact that even without knowing Greek one can find that there is a surprising degree of continuity in the kind of philosophical problems being discussed. Wittgenstein was interested in this general fact, not in any details involving questions of translating particular difficult passages: any translation of just about any one of Plato's dialogues can be used today in an introductory philosophy course or lecture. From Wittgenstein's point of view it was not Plato who introduced the perennial philosophical questions but rather language itself, or maybe the structure of a group of Indo-European languages.[69]

   But then, why did Wittgenstein read Plato's dialogues? One reason was the idea that he could use some bits from Plato to explain his own

notion of philosophy, how it has been practiced, and how he suggested that it should be practiced differently in the future. This is a philosophical use, his own philosophical use.[70] The amount of reading necessary for this purpose was not very much.

This use, therefore, does not explain why Wittgenstein read Plato at the time of his conversations with Bouwsma.[71] There are hardly any traces that Wittgenstein took any notes around that time or that he intended to make any use of that reading in his own work. On the other hand there is ample evidence that Wittgenstein simply did not read other philosophers when he worked on his own philosophical manuscripts, simply because he felt constrained by the very idea of having to follow somebody else's thoughts.[72] His motives for reading books lay therefore outside the sphere of his own philosophical work. To put it somewhat paradoxically: if Plato's work was important for Wittgenstein's philosophical work, then Wittgenstein could not be reading Plato – and if Wittgenstein did read Plato and enjoyed it, this could not possibly be motivated by his own philosophical work. Therefore it may still be true that Wittgenstein did not read Plato as a philosopher but simply as a good and interesting literary author – out of some more general interest, the kind of interest documented so well by Bouwsma's notes from his conversations with Wittgenstein between 1949 and 1951. This interest most probably was much of the same kind that led Wittgenstein to read fairy tales,[73] and he certainly could not have read Aristotle for the same purpose.[74]

## Postscript

The 1938 translation attempt of the *Investigations*, prepared by Rush Rhees and revised by Wittgenstein (Ts 226), contains some further passages relevant to the issues discussed in this chapter.[75] On page 31 we read: 'Socrates (in the *Theaetetus*)' and there is a handwritten addition on top of the name *Theaetetus* reading '201E'. The rest of this page is left blank and it seems that Wittgenstein had planned that in this case an existing English translation should be used rather than a translation of the German version he had used. Eventually the English text of the *Investigations* would carry a translator's note: 'I have translated the German translation which Wittgenstein used rather than the original'. Incidentally, this (Anscombe) translation was again modified in several places in the Hacker/Schulte edition.

The handwriting is definitely not the same as in Ts 220 and it may be Wittgenstein's own. The way it is placed indicates that this reference,

too, was to be used for preparatory purposes only and was not intended to be included with the printed text (there is no page reference in the 1953 edition).

In 226, 50 there is also a translation of the *Charmides* passage: 'Socrates (in        ): "You know it and can speak Hellenic /Greek/, so surely you must be able to say it"'.

The word 'Greek' is typed on top of the word 'Hellenic' and there is no indication, despite heavy handwritten revisions in the typescript, as to which version is to be preferred. Also no attempt is made to use an existing translation; on the contrary, Wittgenstein revised the style of the translation and moved the word 'surely' which originally followed after 'must' so that it preceded 'you must'.[76]

## Notes

Wittgenstein's writings are quoted by von Wright numbers and page numbers except for the *Investigations*. This also includes some manuscripts or typescripts that contain Wittgenstein's own numberings, as these numberings often contain errors. Published writings are referred according to standard abbreviations (PI, PG, CV, 1980 edition). The facsimiles of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* – The Bergen Electronic Edition have been consulted throughout.

1. O. K. Bouwsma (1986) *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949–1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett).
2. L. Wittgenstein (1978) *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 338, 164, 107.
3. A. Ambrose (ed.) (1979) *Wittgenstein's Lectures. Cambridge 1932–1935* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 27–8. Compare: 'Many people see clearly enough that the Greek thinkers were neither philosophers in the Western sense nor scientists in the Western sense' [L. Wittgenstein (1980) *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell)]. This remark seems strongly influenced by Spengler and very much out of tune with Wittgenstein's interest in Plato (but compare the end of this article).
4. The index to the 800-page *Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein* [O. Kuusela and M. McGinn (eds) (2011) *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)] contains not a single reference to Plato.
5. A collection of all passages quoted in Wittgenstein's manuscripts is available in H. Biesenbach (2011) *Anspielungen und Zitate im Werk Ludwig Wittgensteins, gesammelt und ermittelt* (Bergen: Publications from the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen), pp. 303–310. Biesenbach also gives full accounts of the wanderings of passages.
6. L. Wittgenstein (1976) *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell), §§46 and 518.
7. Ts 111, 13. L. Wittgenstein (2005) *The Big Typescript* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 40.
8. Ms 239, 53.

9. Ts 115, 40. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 223.
10. Ts 110, 255.
11. There are no reports that Wittgenstein ever read Plato together with one of his students or anybody else.
12. This is in quite striking contrast to Wittgenstein's attitude towards Aristotle. He claimed not to have read a line, and it seems that he simply was not interested in knowing anything in general – except for a few general remarks on 'Aristotelian Logic'.
13. R. Rhees (ed.) (1984) *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 175. Wittgenstein also repeatedly uses the idea from *Phaedrus* that beauty itself must be more beautiful than mere beautiful things (see A. Ambrose *Wittgenstein's Lectures. Cambridge 1932–1935*, pp. 34–6; Plato is mentioned on p. 34).
14. O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949–1951.* Bouwsma writes: 'This he referred to the Phaedrus, but I think he meant the Symposium'. Thus Wittgenstein may have referred to the same passage from the Phaedrus just mentioned.
15. R. Rhees *Recollections of Wittgenstein,* p. 127.
16. R. Rhees *Recollections of Wittgenstein,* p. 158. Bouwsma also reports that Wittgenstein cited and even discussed Parmenides (O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949–1951*).
17. O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949–1951.*
18. O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949–1951.* This last passage also mentions (again) *Philebus* and the *Republic*. In F. Waismann (1965) *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy* (London: Macmillan), p. 196 there is a quote from *Hippias maior* (287c) which may, or may not, derive from Wittgenstein.
19. G. Baker (2003) *The Voices of Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge), pp. 302, 14. The 1946–47 Lecture Notes contain the further example about the number five that cannot be made on a potter's wheel, which Wittgenstein (falsely) attributes to Plato (L. Wittgenstein (1988) *Wittgenstein's Lectures on Philosophical Psychology, 1946–47* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), Jackson notes, p. 10).
20. This transition is described in detail in W. Kienzler (1997) *Wittgensteins Wende zu seiner Spätphilosophie 1930–1932* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp).
21. This passage has been thought to refer to the Sophist (see editorial note in L. Wittgenstein (1974) *Philosophical Grammar* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 56). I myself endorsed this idea in W. Kienzler *Wittgensteins Wende zu seiner Spätphilosophie 1930–1932*, p. 247, n. 42. It is, however, much more likely that this passage also derives from *Cratylus* (431b–c).
22. This observation did not keep Wittgenstein from reading them.
23. This will be discussed later.
24. Ts 219, 6. A little later Wittgenstein again ruminates on Plato's style: 'In the game of question and answer, as a type of language-use, think of Plato where question and answer are used much more frequently than we would use them.'
25. This last step is not documented in detail as little change happens here.

26. His attitude towards people insisting on using the original language is illustrated by his outrage against a visiting student from Oxford who insisted on quoting Kant in German, R. Rhees *Recollections of Wittgenstein,* p. 149.

27. G. Hallett (1977) *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (Ithaca: Cornell UP), p. 771. Unfortunately, the present location of these books is unknown.

28. This was a four-volume set with one volume on the 'Socratics' and two on the 'Postsocratics' (Nachsokratiker).

29. In 1919 Kurt Frankenberger, a close friend of Rudolf Carnap, translated *Matière et Memoire* (Materie und Gedächtnis). Carnap himself was part of the 'Sera' circle, organized by Diederichs (see A. W. Carus (2007) *Carnap and Twentieth Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 54–5). On Diederichs and Bergson see F. W. Graf (1996) 'das Laboratorium der religiösen Moderne'. Zur 'Verlagsreligion' des Eugen Diederichs Verlags, in G. Hübinger (ed.) *Versammlungsort moderner Geister. Der Eugen Diederichs Verlag Aufbruch ins Jahrhundert der Extreme* (München: Hugendubel), pp. 280–1.

30. For Wittgenstein, the favorite type of publisher was Reclam, especially the pamphlets from Reclam's Universalbibliothek. They were of small size, cheap and aimed at giving everybody the chance of reading the basic books of any field at low cost. One particular example is a copy of Tolstoy's Kurze Darlegung des Evangeliums (The Gospel in Brief) which Wittgenstein bought during the First World War (see his Diary entries Sept 2 and 3, 1914). He later gave the pamphlet to Heinrich Postl, the family servant. It has survived [see the picture in K. Wuchterl and A. Hübner (1979) *Ludwig Wittgenstein in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt), p. 31]. In his attempts to have the *Tractatus* published Wittgenstein approached Reclam (as the only German publisher, after his efforts in Vienna had failed), but not Diederichs.

31. This particular volume is visible on a photograph described to show portions of the 'Wittgenstein family library' (K. Wuchterl and A. Hübner *Ludwig Wittgenstein in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, p. 31).

32. *Cratylus*, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the bulk of *Laws* remained untranslated. While the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* might have seemed too technical for present-day non-academic readers, *Cratylus* with its ample discussions of the etymology of Greek words would have appeared too difficult to entirely translate into present-day German.

33. The *Protagoras/ Theaetetus* volume saw three printings with 2000 copies each.

34. Eugen Diederichs in a letter to Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff from 1903 (quoted in F. W. Graf 'das Laboratorium der religiösen Moderne', p. 275). Little surprisingly, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff eventually declined to take part in the project.

35. This can be found in the 1920 printing of the *Republic*: 'Die deutsche Ausgabe von Platon, die bei Eugen Diederichs erscheint, ist ein kostbares Gut; Bereicherung der Sprache, Klassizität im deutschen Ausdruck und der feine Schmelz der platonischen Dialoge, die sonnige Weise attischer Beredsamkeit erreichen hier ihre Höhe. Als ich diese Übersetzung las,

kam mir ein Wort Kuno Fischers in den Sinn: "In Stunden der Not und der seelischen Bedrängnis wünsche ich mir einen platonischen Dialog als Tröster herbei"' (unfortunately the special flavor of this quote is almost impossible to transport into English).

36. The emphasis was, however, on the modern German reader, so Diederichs did not use 'German' type.

37. 'Die Ausgabe selbst ist eine bloße Übersetzung, keinerlei philologische Einleitungen begleiten sie.' Diederichs, Bücherverzeichnis 1910, quoted in F. W. Graf 'das Laboratorium der religiösen Moderne', p. 275. Eventually, some remarks (Anmerkungen) were placed in the back of some of the more difficult volumes.

38. R. Rhees *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, p. 175. This would identify two of the five volumes reputedly in Wittgenstein's possession.

39. The only obvious exception is the reference to book and chapter of Augustine's *Confessions* at the very beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*. In this case, however, he does not supply any information regarding the edition he used and he does not say that he had himself prepared the translation.

40. I may, of course, have overlooked something.

41. The point Wittgenstein used the sentence for is not to illuminate anything about the verb 'meaning' or 'intention' but as an example for the (illusion of the) 'general form of the proposition'.

42. 'He who means something, will mean something Being' (translated from the German version, *Theaetetus* 189a).

43. The spelling of the name of the dialogue in L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* §46 (Theätetus) is also curious – it follows the Latinized version common in nineteenth century German literature. Preisendanz has 'Theaitetos', and Wittgenstein uses this version for the name of the boy in §518. Wittgenstein seems to be influenced by Anglophone spelling here, but not all the way. In 1931 he uses the titles derived from the Greek versions (Theaitetos, Kratylos, Philebos).

44. These details can best be seen in Joachim Schulte's admirable and truly ground-breaking edition of the successive versions of the *Philosophical Investigations* material. J. Schulte (ed.) (2001) *Wittgenstein: Philosophische Untersuchungen. Kritisch-genetische Edition* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), 154, note 21.

45. Compare J. Schulte *Wittgenstein: Philosophische Untersuchungen*, p. 288.

46. I am, however, unable to imagine what this intended use may have been.

47. The few references Wittgenstein gives are always independent of any particular edition.

48. Compare J. Schulte *Wittgenstein: Philosophische Untersuchungen*, p. 240, note 4. (Schulte seems to suggest that the remark is in Wittgenstein's own handwriting as he does not indicate anything to the contrary.)

49. My colleague Joseph Rothhaupt, one of the first experts on Wittgenstein's handwriting as well as his use of symbols, told me in conversation that he also felt unable to decide the question from a mere look at the page.

50. There are no clues as to who made the insertion and when this took place.

51. K. Preisendanz tr. (1910) *Platons Protagoras, Theaitetos. Ins Deutsche über-tragen*, second printing 1920, third printing 1925 (Jena: Eugen Diederichs), p. 204. In English: 'S: And how should somebody who means something, not have the meaning of *one* Something? – Th: Certainly! – S: He who means a Something, does he not mean something Being?' In English this sounds garbled. Cornford uses 'think' (and suggests 'makes a judgment' as an alternative), F. M. Cornford (1935) *Plato's Theory of Knowledge. The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 115. McDowell (who translates for the 'Greekless reader' (Preface) translates: 'S: Well now, what if someone judges? Doesn't he have in his judgment some one thing? Th: Necessarily. S: And if one has in one's judgment some one thing, isn't it the case that one has in one's judgment a thing which is?' (J. Mc Dowell (1973) *Plato. Theaetetus. Translated with Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 74).

52. J. Schulte *Wittgenstein: Philosophische Untersuchungen*, p. 93 reproduces the struck-out material in notes 2 and 3. He counts the dots Wittgenstein inserted afterwards in order to indicate the omission of the deleted passage as a passage of inserted material which was later deleted again. Therefore he does not reproduce these dots as part of Wittgenstein's intended text (which thus contains only one set of dots instead of two), but only in the accompanying note. This seems to be a misunderstanding as the inserted dots serve the function to indicate the gap Wittgenstein had created by the omission.

53. Except for one typographical error in Ts 220, corrected by hand in Ts 239 (see J. Schulte *Wittgenstein: Philosophische Untersuchungen*, p. 241, note 1 and 479).

54. Another famous example is the third period of the Preface to the *Tractatus*: '...if One would read it with pleasure'.

55. Wittgenstein's reasons for omitting the passages as he did cannot be discussed here (see E. von Savigny (1994) *Wittgensteins 'Philosophische Untersuchungen'. Ein Kommentar für Leser* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann), vol. 1, p. 92 for some comments). His main idea is that of simplification and of leaving aside everything he felt unnecessary. He was not concerned with the details of Plato's thought but rather looked for a good example for his own purposes. Compare also the comments on these passages, and the differing attitudes of Wittgenstein and Ryle towards Plato, as discussed in A. Soulez *How Wittgenstein Refused to be 'the Son of'*.

56. There are translations in the English versions of *Philosophical Investigations* ('And if someone thinks, mustn't he think something?') and *Philosophical Grammar* p. 164 ('And if you have an idea, must it not be an idea of something?...of something real?'). The translation in P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte (2010) 'Wittgenstein, Philosophische Untersuchungen' in L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4th edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), p. 149 (compare the note on p. 257) has: 'And if someone imagines, mustn't he imagine something?' At first sight this seems strange because the very point of (just) imagining something includes that the thing imagined must not exist but could be fictitious. However, Wittgenstein wants to express the (mistaken) idea that there seems to be a metaphysical necessity that even in

this case there must be some ethereal object to the act of imagining. Also, this choice agrees with the preceding remark 517 about the domain of what can be imagined. This seems to be a fitting point as it handles the matter from the point of view of Wittgenstein's own text: The passage is intended to do some work right there – Wittgenstein does not step aside to discuss Plato in §518.

57. The original text is faithfully reproduced in the editions Schleiermacher 1985 and Hülser 1991, but not in the widespread editions published by Rowohlt beginning in the 1950s. Von Savigny (E. von Savigny *Wittgensteins 'Philosophische Untersuchungen'*, vol. 2, p. 204) puzzles over the source of the quote in *Philosophical Investigations* §518. As he used the modified Rowohlt translation he was unable to exactly locate the source.

58. 'S: And whoever represents, what is not, he represents *nothing*? – Th: So it seems. – S: And whoever represents nothing, he will surely not represent at all? – Th: Obviously, as we see.'

59. Wittgenstein: 'You know it, and as you can speak Hellenic, you must be able to say it.' Schleiermacher: 'And this, I continued, what you mean, you should, because you can speak Hellenic, be able to say, what it appears to you like.'

60. Wittgenstein seems to have liked this word, maybe the sound of it. In his own version its three short syllables make for a better rhythm of speech than the two long syllables of 'griechisch' would have made. Still it sounds a bit funny from someone who definitely did not speak either Greek or Hellenic.

61. Compare J. Schulte *Wittgenstein: Philosophische Untersuchungen*, pp. 258 and 496.

62. It remains a matter of conjecture how Wittgenstein remembered the name as he apparently did not have the original at his disposal.

63. Compare G. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker (2009) *Wittgenstein. Understanding and Meaning*, 2nd edition, extensively revised by P. M. S. Hacker (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), pp. 159–60.

64. I have deleted the emphasis as Wittgenstein does not reproduce it in his version either.

65. The Schleiermacher translation has 'Besonnenheit', a word usually used synonymously with 'prudence', for 'wisdom'. This makes for an additional humorous effect of the passage.

66. There is, however, no evidence of Wittgenstein reading Plato before 1930. He repeatedly mentions 'Socrates is human' as an example of a proposition occurring in logic textbooks – once sighing 'good old Socrates' [letter to Russell, Summer 1912, compare to L. Wittgenstein (1974) *Letters to Russell, Keynes, and Moore* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press)]. This, of course, has nothing to do with really reading Plato.

67. The use of the short quotation from *Charmides* illustrates this point.

68. This quote has not been identified so far. Its substance could have been taken from A. N. Whitehead (1929) *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan) and his way of discussing Plato (II, 1), progress in philosophy (I, 1, 3) and Reality (*passim*).

69. Wittgenstein nowhere discusses this limitation of his statement.

70. Wittgenstein even used Plato's name to express a philosophical point (see the second motto above).
71. O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949–1951*. There are hardly any new quotes added after 1936. In 1946 we find a remark alluding to *Theaetetus* about Plato saying 'that thinking is a conversation' (MS130, 123/ Wittgenstein (1980) *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell, volume I, §180), and in 1949 a rather general thought about Plato's ideas being 'false idealizations' (MS 169, 79v).
72. This is even true for the works of Frege and Russell: we have very little evidence that Wittgenstein did a lot of reading of their books. Most Frege quotations seem to be from memory (compare W. Kienzler *Wittgensteins Wende zu seiner Spätphilosophie 1930–1932*).
73. The most enduring success Diederichs ever had was his collection of fairy tales from all over the world (Märchen der Weltliteratur) which flourishes even today. We do not know whether Wittgenstein read any of these volumes.
74. For discussion, information, critique and encouragement I wish to thank Hans Biesenbach, Joseph Rothhaupt, Astrid Schleinitz and Joachim Schulte.
75. Joseph Rothhaupt pointed out these passages to me.
76. This brings up a slight problem regarding the chronology: as J. Schulte *Wittgenstein: Philosophische Untersuchungen,* p. 1100 points out, the translation reproduced in Ts 226 was prepared not from Ts 220 but from the revised version Ts 239. The inclusion of the dialogue's title, however, occurs only in Ts 239 and neither in Ts 220 nor 226. It seems therefore that this remark was translated from the way it stood in Ts 220, and that only after the translation had been prepared was the name inserted, and that even later the entire remark was discarded. This further supports Schulte's suggestion that there are several levels of corrections in Ts 239.

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# 3
## 'The Socratic Method!': Wittgenstein and Plato

*Luigi Perissinotto*

**1.**

We know a number of things about Wittgenstein and Plato. For example, we know that Wittgenstein, who boasted he had never read Aristotle,[1] was definitely a reader of Plato.[2] Thus, perhaps unintentionally, he took the side of Platonic Cambridge against and in opposition to Aristotelian Oxford. We also know that two of the philosophers Wittgenstein read with particular interest were Kierkegaard[3] and Nietzsche. Now, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had a long and intense engagement with Plato, and with the figure of Socrates in particular.[4] Suffice it to think, in Kierkegaard's case, of his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*,[5] or of the intense pages of the *Philosophical Fragments*;[6] as for Nietzsche, we find the best-known and most significant moments of his continual and repeated 'friendly fight' with Socrates[7] in his first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872),[8] and in the chapter 'The Problem of Socrates' in *Twilight of the Idols* (1988).[9] For that matter, as is well known, Nietzsche's dialogue/debate with Socrates is part of the broader one he was engaged in with that Platonism which, as he saw it, marked the entire course of Western philosophy, and which is characterized by the contraposition between two worlds: the supersensory (that 'real world' destined, in the end, to become 'a fable')[10] and the sensory. The first, the supersensory world, is, as Heidegger characterizes it so acutely, that realm which 'since Plato, or more accurately, since the late Greek and the Christian interpretations of the Platonic philosophy [...] has been considered the true and the actually real world'; the second, the sensory world, 'is only the unreal this-worldly world, the changeable and therefore the merely apparent

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world [...] the vale of tears in contrast to the mountain of eternal bliss of the other side'.[11]

But we know at least three other things on the subject of Wittgenstein and Plato. We know that Wittgenstein's references to Plato and to this or that dialogue are significantly frequent in his texts and documents, especially in comparison with the rarity of his references to other philosophers or thinkers.[12] Next, we know that Wittgenstein had explicitly posed the question of whether his philosophy could fit into a philosophical tradition whose father and founder is Plato. It seems that his answer was No, even if with this No he was not specifically opposing his philosophy's assimilation to Platonism but, more generally, the identification of his philosophizing with the philosophy he described as 'traditional'. As Moore in fact recalls, in his lectures Wittgenstein explained that what he was doing, and which he called 'philosophy', 'was not the same kind of thing as Plato or Berkeley had done, but that we may feel that what he was doing "takes the place" of what Plato and Berkeley did, though it is really a different thing'.[13] Wittgenstein, obviously, might have been wrong, and his philosophy could be less new and, in fact, closer to the philosophical tradition than he claimed.[14] In any case, the fact remains that, for Wittgenstein, his philosophy – in a sense still to be specified – broke with what Plato and Berkeley[15] called 'philosophy'.

Finally, the third thing we know on the subject of Wittgenstein and Plato is that, at least at first blush, Wittgenstein's attitude towards Plato and, above all, to the protagonist of his dialogues was by no means sympathetic. Now, this deserves our close attention. Wittgenstein made no bones about his less than high regard for the Platonic Socrates, to the point of confessing, around 1930, that '[i]t has puzzled me why Socrates is regarded as a great philosopher'[16] or remarking the following year (July 1931) that '[r]eading the Socratic dialogue, one has the feeling: what a frightful waste of time! What's the point of these arguments that prove nothing and clarify nothing'.[17] And these are not the only negative reactions of which we have evidence. Perhaps the most surprisingly negative reaction to Plato and his Socrates – nearly an invective – is the one that came twenty years later (1950), as reported by O. K. Bouwsma:

> Plato's arguments! His pretence of discussion! The Socratic irony! The Socratic method! The arguments were bad, the pretence of discussion too obvious, the Socratic irony distasteful – why can't a

man be forthright and say what's on his mind? As for the Socratic method in the dialogues, it simply isn't there. The interlocutors are ninnies, never have any arguments of their own, say 'Yes' and 'No' as Socrates pleases they should. They are a stupid lot. No one really contends against Socrates. [...] The young man Theaetetus is introduced as a promising, bright youngster, but he shows none of this. He has no fight in him at all. Why doesn't he make a stand? Socrates arguing with these weaklings![18]

It is perfectly clear that Wittgenstein's reservations and objections do not regard this or that specific thesis of Plato's (for example, his doctrine of forms or of reminiscence or of greatest kinds) but rather, and far more significantly, the Socratic method and Plato's dialogical construction itself, which he finds so pretentious and artificial that, for example, he openly sides with the *Parmenides* against the *Theaetetus*. Unlike the *Theaetetus*, in fact, the *Parmenides* is 'a dialogue in which although you get no discussion you also get no pretense of any discussion'.[19] This is why it is hard to agree fully with von Wright's observation that 'it is significant that he [Wittgenstein] did read and enjoy Plato. He must have recognized congenial features, both in Plato's literary and philosophical method and in the temperament behind the thoughts'.[20] The fact is, as Wittgenstein seems to suggest in the passage just quoted, recourse to the dialogical form does not suffice to rescue Plato's philosophical method from dogmatism. As Wittgenstein reads and understands them, in the Platonic dialogues the discussion is in fact only apparent, mere 'pretense', because the path down which Socrates leads his interlocutors never seems to depend on the actual course of the dialogue.

Behind these considerations that appear to be limited to Plato and to his dialogues we can perhaps glimpse some reflections on the 'dialogical' form that Wittgenstein had attempted to give to his *Philosophical Investigations*.[21] As every reader knows, in the *Philosophical Investigations* real interlocutors very often make their appearance (Wittgenstein himself as author of the *Tractatus*, Frege, Russell, William James, for example), along with imaginary ones. Now, we might be tempted to consider these interlocutors no less 'ninnies' and 'weaklings' with respect to Wittgenstein as, to his eyes, Socrates' interlocutors were. This would be the case, for example, if we were to consider the questions or the objections these interlocutors raise in the course of the *Philosophical Investigations* as questions or objections for which Wittgenstein has already had his answer ready from the very beginning. In this perspective the distinctively dialogical form of Wittgenstein's text would be

merely or little more than a stylistic expedient. Read in this manner many sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* would totally lose their dramatic character. In denigrating Socrates' interlocutors as 'ninnies' Wittgenstein seems, then, to want to give us a key to the reading of his *Philosophical Investigations*: 'My interlocutors, be they real or imaginary, are by no means ninnies or weaklings! The questions they ask are really questions!' Consider, for example, the rightly famous §65 in which Wittgenstein speaks of that 'great question' which, at the time of the *Tractatus*, had given him 'the most headache' and that now a hypothetical objector re-proposes in these terms: 'what is common to all these activities [to all these language-games], and makes them into language or parts of language?' Nothing here suggests that the objector – in this case, clearly, the young Wittgenstein himself – is a ninny. The question he asks does not just 'pretend' to be 'great' – not at all, and in fact to answer it Wittgenstein is obliged to make explicit, here and in the following sections (§§65–77), a fundamental aspect of his method:

> And this is true. – Instead of pointing out something common to all that we call language, I'm saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in virtue of which we use the same word for all – but there are many different kinds of *affinity* between them. And on account of this affinity, or these affinities, we call them all 'languages'. I'll try to explain this.[22]

But not all of Wittgenstein's judgments on Plato are equally – devastatingly – negative. As Bouwsma remarks, what Wittgenstein did like in Plato were, in particular, 'the allegories, the myths'; he considered them 'fine'.[23] For that matter, it is not difficult to connect this positive judgment on the Platonic allegories and myths with some of the most evident characteristics of Wittgenstein's philosophical work, in particular with the imaginative dimension of his method that manifests itself in his continual invention of new cases and situations (for example, if you wonder whether thinking is a sort of speaking, try to imagine 'people who could think only aloud')[24] or his equally systematic recourse to extremely powerful images and similes (such as the image he uses to illustrate the impression we sometimes have when we do philosophy: 'We feel as if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers').[25] But Wittgenstein does not limit himself to considering the Platonic myths and allegories 'fine'. In the selfsame conversation reported by Bouwsma, right after calling, as usual, the Socratic interlocutors 'a stupid lot', Wittgenstein confesses that he is

not entirely certain about his judgment on Plato: 'Perhaps Plato is no good, perhaps he's very good. How should I know? But if he is good, he's doing something which is foreign to us. We do not understand. Perhaps if I could read Greek!'[26]

It is almost as if Wittgenstein here were turning the negative judgment he had just pronounced on Plato against himself or his contemporaries. Perhaps it is not Plato who is no good; perhaps it is we today who are unable to understand him; perhaps the Plato who appears no good to us is only a projection of ours. This suspicion makes some other references to Plato (dating from 1944, this time reported by Drury) as significant as they are problematic. Here, again in reference to *Theaetetus*, Wittgenstein not only says, explicitly, that 'Plato in this dialogue is occupied with the same problems that I am writing about', but rebuts Drury, who had found the dialogue 'cold', with the words that '[i]t was very far from cold when it was written'.[27] Here Wittgenstein finds himself at the same time close to Plato and far from an epoch, his own epoch, in which a dialogue such as *Theaetetus* (a dialogue in which, as we saw, Plato appears to Wittgenstein to be 'occupied with the same problems' he himself was writing about) can now appear 'cold'. A number of years earlier (1931) Wittgenstein had in fact extended this judgment on Plato to all of Greek thought: 'That the Greek thinkers were neither philosophers in the western sense, nor scientists in the western sense, that those who took part in Olympic Games were not sportsmen and fit into <no> western occupation, is clear to many people'.[28]

The observation is important because, as is well known, Wittgenstein, too, felt himself to be neither a philosopher nor a scientist 'in the western sense'[29] – even if, at least as far as his remarks of the 1930s are concerned, he seems to ascribe his alienation from the present time and from the West to his 'Judaism'. But, he believes, if this is the true reason, then the alienation is even more profound: if in fact, as we have just seen, for many it is clear that 'the Greek thinkers were neither philosophers in the western sense, nor scientists in the western sense', for very few is it equally clear, in Wittgenstein's judgment, that the same is also true of the Jews, in the clear light of the fact that '[i]n Western civilization the Jew is always being measured according to calibrations that do not fit him'.[30] It is as if to say that the Jews are the more alien to Western Civilization the less one recognizes their alienation.

But what, more exactly, does it mean to be a philosopher 'in the western sense'? A remark from the same year (1931) can help us to see what Wittgenstein means. Here, Wittgenstein goes back to the

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common conviction 'that philosophy really does not progress, that we are still occupied with the same problems as were the Greeks'.[31] Such a view can sound, first of all, like a condemnation of philosophy, above all if it is made to resound in the domain of 'our civilization', which 'is characterized by the word progress. Progress is its form, it is not one of its properties that makes it progress. Typically it constructs. Its activity is to construct a more and more complicated structure'.[32] If philosophy wants to be in tune with this civilization of ours, it must progress, if not exactly in the same way as science does, most definitely in the same spirit: 'Thus – as Carnap wrote – stone will be carefully added to stone and a safe building will be erected at which each following generation can continue to work'.[33] What is true for Carnap is true, obviously, for many others. It is true for Russell, for example, who held that only a philosophy under the aegis of the scientific method will be able to make the progress it has not made until now. He wrote: 'A scientific philosophy such as I wish to recommend will be peicemeal and tentative like other sciences; above all, it will be able to invent hypotheses which, even if they are not wholly true, will yet remain fruitful after the necessary corrections have been made'.[34]

But, unlike what we find in Carnap and Russell, the observation that 'philosophy does not progress' can also correspond to the claim for philosophy of a metaphysical dimension that no physics can replace: 'I read: "philosophers are nearer to the meaning of 'Reality' than Plato got; ..." What a singular situation. How singular then that Plato has been able to get even as far as he did! Or that we could get no further afterwards! Was it because Plato was *so* clever?'[35]

From this perspective philosophy does not progress precisely because its problems, unlike scientific problems, are 'cryptic',[36] 'hard' and 'slippery'[37] in a most peculiar way. According to the terminology of the *Tractatus*, they could be called 'riddles': questions that, in principle, have no answer.[38] While sciences progress because they have questions they answer, philosophy comes up against the same riddles time and again. To be sure, for philosophers such as Carnap and Russell and for scientists 'in the western sense' this constant focusing on 'something that no explanation seems capable of clearing up'[39] cannot but seem (to say the least) pointless. And yet, Wittgenstein tells us, also this behaviour satisfies a need, 'a longing for the supernatural [transcendent] for in so far as people think they can see the "limit of human understanding", they believe of course that they can see beyond it'.[40] A condition of this sort seems to correspond to that which, for Nietzsche, is the third stage (the Kantian stage) of the journey through which

'the "real world" finally became a fable': 'The real world unattainable, unprovable, unpromisable, but the mere thought of it a consolation, an obligation, an imperative'.[41]

That very lack of progress which for Carnap (who, in this respect, reflects perfectly the spirit of what Wittgenstein called 'the prevailing European and American civilization'[42]) condemned all philosophy that failed to become science is, therefore, from this other perspective, a sign of philosophy's irreducibility to science. For his part, Wittgenstein intends to resist both orientations. As regards the first, his attitude is so explicit we can limit ourselves to documenting it with the passage from the *Blue Book* in which he observes that '[p]hilosophers constantly see the method of science[43] 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'.[44] From this perspective metaphysics is philosophy that models itself on science and that shares with science what Wittgenstein calls 'the craving for generality' (or 'I could also have said "the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case"'[45]). In any event, we cannot but note that, for Wittgenstein, the roots of this 'craving for generality' are to be found, long before the method of modern science, in Plato, who constantly, in his dialogues, and in *Theaetetus* in particular, 'dismiss[es] as irrelevant the concrete cases':[46] 'When Socrates asks the question, "what is knowledge?" he does not even regard it as a *preliminary* answer to enumerate cases of knowledge'.[47]

In this sense the fact that philosophers are fascinated by science must not surprise us. Indeed, as Wittgenstein tells us, philosophers 'constantly see the method of science before their eyes': in the method of science the philosopher rediscovers himself and his origins, and his *Platonic* origins in particular. For Wittgenstein, as for Nietzsche before him, Platonism and the question it has imposed on us ('What is it?') has thus become a constant term of dialogue and debate. It is not fortuitous that Wittgenstein opens the *Blue Book* with this very question and with the 'mental cramps' it produces, thus indicating the liberation from Platonic bewilderment to be one of the tasks of his philosophizing: 'The questions "What is length?", "What is meaning?", "What is the number one?" etc., produce in us a mental 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)'.[48]

Wittgenstein seems to perceive evident Platonic roots in the second orientation as well. In a remark from 1937, partially quoted above,[49] Wittgenstein recalls the feeling he shared with Russell when, together, in the years 1910 to 1915, they pondered the problems of logic: 'their immense difficulty. Their hardness – their hard slippery texture'. This was a feeling, or an experience, that – Wittgenstein now supposes – stemmed mainly from the following fact: 'that each new phenomenon of language that we might retrospectively think of could show our earlier explanation to be unworkable'.[50] To Russell and Wittgenstein, engaged with the problems of logic, actual language never appeared to be as it (logically) ought to be; the ideal seemed never to capture the real. And yet, they felt, the real – actual language – *had* to correspond to the ideal, above all because the ideal did *not* present itself, to either one of them, 'as an abstraction, but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is'.[51] In this way Russell and Wittgenstein, like many other philosophers before and after them, lost their peace of mind, tangling themselves up in an antithesis that they could only continually repeat: '"But *this* isn't how it is!" – we say. "Yet *this* it how it *has to be*!"'[52] For Wittgenstein, however, this was the same antithesis in which Socrates was entangled:

> But that is the difficulty Socrates gets caught up in when he tries to give the definition of a concept. Again and again an application of the word emerges that seems not to be compatible with the concept to which other applications have led us. We say: but that *isn't* how it is! – it *is* like that though! – & all we can do is keep repeating these antitheses.[53]

Wresting oneself free from the force of this antithesis is one of the tasks, if not *the* task, that Wittgenstein assigns to his philosophizing, which, from this point of view, takes the shape of a struggle against Socrates and Platonism, committed – as we shall see more clearly in the second part of this essay – to showing: (a) that the ideal that every Platonist pursues is not something that has been 'discovered' but, rather, is a 'requirement' (*Forderung*);[54] (b) that we can avoid the dogmatism 'into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy' [in Plato's footsteps] only by taking the ideal for what it is: 'as an act of comparison – as a sort of yardstick; not as a preconception to which reality *must* correspond';[55] (c) if philosophy is not a physics, this does not make it a metaphysics whose object is 'some non-spatial, atemporal non-entity'.[56]

The last point is the one most frequently referred to in considering Wittgenstein an anti-Platonist.[57] If in fact the term 'Platonism' signifies as, for the most part, it does today, 'the [ontological] view that certain abstract entities (e.g., numbers, functions, or senses) exist or have being, and their being and natures are independent of relations to any entities that exist, or have being, in time',[58] then Wittgenstein was unquestionably an anti-Platonist. He was most definitely anti-Platonist from the very beginning, as one of the very first documents of his philosophizing attests, the *Notes on Logic* from September 1913, in which we find, in his polemic against Russell, a statement that can almost be considered an anti-Platonism manifesto: 'There is no thing which is the form of a proposition, and no name which is the name of a form. Accordingly we can also not say that a relation which in certain cases holds between things holds sometimes between forms and things. This goes against Russell's theory of judgment'.[59]

This slogan ('There is no thing which is the form of a proposition') was the bedrock of the *Tractatus*, in which, as David Pears wrote, '[t]he forms that Russell had placed in a Platonic world were treated by Wittgenstein as essential features of objects'.[60] It resounds in all those propositions of the *Tractatus* in which Wittgenstein reasserts,[61] in an unremittingly anti-Platonist spirit, 'that there can be no representatives of the *logic* of facts';[62] that '[t]here are no "logical objects"';[63] 'that there are no "logical objects" or "logical constants" (in Frege's and Russell's sense)'.[64] But after the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein does not cease to be anti-Platonist. We see this, for example, in the way in which he rejects the image that depicts the understanding – for example, the understanding of a rule – as 'a momentary grasping of something, from which only subsequently the conclusions are drawn, and precisely in this way: that these conclusions already exist, in an ideal sense (*in einem ideellen Sinn*) of "existing," before being drawn'.[65] What this 'Platonist' image suggests is that every conclusion we can *physically* draw is already *ideally* anticipated in the rule we have understood. In this way, however, the image gets tangled up in the same difficulty in which, if not Plato himself, Platonisms of all times have been entangled: how can it ever be decreed that the point we have physically reached is that point that the rule has always ideally reached? How can it ever be established that the physical movement and the ideal movement finally coincide?

That Wittgenstein was an anti-Platonist in the sense we have just illustrated could be documented further. Here, however, I would like to insist on the other two aspects of Wittgensteinian anti-Platonism, with specific reference to those sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* in

which, when coming up against the 'great question'[66] that, at the time of the *Tractatus*, had given him 'the most headache,' he indicates his therapy for his own Platonist side.

**2.**

When one thinks of Wittgenstein's attitude to Plato, almost certainly the first thing that comes to mind are the passages[67] in which he takes the question Socrates asks Theaetetus, 'What is knowledge?',[68] or questions of the same form, 'What is x?', as a particularly significant example of the type of questions that, precisely because of their form, 'produce in us a mental cramp'[69] and against whose 'fascination' or seduction philosophy is called upon to fight.[70] Now, the indications we can obtain from these famous passages are, at least, the following: (a) that the fascination against which philosophy as Wittgenstein understands it is today called upon to fight is, basically, the same fascination[71] that led Socrates to think, against Theaetetus, that the enumeration of cases of knowledge does not constitute an answer, not even 'a *preliminary* answer',[72] to his question; (b) that Wittgenstein's philosophical method[73] consists, in a sense to be specified, in fighting against the fascination of questions of a Socratic type by recognizing that an enumeration of cases can be the answer that is required and not a mere begging of the question or simply 'a preliminary answer'; (c) that the fascination experienced by Socrates is sharply analogous to that experienced by Wittgenstein when, at the time of the *Tractatus*, he believed his task was that of individuating 'what is essential [...] to language,' i.e., 'what is common to all these activities [which he now calls "language-games"], and makes them into language or parts of language'.[74]

Taken as a whole these indications seem to suggest the following interpretation (which I will call 'standard') of Wittgenstein's philosophy and of his anti-Platonism: in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein breaks radically with that essentialism which the *Tractatus* (despite its logico-ontological anti-Platonism[75]) shared with Plato and his Socrates. For the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* there are no essences; for example, between the various games or the various types of number there is not something in common; something that makes ring-a-ring-a-roses (like any other game) a game, or a transfinite number (like any other number) a number; something, to put it differently, that authorizes us to call ring-a-ring-a-roses 'game' (just like any other game) and a transfinite number 'number' (just like any other number). In some of the most famous and most

often quoted sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein states his objection to essentialism: games, like the various types of numbers, 'form a family'[76] between whose members there is 'a complicated network (*Netz*) of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing; similarities in the large and in the small';[77] similarities for which, Wittgenstein remarks, 'I can think of no better expression to characterize [them] [...] than "family resemblances" (*Familienähnlichkeiten*)'.[78] From essences to families: according to the standard interpretation, this was Wittgenstein's route.

It is evident that the standard interpretation quite naturally fits Wittgenstein and his *Philosophical Investigations* into a history that ranges from the Platonic Socrates all the way to Frege[79] and to Wittgenstein himself. In this sense Wittgenstein is a perfectly traditional philosopher who gives a negative answer ('I'm saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in virtue of which we use the same word for all'[80]) where other philosophers, including the author of the *Tractatus*, gave (or at least attempted to give) a positive answer. In this light, however, these sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* seem rather weak: recognizing that the games form a family does not of itself rule out the possibility that there might be, between all the games, something in common; just as recognizing that we see nothing in common in all those [things] we call 'games' does not authorize us to conclude that they have nothing in common. One may suspect that if we do not see anything in common it is perhaps only because our vision is not sufficiently sharp. In short, how can we rule out the possibility that someone else can see in the various games or in the various types of numbers 'that common feature which I – for some reason – was unable to formulate'?[81]

These considerations perhaps ought to induce us to seek an interpretation different from the standard, following, moreover, a suggestion made by Wittgenstein himself in a passage of the *Blue Book*. In this passage Wittgenstein imagines someone who is trying to explain the concept of number and who 'tells us that such and such a definition will not do or is clumsy because it only applies to, say, finite cardinals'.[82] Wittgenstein responds to this with a question: 'why should what finite and transfinite numbers have in common be more interesting to us[83] than what distinguishes them?'[84] According to the standard interpretation the answer ought to be that, in fact, there is nothing that they have in common and that, in consequence, giving importance to that which is 'in common' can only lead to failure. Now, Wittgenstein glimpses this possible interpretation, but does not endorse it. This is why he corrects his first reaction, noting that he should not have

asked 'why should it be more interesting to us?' but, rather, should have declared that 'it *isn't* more interesting to us' and that precisely this is what 'characterizes our way of thinking'.[85] At least two points must be emphasized here: (a) what (the various types of numbers and of games) have in common is put at the same level as what distinguishes them; *this* is what characterizes 'our way of thinking' and not (as the standard interpretation seems to suggest) the affirmation that what distinguishes them is always (or in principle) more interesting than what they have in common; (b) Wittgenstein by no means denies that between all the types of numbers (or of games) there is something in common; what he contests is that what they have in common is always (or in principle) more interesting (philosophically) than what distinguishes them.

To clarify these two points, it is useful to recall one of the first sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*, §14 – a section that has been unjustly neglected:

> Suppose someone said, '*All* tools serve to modify something. So, a hammer modifies the position of a nail, a saw the shape of a board, and so on.' – And what is modified by a rule, a glue-pot and nails? – 'Our knowledge of a thing's length, the temperature of the glue, and solidity of box.' – Would anything be gained by this assimilation of expressions?[86]

According to the standard interpretation, the question that concludes the section is, beyond the shadow of a doubt, a rhetorical question. It is perfectly clear that by means of this assimilation nothing is gained. Do I know something more about the rule if I assimilate it, by means of the idea of modification, to the hammer? Rather than clarifying this assimilation it seems to obscure what makes a rule a rule. The problem is that, according to the standard interpretation, for Wittgenstein this would hold not only for this specific assimilation but for any and all assimilations. But how can this conclusion be reconciled with the maxim that, as we shall see in a moment, Wittgenstein makes explicit in §66: 'don't think, but look!'? If we follow this maxim the question in §14 ('Would anything be gained by this assimilation of expressions?') cannot in fact always and of necessity be a rhetorical question; in any case nothing Wittgenstein writes in the *Philosophical Investigations* suggests that the answer to that question must be always of necessity negative. Why, if we look, should we never see something in common?

Let us try to read §66 of the *Philosophical Investigations* from this perspective. As we know, after having initially enumerated a certain number of games ('board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic games, and so on'), Wittgenstein asks himself: 'What is common to them all?' There is certainly a sense in which the question is perfectly innocent; likewise, the attempt to answer it is perfectly innocent. Perhaps the problem is that the question is all too easy to answer: there are too many things the various games have in common. In order to answer we ought, therefore, in our turn to ask what motivates the question and on what level the answer has to be located. In short, it is evident that Wittgenstein does not contest the question 'What is common to them all?' as such. And why should he do so? What he contests is: (a) the insertion between the question and the eventual answer of the affirmation according to which '[t]hey *must* have something in common, or they would not be called games'. It is this insertion that prevents us from looking and seeing, as Wittgenstein specifies immediately, with extreme clarity: 'Don't say: "They *must* have something in common" [...] – but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all'; (b) the assumption that what is common to all games or to all types of numbers is precisely what makes them games or numbers.

To confirm this interpretation we must pay due attention to the maxim 'don't think, but look!' This, as is immediately evident, is a maxim whose meaning is far from obvious. Isn't this command not to think bizarre to say the least? And isn't it all the more bizarre if the command appears in a philosophical sphere, if one reads it in a book whose very title includes the word 'philosophy' (*Philosophical Investigations*)? This, obviously, is not the sole perplexity. We could in fact ask whether thinking and looking can be opposed as Wittgenstein seems to do here. What will someone who looks without thinking be able to see? Can there be a looking that is not in some way and to some extent connected with thinking? If someone commands me to look shouldn't I at least ask where and what I am to look at? In short, to look mustn't I think about where and what I have to look at?

To get to the bottom of these and other questions we have to ask ourselves what thinking and looking mean in the maxim 'don't think, but look!', trying to imagine some context in which we could react by, in fact, exclaiming 'don't think, but look!'. I shall indicate two such contexts. For example, (a) 'don't think, but look!' can be the way we react to someone who continues to wonder whether his bank account is in the red. Here, thinking means something like conjecturing or hypothesizing or trying to recall, while looking means something like

verifying or checking. In this context 'don't think, but look!' is a sort of reproach that means, more or less, 'You will most certainly never know if, instead of going to the bank and checking, you just sit there on your sofa and ruminate!'; but (b) 'don't think, but look!' can also be the way we react to someone who, confronted with a path flooded by rain, continues to affirm that the path is not flooded because the weather report did not forecast rain for that day or that place. In this case we are reacting to someone who, so to speak, only apparently looks; someone who does not see because, properly speaking, he does not look at or does not want to see what, so to speak, is right before his eyes. Here, then, thinking means something like denying the evidence,[87] imposing on things one's own beliefs and desires,[88] one's own preconceptions;[89] pretending that things *must* be as one *wishes* they were. For this reason in the second case the invitation to look has – unlike what occurs in the first case – an immediately critical or, as we might also say, an antidogmatic valence.

The exclamation 'don't think, but look!' as it appears in §66 is unquestionably to be understood as analogous above all to case (b): it is an antidogmatic reaction. For Wittgenstein, in fact, dogmatism – in particular that type of dogmatism 'into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy' – consists precisely in this: in not taking 'the model as what it is, an object of comparison – as a sort of yardstick,' but in taking it rather 'as a preconception to which reality *must* correspond'.[90] In our example it is the weather that must correspond to our preconceptions, to our weather forecasts.

Obviously, this is not a criticism of weather forecasts but, rather, of a dogmatic way of using them. In the same way, Wittgenstein does not criticize the recourse to models. In fact, the use of models as objects of comparison is not opposed to looking but, on the contrary, is a mode of looking. In this sense language-games as models, i.e., as objects of comparison, are the modes to which Wittgenstein has recourse in order to look at language. In fact, as he makes perfectly clear, 'the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language'.[91] The dogmatism, then, does not consist in the use of models but, rather, in mistaking 'the possibility of comparison,' which the model allows us, for 'the perception of a highly general state of affairs'.[92] This is the constitutive move of all Platonism:[93] 'one predicates of the thing what lies in the mode of representation'.[94] To look, therefore, one must not perceive, in the sense in which the Platonist is under the illusion that he perceives.[95]

It is from this viewpoint, for example, that Wittgenstein criticizes Spengler in the early 1930s. Wittgenstein, in fact, reproaches the author of *Der Untergang des Abendlands*[96] for confusing prototype and object, i.e., of conferring 'dogmatically [...] on the object properties which only the prototype necessarily possesses'. But here Wittgenstein criticizes Spengler also for having thought that 'the approach will lack the generality we want to give it if it really holds only of the one case', while it must be acknowledged that a prototype 'stands at the head & is generally valid by virtue of determining the form of approach, not by virtue of a claim that everything which is true only of it holds for all the objects to which the approach is applied'.[97] Clearly, that for which Wittgenstein reproaches Spengler here is that for which in the *Philosophical Investigations* he will generically reproach dogmatism, i.e., if I may repeat it once again, for the failure to recognize – 'dazzled by the ideal',[98] i.e., by the idea that 'the ideal "*must*" occur in reality'[99] – that the models or the prototypes (our language-games) are, precisely, objects of comparison.

But what obstructs this passage from the ideal to the object of comparison? From object of vision[100] to mode of looking? What type of difficulty can we come up against here? Using a distinction that Wittgenstein made in 1931, commenting on Tolstoy, we could put it this way: 'It is not a difficulty for the intellect but one for the will that has to be overcome'. Some things are in fact difficult to understand not because, to understand them, 'you have to be instructed in abstruse matters' but, rather, because there is an 'antithesis between understanding the object & what most people *want* to see. Because of this precisely what is most obvious (*das Naheliegendste*) may be what is most difficult to understand. It is not a difficulty for the intellect but one for the will that has to be overcome'.[101]

In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein had already given us some indications on this kind of difficulty. He had posed the question of what made it so difficult to accept his method of investigation, which '[i]nstead of giving any kind of general answer' to a question such as 'What are signs?' asks us 'to look closely at particular cases[102] which we should call "operating with signs"'.[103] His well-known answer to the question is that the difficulty stems from 'our craving for generality',[104] which is the result of at least four tendencies, one of which is 'our preoccupation with the method of science'.[105] For Wittgenstein, this craving for generality, which could also be called 'the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case',[106] 'springs from the idea that it [the particular case] is incomplete'; that it bears in itself a 'mark of

incompleteness'.[107] But, as Wittgenstein ironically observes, a work of philosophy is radically different from 'a treatise on pomology' that finds 'in nature' its 'standard of completeness' – and, indeed, 'may be called incomplete if there exist kinds of apples which it doesn't mention'.[108] When Wittgenstein asks what 'in nature' could give us an answer to the question 'What still counts as a game, and what no longer does?'[109] his interlocutor is the Platonist, for whom a work of philosophy is truly like a treatise on pomology. What still counts as a game? For example, a rigged game is certainly very similar to a game that is not rigged, but is it still a game? Let us imagine that a game has been invented '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'.[110] But does it necessarily stop?[111] Is a rigged game like false gold that is not gold? Shall we include this rigged game in our book of games? Here, in any case, is Wittgenstein's answer, which can be considered almost a manifesto of his anti-Platonism: 'What still counts as a game, and what no longer does? Can you say where the boundaries are? No. You can draw some, for there aren't any drawn yet (*denn es sind noch keine gezogen*)'.[112]

   *Translated from the Italian by Giacomo Donis*

## Notes

1. 'Did you ever read anything of Aristotle's?' asked Drury to Wittgenstein who replied like this: 'Here I am, a one-time professor of philosophy [the conversation dates from autumn 1948] who has never read a word of Aristotle!' See M. O'C. Drury (1996) 'Conversations with Wittgenstein' in D. Berman, M. Fitzgerald, and J. Hayes (eds) *The Danger of Words and Writings on Wittgenstein* (Bristol: Thoemmes), p. 158.
2. The Platonic dialogues Wittgenstein mentions in his writings, lectures, and conversations include: *Charmides, Cratylus, Euthydemus, Laches, Parmenides, Phaedrus, Philebus, Protagoras, Republic, Sophist, Symposium, Theaetetus*.
3. On Wittgenstein's relation to Kierkegaard see G. Schönbaumsfeld (2007) *A Confusion of the Spheres. Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
4. 'I for my part tranquilly adhere to Socrates. It is true, he was not a Christian; that I know, and yet I am thoroughly convinced that he has become one' [see S. Kierkegaard (1935) *The Point of View for My Work as an Author. A Direct Communication*, trans. W. Lowrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 9].
5. See S. Kierkegaard (1989) *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*, trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

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6.  See S. Kierkegaard (1985) *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press). On this work and, in general, on the Kierkegaardian interpretation of Socrates, see J. Howland (2006) *Kierkegaard and Socrates. A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

7.  'Socrates, to confess it frankly, is so close to me that almost always I fight a fight against him.' This remark of Nietzsche's, which dates from 1875, is quoted and translated in W. Kaufmann (1974) *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, fourth edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 398.

8.  See F. Nietzsche (1966) *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage).

9.  See F. Nietzsche (1998) *Twilights of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans. D. Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 11–15. On Nietzsche's complex, ambivalent, and ambiguous relation with Socrates see J. Porter (2006) 'Nietzsche and "The Problem of Socrates"' in S. Abhel-Rappe and R. Kamtekar (eds) *A Companion to Socrates* (Oxford: Blackwell).

10. F. Nietzsche *Twilights of the Idols*, p. 20: 'How the "real world" finally became a fable'.

11. See M. Heidegger (2002) 'Nietzsche's Word: "God is Dead,"' in J. Young and K. Haynes (trans and eds) *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 162–3. In the same context, commenting on Nietzsche's word 'God is dead', Heidegger notes that 'Nietzsche uses the names "God" and "Christian God" to indicate the supersensory world in general. God is the name for the realm of ideas and the ideal'. From this it follows that: '"God is Dead" means: The supersensory world has no effective power. It does not bestow life. [...] [it] is bereft of its binding and above all its inspiring and constructive power'.

12. We recall his statement in the preface to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: 'I do not wish to judge how far my efforts coincide with those of other philosophers. Indeed, what I have written here makes no claim to novelty in detail, and the reason why I give no sources is that it is a matter of indifference to me whether the thoughts that I have had have been anticipated by someone else' [L. Wittgenstein (1974) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, 2nd edition (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 3]. We note that in this context his refusal to give sources seems to be a polemical reference to a pre-war episode involving Moore. It seems that in 1914 Moore had reminded Wittgenstein, who intended to present an essay in fulfillment of the requirements for his Bachelor of Arts at Cambridge, that, according to Cambridge regulations, a dissertation had to contain a preface and notes in which the student had to give his sources and state the extent to which he made use of the work of others. Wittgenstein's reaction to this was violent and unjustified: 'If I'm not worth you making an exception for me *even in some STUPID details* then I may as well go to Hell directly; and if I *am* worth it and you don't do it then – by God – *you* might go there'. For the entire – sarcastic and violent – letter, see L. Wittgenstein (2008) *Wittgenstein in Cambridge. Letters and Documents 1911–1951*, B. McGuinness (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 73 (in the editor's note the circumstances that provoked Wittgenstein's reaction are explained in detail).

13. See G. E. Moore (1970) 'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–1933' in *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd edition, (London: George Allen and Unwin), p. 305; see also p. 322: 'In answer to the question why this "new subject" [this is how Wittgenstein referred to his research activity] should be called "philosophy" he said [...] that though what he was doing was certainly different from what, e.g., Plato or Berkeley had done, yet people might feel that it "takes the place of" what they have done – might be inclined to say "This is what I really wanted" and to identify it with what they had done, though it is really different'.

14. For that matter – again according to Moore – in his lectures Wittgenstein had also asserted that 'the "new subject" did really resemble what had traditionally been called "philosophy" in the three respects that (1) it was very general, (2) it was fundamental both to ordinary life and to the sciences, and (3) it was independent of any special results of science; that therefore the application to it of the word "philosophy" was not purely arbitrary' (G. E. Moore 'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–1933', p. 323).

15. It remains uncertain whether Wittgenstein wanted to suggest that Plato and Berkeley were doing, under the name of philosophy, the same thing he was.

16. See M. O'C. Drury 'Conversations with Wittgenstein', p. 115.

17. L. Wittgenstein (2006) *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright (ed. with H. Nyman), revised edition by A. Pichler, trans. P. Winch, 9th edition (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 21.

18. O. K. Bouwsma (1986) *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949–1951*, J. L. Craft and R. E. Hustwit (eds) (Indianapolis: Hackett), pp. 60–1.

19. O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations*, p. 61.

20. G. H. von Wright (1984) 'A Biographical Sketch,' in N. Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Memoir*, second edition (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), p. 19.

21. L. Wittgenstein (2009) *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, bilingual, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, fourth edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell).

22. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §65.

23. O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations*, p. 61.

24. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §331.

25. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §106.

26. O. K. Bouwsma *Wittgenstein. Conversations*, p. 60.

27. M. O'C. Drury 'Conversations with Wittgenstein', p. 149.

28. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 23.

29. I quote the first lines of L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 8, 'Sketch for a Foreword' (1930): '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 [...] is a spirit that is alien & uncongenial to the author'.

30. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 23. It is in this sense that, as Wittgenstein immediately makes clear, 'we are always doing him [them] injustice'.

31. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 22.

32. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 9.

33. R. Carnap (2003) *The Logical Structure of the World and Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*, trans. R. A. George (Peru, Ill: Open Court), p. XVII.

34. B. Russell (1918) 'On Scientific Method in Philosophy' in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, (Feedbooks), p. 86.

35. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 22.

36. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 22.

37. 'In the course of our conversations Russell would often explain: Logic's hell! – And this *fully* expresses what we experienced while thinking about the problems of logic; namely their immense difficulty. Their hardness – their hard & *slippery* texture' (L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 35).

38. Recall, in this regard, that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein had declared that '[t]he *riddle* does not exist.' In fact, '[i]f a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it' (proposition 6.5). In this sense, a riddle would be a (sensical) question that in principle has no answer.

39. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 22.

40. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 22.

41. F. Nietzsche *Twilights of the Idols*, p. 20.

42. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 8.

43. 'I mean 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' [L. Wittgenstein (1975) *The Blue Book*, in R. Rhees (ed.) *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p. 18].

44. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 18. The passage continues: 'I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really *is* "purely descriptive." (Think of such questions as "Are there sense data?" and ask: What method is there of determining this? Introspection?)'

45. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 18.

46. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 19.

47. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 20.

48. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 1. Here Wittgenstein suggests that before asking 'What is meaning?' we first ask the question 'What's an explanation of meaning?' Beginning with this second question has two advantages. The first advantage, expressed with a clearly anti-Platonic image: 'You in a sense bring the question "what is meaning" down to earth'; the second advantage, it, too, anti-Platonic in its anti-reifying spirit: the second question 'will cure you of the temptation to look about you for some object which you might call "the meaning"'.

49. See Note 31.

50. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 35. The manuscript also contains the following variant: 'Our experience was that language could continually make new, & impossible, demands; & in this way every explanation was frustrated.'

51. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §97. It is not fortuitous that in this passage Wittgenstein refers, in parentheses, to proposition 5.5563 of the *Tractatus*.

52. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §112.

53. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 35.

54. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §107.
55. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §131. In this section Wittgenstein speaks of model, not of ideal, but the terminological difference is not significant here.
56. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §108. For Wittgenstein metaphysics, too, maintains that philosophy is a science, albeit a science of 'non-entities' or of spiritual entities. We find an excellent illustration of all this in §36: 'And we do here what we do in a host of similar cases: because we cannot specify any *one* bodily action which we call pointing at the shape (as opposed to the color, for example), we say that a *mental, spiritual* activity corresponds to these words. / Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a *spirit'*.
57. Using the term 'anti-Platonist' rather than 'anti-Platonic' permits us to get around the question of how much there is of Plato in the contemporary forms of Platonism.
58. T. Burge (2005) *Truth, Thought, Reason. Essays on Frege* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 5–6.
59. L. Wittgenstein (1979) 'Notes on Logic' in G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe (eds) *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p. 105. On this and other aspects of the *Notes on Logic* see M. Potter (2009) *Wittgenstein's Notes on Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
60. D. Pears (1979) 'The Relation between Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Propositions and Russell's Theories of Judgment' in C. G. Luckardt (ed.), *Wittgenstein. Sources and Perspectives* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press), p. 202. In reference to proposition 2.0123 Pears is commenting here on Wittgenstein's 'Aristotelian in spirit' anti-Russellerian solution, in which, for Wittgenstein, forms are not things, but rather 'possibilities inherent in the constituents of states of affairs'.
61. Here, obviously, I cannot tackle the question of how all this can be reconciled with the famous proposition 6.54, in which Wittgenstein observes that his 'propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical (*unsinnig*) [...]'.
62. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 4.0312. This proposition is a take on a remark of 25 December 1914 (see L. Wittgenstein 'Notes on Logic', p. 37). On proposition 4.0312 see B. F. McGuinness (1974) 'The *Grundgedanke* of the *Tractatus*' in G. Vesey (ed.) *Understanding Wittgenstein* (Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures) (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan), pp. 49–61.
63. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 4.441.
64. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 5.4.
65. L. Wittgenstein (1978a) *Philosophische Grammatik*, R. Rhees (ed.) (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp), I, §18.
66. '[W]hat is common to all these activities [to all these language-games], and makes them into language or parts of language?' (L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §65).
67. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 20 and pp. 26–7; L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 35 (remark from MS 119).
68. *Theaetetus*, 146d–147c.

69. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 1.
70. 'Philosophy, as we use the word, is a fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert upon us' (L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 27).
71. 'We keep hearing the remark that philosophy really does not progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. Those who say this however don't understand why it is so. It is because our language has remained the same & keeps seducing us into the questions' (L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 22).
72. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 20.
73. Perhaps this was the 'new method' in philosophy that required 'a "sort of thinking" to which we [educated in the Platonic tradition] are not accustomed' of which – Moore reports – Wittgenstein spoke in his lectures in the early 1930s (G. E. Moore 'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–1933', p. 322).
74. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §65.
75. See, in this regard, the concluding remarks of the first part of this essay.
76. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §67.
77. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §66.
78. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §67. Wittgenstein's source for this expression is not entirely clear: perhaps Nietzsche, or Spengler, or Nicod. See, in this regard, H.-J. Glock (1996) *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 120.
79. See, for example, L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §71.
80. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §68.
81. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §71.
82. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 18.
83. By 'us' Wittgenstein was presumably referring not only to himself but, also, to those (in the first place, the students to whom he was speaking) who identified with his way of thinking.
84. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 19.
85. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 19.
86. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §14.
87. Here I use the expression 'denying the evidence' as it is used in many ordinary contexts, without particular epistemological valences.
88. The person who, in our example, denies the fact that the path is flooded might do so because he ardently desires to take the walk he has been planning on for so long.
89. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §131.
90. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §131.
91. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §130.
92. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §104.
93. Wittgenstein does not use the expression 'Platonism', but I think that the passage quoted is a good characterization of that which in the philosophical tradition is meant, as a criticism, when this expression is used.
94. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §104.
95. See, in this regard, also L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* §113: 'I feel as though, if only I could fix my gaze *absolutely sharply* on this fact and get it into focus, I could not but grasp the essence of the matter'.
96. It is evident that this criticism anticipates the sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* on the dogmatic use of models.

97. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, pp. 21–2.
98. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §100.
99. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §101.
100. 'We think the ideal must be in reality; for we think we already see it there' (L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §101).
101. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 25 (from MS 112). This remark is strictly connected with Wittgenstein's characterization of philosophical work elsewhere in MS 112: '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 (*verlangt*) of them.)' (L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 24). It must also be emphasized how in the first remark Wittgenstein makes it clear that one has this difficulty of the will above all in the cases in which what is to be understood is something 'significant, important' (L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 25). Wittgenstein seems to suggest, for example, that to understand whether the suffering in our human life has meaning (and, if it does, what the meaning is) it is certainly not necessary 'to be instructed in abstruse matters' (L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 25).
102. As Wittgenstein will observe in the *Philosophical Investigations*, there is something 'in philosophy that resists such an examination of details (*Einzelheiten*)' (L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §52).
103. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 16.
104. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 17.
105. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, pp. 17–18. By 'method of science' Wittgenstein means 'the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest number of primitive natural laws; and, in mathematics, of unifying the treatment of different topics by using a generalization' (L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 18).
106. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 18.
107. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 19.
108. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue Book*, p. 19.
109. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §68.
110. L. Wittgenstein (1978b) *Remarks on the Foundations of* Mathematics, G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe (eds), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell), III, §77.
111. We could, in fact, quite easily imagine that, at least for some people, it does not stop being a game. For example, once the trick has been discovered one could react like this: 'What a nice game! And so relaxing! All the players have the certainty that, when it's their turn to begin, they win'.
112. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §68.

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# 4
## The Scales and the Compass of Philosophy: Wittgenstein in the Mirror of Plato

*Cecilia Rofena*

*His quaint opinions to inspect,*
*HHis knowledge to unfold*
*On what concerns our mutual mind,*
*The literature of old;*

*What interested scholars most,*
*What competitions ran*
*When Plato was a certainty,*
*And Sophocles a man*

Emily Dickinson

## 1. Introduction

The scales of justice in ethics and the compass of 'perspicuous representation' in linguistic analysis are, in this essay, the tools for sketching a physiognomy of Wittgenstein reflected in the mirror of the Socratic method. The comparison I draw between Wittgenstein and Plato centres on the figure of Socrates and on the method of the dialogue, and is designed to reflect on the meaning of philosophical therapy in its original sense of 'observation of anomaly'. In order to grasp the anomaly one must know the code of reference, capturing the emergent or dissonant aspect. This is the character of the *teras* – a borderline case of the *casus datae legis* – that requires a 'therapy' in an observation made more acute by the examples of the norm. The Latin term *monstrum*, which translates the Greek term *teras*, captures the *contra naturam* character of that which goes beyond the limits of

a natural form. There is a semantic duplicity in the term – a positive sense, which goes together with its negative: namely, the emergence of an 'extraordinary' character confirms the rule, from which error draws away, and indicates not simply the place of an impossibility but the occasion of a recognition. In section 90 of the 'Philosophy' chapter of the *Big Typescript* we read: 'Just as laws only become interesting when they are transgressed, // when there is an inclination to transgress them //, certain grammatical rules only get interesting when philosophers want to transgress them'.[1] The problem becomes that of 'depicting anomalies precisely'. Wittgenstein remarked in 1948: 'What is important about depicting anomalies precisely? If you cannot do it, that shows you do not know your way around the concepts'.[2] I wish to raise some questions about this passion for anomalies, in an effort to clarify an aspect that characterizes Wittgenstein's entire philosophical disposition.[3] With perfect continuity, from the first to the last moments of his reflection, we find an imperative of clarity that has been described as 'the fulfilment of a distinctively human possibility',[4] and has called to mind[5] the full realization of proposition 5.4541 of the *Tractatus*: 'The solutions of the problems of logic must be simple, since they set the standard of simplicity. Men have always had a presentiment that there must be a realm in which the answers to questions are symmetrically combined – a priori – to form a self-contained system. (*regelmässigen Gebilde*)'.[6] As I shall seek to show, this is a canon that has not been lost over the years because it belongs to the aporetic form and purpose that is present from the very beginning of Wittgenstein's philosophical path in the idea of a view that is *sub specie aeternitatis*.

The concepts of virtue (*arete*), conversion (*epistrophe*), and education (*paideia*) permit us to bring to light further articulations and distinctions in the form of the philosophical method, with respect to a comparison that insists on irremediable dichotomies and differences. Following the traces of the presence of Socrates and Plato in Wittgenstein's writings, lectures, and conversations, we can move in at least three directions: (1) analysing considerations on specific themes of Platonic theory; (2) comparing aspects of the form of conceptual investigation; (3) focusing on the characteristics of the figure of Socrates. By examining the questions in different ways we can show important differences relative to the themes of essence and definition – the 'craving for generality' criticized in the *Blue Book* – as well as to the dichotomy between 'real' and 'ideal' and the distinction between 'simple' and 'complex', delving into the questions of logical atomism and mathematical Platonism. We can dwell on the characteristics of philosophical

writing to assess the degree of influence on Wittgenstein of the dialog-ical form, of irony as a method of indirect argumentation, of aporia as a solution open to different ways of conclusion – all questions much discussed in the literature. By contrast, in an investigation of similari-ties a stress on method would prevail and, on the scale pans that weigh the quality of the relation between Socrates–Plato and Wittgenstein, we would have to make the weight of the methodological and metaphilo-sophical interrogation oscillate. In all these cases, however, we must not overlook the fact that, as soon as we get into a more detailed analysis, the relation between differences and similarities changes radically and the analogies translate into new significant differences, in a manner directly proportional to the weight of the distinctions we bring into the elements of comparison. From the particular of the individual themes dealt with to the differences between Plato and Socrates, to the metaphilosophical level of the form of investigation, we can construct new parallels susceptible to revision: each approach must take the basic critical tonality of Wittgenstein's considerations into account.

The concept of 'perspicuous representation' (*übersichtliche Darstellung*), as a cornerstone of philosophical dialogue, permits us to see the ethical nature of the interrogation that Wittgenstein and Plato share. This concept becomes the objective of that work on 'one's way of seeing things' that is at the centre of the difficulties philosophy must over-come with a change of view.

There is an ethical meaning of anomaly that adds another dimension to this path of ours through certain modes of the aporetic method: the Gordian knot of philosophy as therapy is the awareness that even if we reach extreme conceptual clarity we are still subject to the limits of the will and to its natural resistances. Even if they have been sharpened, the instruments of the philosophical method must be used time and again; a weak or contrary will makes philosophical analysis useless, be it at the logical, epistemological, or ethical level.

'Clarity' and 'perspicuity' are concepts that appear to be as disarming as Socrates' celebrated 'all that I know is that I don't know' if one is seeking a philosophical thesis that has been verified in the certainty of an epistemic object – the notion of truth as correspondence, for example. If, by contrast, they are referred to the method, they regain their sense of use as critical elements – signals of the correction of the error in philosophical problems draped in conceptual clothing.

In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein exemplifies the aporia – the 'puzzle' – of the search for a unique definition of a word as the paradigm of a type

of fascination that forms of expression can exert upon us, making the 'therapy' of his method necessary:

> The man who is philosophically puzzled sees a law in the way a word is used, and, trying to apply this law consistently, comes up against cases where it leads to paradoxical results. [...] We mistakenly think that a definition is what will remove the trouble (as in certain states of indigestion we feel a kind of hunger which cannot be removed by eating). [...] *Philosophy, as we use the word, is a fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert upon us*.[7]

Wittgenstein guides his reader (and himself) through a process of liberation from the resistances of the will, from the blind alleys of the necessitating pictures[8] that characterize the craving to theorize. The therapeutic disposition seems to renounce all sure possession in the field of logic; as a result, one may have the sensation of losing some logical concepts that are useful for the philosophy of language. The illusions and presumptions of knowledge become the hurdle to be cleared in an exercise of critical awareness of one's conceptual tools and of one's choices and decisions. We are considering here the double meaning of the verb 'to know' in the Latin sense of *sapere*: 'to know' but also 'to be wise', in which the cognitive and the ethical use of the term are united, as in the concept of the 'extreme clarity' that results from 'perspicuous representation'.[9]

Following the *fil rouge* of the tradition of spiritual exercises, brought to light by Pierre Hadot's investigations,[10] we can reconstruct a few features of the exemplarity of the Socratic method that we find in Wittgenstein. Hadot writes: 'The questioning of discourse leads to the questioning of the individual, who must decide whether or not he will resolve to live according to his conscience and to reason'.[11] The problem of the insistence on the transformation, or conversion, of an order of thought and of action is at the origin of the form of analysis that favours the aporia, the unmasking of the forms of presumed certainty and knowledge. Hadot recalls Hippias's protest against Socrates in Xenophon's dialogue *Memorabilia* [*Memoirs of Socrates*]: 'Hippias tells Socrates that, instead of always asking questions about justice, he would do better simply to say, once and for all, what justice is. Socrates replies: "If I don't reveal my views on justice in words, I do by my conduct"'.[12] I would like to relate these words to Wittgenstein's thinking on the

subject of truth, which gains further meaning from a comparison with the Socratic attitude that philosophy has nothing to teach and can put forward no theory. Wittgenstein writes:

> No one *can* speak the truth; if he has still not mastered himself. He *cannot* speak it; – but not because he is not clever enough yet.
>    The truth can be spoken only by someone who is already *at home* in it; not by someone who still lives in falsehood and reaches out from falsehood towards truth on just one occasion.[13]

Hadot finds the form of Socratic interrogation in two authors that were quite important for Wittgenstein's thinking: Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Both were influenced by the method of indirect knowledge that teaches not by stating theses but indirectly, through criticism and example. The mirror of Socrates, then, can help us analyse these aspects of philosophical investigation in Wittgenstein's reflection. To this end we disassemble our mirror to reveal the play of three reflections of the ethical, three figures of the ancient Greek tradition: Euthyphro of the Platonic dialogue, Eudamidas of Lucian's *Dialogues*, and Antigone of Sophocles' tragedy. All three are paradigms of the Socratic exercise of 'care of the self' (*epimeleia seatou*), and thought experiments through which to reflect the ethical elements that intersect the method of linguistic analysis, in our effort to articulate the technical connection between the idea of 'perspicuous representation' and ethical awareness. The three ethical cases exemplified by the figures of Socrates, Eudamidas, and Antigone share the common theme of the interiorization of a norm that can become an anomaly if it takes the form of the transgression of a recognized law and custom: here, we have 'anomalies' with respect to the code of a social and political order, in relation to institutionalized and implicit laws of shared and accepted forms of life. An analysis of these three ethical examples can help us bring to light a pedagogical aspect that Wittgenstein's philosophical analysis and Socrates' method have in common. The legality of the norm is reason in the ethical sense – it belongs to the subject who recognizes it as a rule – if and when it becomes conscious motivation; that is, when it is not the result of a mechanical reaction to a principle imposed from outside but is the consequence of a free choice, even at the risk of one's life, as in the cases of Socrates and Antigone. In this comparison the examples of ancient Greek ethics are linked to the idea of ethics 'in the first person' of Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics*.[14]

## 2. *Emblemata voluntatis*: the mirror of Socrates

Looking at Wittgenstein in the mirror of Socrates we may wonder how the search for *extreme conceptual clarity* and the method of *perspicuous representation* can transform our way of thinking and acting. It is a question of rediscovering in Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis Socrates' lesson in the *Alcibiades*: 'take care of yourself'. The ethical root of the concept of 'perspicuous interpretation' is connected with the possibility of testing the models with which we interpret experience, without considering them natural and necessary, but examining their effectiveness in terms of possible freedoms. Recognizing the effect of the use of words in our life – seeing how they construct or exclude possible worlds, how they give rise to understanding or misunderstanding, how they can build the edifices of art, the constructions of metaphysics, or the visions of ethics – poses the question of the recognition of the unconscious forms in which dogmatism is embedded: dogmatism, which depends on resistances of the will and not on the imprecision of the linguistic means in itself. What conceptual analysis reveals is the illusion that can fossilize our logical and ethical, conceptual and practical schemas into unconscious certainties. Making the reasons that guide our actions explicit, just as Socrates does with his interlocutors, is the way to accept a comparison with our forms of implicit knowledge that are recognized in Plato's dialogues. In a notation in the *Big Typescript* (§90) Wittgenstein observes:

> Human beings are deeply imbedded in philosophical, i.e. grammatical, confusions. And freeing them from these presupposes extricating them from the immensely diverse associations they are caught up in. One must, as it were, regroup their entire language. – But of course this language developed // originated // as it did because human beings had – and have – the tendency to think *in this way*. Therefore extricating [*Herausreißen*] them only works with those who live in an instinctive state of dissatisfaction with // live in an instinctive state of rebellion [*Auflehnung*] against // language. Not with those who, following all of their instincts, live within *the very* herd that created this language as its proper expression.[15]

We can read this note as a reference to the will, an instinctive 'rebellion' (*Auflehnung*) against language. If we seek to grasp fully this insistence on the 'dissatisfaction' at the origin of philosophical intention, we may wonder how this will to 'extricate' oneself (*Herausreißen*)

from the restraints of the forms of expression that generate philosophical confusions can reform not only our philosophical attitudes but, indeed, a form of life in its entirety. The awareness of linguistic uses and, from an ethical viewpoint, of free decision, depends on the extent of this dissatisfaction (*Unbefriedigung*): a renewed attention to the models of our linguistic practices translates into a new possibility in the choice of words, as occurs in the writing of poetry, which is the model for an investigation into the *physiognomy* of words, freely compared and chosen 'by fine differences of smell'.[16] Delving into and investigating the aspect that escapes us, that which we consider 'natural', that which we do not willingly call into question, is possible through those questions that draw our attention back to the models of action and to the linguistico-conceptual instruments with which we interpret the world.

On 4 September 1929 Wittgenstein jotted down a thought that synthesizes, for him, the nature of ethics: 'What is good is divine. Queer as it sounds, that sums up my ethics'.[17] The hermetic character of the formula, as he himself admits, requires a further specification: 'Only something supernatural can express the Supernatural.' Are we confronted with a tautology without content that leaves us in the uncertainty of the nonsensical? Or is Wittgenstein presenting us with a riddle to be solved? Are we, perhaps, to interpret his extreme synthesis as a hyperbolic statement that declares the limit of an impossibility? Or to see in it the *brevitas* of an overview (*Übersicht*) that aspires to the extreme clarity of the *übersichtliche Darstellung*? As in the motto of an emblem, ellipsis is of the essence. If we consider the phrase as the definition of a criterion, accentuating its assertive modality, we could use it to rule out those contexts that do not fall within the sphere of the definition. The thought could be intended as parody, ruling out any possibility of adequacy to the criterion that has been formulated. It could be an example of Socratic irony, or could represent a form of interdiction, to be taken as a warning: considering the sphere of the ethical as the argument of any given science with its natural objects is forbidden. To use Hilary Putnam's synthetic expression, this thought might allude to the idea of an 'ethics without ontology'.[18]

In the text of his *Lecture on Ethics*, also from 1929, Wittgenstein used the expression once again: 'Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water even if I were to pour out a gallon over it'.[19] The words of the ethical are distinct and separate from those of science, which 'are

vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, *natural* meaning and sense'.[20] In the *Lecture* Wittgenstein sees in the expressions of the ethical a will to 'go beyond the world':

> Now I want to impress on you that a certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through *all* ethical and religious expressions. All these expressions *seem*, *prima facie*, to be just *similes*. Thus it seems that when we are using the word '*right*' in an ethical sense, although, what we mean, is not right in its trivial sense, it is something similar, and when we say 'This is a good fellow', although the word 'good' here does not mean what it means in the sentence 'This is a good football player' there seems to be some similarity.[21]

Wittgenstein is referring here to a subject's working on the linguistic code, which forces the natural possibilities of language in an attempt to express the 'supernatural' of ethics.[22] Our language mirrors the world understood as 'the totality of facts' (*Tractatus*, 1.1); 'the self-evidence of the world is expressed in the very fact that language signifies only it, and can only signify it'.[23] The lack of sense is the peculiar essence of the expressions of ethics and of religion: in fact, 'No state of affairs has in itself, what I would like to call, the coercive power of an absolute judge'.[24] If we were to seek a criterion of absoluteness that can ground the use of ethico-religious expression, we would not be able to find it in any 'super-fact'. The concept of 'good' dissolves if it is compared with the relativity of natural and everyday use. In the *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein shows that there are neither facts behind ethical and religious expressions nor private inner experiences describable as facts, but only a sense that depends on the will to use language against its ordinary sense. It is not a question of a Platonic appeal to a transcendent and metaphysical principle of the good, but of an attention to the difference our models 'make at various points in your life', as we read in a remark from 1950 – which also shows how Wittgenstein's idea of ethics and of its meaning has not changed, twenty years after the Cambridge conference:

> 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; [...] 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.[25]

'Only something supernatural can express the Supernatural' [*Nur das übernatürliche kann das Übernatürliche ausdrucken*): the English translation adds a 'something' that risks causing unwonted confusion, sending us off in search of possible examples of the supernatural, far afield from Wittgenstein's anti-essentialism.[26] If, by contrast, we read the 'something' as referring to the idea of the supernatural 'point of view', we recapture the meaning of a concept Wittgenstein utilized at the time of his war diaries, confirming it in the *Tractatus* and in the text of the *Lecture*, and taking it up once again in his notes of 1948–51. I refer to the Spinozist idea of a vision *sub specie aeternitatis*, broached by Schopenhauer to describe the Platonic idea of art in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (I, book III, §34): *Mens aeterna est, quatenus res sub aeternitatis specie concipit* (Spinoza, *Ethics* V, proposition 31, scholium).

A *species* – a shape – is a way of seeing that determines a conception of the world. It is not a question of a quality of objects, but of the model with which we interpret reality: in Wittgenstein, the concept of a vision *sub specie aeternitatis* is the key to the union between ethics and aesthetics, expressed in the *Tractatus* by proposition 6.421, '*Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins*'. In the light of the Spinozist legacy the *incipit* of the *Lecture on Ethics* becomes clear: 'Now I am going to use the term "Ethics" in a slightly wider sense, in a sense in fact which includes what I believe to be the most essential part of what is generally called "Aesthetics"'.[27] In the entry from Wittgenstein's war diary of 7 October 1916, we read: 'The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connexion between art and ethics'.[28]

Before pursuing this solution – seeking to draw some conclusions on the relation between the Platonic and the Wittgensteinian conception of ethics – we have to consider some of the meanings of 'supernatural' and 'divine' that emerge from our comparison with ancient Greek ethics, beginning with the Platonic dialogue dedicated to the relation between 'piety and impiety', i.e., to the pious as a part of the just in relation to divine justice: the *Euthyphro*.

## 3. 'Knowledge is virtue', or what can be said in three words

'All I know is that I know nothing', Socrates' famous declaration, is a negation of the value of knowledge. Our inquiry begins with the aporetic character of a difficulty that calls to mind a particular rhetorical device:

the paralipsis (*praeteritio*). Like the aporia of Socratic teaching – the so-called 'Socratic fallacy'[29] – so also the silence of the *Tractatus* and the 'supernatural' ethics of the *Lectures* call to mind the semantic characteristic of the *interdictio*: the impossibility that names a limit, confirming the importance of an absence that reveals a deferred presence. A particular emphasis is concealed by the apparent negation. In this way Wittgenstein raises that which falls within the sphere of the ethical – the transcendental triad of beautiful, good, and just – above the nature of facts, beyond the contingent space of nature and of history.

If we read the reference to the *supernatural* quality of ethics against the background of the remark that immediately follows it the meaning becomes more precise, showing us the path we need to follow in our comparison with Plato. Wittgenstein says: 'You cannot lead people to what is good; you can only lead them to some place or other. The good is outside the space of facts'.[30] In this further specification of the limit we again hear the echo of the difficulty of teaching virtue, introducing the Platonic terms of the question. The model of the good and of the just can be followed, recognized, or evaded: it can remain unconscious and condition our way of seeing, or can become the instrument – the term of comparison – of our actions, as a regulative ideal. In his 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*' Wittgenstein makes reference to an analogous teaching difficulty, reminiscent of Socrates' efforts to convince his interlocutor, guiding him through the numerous passages of the elenchus and its successive refutations, according to the degrees and the passages of new attempts and corrections. Wittgenstein writes:

> One must start out with error and convert [*überführen*][31] it into truth. That is, one must reveal the source of error, otherwise hearing the truth won't do any good. The truth cannot force its way in when something else is occupying its place.
>
> To convince someone of the truth, it is not enough to state it, but rather one must find the *path* from error to truth.[32]

The idea of the need to free a 'space' to 'make room' for the truth recalls Wittgenstein's image of language as a ground crowded with buildings that hinder the work of thought, 'buildings in the air' (*Luftgebäude*)[33] – 'houses of cards' – whose philosophical solidity is significantly limited. The ground must be cleared and ploughed up to bring the *tiefe Grammatik* back to light. This calls for an aporetic method. The reform of the method takes shape in the idea of 'perspicuous representation'.

It is the same process that guides Socrates' dialectical method designed to eliminate error and confusion through the elenchus.

'One of the most important tasks is [...] to make a tracing of the physiognomy of every error' (*die Physiognomie jedes Irrtums nachzuzeichnen*),[34] i.e. to trace its characteristic form precisely. One must find the path from error to truth to modify a way of seeing. Correction is possible only if the interlocutor (interlocutor/reader/pupil) acknowledges the expression as *his* way of thinking:

> Indeed, we can only prove that someone made a mistake [*eines Fehlers überführen*] if he (really) acknowledges this expression as the correct expression of his feeling // if he acknowledges that this really is the expression of his feeling [*der Ausdruck seines Gefühls*] //.
>
>   For only if he acknowledges it as such, *is* it the correct expression. (Psychoanalysis.)
>
>   What the other person acknowledges is the analogy I'm presenting to him as the source of his thought. [*Was der Andern anerkennt, ist die Analogie die ich ihm darbiete, als Quelle seines Gedankens*].[35]

Wittgenstein's numerous examples drawn from the proof that pupils must give their mathematics teacher to demonstrate their understanding of the rule, together with the orders of the *Philosophical Investigations*, draw our attention to the importance of 'proof' in the action of actual understanding. This accent placed on the effects of understanding, as they can be observed in action, is the sign of an ethico-practical concern, which is also an attention turned to the moment of verification of the method's efficacy. The change that results in linguistic practice from the correction of a conceptual confusion, like the understanding of meaning in communication, most certainly resembles the explanation of the reasons for a symptom in psychoanalytic therapy, but a context that is closer and more suitable is that of learning – or of training, to use a key term of the *Investigations*. The process of teaching and of learning is similar to the way in which one learns an art. What prevails is the idea of execution, of being able to continue to act according to correct examples and judgments, as is the case when one is in possession of a technique. Paragraph 75 of the *Philosophical Investigations* seems to recall the way in which Socrates' interlocutor attempts to answer his questions:

> What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean, to know it and not be able to say it? Is this knowledge somehow

equivalent to an unformulated definition? So that if it were formulated I should be able to recognize it as the expression of my knowledge? Isn't my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in the explanations that I could give? That is, in my describing examples of various kinds of game; showing how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of these; saying that I should scarcely include this or this among games, and so on.[36]

From the problem of understanding we have passed on, following Wittgenstein, to the problem of learning. The drive to describe the functioning of language, to rethink the results of logic in the light of philosophical confusions, draws strength from the importance of the moment of understanding that is realized in a new way of proceeding in experience, so that one is able to 'notice the turn' in the 'immense network of easily trodden // well-kept // false path. […] Therefore wherever false paths branch off I ought to put up signs to help in getting past the dangerous spots'.[37]

If the objective of philosophical investigation is, as Wittgenstein says in the *Big Typescript*, 'working on oneself', the problem becomes that of the 'goodwill' [*gute Will*] and of the 'talent' [*Talent*] capable of bringing about the change of view: in these terms we can speak of virtue and the difficulty of teaching it. Wittgenstein's therapy is not the 'vaccine' of the possession of one or another verified theory; one is never safe from the limits of the 'resistances of the will', and the only proof that we have been liberated from a conceptual confusion resides in a new way of proceeding in experience, just as one demonstrates one has understood a rule by going on to apply it correctly.

### 3.1  The trial of Euthyphro

The Platonic dialogue I have chosen is the *Euthyphro*, which regards a case of 'natural' obedience to the law contrasted with the anomaly of Socrates' behaviour – with the error that will be the cause of the charge against him and of his sentence. The question of a divine ethics is tackled in a discussion on the definition of the just and of the pious (*osion*). The cornerstone that sustains the arguments of the dialogue, in light of the interests of our comparison, is Socrates' request that Euthyphro give some definite proof (*tekmerion*, 9 a–b), i.e., make the reasons for his action clear with convincing arguments that can attest to the meaning and authenticity of a just action. Euthyphro knows the divine law of the pious as 'that which is dear to the gods'; he recognizes

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a rule that he follows blindly, out of obedience to a norm he does not call into question, not even when he prosecutes his own father for manslaughter, convinced that acting in the most just way means making no exceptions to the rule. The will to be 'dear to the gods' is the motive that induces Euthyphro to perform an action that many others would never have performed. Not the slightest hesitation seems to undermine the certainty that sustains his conviction. For Socrates this is a good reason to learn from Euthyphro about the knowledge that confirms his belief that he is acting in the best way possible. Socrates' questions aim to insinuate doubt in his interlocutor, to investigate the sense of justice and of the pious that he declares he does not know and wants to learn from Euthyphro's concrete example. Euthyphro is aware of a limit to be respected that he holds to be just and legitimate, because he accepts the principle that the gods can desire nothing other than the justice that punishes a misdeed. Why is Socrates unconvinced by this obedience to a divine law? He is unconvinced because Euthyphro does not understand justice, since he does not perform his action for the right reason. The dialogue will show that Euthyphro's certainty is destined to waver in the face of Socrates' pressing interrogation. Euthyphro confuses justice with a personal attitude that stems from a presumption of knowledge. There is no doubt (*skepsis*) in his decision and Socrates, master of doubt, wants to instil the seed of that correction which begins with the examination of one's own actions: in this self-examination there is the possibility of an alternative that can revoke the present decision, otherwise considered natural and self-evident. There are at least two reasons for Euthyphro's error, distinct but correlated: (1) he opts for the utility of the advantage he is sure of obtaining from the respect for a divine law, the award of a recompense, precisely when he claims he is acting disinterestedly. This aspect of a utilitarianism that seeks recognition for a just action is not in keeping with the nature of the ethical interrogation that for Socrates has to lead to a radical self-transformation in lifestyle; i.e., to an interiorized rule by which one follows justice liberating oneself from injustice, curbing the action of an unreasonable life. (2) Euthyphro is not able to question himself about the reasons for his action, because he lives in the presumption of an incontrovertible correctness of his knowledge; the certainty of his knowledge gives rise to a presumption/illusion that can cast him into the darkness of a behaviour he has neither examined nor chosen, but that mechanically derives from an external authority. He is not able to make the reason for his action clear to himself, and

limits himself to providing a reason in keeping with the convention of following a rule.

The definition of justice is like a grammatical proposition empty of empirical content until it is applied in the concrete context that shows the validity in its effects, like the law that is an empty form until every single case is considered as its case in point in a judgment. More than the Platonic problem of definition, what is in play in this dialogue is the problem of the consciousness of choice, of the will that dictates the inner law. Euthyphro's error is not in the logical weakness of his definition but, rather, in the lack of a critical examination of his actions and, thus, in his lack of a capacity to recognize the case in point of his action as just. But it is this capacity alone that can guarantee the justice of future actions. We might say that Euthyphro is unable to justify his behaviour for the *right* reason and, as the end of the dialogue attests, can feel fear and shame before neither gods nor men: 'For fear of the gods you would have been afraid to take the risk lest you should not be acting rightly, and would have been ashamed before men, but now I know well that you believe to have clear knowledge of piety and impiety' (15d–e).[38] Fear and shame are the signs of an understanding that stems from self-examination: they are proof of a change that has transformed life in the present. Consciousness of the fullness of the meaning of justice is expressed in the capacity to have the feelings that are the effects of this consciousness, without which one has no contact with the judgment of gods and men. The meaning of justice does not translate into a formally correct definition but into the transformation of personal experience. In this sense we can say that 'knowledge is virtue'. Following the line of Socrates' interrogations and counterexamples, we can imagine other questions from the summit of the effects of justice in the action: what did Euthyphro do to avoid the unjust action of which he accuses his father? Did he truly behave as a son? These questions belong to the critique that brings to light the hidden reasons for the action, the resistances of the will that saturate the space of ethical reasons, which is the space of revision and discussion – the space to be cleared of the certainty of pictures that can become idols, prisons, and errors. Here, then, we see the importance of reasoning that seeks anomaly and shows difference. It is a spiritual exercise summarized in the teaching Socrates addressed to Alcibiades: 'take care of yourself'. We must make an effort to find examples that represent alternatives to our conceptions and to the conventions that regulate our form of life, verifying the use of our concepts as orders of discourse that we must renew based on the new

conditions of our practice and our relations with others. The deepest question that surfaces in this dialogue is, then, 'what makes us just'; i.e., what transforms our way of living into a just life. The extreme clarity of our reasons is the condition for acting freely, against the natural tendency to forget the role of the knowledge and the pictures that influence our life – to forget the role of the nature of our *ethos*.

The tragic contrast in the dialogue is that the charge against Socrates regards precisely the infringement of the law of the city, in his will to follow an inner law that is independent of the judgment of the majority, and therefore anomalous. It is, as Plato tells us, the law of his *daimon*. The justification we give ourselves must be honest and genuine, as it can be if we call our certainties into question and put them to the test. The capacity to question ourselves about the limits of and obstacles to our choices has a dual nature: it is both linguistic and ethical.

We shall now compare Socrates' 'difference' with two other emblematic examples of anomaly in the conduct that challenges the convention of the law of the state and the custom of current morality, in the coherence of actions chosen according to the law of an absolute ethical autonomy. The exemplariness of the behaviours of Antigone and of Eudamidas – the *contra naturam* version of ethics the two characters personify – can illuminate an important aspect of Socrates' 'supernatural' ethics and of Wittgenstein's definition.

### 3.2   The testament of Eudamidas

At the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen there is a painting by Nicolas Poussin that depicts an episode from Lucian's *Dialogues*, which the painter probably knew from his reading of the essays of Montaigne: *The Testament of Eudamidas*. Eudamidas of Corinth, fallen into extreme poverty, is on his deathbed dictating his will. Poussin depicts four other figures along with Eudamidas: two desperate women – his elderly mother and his young daughter – the doctor treating him and the scribe writing down his last will and testament. Eudamidas has nothing to bequeath, except for the duty to take care of his mother and his daughter: they are his only goods. The responsibility of this bond, which goes beyond the separation of death, induces him to leave to his two friends the task of supporting and aiding his mother and of giving hospitality to his daughter, supplying her with a dowry that will make it possible for her to marry. In Lucian's story the whole city derides the nature of the will and the absurdity of a burden bequeathed in such a way, seen as a gesture against nature, and against all reason. The

two friends of the deceased, flying in the face of the logic of personal interest, accept the weight of that inheritance, without breaking their bond of friendship and its ethical duty. Theirs is an ethical response that runs counter to the belief of many – counter to the egotistically interested and utilitarian common reading of such an affair. The reaction of the people described by Lucian and Montaigne, as in the case of the dialogue between Euthyphro and Socrates, consists of scorning and ridiculing everything that does not fall within the naturalness of a predictable reaction. The unpredictable is seen as *contra naturam*, counter to the self-evidence of utilitarian customs bound by rules of relations in which self-interest and advantage can become the norm, erasing the meaning and the value of the sentiment of friendship that asserts a different and deeper law: the duty to care. In a new twist on Alcibiades' motto, its teaching could be summarized in the formula 'take care of others'. The moral of the story for Lucian and for Montaigne is that of the example that challenges common logic and its brutality. The features of an ethics of the unexpected are taking shape. It is a new meaning of responsibility: we could say that this behaviour suspends current morality to assert a logic that is higher, 'supernatural', or divine. In this example too we hear the echo of a sense of Wittgenstein's thought that sums up his ethics, further articulating the presence in his reflection of Socratic–Platonic motifs and, more generally, of the ethics of late antiquity.

### 3.3 The law of Antigone

Antigone's story turns on the anomaly of a behaviour that challenges the law. The heart of the tragedy consists in Antigone's being sentenced to death for her insistence on burying an enemy: her duty to her dead brother leads her to transgress the *nomos* of the *polis* and binds her to a law stronger than that of the city, an unwritten law,[39] the only one she recognizes and that she is ready to follow all the way to the extreme sacrifice of her life. These are the traits of what Foucault called the *parrhesiaste*: someone who is willing to lose their life rather than deny an ideal that is a norm of their action. Plato in the *Cratylus* opposes *nomos* to *ethos* 'according to right and custom' (384). Divine law and human law, *agrapta nomima* and *nomos-kerygma*, are the symbols of two different conceptions of the world that Albin Lesky described as a *theonoma* vision and an *anthroponoma* vision destined to clash in a gigantomachia that will later be fought over the ideas of being and of man.[40] In *Oedipus the King* (vv. 865–871) Sophocles exalts the divine

laws, contrasting them with the 'mortal nature' (*thnata physis*) (v. 868) of the natural law of man. In the *rhesis* of the *Antigone* the divine laws are 'unwritten and unfailing' (*agrapta kai asphale*, v. 454), since they are 'not of today, or of yesterday, but always are' (v. 456). The expression *agrapta nomima* (vv. 454–455) refers to the religious sphere.

The tragic dispute stems from the incommensurability between forms of life and is expressed in language, in the levels of two untranslatable codes, in which the same terms are used by the two protagonists with opposite meanings. There is no deceit or disaccord to distort the communication but, rather, an impossibility of understanding one another that stems from Creon's indifference to Antigone's motivation – the opposite of the Greek concept of *sympatheia* – and from the nonsensical public prohibition issued by the *basileus* against the 'unwritten law' of the ancestors and of the affects, which Antigone respects as more important than any other law. Sophocles presents us with the irreconcilability of two visions of the world that remain closed in a reciprocal 'mis-recognition' in the etymological sense of *minus cognoscere*: Creon does not 'recognize' Antigone and lets her die, guilty of a crime stemming from a 'mis-understood' act of *pietas*. The two visions are destined to be misunderstood in the tragic 'ambiguity' of the discourses, closed in the secret law of their certainties. The 'non-sense' is generated by the misunderstanding of the communication and by the incomprehension between the speakers – that which is *sense* for Antigone is *non-sense* for Creon, in the exemplary case of the tragedy.

Antigone's exemplarity is bound up with an ethics of transcendence that assumes the viewpoint of eternity, a 'supernatural' – or *sub specie aeternitatis* – viewpoint, as a norm of conduct that criticizes positive right, emptying it of its content and displaying the empty form it cannot apply to the fullness of life.

## 4. The 'Tree of Life' or the fullness of meaning: grammars of ethics

The examples of ethics we have described as 'supernatural' are exemplary anomalies of conduct ruled by personal choice, according to autonomous forms of decision. Here, we have contexts ruled by individual grammars, by 'extraordinary' uses of language – as the *Lecture on Ethics* affirms – and new innovative descriptions of experience. I would like to draw a distinction between grammars of ethics and systems of

ethics, emphasizing the distance between the plurality of the ways of articulating ethical experience – an aporetic and fallibilistic conception that insists on the revision of our conceptions – and the natural order that a normative ethics tends to institute, pinning concepts down as principles from which the possibilities of action are to be normatively derived. The idea of grammar clarifies the importance of the use of ethical concepts as reasons in a sense we could describe as pragmatist, by which we understand the content of our thoughts in terms of what we do and in relation to the changes that concepts broach in our existence. The idea of the good that characterizes the tradition of the patrimonial ethics of the possession of virtue is radically renewed in Wittgenstein's thinking. It is the aspect that I suggest we call an *ethics of character* because it abandons the idea of a privileged ethical object, endowed with an intrinsic ethical quality – the 'good' that moral theory ought to grasp and master, as in the Stoic sense of the *desiderabilia*. Wittgenstein in fact calls attention to the ethical *disposition* and to the forms of different ways of acting. An action is not ethical because the object at which it aims, and which justifies it, is ethical: an ethical concept is not to be grasped as one grasps an object placed in front of us. But just as there is a way of seeing the world *sub specie aeterni*, so a fact becomes *sub specie morale* on the basis of our disposition and of the way in which it constructs a possibility of action.[41]

Citing a passage on Plato, Wittgenstein writes in the *Big Typescript*: 'I read "…philosophers are no nearer to the meaning of 'Reality' than Plato got…." What a strange state of affairs. How strange in that case that Plato could get that far in the first place! Or that after him we were not able to get further! Was it because Plato was *so* clever?'[42] Wittgenstein tells us:

One keeps hearing the remark that philosophy really doesn't make any progress, that the same philosophical problems that occupied the Greeks keep occupying us. But those who say that don't understand the reason it must be so. // it is so. // That reason is that our language has remained constant and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. So long as there is a verb 'be' that seems to function like 'eat' and 'drink', so long as there are the adjectives 'identical', 'true', 'false', 'possible', so long as there is talk about a flow of time and an expanse of space, etc., etc., humans will continue to bump up against the same mysterious difficulties, and stare at something that no explanation seems able to remove.

> And this, by the way, satisfies a longing for the transcendental // supernatural //, for in believing that they see the 'limit of human understanding' they of course believe that they can see beyond it.[43]

I would like to connect these two observations with the idea that the degrees of a possible philosophical progress are measures in the degrees of freedom of the will, i.e., in terms of a change in the way of seeing that regards the subject and its relation to its own concepts. In this sense philosophy leaves everything just as it is and seems to make no progress: it does not modify reality but, rather, our way of seeing and interpreting it. That which 'we can say in three words', according to Kürnberger's motto chosen as the epigraph of the *Tractatus*, is that which we have been through, recognized, and overcome, as in the three prepositions that indicate the use of the philosophical scale in proposition 6.54: *durch, auf, über* (through, on, over). Once the instruments of philosophical analysis have been utilized we can 'be silent', because the form of our actions is different: it is the silence of action that speaks for itself in the field of ethics. In this context it is not a question of describing correctly or imitating a correct action by following an external or transcendent principle, but rather of 'perspicuously representing', *per speculum*, putting one's way of seeing – one's intellectual resources – to the test and seeking to find one's own law. In this sense we can speak of a fullness of meaning that each subject has the task of discovering. In a personal note Wittgenstein remarks on the cost of thoughts: 'What you have achieved cannot mean more to others than it does to you. Whatever it has cost you, that's what you will pay'.[44] One cannot teach what is learned through a 'spiritual exercise'.

The resistances of the will are for Wittgenstein, as for Socrates, the hurdle to be cleared in the 'working on oneself' that philosophy continually requires, in the recognition of pictures that can guide and influence us unconsciously, as they deceive Euthyphro in his presumption of knowledge. Correcting our way of seeing means, in Wittgensteinian terms, working on 'what we demand'[45] of ourselves, of others, of things. The solution of philosophical problems is an ethical exercise and the human fact is not only observed and described: Wittgenstein's 'description', like Socrates' dialogue, is a judgment, because philosophy destroys 'buildings in the air' (*Luftgebäude*), illusions of knowledge that vanish, 'clearing up the ground of language on which they stand',[46] dissolving that which is not worth preserving in the construction of our certainties. The defect of the philosopher who transforms a *Vorstellung* into a *Bild* – a recurrent theme in Wittgenstein's writing – is a consequence of

his vain attempt to adapt the method and the object of philosophy to those of science,[47] guided by a false analogy. But there is another type of error at work in philosophical analysis that is subtler and more difficult to recognize: 'For our forms of expression prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras'.[48] The problem is one of resolving 'unwitting commitments', confusions that can become unconscious constraints: 'A *picture* 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'.[49]

By recognizing ourselves in every process of seeing, by considering our pictures as 'ours' and not as norms and rules independent of us that can become meaningless 'empty forms', we acquire the possibility of a free and meaningful experience, we confront the anomaly without fossilizing it in aporia, learning form the differences. In a famous letter to Norman Malcolm, recounting the episode of a misunderstanding over a question of 'national character', Wittgenstein muses: 'I then thought: what is the use of studying philosophy [...] if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if does not make you more conscientious that 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 and other people's 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. – Let me stop preaching'.[50]

As language users we have to call our conceptual instruments into question, increasing the degrees of a new mastery of ourselves. Freeing ourselves from the tight spots of thought that inhibit action is an exercise that is always possible: the ethical nature of this *emendatio intellectus* poses the problem of what can be learned from the philosophical exercise, in a formula: can philosophical investigation be a tool like a compass or like scales?[51] Can it be an instrument of valuation and orientation in practice? I do no more than raise the question, because the answers are as numerous and as different as the philosophical disciplines engaged in employing their methods to extend the field of knowledge to which they apply.

The aporetic method chooses extreme clarity as its objective, *pars destruens* of a work of correction that invests thought in its entirety, sketching the physiognomy of possible conceptual freedoms in the recognition of anomalies, differences, errors, and deceptions. In Wittgenstein different possibilities and ways of articulating experience

are made visible by the synoptic perspective of linguistic analysis that summarizes and simplifies the diversified panorama of language, according to heuristic models of individuation of the critical points of conceptual confusions.

Recognizing an analogy that directs action as an unconscious motivation, unmasking an apparent certainty or presumed knowledge, a mechanical and repetitive faithfulness to the worn-out use of a word (the imprint of a coin so worn as to be unrecognizable), means recognizing that which mirrors a genuine meaning, that which must be called into question: in Wittgenstein as in Socrates this is a path the proceeds from error to truth. Here error has a reflexive and metalogical meaning, referring to knowledge understood as critical consciousness of the subject; it regards the preliminary aspect of all investigation and is not used in the normative sense of a defect with respect to the correctness of a necessary model. I would like to suggest that in this framework Wittgenstein's decision to describe ethics as 'divine' or 'supernatural' can be taken as an expression of the Socratic demand to overcome the limits and the obstacles at the extreme consciousness of self, to be understood as a continual overcoming of the naturalness of one's self and of one's actions. The therapeutic method is thus applied to the errors and deceptions attributable to an *acrasia*, the weakness of a will that is caught in the snares of conceptual confusions. Making room, freeing a space: these are the metaphors Wittgenstein utilizes that allude to the possibility of avoiding the inevitable, of transforming necessity into the contingency of what we construct through the grammars of our concepts.

The idea of a 'perspicuous view' alludes to a way of seeing things that cannot be taught but can only be discussed and tested in dialogue – in comparison – as occurs in the comparative method of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Reflecting on Kierkegaard in a remark of 1946, Wittgenstein notes down a thought on the possibility of change and distinguishes between the nature of a sound doctrine and the passion of faith:

> The point is that a sound doctrine need not *take hold* of you; you can follow it as you would a doctor's prescription. – But here you need something to move you and turn you in a new direction. – (I.e. this is how I understand it.) Once you have been turned around, you must *stay* turned around.
>
> Wisdom is passionless. But faith by contrast is what Kierkegaard calls a *passion*.[52]

It is the theme of the conversion (*Umstellung*)[53] that can transform a way of living. Wittgenstein proposes a methodological renewal that insists on a centripetal revolution, at the centre of which we find not the transcendental 'I' legitimized by the critique of its possibilities but, rather, the subject observed in its operating – *operari sequitur esse* – and in its erring. In the scenario of the *Philosophical Investigations* it seems that a relativism of the indifferent validity of the versions of the world is to prevail. But, in fact, in shifting our attention towards the practice of linguistic uses Wittgenstein gives us an ethics whose task is to observe the world 'from above, in flight',[54] leaving it as it is, in order to work on the capacity to hear of a subject restored to the perspicuous view of differences and to the possibility of their comparison. A new – comparative and morphological – method is the condition of discernment between linguistic uses that permits us to distinguish between forms of thought and communication, making a choice possible. From a passion for anomalies stems this choice of an extreme clarity that grasps and convinces us.

*Translated from the Italian by Giacomo Donis.*

## Notes

1. L. Wittgenstein (2005) *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, bilingual, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. C. Aue (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), p. 313e.
2. L. Wittgenstein (1980) *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright (ed.), trans. P. Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 72e.
3. In recent years some Wittgenstein interpreters have focused their critical reading on the nature of his method, insisting on the 'therapy' of 'philosophical problems' and on the pivotal notions of 'nonsense' and 'unwitting comments'. See A. Crary and R. Read (eds) (2000) *The New Wittgenstein* (London and New York: Routledge). I shall not enter into the question of how to distinguish sense from nonsense, limiting myself to recalling the distinction between 'clarification' by means of 'nonsense' and by means of 'notation', in light of the question of the solution of 'philosophical problems'. See also O. Kuusela (2006) 'Nonsense and Clarification in the *Tractatus* – Resolute and Ineffability Readings and the *Tractatus*'s Failure' in S. Pihlstrom (ed.) *Wittgenstein and the Method of Philosophy*, vol. 80 of *Acta Philosophica Fennica* (Helsinki: Philosophical Society of Finland), pp. 35–65. In this essay I do not dwell upon the discussion of exegetical theses on the problem of the philosophical status of ethics. I have preferred a point of view that, in light of the exegetical key of anomaly, seeks to reconstruct an aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophical method. For an interpretation of the key points of the so-called 'resolute readers', see J. Conant (2007) 'Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism' in A. Crary (ed.) *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life. Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), and M. Kremer (2007) 'The Cardinal Problem of Philosophy' in A. Crary (ed.) *Wittgenstein*

*and the Moral Life. Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 143–76.

4. See S. Mulhall (1990) *On Being in the World. Wittgenstein and Heidegger on 'Seeing Aspects'* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 201.

5. J. Bouveresse, synthesizing the canon of this philosophical reflection, spoke of a classical ideal: 'The overall impression one takes and which corresponds to an entirely classical ideal of calm, of balance, of order, of rigor, and of measure almost irresistibly evokes that which is indicated in proposition 5.4541'. See J. Bouveresse (2000) *Essai I. Wittgenstein, la moder- nité, le progrès & le déclin* (Paris: Agone), p. 134.

6. *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (Routledge: London, 2001).

7. L. Wittgenstein (1960) *The Blue and Brown Books*, R. Rhees (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 27 (my italics).

8. See G. Baker (2004) *Wittgenstein's Method. Neglected Aspects*, K. Morris (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell).

9. For a brilliant discussion of this distinction based on the expression 'noli altum sapere' in the Saint Jerome translation of the Bible, see C. Ginzburg (1992) *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press).

10. I am grateful to Arnold Ira Davidson for his valuable suggestions on these themes and for the example of his investigation.

11. See P. Hadot (1995) *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, edited and with an Introduction by Arnold I. Davidson, trans. M. Chase (Oxford and New York: Blackwell), p. 155.

12. P. Hadot *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 155. (See Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 4, 4, 10). Hadot adds: 'What he wanted to show us is that we can never understand justice if we do not live it. Justice, like every authentic reality, is indefinable, and this is what Socrates sought to make his interlocutor understand, in order to urge him to "live" justice'.

13. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 35e.

14. This comparison allows us to reflect on some aspects of the contempo- rary ethical debate on the distinctions between virtue ethics, consequen- tialism, and utilitarianism, delineating through contrast the ethical form of Wittgenstein's philosophical investigation, which is in many respects closer to the ancient root of ethics than to its contemporary forms. It would be interesting at this point to look for Wittgenstein's points of contact with an even more ancient form of ethics, namely, that of Jewish philosophy. Since this is not the place for such a far-ranging discussion, I limit myself to recalling the new perspective offered by Hilary Putnam's analyses and comparisons: see H. Putnam (2008) *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life. Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press).

15. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 311e.

16. L. Wittgenstein (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell), II, xi, p. 218e.

17. 'Wenn etwas gut ist, so ist es auch göttlich. Damit ist seltsamerweise meine Ethik zusammengefasst. Nur das übernatürliche kann das Übernatürliche ausdrucken'. See L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, pp. 3 and 3e.

18. See H. Putnam (2004) *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

19. L. Wittgenstein (2007) (TS 207) *Lecture on Ethics. Introduction, Interpretation and Complete Text*, E. Zamuner, E. V. Di Vasco and D. Levy (eds) (Macerata: Quodlibet), p. 229.

20. L. Wittgenstein (TS 207) *Lecture on Ethics*, p. 229.

21. L. Wittgenstein (TS 207) *Lecture on Ethics*, pp. 233–5.

22. Defining ethics as 'the search for the good' means failing to understand the role ethical and religious expressions play in human life, reducing it to the level of an idea, to a rigid model of correspondence that rules out the anomaly and any form that differs from the norm. Wittgenstein wants to reinstate a correct observation of linguistic practices, avoiding the illusion and the sublimations of theoretical constructions.

23. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 315e.

24. L. Wittgenstein (TS 207) *Lecture on Ethics*, pp. 229–31.

25. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 85e.

26. This 'something' in the English translation has given rise to differing and opposing readings: C. Diamond (1991) 'What Nonsense Might Be' in C. Diamond *The Realistic Spirit. Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 94–113; C. Diamond (2000) 'Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*' in A. Crary and R. Read (eds), pp. 149–73; J. Conant (2005) 'What "Ethics" in the Tractatus is not' in D. Z. Phillips (ed.) *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing), pp. 39–95.

27. L. Wittgenstein (TS 207) *Lecture on Ethics*, p. 223.

28. L. Wittgenstein (1979) *Notebooks 1914–1916*, G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe (eds), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 83e.

29. Gregory Vlastos considered the 'Socratic fallacy' 'one of the standing puzzles in the history of Western philosophy' [G. Vlastos (1994) 'Is the "Socratic Fallacy" Socratic?' in M. Burnyeat (ed.) *Socratic Studies* (Cambrige: Cambridge University Press), p. 67], and made a brilliant attempt to resolve it in the third chapter of his *Socratic Studies*. He argues that Socrates used the term 'knowledge' in a double sense, distancing himself from the notion of infallible certainty that his contemporaries attributed to science to broach a significant difference. For Vlastos, Socrates admitted a fallible science in which 'knowing p' entails nothing more than the affirmation that 'p' proves to be practicable through the process of the elenchus. See G. Vlastos 'Is the "Socratic Fallacy" Socratic?'

30. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 3e.

31. The German term *überführen* is the semantic equivalent of the Latin *traducere*, whose original meaning is to 'transport' and, literally, to 'guide' – in our case, to guide maieutically on the path towards the recognition of error.

32. L. Wittgenstein (1993) 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*'/'Bemerkungen über Frazers *Golden Bough*', bilingual, trans. J. Beversluis, in *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, J. C. Klagge and A. Nordman (eds) (Indianapolis: Hackett), p. 119. 'Man muss beim Irrtum ansetzen und ihn in die Wahrheit überführen. D.h., man muss die Quelle des Irrtums aufdecken, sonst nütz

uns das Hören der Wahrheit nichts. Sie kann nicht eindringen, wenn etwas anderes ihren Platz einnimmt. Einen von der Wahrheit zu überzeugen, genügt es nicht, die Wahrheit zu konstatieren, sondern man muss den Weg vom Irrtum zur Wahrheit finden' (p. 118).

33. 'Aber es sind nur Luftgebäude, die wir zerstören, und wir legen den Grund der Sprache frei, auf dem sie standen'. See L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §118: *Luftgebäude* is translated by Anscombe as 'houses of cards'.

34. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 303e.

35. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 303e.

36. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §75.

37. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 312e.

38. Plato (1975) *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Death Scene from Phaedo*, 3rd edition, J. M. Cooper (ed.), trans. G. M. A. Grube, translation revised by J. M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing 2000), p. 19.

39. Socrates too, in a story of the *Memorabilia*, asks Hippias: 'Do you know what is meant by "unwritten laws" (*agraphous nomous*), Hippias?' (IV. iv. 19). See Xenophon (1992) *Memorabilia*, trans. E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd, in *Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press), p. 321.

40. See A. Lesky (1996) *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett).

41. Describing, in the *Tractatus*, the will to protect the ethical 'from babbling', Robert Fogelin states, resolutely: 'ethical propositions do not exist; ethical actions do exist'. See R. J. Fogelin (1976) *Wittgenstein. Arguments for the Philosopher* (London: Routledge), p. 99.

42. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 312e (312: 'Ich lese: "…philosophers are no nearer to the meaning of 'Reality' than Plato got…." Welche seltsame Sachlage. Wie sonderbar, dass Plato dann überhaupt so weit kommen konnte! Oder, dass wir dann nicht weiter kommen konnten! War er, weil Plato *so* gescheit war?').

43. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 312e.

44. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 13e (13: 'Was du geleistet hast, kann Andern nicht mehr bedeutet als Dir selbst. Soviet als es Dich gekostet hat, soviet werden sie zahlen').

45. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, p. 300e: 'Difficulty of philosophy not the intellectual difficulty of the sciences, but the difficulty of a change of attitude [*Umstellung*: translated in this essay as 'conversion']. Resistance of the *will* must be overcome' [300: 'Schwierigkeit der Philosophie, nicht die Schwierigkeit der Wissenschaften, sondern die Schwierigkeit einer Umstellung. Widerstände des Willens sind zu überwinden'] 'As is frequently the case with work in architecture, 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).'

46. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §118.

47. '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'. See L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 18.

48. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §94.

49. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §115.
50. See B. F. McGuinness (ed.) (2008) *Wittgenstein in Cambridge. Letters and Documents 1911–1951* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 370.
51. In this analysis I approach the metaphilosophical problem in continuity with Hilary Putnam's idea that corrects a deflationary reading of the philosophical discipline. Putnam judges Wittgenstein's analysis to be 'a way to bring philosophical reflection to areas in which we often fail to see anything philosophical at all'. See H. Putnam *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life*, p. 11.
52. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 53e.
53. L. Wittgenstein *The Big Typescript*, §86: 'Schwierigkeit der Philosophie, nicht die Schwierigkeit der Wissenschaften, sondern die Schwierigkeit einer Umstellung. Widerstände des Willens sind zu überwinden'.
54. See L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 5e. We find an analogous conception of the philosophical meaning of this view 'from above' in Goethe, whom Wittgenstein read avidly. It has been masterfully reconstructed in the philosophical analysis of Pierre Hadot: see P. Hadot (2008) *N'oublie pas de vivre. Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels* (Paris: Albin Michel). I thank Arnold Ira Davidson for calling it to my attention.

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# 5
# Knowing Where to Turn: Analogy, Method and Literary Form in Plato and Wittgenstein

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Notoriously, Wittgenstein read very little philosophy.[1] 'He could only read what he could wholeheartedly assimilate,' recalled von Wright, '[...] as a young man he read Schopenhauer. From Spinoza, Hume and Kant he said he could get only occasional glimpses of understanding. I do not think he could have enjoyed Aristotle or Leibniz, two great logicians before him. But it is significant that he did read and enjoy Plato. He must have recognized congenial features, both in Plato's literary and philosophical method and the temperament behind the thoughts' [MM:19].

Wittgenstein's interest in Plato, however, was not consistent throughout his career. There is no mention of Plato or Socrates in Wittgenstein's *Notebooks 1914–1916*; 'Socrates' is merely used as an example of a name in the *Tractatus*, published in 1921 [TLP:5.473, 5.4733];[2] and neither Plato nor Socrates is referred to in the *Philosophical Remarks* from 1930.

But there is evidence that Wittgenstein began to read Plato in mid-1931 [CV:21e, 22e], and in the *Big Typescript*, which he worked on largely from 1929 to 1933 (although he continued to make corrections until 1937), there are ten references to Plato and Socrates: 23e (*Sophist*), 35e (*Cratylus*), 54e (*Theaetetus*), 56e (*Theaetetus*), 170e (*Theaetetus*), 176e (*Philebus*), 195e (*Charmides*), 270e (*Theaetetus*), and two more general remarks on 312e and 317e. There are further remarks about the *Theaetetus* in the *Philosophical Grammar* (§§76ff, 90, 114, p. 208), the *Blue Book* (20), and the *Philosophical Investigations* (§§46, 48, and 518).[3] And there are references to the *Philebus* in the *Philosophical Grammar* (§§19, 90), the *Charmides* in *Zettel* (§454), and more general references to Plato

in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (§71), *Culture and Value* (21e, 22e, 35e, 64e), *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (I:§180e), and *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* (II:§48e).

Plato and Socrates are also mentioned in many reports of Wittgenstein's lectures and conversations. In G.E. Moore's 'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–33,' for example, Plato is referred to twice [PO:96, 113]; in the second part of 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*' (written 'not before 1936 and probably after 1948' [PO:115]) and *Lectures on Philosophical Psychology* 1946–7, he receives one brief mention in each case [PO:141; LPP:45]; and in the conversations with Bouwsma, Wittgenstein refers to the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides* [WC:50, 61], and possibly the *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras* and *Republic* as well [WC:42].[4]

From these references, one can make a number of generalizations. First, Wittgenstein's interest was not scholarly, and he makes no distinction between Plato and Socrates, or between early, middle and late Plato.[5] Second, a limited number of topics and passages in Plato's works are of almost obsessive interest: in the *Big Typescript* and *Philosophical Grammar*, he returns again and again to the fact that Socrates does not collect examples of a word being used before generalizing about the concept it expresses; and in the *Big Typescript* and *Philosophical Investigations* he frequently revisits the *Theaetetus*, particularly 189a (about thinking of nothing), and 201e–202b (about simple objects). Generally, the *Theaetetus* is the dialogue which most thoroughly captured his imagination.[6]

Wittgenstein's early remarks about Plato and Socrates can be quite dismissive ('Reading the Socratic dialogues, one has the feeling: what a frightful waste of time! What's the point of these arguments that prove nothing & clarify nothing[?] [CV:21e]),[7] but as Wittgenstein aged, his interest and respect for Plato's work appears to have grown, and Plato and Socrates loom largest in the conversations recorded by Bouwsma in 1949–1951. Here, Wittgenstein's interests extend well beyond his favourite passages in the *Theaetetus*, and he devotes several hundred words to an amused critique of Plato's tone, style and method. Indeed, by this stage, Plato is not just a philosopher he reads: Plato is the 'only philosopher he reads' [WC:61].

## 1.

In the middle of Wittgenstein's extensive critique of Plato, Bouwsma records the one aspect of Plato's method and style for which Wittgenstein

feels unequivocal admiration: 'But he likes best the allegories, the myths. They're fine' [WC:61].[8]

The fact that the writings of both Plato and Wittgenstein are full of concrete illustrations of abstract thoughts (which I shall, from now onwards, refer to as 'analogies') suggests an intellectual affinity, but Wittgenstein's admiration for Plato's analogies need not imply that he uses the same kind of analogies and for similar reasons.

Inventing new comparisons was important for Wittgenstein because the unconscious operation of inappropriate analogies inhibits philosophical understanding ('A *picture* held us captive' [PI:§115]); and the best way to undo their harmful influence is to replace them with better analogies. His comparisons tend to be brief and constantly evolving because if the understanding is in thrall to *one* analogy – however enlightening – then this can only lead to ossification and ultimately falsehood. In addition, because he feels that philosophers are always inclined to inflate, sublime and hypostatize their subject matter [PI:§§94, 97, 98], his analogies tend to be ordinary, homespun and deflationary. A good example of this procedure can be found in the first part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where our use of language is compared with many quotidian practices including using tools [PI:§11], playing games [PI:§83], and spending money [PI:§120].

For Wittgenstein, analogies take the place of the generalizations which most philosophers use to order data – rules, principles, and theories – and these analogies are not intended merely to make generalizations more assimilable, or to act as inferior place-holders until generalizations are formulated to replace them. Consequently, when Wittgenstein remarks, 'What I invent are new *comparisons*', [CV:16e] he is not belittling his own achievement or saying that he can only illustrate the work of others; he is implying that analogies – far from being ornaments of his style – are an essential part of his method.

There are at least four reasons why he may have preferred analogies to generalizations. First, an analogy suggests a way of ordering an area of knowledge which does not imply that it is the only way of ordering the area; one analogy always suggests the existence of others. Second, an analogy never pretends to be a complete account of some field of phenomena, and there is thus less temptation on the author's part to overlook, cramp, trim or otherwise falsify the data.

Third, an analogy, unlike a generalization, does not wear its interpretation on its face: the reader is aware of having to interpret an analogy and there is thus an element of dialogic interaction between reader and text as he tries to determine how the analogy should be applied

and what its implications are. Fourth, analogies are open-ended. Not only do they imply the possibility of other analogies, but they are, as Empson[9] emphasizes, pregnant: when we have finished our interpretation, we are always conscious that that we could have missed something, and that more could be said. Consequently, analogies are organic, living, human and appealing to the Romantic sensibility[10] in a way that generalizations are not.

Plato's use of analogy is quite different. Although he too often uses brief comparisons (such as his regular references to potters and cobblers), he sometimes builds an entire work around *one* analogy; his most famous analogies tend to be complex and extended set-pieces; and rather than introduce a completely new analogy, he sometimes builds on and elaborates analogies he has used earlier in a text. (Wittgenstein's reference to 'the allegories, the myths' probably indicates that it is these extended analogies or analogy-clusters that he has in mind.)

The analogy between the state and the individual psyche in the *Republic* is the paradigm case of Plato building a work around one analogy. The account of heavenly life in the *Phaedrus* is a fine instance of an extended single analogy (which also functions as a Just-So story) [P:245b1–257b5]. And the Simile of the Cave in the *Republic* [R:514–521b] is a good example of how Plato sometimes tries to subsume earlier analogies into later ones: the Cave is clearly intended as a kind of super-simile designed to include and encompass many of the explanatory features found in the Sun and the Divided Line [R:507–511e]. Both the *Phaedrus'* account of heaven and the Simile of the Cave exhibit much unlikely, fantastic and baroque detail, and the developed pictures serve to illustrate Plato's view that the ordinary everyday world of the senses is not a reliable guide to the nature of reality.

Plato's analogies, of course, exhibit some of the features which I have suggested Wittgenstein found attractive in analogies generally, but Plato's similes seem to have two purposes which Wittgenstein's do not share. First, the use of analogy allows Plato to present his intellectual views in a sensory form, and this makes his views more assimilable and potentially popular. Second, Plato clearly feels that analogies can eventually be superseded by more reason-based and propositional accounts, and this is what we would expect from someone who holds the senses in such low esteem. There may be some rhetorical loss, but the abstract explanation will always have greater explanatory power.

Consider two examples of this second point. The Simile of Cave is not intended to be self-standing but to illustrate conclusions already

reached by logical argument earlier in the book [R:474c–480], and there is an instructive passage just before Socrates outlines the Simile of the Sun [R:506d–507]. Glaucon asks for an account of the Good which is similar to the account of justice and self-control that Socrates has already given. Socrates replies that such an explanation is beyond him and outside the scope of the present inquiry, but offers instead to talk about 'the Child of the Good' [R:506e] which turns out to be the sun in the simile. With some discomfort, however, he acknowledges that he still owes Glaucon a full explanation of the Good [R:507]. In certain respects, therefore, a simile cannot count as an entirely full or satisfactory explanation for Plato.

The latter case illustrates one further use of analogy for Plato: it allows him to present certain conclusions which are hard to justify by straightforward philosophical argument. It is difficult to see, for instance, how the Form of the Good could possibly play the foundational and essential role in life which Plato ascribes to it in both the similes of the Sun and the Cave [R:507–509c; 514–521b]; or that homosexuality has all the intellectual advantages Diotima ascribes to it in the *Symposium* [S:208e–209d].

Religion and literature have always made extensive use of myth and analogy's ability to tell on the popular consciousness, and Plato and Wittgenstein have intimate relationships with both traditions. Plato was much occupied with religious questions; had literary ambitions in his early years; and strove for stylistic excellence. Wittgenstein held both Christianity and literature in high regard; was as much influenced by novelists and theologians – Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Augustine, Kierkegaard – as he was by philosophers, and expended much effort on the form of his writing.

Rather than being attracted to rarefied or intellectual texts, both philosophers were drawn to works which exemplified moral wisdom and were part of a common folk heritage; indeed, many of the works which meant most to them had oral origins. Plato draws on and quotes extensively from Homer and Hesiod (the most widely known poets in ancient Greece, and sources of much Greek religion and mythology); Wittgenstein was drawn to Biblical parables, the Brothers Grimm and the Christian tales of Tolstoy. It is significant that oral philosophy played such a major role in both philosophers' lives, and that Plato's writings and Wittgenstein's *Investigations* often retain the form of conversation.

But there are clearly important differences in their relations with literature: Plato was suspicious of literature's power, and it is thus paradoxical he should have made such full use of literary devices in his own

work; Wittgenstein was at odds with the scientistic orientation of his own culture, and frequently urged philosophers to give literature more serious attention [CV:42e].

**2.**

Now let me turn my attention to two passages, one from each philosopher, where the analogies they use are uncharacteristically similar. The first is the Simile of the Cave, mentioned above, from the *Republic*:

> Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern with a long entrance open to the light on its entire width. Conceive them as having their legs and necks fettered from childhood, so that they remain in the same spot, able to look forward only, and prevented by the fetters from moving their heads. Picture further the light from fire burning higher up and at a distance behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners a wall has been built as the exhibitors of puppet shows have partitions before the men themselves, above which they show their puppets. [...] See also [...] men carrying past the walls implements of all kinds that rise above the wall, and human images and shapes of animals as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material, some of these bearers presumably speaking and others silent. [R:514–515b]

When the prisoners name the shadows, they naturally think they are naming the passing objects; when they hear the echoing talk of the puppeteers, they naturally suppose it is the passing shadows which are speaking. They thus mistake this world of shadows and echoes for reality.

When a prisoner is released and turned around, he initially finds the experience painful: he is stiff, and dazzled by the fire in front of him, and only sees the objects used to throw the shadows very indistinctly. Protesting, he is dragged up the steep tunnel and into the open air and daylight. This process too he finds painful and laborious, and it takes time for his eyes to become used to the light. At first, he can only look at shadows and reflections; later, he finds he can contemplate physical objects and the moon and stars; lastly, he finds that for brief periods he can bring his eyes to rest on the sun itself [R:516–516b].

The story is an allegory of what human education ought to be. We should progress from illusion to belief, but both states are still only subsets of the inferior cognitive state which Plato calls 'opinion'. From

opinion we should pass to knowledge. Beginning with mathematics (reasoning from assumed first principles), we ought to progress to dialectics (discovering and securing first principles), and finally find ourselves contemplating the Form of the Good itself.

Now consider an unusually extended analogy which Wittgenstein used on several occasions:

> It is as if a man is standing in a room facing a wall on which are painted a number of dummy doors. Wanting to get out, he fumblingly tries to open them, vainly trying them all, one after another, over and over again. But, of course, it is quite useless. And all the time, although he doesn't realize it, there is a real door in the wall behind his back; and all he has to do is to turn round and open it. To help him get out of the room all we have to do is to get him to look in another direction. But it's hard to do this, since, wanting to get out, he resists our attempts to turn away from where he thinks the exit must be. [WMP:52]

There are a number of striking parallels between the two analogies. Both Plato and Wittgenstein describe men who are imprisoned in confined spaces. Both men are taken in by two-dimensional simulacra – in one case, shadows, in the other, dummy doors – and the power of these simulacra keep both men captive.[11] Both philosophers see that these men need to be *turned round* to see where the real solution lies; and in both similes, the men show great reluctance to be turned round. This suggests, in both cases, that not merely new information, but a completely new attitude and approach is required, and that this approach, at least initially, is found awkward and unnatural. Finally, both philosophers think that philosophy – correctly pursued – provides this new approach, and the solution to one important subclass of intellectual problems.

There are, however, important differences. Plato's prisoner is imprisoned with others, but his stay in the upper world and his ascent to it are solitary; Wittgenstein's man is imprisoned by himself, but there is no reason to suppose that the world he escapes to is not just our ordinary social world. For Plato's prisoner, the shadows' illusion is so complete that he does not even realize he is imprisoned, and thus feels no dissatisfaction; Wittgenstein's man does realize he is imprisoned and clearly does feels chafed by his circumstances. Plato's prisoner is initially quite content with watching, listening and talking; Wittgenstein's man does not want to contemplate, he wants to act, and thus feels irked by his circumstances.

But the really significant difference is this: Plato's prisoner represents a man who has not yet discovered philosophy; Wittgenstein's man is trapped in his room precisely because he is already doing it. For Plato, philosophy in (what would become) the traditional sense is the solution; for Wittgenstein, it is the problem. The new approach Plato requires from the prisoner who is about to turn around is to withdraw his faith from the senses and particularity and place it in generalities and abstract reason. The new approach Wittgenstein requires from the man trapped in the room and about to turn around is to withdraw his faith in generalities and abstract reason and place it in particularity and the senses.

These divergent philosophical solutions are mirrored in the philosophers' approaches to life. Plato valued his aristocratic origins; sought political power and influence; and strove to distinguish himself from the ordinary man. His interest in the common culture largely stemmed from his desire to have influence on the populace, and thus gain power from it.[12] Wittgenstein, on the other hand, gave his money away; had no political ambitions; and valued and found comfort in manual work (he frequently advised his pupils to work in factories rather than take up academic positions). For Plato the ordinary is something to be overcome and escaped from in philosophy and life; for Wittgenstein the ordinary offers a balm and solution to both. The differing character of their myths and analogies emerges as a partial consequence of these divergent metaphysical and ethical outlooks.

**3.**

Wittgenstein regards the method and metaphysics of Plato's middle period as the paradigmatic products of someone who has succumbed to philosophical temptations: when Plato unveils his theory of the Forms, he has not reached the light and air; he has trapped himself in the room and is scrabbling frantically at the dummy doors. Wittgenstein is often harsh with Plato's views, not because he regards them as ridiculous,[13] but because he sees them to be deeply attractive standing temptations; indeed, he has succumbed to some of them in the past himself.

According to Wittgenstein, the first thing wrong with the theory of the Forms is the idea that every concept has an exact definition and it is the philosopher's duty to search for it. Wittgenstein, of course, holds that most non-technical words cannot be defined, and that the things to which general terms apply exhibit overlapping sets of features which only share a family resemblance [PI:§67]. He contends that if you do frame a definition of a non-technical word, then you will keep

discovering legitimate uses of the word that the definition does not cover. He applies this criticism to Socrates in a remark from 1937:

> Each new phenomenon of language that we might retrospectively think of could show our earlier explanation to be unworkable. But this is the difficulty Socrates gets caught up in when he tries to give the definition of a concept. Again and again an application of a word emerges that seems not to be compatible with the concept to which our applications have led us. We say: but this *isn't* how it is! – it *is* like that though! -& all we can do is keep repeating these antitheses. [CV:35e]

The second fault is to suppose that looking at individual cases, and recalling how we use particular words in normal contexts, tells us nothing about the nature of the concepts being investigated. Both criticisms are hinted at in the following passage from the *Philosophical Grammar*:

> Socrates pulls up the pupil who when asked what knowledge is enumerates cases of knowledge. And Socrates doesn't regard that as even a preliminary step to answering the question.
>
> But our answer consists in giving such an enumeration and a few analogies. (In a certain sense we are always making things easier and easier for ourselves in philosophy). [PG:§76] [See also: BT:54e, 56e; BB:20]

A third difficulty is the problematic notion of an eternal and unchanging realm which exists above and beyond the normal physical world [PI:§§94, 97, 98]. A fourth is Plato's so-called 'self-predication argument': the idea that the form of a quality exemplifies the quality to the highest degree: the Form of the Good is apogee of goodness; the Form of the Beautiful is the apogee of beauty. The Form of the Beautiful can be conceived of as the meaning of the word 'beauty', and from this position, it is merely a short step to thinking that beautiful objects in the empirical world contain only a small quantity of beauty mixed with other, often contradictory, qualities [R:479–479d]. Wittgenstein explicitly criticizes both aspects of this puzzling idea:

> Driving out death or killing death; but on the other hand it is portrayed as a skeleton, and therefore as dead itself, in a certain sense. 'As dead as death.' 'Nothing is as dead as death; nothing

is as beautiful as beauty itself!' The picture according to which reality is thought of here is that beauty, death etc., are the pure (concentrated) substances, whereas in a beautiful object they are contained as an admixture. – And don't I recognize my own observations [in the *Tractatus*] about 'object' and 'complex'? (Plato.) [BT:317e]

   71. When one says: 'This shape consists of these shapes' – one is thinking of the shape as a fine drawing, a fine frame of this shape, on which, as it were, things which have this shape are stretched. (Compare Plato's conception of properties as ingredients of a thing.) [RFM:§71]

The idea that all concepts have precise definitions, are unconnected with ordinary word-use, are the meanings of the words, are the ingredients of ordinary objects, and exist in some higher non-physical and unchanging world, are all mutually reinforcing false idealizations. These have come about because we have not looked carefully at the use of individual words, and, in particular, at how these words function in the appropriate language-games:

> Instead of 'chimera' I could have said 'false idealization'.
>    Perhaps the Platonic ideas are false idealizations.
>    If there is such a thing then, someone who idealizes falsely must talk nonsense – because he uses a mode of speaking that is valid in one language-game in another where it doesn't belong. [LRPP:II:48]

Given these four major disagreements over philosophy's aims and methods, it is not surprising that Wittgenstein should say: 'I cannot characterize my position better than by saying that it is opposed to the one which Socrates represents in the Platonic dialogues' [TS:302 quoted in WD:114].

**4.**

In the *Theaetetus*, which was probably written shortly after the *Republic*, Plato abandons several of the earlier dialogue's claims about knowledge: for example, that there is a world of Forms, and that the empirical world cannot be the object of knowledge.[14] However, he also introduces several new ideas about knowledge, one of which is that it ultimately rests on metaphysically simple objects [T:201d–202d].[15] In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein makes clear that this is not an advance, but simply a new

false idealization, and quotes a long section from the *Theaetetus* to illustrate this general temptation:

> 46. What lies behind the idea that names really signify simples? – Socrates says this to Theaetetus: 'If I make no mistake, I have heard some people say this: there is no definition of the primary elements – so to speak – out of which we and everything are composed; for everything that exists in its own right can only be *named*, no other determination is possible, neither that it *is* nor that it *is not*... But what exists in its own right has to be named without any other determination. In consequence it is impossible to give an account of any primary element; for it, nothing is possible but the bare name; its name is all it has. But just as what consists of these primary elements is itself complex, so the names of the elements become descriptive language by being compounded together. For the essence of speech is the composition of names.'
>
> Both Russell's 'individuals' and my 'objects' (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) were such primary objects. [PI] [T:201e–202b]

Wittgenstein argues that the notions of simple and complex cannot be understood outside of the context of a specific language game; there is no, as it were, absolute and unconditioned notion of simplicity or complexity:

> 47. But what are the simple constituent parts of which reality is composed? – What are the simple constituents of a chair? – The bits of wood of which it is made? Or the molecules, or the atoms? – 'Simple' means: not composite. And here the point is: in what sense 'composite'? It makes no sense at all to speak of the 'simple parts of a chair'. [PI]

If you think that the meaning of the word 'red' is to be found in the class of existing red objects, then it becomes difficult to understand how sentences containing the word 'red' can retain their meaning in a world which – perhaps only for a short time – lacks objects of this colour: how, for example, could the sentence 'There are no red objects' ever be meaningfully asserted? The positing of a Form of Redness, which exists unchangingly in a realm beyond the physical, is one way of solving this difficulty [PI:§57]. Similarly, the temptation to posit abstract objects which exist in queer and non-physical ways can arise

when we misunderstand intentional verbs. In the *Republic*, Socrates argues that knowledge can only be about that which exists [R:476e–477b]; and in the *Theaetetus*, he applies a very similar argument to thought. Again, Wittgenstein quotes the relevant section to illustrate the general temptation:

> 518. Socrates to Theaetetus: 'And if someone thinks mustn't he think something?' – Th: 'Yes, he must.' – Soc: 'And if he thinks something, mustn't it be something real?' – Th.: 'Apparently.' [PI][T:189a]

Just as before, Wittgenstein argues this confusion arises through confusing one class of words with another, a confusion which arises through not looking carefully enough at the contexts in which the relevant words are used. If we contemplate the verbs 'eating' and 'kicking' then it is certainly true that one can only eat or kick something real, and this might lead us to suppose that that we can only think or imagine real things too. But if we consider another kind of verb – 'painting', for example – then we feel no temptation to conclude that we cannot paint fictional subjects:

> And mustn't someone who is painting be painting something – and someone who is painting something be painting something real! – Well, tell me what the object of painting is: the picture of a man (e.g.), or the man that the picture portrays? [PI:§518][See also PG:§90; BT:170e, 270e]

Once we realize you can paint non-existent or fictional subjects, we find no difficulty in concluding that one can think about non-existent or fictional subjects too.

**5.**

One point where Wittgenstein acknowledges that his own *later* conception of philosophy comes close to Plato's concerns the question of memory. Norman Malcolm writes:

> Wittgenstein once observed in a lecture that there was a similarity between his conception of philosophy [...] and the Socratic doctrine that knowledge is reminiscence: although he believed that there were other things involved with the latter. [MM:44. See also WML:17]

Neither the *Republic* nor *Theaetetus* argue that all knowledge – or even all philosophical knowledge – involves memory, and it thus seems likely that Wittgenstein is here thinking of an earlier dialogue from Plato's middle period – the *Meno* (and possibly the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* too). In the *Meno*, Socrates makes a slave boy discover the answer to a geometrical problem simply by asking him questions and without asserting any information. When the boy arrives at the correct answer, and sees why it is true, Socrates concludes that all genuine knowledge is actually reminiscence, that we all retain memories of a former life amongst the Forms, and that the soul is immortal [ME:81e–86c].

Wittgenstein seems to have been impressed by several aspects of Plato's practice. First, philosophy is not taught by passing on information, but by making an interlocutor realize and recognize something for himself. Second, the most effective way to bring this about is to prompt the interlocutor, and one of the easiest ways to achieve this is through asking him questions: '[...] Philosophy could be taught (cf. Plato) just by asking the right questions so as to remind you – [...]' [LPP:45. See also MM:28]. This conception of philosophy finds its most natural home in conversation, and this kind of conversation is most naturally written up in dialogue form.

There are thus two similarities between Wittgenstein's and Socrates' conception of philosophical enlightenment, but Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical knowledge certainly does not involve holding that *all* genuine knowledge is reminiscence, or that we have enjoyed a previous life amongst the Forms, or that the soul is immortal. These, presumably, are the 'other things' in Socrates' outlook which Wittgenstein felt no inclination to share.

Socrates and Wittgenstein are surely wrong, however, to think that, just because their methods involve recognition, they must also involve memory and reminiscence. Both philosophers are interested in clarifying our use of words:[16] Socrates is interested in definitions (although none of the Socratic dialogues succeeds in arriving at such a definition);[17] Wittgenstein is interested in looking at examples of word usage in particular contexts. These methods require us, in Austin's words, to consider 'what we should say when' [PP:181], and they can both bring about enlightenment because it is possible to know *how* to a use a particular word without knowing *that* you use it in such-and-such a way. When, in the face of another's prompting, we suddenly realize that we *do* say this but *don't* say that in a certain context, then this can bring with it the shock and

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delight of recognition: we feel that we were already in possession of the requisite data, but had not seen a pattern or drawn the conclusion the data allowed.

If you think that this new awareness depends on reminiscence and reminder, then it is natural to think that Plato's doctrine, that all knowledge is reminiscence, is just an explicit metaphysical exaggeration of something that was implicit and unpretentiously true in the real Socrates' philosophical practice.

Although the idea that the real Socrates' and Wittgenstein's methods depend on memory is attractive, it is also false: recognition of correct word use does not depend on memory, except insofar as speaking a language has to be learnt in the past and not completely forgotten, i.e., forgotten to the extent that we cannot even recognize correctness when it is shown to us. The contexts in which the segment of language under investigation is used can be entirely fictional (either made up for the occasion or drawn from a work of fiction), and do not have to be taken from a speakers' past life or from factual sources about the past.

It is certainly true that philosophical knowledge involves recognizing rather than being informed, but the manifest etymology of 'recognition' (i.e., re-cognition) should not lead us to suppose that the person recognizing already knows or has in some sense seen the thing he recognizes before. If we recognize a person, then we must have seen him (or some likeness) before; but there are cases of recognition where prior knowledge of this kind is not required. For example, if I go shopping for a desk-lamp, and someone asks what kind of desk-lamp I want to buy, a reasonable reply might be: 'I don't know, but I'll recognize the right one when I see it.' There is clearly no implication here that I know, at any level, what the lamp I want to buy looks like, or that I have in some way encountered it (or a likeness) on a previous occasion. In the same way, I might recognize the solution to an equation, or agree that a certain English word could be used in such-and-such a way, even though I have never encountered such a solution or use of English before. Not all recognition involves recollection; not all prompting is reminding.

In this context, therefore, the true analogy between Wittgenstein and the real Socrates is that their methods depend on prompting (especially questioning) and recognizing; the true analogy between Wittgenstein and the fictionalized Socrates who speaks in the *Meno* is that both are under the misapprehension that prompting and recognizing involves reminder and reminiscence.[18]

## 6.

Wittgenstein's most extended discussion of Plato's method and literary form is found in the conversations with Bouwsma. Because these are records of comparatively unstructured discussions, Wittgenstein's criticisms are not always found in one place, and criticisms of one aspect of Plato's views are often intertwined with criticisms of another. Accordingly, in this section, I shall slightly reorder Bouwsma's reports while retaining his words.

The first aspect of Plato's work which Wittgenstein finds unsatisfactory is his use of the interlocutor:

> [Plato's] pretence of discussion! [...] The Socratic method! [...] [T]he pretence of discussion [is] too obvious [...] As for the Socratic method in the dialogues, it simply isn't there. The interlocutors are ninnies, never have any arguments of their own, say 'Yes' and 'No' as Socrates pleases they should. They are a stupid lot. No one really contends against Socrates. [...] He made fun of these stool pigeons in the dialogues. He cited the *Parmenides* as a dialogue in which you got no discussion and also got no pretence of any discussion. In contrast is the *Theaetetus*. The young man Theaetetus is introduced as a promising, bright youngster, but he shows none of this. He has no fight in him at all. Why doesn't he make a stand? Socrates arguing with these weaklings! [WC:60–61]

Wittgenstein makes extensive use of an interlocutor or interlocutors in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and there is good evidence that his adoption of this literary device was influenced by Plato.

At some point before 1937, it must have struck Wittgenstein that a form of interlocutor would help solve a profound difficulty he felt with the idea of *written* philosophy. Wittgenstein viewed his work as therapeutic [PI:§133]: he wanted to make a subject aware of the unconscious picture that was cramping his thoughts and to replace it with a better one. Clearly, because we speak similar languages and live in similar cultures, we shall often be open to the same temptations, but equally clearly, how the philosopher should make his subject aware of his difficulties, and how the subject might be prompted into curing them, could vary between one person and another. In the same way, there are basic psychoanalytic temptations and principles, but every conversation between an analyst and his patient will be different.

This raises the following questions: if the most natural form of psychoanalysis or philosophy is a conversation between one person and another, and the aim is not to produce a theory but to clear and clarify someone's consciousness, how can a *written* text bring about this cure in an unknown reader? How can the author know what problems, tastes and inclinations a particular reader has? How can an author know when a particular example has been successful? How can he know when a reminder or summary is required? It is these problems which explain Wittgenstein's experiments with literary form in the 1930s (the straightforward prose exposition of the *Blue Book*, the list of puzzles and puzzling cases found in the *Brown Book*), and his frequently expressed despair about ever writing anything worthwhile: 'The remarks which I write enable me to teach philosophy well, but not to write a book' [*Nachlass* 1937, quoted in PH:193–4]. Like Plato, he felt that a good philosophy book could only be written by someone who realized the task was impossible [L7:431d].

As in Plato, the use of the interlocutor solves at least some of these difficulties. The interlocutor can, to an extent, go proxy for the reader: he can state the reader's own likely views, raise difficulties with examples, request summaries; and this can only facilitate the effect Wittgenstein intends to bring about in the reader's consciousness. The written dialogue form is not a way of making philosophical prose more entertaining; it is the least inadequate substitute – adopted by Wittgenstein with deep misgiving – for oral conversation between the philosopher and his subject.[19]

Was this solution prompted by Wittgenstein's reading of Plato? As I have already shown, Wittgenstein read a good deal of Plato from mid-1931 onwards, and by 1950 he claimed that Plato was the only philosopher he read. Plato was also greatly exercised by the problems of how to find a sympathetic philosophical audience [P:275e–276e], and how to turn true philosophy into writing [L7:341c–341e], and he solved them – or at least came as close as possible to solving them – by writing in dialogue form. It thus seems natural to think that, having struggled to find solutions to his own similar writing problems, Wittgenstein adopted Plato's solution of using a form of written dialogue. Of course, Wittgenstein's solution to his problem may have been entirely original, and it may only be fortuitous that it akin to Plato's solution to his own similar problems. But Wittgenstein appears not to have read any other philosophical works written in dialogue or dialogic form, and thus it is hard to imagine a philosophical origin for the form of the *Investigations* apart from Plato.[20]

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To a limited extent, the tone and character of the disputants in Plato's and Wittgenstein's work are also analogous. There are at least two voices in the *Investigations* – sometimes characterized as the 'voice of temptation' and 'the voice of correction' – and it is striking that the latter is rarely overtly helpful or illustrative. It gives the impression of knowing more than it is prepared to say, and tends to be gnomic, elusive and evasive. For example, it is given to uttering strange confessions ('I am inclined to suppose that a mouse has come into being by spontaneous generation our of grey rags and dust' [PI:§52]), and asking baffling questions: 'Try this experiment: say the numbers from 1 to 12. Now look at the dial of your watch and *read* them. – What was it that you called "reading" in the latter case?' [PI:§160]. There is certainly something Socratic in these devices – they are intended to stop someone in his tracks and make them reflect, rather than elicit a straightforward answer – and this too would seem to indicate that there is some Platonic influence on the dialogic form of the *Investigations*.[21]

There are two important reasons why Wittgenstein demands strong interlocutors. First, if the interlocutor is to go proxy for the intelligent reader, then the questions he asks and the views he expresses must be as tough and plausible as possible. Wittgenstein's contempt for many of Plato's middle-period interlocutors is therefore understandable. The same reason also helps motivate one of his worries about the legitimacy of Socrates' argumentative procedures: 'Socrates, who always reduces the Sophist to silence – does he reduce him to silence *rightfully*? – It's true, the Sophist does not know what he thinks he knows; but that is no triumph for Socrates. It can neither be a case of "You see! You don't know it!" – nor, triumphantly, "So none of us knows anything!"' [CV:64e]. There is clearly no point in having interlocutors over whom the philosopher can triumph illegitimately, because this will leaves the intelligent reader's concerns untouched and unanswered.[22]

Second, the dialogic form of the *Investigations*, unlike the straightforward dialogue form of most of Plato's work, means that it can suggest not only a conversation between one person and another, but one person talking to himself, and trying, not to present a conclusion, but to thrash out a difficulty. Wittgenstein was sufficiently struck by Plato's suggestion, in the *Theaetetus* [189e–190], that thinking is a form of internal conversation, to make a note of the remark ('Plato says that thinking is conversation' [RPP:I:180]), and he was equally clear that philosophy could be thought of as a kind of conversation – sometimes out loud, sometimes to oneself – between one half of a person and the

other: 'Almost the whole time I am writing conversations with myself. Things I say to myself tête-à-tête' [CV:88e].[23]

If writing must mirror the philosopher in the process of self-analysis and in the process of overcoming his own temptations, then using sophistical arguments and stool-pigeons as interlocutors can only ensure failure. Indeed, the interlocutors in Wittgenstein's writings are sometimes so effective that he is not sure which voice represents his true self. On occasion, the two voices cancel one another out altogether: as Wittgenstein once said when someone offered to publish his works: 'But see, I write one sentence, and then I write another – just the opposite. And which shall stand?' [WC:73].

**7.**

Wittgenstein's second main objection to Plato is the discreteness and crispness of his arguments:

> Plato's [...] arguments were bad [...] they're too formal, too neat. There's no groping. It's X or Y or Z. When you're looking for something you go and look closely, if you think D is in a certain place, and if it isn't there you look somewhere nearby. You don't go from X and run over somewhere to Z (pointing back over his head). (This no doubt has something to do with the difference between Plato's conception of Ideas, and W.'s own notion of family resemblances.) Plato's view involves this discreteness of ideas: X or Y or Z. W.'s is more like: X or not quite X or a little bit more. Entering a room and looking for something, you do not stand and say: 'Here or There or There.' You look about and move slowly about, pausing, taking second views, etc. (Actually, it all depends. But in any case, with respect to Socrates' subjects, one must grope –step forward and perhaps back again and shuffling along, turning and feeling one's way – slowly [...] [WC:60–61]

Plato, as a logician and mathematician, aims to know how things must be at the most abstract level, and, for much of his middle period, only regards knowledge of necessary truths as genuine knowledge. Wittgenstein conceives of this view as a philosophical temptation: '[A] preconceived idea to which reality must correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily when doing philosophy)' [PI:§131]. Instead, he directs our attention to the messiness, the rough ground [PI:§107], of everyday life, and advises us to '*look and see* [...] to repeat:

don't think, but look!' [PI:§66]. Plato, as I've already noted, takes a dim view of the senses, but Wittgenstein is more than happy to think of philosophical knowledge in quasi-perceptual terms.

Given this way of conceiving matters, it is not surprising that Wittgenstein frequently thinks of himself as an artist rather than logician: he describes the *Philosophical Investigations* as 'an album' of 'sketches' [PI:vii] and remarks that 'Everything that comes my way becomes for me a picture [...]' [CV:36e], '[...] and what I basically am after all is a painter & often a very bad painter' [CV:95e]. Plato has a low opinion of artists and their pretensions, and, for him, such a comparison is clearly unthinkable. This distrust of artists is one further reason why Plato does not base his ultimate explanations on concrete models and analogies.

## 8.

Wittgenstein's third main objection to Plato's procedure is his use of irony: 'The Socratic irony! [...] [It is] distasteful – why can't a man be forthright and say what's on his mind?' [WC:60].

Some have claimed that Wittgenstein's style is ironic. Judith Genova, for example, writes: '[Wittgenstein and Socrates] shared a riddling, ironic style and managed to have dramatic effects on those with whom they came into contact' [WWS:7]. There are certainly suggestions, as I have already argued, of Socrates' manner in the *Investigations*' voice of correction – hints of knowing more than it says, questioning, elusiveness and so on – but one can clearly exhibit all these traits without being ironic. This is because, as Gregory Currie has recently argued [NN:148–166], irony involves *pretence*, and there is no hint of pretence in either Wittgenstein's personal manner or his writings.[24] In fact, in conformity with the outlook of *Jung Wien*, Wittgenstein was passionate about the alignment of inner and outer, and demanded that the surface must represent the reality within.[25] And while the voice of correction does not display Wittgenstein's tortured irritability, its tone does not require the projection of an invented persona. Wittgenstein should not be thought infallible on his aims and methods, but his own avowed distaste for philosophical irony lends some support to the idea that neither he nor the voice of correction employs it.

Irony can be amused and/or bitter. Socrates is never bitter, but he is often amused; and he and his interlocutors frequently laugh in the dialogues, even when death is imminent (e.g., PHA:64b, 77e, 115c). But

while Wittgenstein thought jokes had a place in philosophy, he rarely permitted himself more than a tight grin, and chuckles were discouraged in class: 'He would not tolerate a facetious tone in his classes,' writes Malcolm, 'the tone that is characteristic of philosophical discussion among clever people who have no serious purpose' [MM:27–8]; and Geach once observed that his classes looked like Quaker prayer meetings [MM:45].

Wittgenstein is the very opposite of ironic, but he has one stylistic feature which performs the same function as Socrates' irony – his characteristic obscurity. In general, one has only to think of the variety of interpretations projected onto the discussions of rule-following [e.g., PI:§202] or private language [e.g., PI:§293] to see how obscure Wittgenstein's style is. More specifically, one might consider how one sets about decoding remarks like, 'If a lion could talk, we could not understand him,' [PI:223] or 'One might say: the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated about the fixed point of our real need' [PI:§108]. These examples make clear that three persistent difficulties in reading Wittgenstein are overcoming his characteristic compression, establishing the precise scope of his remarks, and trying to discover how one remark fits in with those around it.

Such obscurity brings the listener's mind into operation. We are puzzled, we back-track, we try alternative meanings, test them for truth, feel satisfied with this interpretation, compare what someone is saying here with what he says in another places, frame hypotheses about his general line of thought, and so on. Evidently, irony works in the same way; in fact, irony is just one way of being obscure, of not saying explicitly what you mean. Thus obscurity ensures 'one must grope – step forward and perhaps back again and [shuffle] along, turning and feeling one's way – slowly [...]' [WC:61].

Collecting true sentences and registering literal meanings is an essentially passive activity. Such sentences are easily forgotten and they are unlikely to help clarify the collector's ideas. But by using irony or other forms of obscurity, a philosopher can make his listener or reader *work*, engage in mental *actions*, and this both fixes truths in his head and helps clarify his existing ideas because these must have been used in the interpretative process. We can thus see that Wittgenstein's use of obscurity is of a piece with his preference for analogies and questions: both ensure there is a perpetual dialogic interplay between the reader and what he reads.

However, Wittgenstein only offers his three main criticisms with some degree of hesitation, and is quite prepared to acknowledge that

he judges from a position of ignorance: 'Perhaps Plato is no good, perhaps he's very good. How should I know? But if he is good, he's doing something which is foreign to us. We do not understand. Perhaps if I could read Greek!' [WC:61].

**9.**

There are several points where Wittgenstein seems to share Plato's tastes and opinions – on the value of analogies, on the role of recognition in philosophical method, on the importance of the dialogue form – although closer examination suggests that they value different aspects of these things and for different reasons. More frequently, the two philosophers appear to be straightforward opposites: on the question of philosophy's goal, the nature of ideas, the most effective kinds of argument, and irony. But being the opposite of something is just one way of being very like it (just as a mirror image differs in only one way from an image). Despite Wittgenstein's misgivings, the fact that he felt he could usefully enter into dialogue with Plato, and that it is possible to say they agree about one thing but disagree about another, suggests – in spite of huge differences in time, culture, place and language – that they share a remarkable commonality of outlook, interest, and intellectual temper.

### Notes

This chapter is a companion piece to my 'Wittgenstein, Plato, and the Historical Socrates' *Philosophy*, 82, 2007, pp. 45–85. In that paper, I concentrate on similarities between Wittgenstein and the historical Socrates; in this chapter, I shift my emphasis and look largely at *Wittgenstein's* attitude to the platonic inheritance, and the dissimilarities between Wittgenstein and middle-period Plato.

1. I would like to thank Oskari Kuusela, Sean Mcconnell, Catherine Rowett, and Rupert Read for making very useful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.
2. Where possible, I refer to Wittgenstein's texts by paragraph numbers; otherwise I use page references. All other books are referred to by page references.
3. Quite a few of the references in this paragraph contain repetitions or close paraphrases of earlier remarks. In particular, the *Philosophical Grammar*, a work envisaged by Wittgenstein but put together by later editors, is largely based on material from the *Big Typescript*.
4. These paragraphs only form a brief sketch of Wittgenstein's interest in Plato. Wittgenstein's habit of repeating remarks between one work and another,

and of cutting up and reassembling his manuscripts, together with lost and incomplete manuscripts, scholarly confusion about when passages were written, and the rather unsystematic early publication of Wittgenstein's posthumous works, means that tracing precisely how and when Plato influenced Wittgenstein would be a major scholarly undertaking. Generally, I've found von Wright's 'The Wittgenstein Papers' in [LWCA:1–21], and David Stern's [WML:54] extremely helpful.

5. In this chapter, I follow received scholarly opinion on the Socratic question. Generally, I am treating all of Plato's dialogues up to the *Gorgias* as rational reconstructions of what the historical Socrates actually said; the dialogues which follow the *Gorgias*, I regard as increasingly Platonic. The 'Socrates' shown in these later dialogues – although he clearly still has strong connections with the historical figure – is increasingly Plato's mouthpiece and literary creation. The chronology of Plato's dialogues I am using can be found in [EPS:5].

Wittgenstein often uses the names 'Socrates' and 'Plato' interchangeably. For example, in [RFM:§71] and [RPP:I:180], Wittgenstein asserts remarks made by Socrates in the dialogues to be Plato's opinions. And Bouwsma reports Wittgenstein as passing from Plato to Socrates in the following manner: 'Plato's arguments! His pretence of discussion! The Socratic irony! The Socratic method! The arguments were bad, the pretence of discussion too obvious [...]' [WC:60]. There seems to be no sense that an important transition has been made here. It thus seems reasonable to conclude that there is no reason to believe that Wittgenstein thinks of Plato's Socrates as a character in a drama whose opinions need not be the same as his creator's.

Wittgenstein appears to be equally loose in his use of 'Socratic' and 'Platonic'. In [MM:44], Malcolm reports Wittgenstein as saying that the idea that philosophical knowledge is based on memory is a 'Socratic' doctrine, whereas the view is generally thought to be a middle-period Platonic view and not held by the historical Socrates. [SI:48] In TS:302 [Quoted WD:114], Wittgenstein expresses his disagreement with 'Socrates [...] in the Platonic dialogues,' whereas there is no reason to suppose he disagrees any less with the Socrates represented in the Socratic dialogues. In many passages, Wittgenstein takes the *Theaetetus* to show Socrates' normal mode of proceeding, whereas this dialogue is now generally thought to be a middle-period Platonic work which vastly expands the elenctic method used by the historical Socrates and found in the early Socratic dialogues [SI:266].

6. Wittgenstein owned very few books, and his respect for Plato is shown by the fact that, at the end of his life, he owned a number of volumes of Plato in Preisendanz's German translation (1908–25). David Stern mentions fives volumes [WML:54], but searches of German bibliographies and libraries suggest that only four were ever published. It is possible that one of Wittgenstein's volumes was a duplicate or second edition.

7. The following remark, written just over three weeks later than the one quoted in this paragraph, could also be read as disparaging: 'I read: "philosophers are no nearer to the meaning of 'Reality' than Plato got;..." What a singular situation. How singular then that Plato has been able to get even as far as he did! Or that we could get no further afterwards! Was it because Plato was *so* clever?' [CV:22e]. But this strikes me as double-edged. On the

one hand, it is sceptical about Plato; on the other, it is sceptical about people who believe that philosophical problems are like scientific problems, and amenable to the same kind of progress.

8. If we compare this remark from 1950 with the remark from *Culture and Value* quoted above (from 1931) then we can see not only a growth of interest but also a change of emphasis. In 1931, Wittgenstein is contemptuous of Plato's *arguments*; in 1950, he admires Plato's *myths*.

9. Empson's remark, where is talking about metaphor in particular, is mentioned in [MWM:79]

10. Wittgenstein's affinities with Romanticism are discussed in my 'Goethe and Wittgenstein' and 'Wittgenstein's Romantic Inheritance,' both in [PAL:1–21 and 46–72].

11. Plato's prisoner is also kept captive by his chains, but the shadows' fascination ensures he finds his fetters of no consequence.

12. As these statements indicate, I accept the authenticity of [L7]; indeed, it strikes me as one of the most interesting documents in the Platonic canon (not that this is a good reason for accepting its authenticity).

13. Wittgenstein said to his pupil Drury: 'Don't think I despise metaphysics or ridicule it. On the contrary, I regard the great metaphysical writings of the past as amongst the noblest productions of the human mind' [DW:105].

14. Some have argued that the fact the *Theaetetus* does not end in agreement shows that the Forms *are* necessary for grounding knowledge.

15. Neither Plato nor Socrates is shown to endorse this view about simple objects. It is introduced for discussion and then rejected.

16. Socrates may not believe that his method involves examining our use of words, but in actual fact it does.

17. Drury suggested to Wittgenstein that the uniform failure of all attempts to define terms in the Socratic dialogues may be Plato's way of demonstrating that (some) terms are indefinable [RW:116]. This, of course, would imply that Plato and Wittgenstein had a common view of the matter.

18. In this section, I have revised the views I expressed in 'Wittgenstein, Plato, and the Historical Socrates', pp. 60–62.

19. The whole question of Plato's influence on Wittgenstein's way of writing philosophy is examined in more detail in 'Wittgenstein, Plato, and the Historical Socrates,' pp. 79–85.

20. The *Investigations'* dialogic form may, of course, have other non-philosophical sources. In 'Wittgenstein's Romantic Inheritance' I explore the use of inner dialogue in Christian and Romantic literature known to Wittgenstein.

21. I would like to thank Andrei Nasta for making this point to me.

22. The quoted thoughts lead Wittgenstein to reflect on the differences between his own and Socrates' aims and methods: 'Because I don't want to think *just* to convict myself, or even someone else, of unclarity[,] I am not trying to understand something *simply* in order to see that I still do not understand it' [CV:64e]. It is clearly contentious to say that Socrates' overriding aim is to show that people (including himself) who claim to know something actually know nothing; it seems more accurate to say that he himself wants to know, and that his showing up of his own and others' ignorance is simply a necessary stage on the way. Once this point is made,

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one can see that Wittgenstein's project is analogous: he wants to clear away false knowledge-claims, philosophical houses of cards [PI:§118], in order to achieve a perspicuous overview of some field of phenomena.

23. It is worth noting that Socrates sometimes enters into dialogue with himself, e.g., [G:506e–507], and [T:195c–195d].

24. Unfortunately, I do not have space for a full discussion of what irony is. However, the following quotation from the Fowler's, although it requires a little adjustment to bring it in line with Currie's analysis, provides a helpful hint: '[Irony is] the use of words intended to convey one meaning to the uninitiated part of the audience and another to the initiated, the delight of it lying in the secret intimacy set up between the latter and the speaker' [MEU:306].

25. The contrast between inner to outer is a feature of Socrates which interested Wittgenstein. Bouwsma reports: 'He thought of the description of Socrates as outwardly a monster and all beauty within. (This he referred to the *Phaedrus*, but I think he meant the *Symposium*.) On this he said: 'Now there is something which I think I can understand' [WC:50]. Perhaps this was because he thought it was the opposite of his own case. He famously felt he was full of inner foulness and yet he was strikingly beautiful in appearance: 'Few could withstand your haggard beauty,' wrote I. A. Richards [M:290]; and in the opening chapter of his book, *Wittgenstein: A Critique*, J. N. Finlay remarks: 'I found him at the age of 41, of a quite unbelievable personal beauty, such as might be attributed to the Apollo one visits at Olympia, or the Norse Sun-god Baldur' [WAC:19]. The fact that someone feels that inner and outer should be in complete alliance does not mean, of course, that he or anyone else has achieved it.

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# 6
# Writing and Communicating Philosophy: Consonances between Plato and Wittgenstein

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## 1. Introduction

If we consider Plato's and Wittgenstein's conceptions of philosophy we cannot but be struck by the paradoxical form of their most celebrated argumentations – we refer, in particular, to Plato's criticism of writing in the *Phaedrus*, or to the call for silence that concludes Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Our essay asks whether this surface consonance points to deeper consonances between the two philosophers' conceptions of philosophy and of writing and communicating philosophy. Our investigation will follow the methodology of the analysis of language games elaborated by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*; that is, by showing the similarities and the differences between the two conceptions through an *Übersicht*,[1] a synoptic view that does not presuppose criteria of comparison but makes them emerge from a consideration of the two philosophical horizons surveyed together.[2]

## 2. Plato

### 2.1 The enigma of Plato the writer

The only somewhat reliable testimony given by Plato himself on his intentions as a writer is his *Letter VII*. If we accept its authenticity,[3] the *Letter* tells us something about the philosophical vocation of an otherwise evasive author – one who not only never speaks about himself or in his own name, but who gives voice to a host of other characters on the scene of his dialogues, from which he is glaringly absent.[4]

Unlike the dialogues, the account we find in the *Letter* takes the form of an autobiographical reconstruction,[5] moving with rapid flashbacks between the ethico-political awakening of the young Plato (driven to disgust for political activity by the sight of the civil war in Athens, at the end of the fifth century) and the theoretical reflections of the old philosopher, who denies he was able to communicate the precious knowledge of philosophy to the tyrant of Syracuse (whose guest and teacher he was for a short time), for the good reason that:

> it is not something that can be put into words (*rheton*) like other branches of learning (*mathemata*); only after long partnership (*synousia*) in a common life (*synzen*) devoted to this very thing does truth flash suddenly (*exaiphnes*) upon the soul, like a flame kindled by a leaping spark (*phos*), and once it is born there it nourishes itself thereafter.[6]

The attention of the interpreters has quite rightly been drawn to the declarations of the *Letter* on this point concerning the nature of philosophical knowledge – declarations that, while in truth rather elliptical, are highly exacting in their implications. Rejecting the idea that Dionysius could have put in writing what he had learned from him, Plato (or the author of the letter for him) denies in general that anyone can ever claim to 'know the things in which I am engaged (*spoudazo*)', and above all peremptorily asserts that 'on these things no *syngramma* (writing, treatise, compendium) of mine exists or will ever exist'. These are surprising declarations, if we take them to be an authentic expression of the late maturity of Plato,[7] who throughout his life devoted such great care to the writing of dialogues. However they be interpreted, they call into question the Platonic conception of knowledge and the modalities with which it can or cannot, in his view, be communicated and transmitted to others. Whoever accepts the authenticity of the *Letter* cannot keep from wondering what types of knowledge Plato is distinguishing philosophy from and what path to knowledge he is proposing, as an alternative to a synthesis that may be codified in formulas and entrusted to a written text.

On the other hand, even if the exegetes should be tempted to exclude the problematic philosophical *excursus* of the *Letter* from their investigation of the intentions of Plato the writer, one has inevitably to face the well-known passages of the *Phaedrus*[8] (one of the most complex of the Platonic dialogues, whose authenticity is unquestioned), which raised equally disquieting questions on the possibility

of transmitting knowledge through writing, the means of expression that in the Socratic–Platonic epoch was revolutionizing the (oral and poetic) traditional forms of *paideia*.[9] Here, an Egyptian fable is the occasion for Socrates to accuse the god Theuth, the inventor of writing, of having not saved but damaged human memory with his 'pharmakon': the expropriation of knowledge and the repetition of empty formulas will be the formative result obtained by those who place their trust in writing. But the attempt to derive genuine knowledge from writing will be all the more dramatic and disquieting when one realizes that a piece of writing (like the motionless portrait of a living person) does nothing but eternally repeat itself, without the ability to answer questions or defend itself against bad interpretations. Later, we shall discuss the questions raised by this extremely dense passage more analytically. For now, we note the alienating effect of the context of communication upon a reflection that concerns the modalities of communicating: how can one ignore the paradox generated by a text in which Socrates, the philosopher, declares that what can be transmitted in a text is of no use for philosophical education? It is this paradox that transformed the few, intense passages of the criticism of writing in the *Phaedrus* into the possibility of calling into question the widespread (but only after Schleiermacher[10]) conviction that Plato's philosophy is completely expressed in his dialogues.

As we know, the explicit mention of writing as a form of communication that is inadequate for the transmission of the 'most precious things' (*timiotera*)[11] of philosophy has induced some of Plato's interpreters to look outside the written dialogues, in the oral communication (originally reserved for members of the Academy and presumably conserved in the indirect tradition), for the most important results of his investigations, the true doctrines of his philosophy. But this type of study, whose foundations and results we shall not discuss here, is far indeed from exhausting the complexity of the questions raised by the very existence of a philosophical writing such as Plato's, in which the function of the author and his possible demonstrative intentions are carefully concealed in the dialogical form. This permits Plato, the philosopher, to shift the burden of the novelty of a certain discursive practice and the anomaly of a life choice onto the shoulders of Socrates; at the same time, it does not permit the reader to simplify Plato's communication by identifying the author with his character. On the contrary, the reader has no choice but to retrace the difficulties, the risks, and at times the inconclusiveness of a discoursing that seeks to discover (and to speak) the truth.

To extricate oneself from the paradox of a discourse on writing that patently belittles the contents of the communication it contains, one can stop and observe the form it presents to the reader, and attempt to discover – in this dialogue form that is so opaque to the quest for the author's intentions – some element that can clarify the meaning of philosophical communication for Plato.

## 2.2   The dialogue form and Plato's use of Socrates

Plato was not the only one to use the dialogue form for *post mortem* communications of Socrates, a leading figure in Athenian culture of the fifth century BC whose life story gave rise to an editorial phenomenon so imposing that it came to be considered a new literary genre, the *logoi sokratikoi*.[12] But Plato was perhaps the only one to represent Socrates as the natural prototype of an entirely new kind of intellectual figure, that is, as a benchmark for the claims of every other intellectual figure of public prestige (poets, priests, naturalists, sages, politicians, skilled craftsmen, rhetoricians).[13] In Plato, Socrates is not only the wise and authoritative friend, acclaimed master of the art of discussion and of *savoir-vivre* for the group of his habitual interlocutors (as he appears in Xenophon and, in a caricatural version, even in Aristophanes), but is the philosopher engaged in a journey of reflection for the most part autonomous, who, moreover, seeks to involve his interlocutors in a common investigation. Therefore, in Socrates' manner of dialoguing with others, in his way of buttonholing them and getting them involved in his discourse designed to make it thoroughly clear what it is possible to say on a subject, we can expect to see the representation of a practice that Plato recognized as philosophy. What Socrates does in the Platonic theater is to show how a natural philosopher acts – which he is by *theia moira*.[14] And it is worthy of note that the character claims *atopia* to be his distinctive trait: the typicality of thinking atypically within a culture, within a shared tradition. At what point, between historical reality and literary fiction, Plato's representation of Socrates can be placed is probably undecidable. What is certain, however, is that in Plato's construction of the character he is the bearer of an intellectual and ethical novelty in the cultural panorama of the fifth century *polis*; and it is in the character's way of acting that we can look for what Plato meant by 'doing philosophy'.

## 2.3   The dialogue with the city

The philosophical practice to which the character, Socrates, bears witness consists in the commitment to discuss questions of ethical,

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political, or cognitive importance (questions that, in any case, are initially in no way abstract) with interlocutors that are never totally anonymous,[15] but are endowed with precise connotations of role, of skill, of language. The result is a representation – for a plurality of voices – of Periclean and post-Periclean Athens, a sort of theater of the city of Socrates, in which the philosopher appears at the centre of a network of cultural references, in dialogue with characters who are concretely or symbolically recognizable (even when their names do not precisely tally), invited to air the reasons for their opinions and, above all, for the criteria that govern their behaviours. The historical realism of this representation is an important innovation with respect to what the tragic theatre had already done with the reinvention of myth, bringing onto the stage the problematic contents of contemporary civil consciousness and projecting them into a timeless dimension, as possible keys to the interpretation of stories already known. If, in this way, tragedy had become the mirror in which the city could recognize itself, reweaving the threads of common memory through the ancient language of poetry, in Plato we find the reinvention of the recent past, with the opening up of dramatic spaces focused on the few decades in which the hegemony of great fifth-century Athens was played out: credible dialogues and identifiable voices rendering a collective event whose effects, in Plato's day, were not yet exhausted. Here it is history (a genuinely tragic history) that is rethought, literarily and politically. And the care with which Plato mimetically reproduces the voices of the city is part of a precise strategy to reconstruct the public memory, where the voice of the philosopher is called upon to play a decisive role.

The importance of the representational aspects for an understanding of the meaning Plato attached to the practice of philosophy has long been concealed by the prevailing interest in extracting the theoretical and methodological content of the dialogues from their unwieldy narrative frame. The observation that Plato seemed perfectly aware of the significance and the effects of the various means of communication utilized in his time (including the treatise form), and thus of the choices he himself made in making philosophical discourses available to the reader, has contributed to the overcoming of that which today appears to be a prejudice (the primacy of theory, as the object and aim of the philosophy of all times). Plato's awareness of these questions is confirmed by his criticism of the contents and forms of the poetic tradition in Books II, III, and X of the *Republic*, as well as by the detailed comparison of discourses and forms of communication in the second part of the

*Phaedrus*, where we also find his criticism of writing. For contemporary scholars, all this has given rise to the conviction, consolidated by a series of important studies, that in constructing the society of the dialogue Plato was responding to a very precise strategy of communication.[16] In any event, only quite recently has the importance of the dialogical structure, and of the cultural background that sustains it, emerged as a genuine object of Platonic representation – a context that is necessary if one is to show what the action of the philosopher is, as a practice rooted in a very exact cultural and political milieu.

### 2.4 Writers of discourses and writing on the soul. Reasons for the mimesis of the dialogue

The Platonic representation of the dialogues suggests, in general, that Plato wanted to draw the reader's attention to the situation of philosophical investigation even more than to its results. If we think that this is the case, our approach to the dialogues can no longer consist in wondering who the spokesperson of Plato's philosophy is, or whether, when, and in what contexts that philosophy was completely defined in theoretical form; or, again, what Plato's reasons are for refraining from giving it a clear formulation, which can be understood and analysed in its logical and doctrinaire capacity. Questions of this sort presuppose, in fact, that Plato's intention, as a philosopher, cannot but be that of constructing and communicating a philosophical theory. We note, however, that, when the question of the transmission of knowledge is raised in the dialogues, Plato's principal concern seems to be that of excluding – as an ingenuous belief – the possibility of knowledge as something that can be transferred – decanted – from one individual to another.[17] Socrates the philosopher is engaged, rather, in emphasizing the risks that this idea entails both in the sphere of culture and traditional *paideia*, and in the sphere of the new philosophical knowledge whose standard-bearer he is.

In regard to the first sphere, we have the warnings formulated in the *Republic* about the ambiguity of myths and of poetic *mimesis*, and about the risks of misunderstanding for those who are not capable of deciphering the 'hidden meaning' (*hyponoia*) of the stories correctly;[18] at a propositional level, the pedagogical indications (more explicit in the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, but spreading throughout the entire *corpus* of the dialogues) signal, on the one hand, the selective need to distinguish, from a very early age, the natural dispositions of the human types, and on the other, that of proceeding with dialogical techniques to an individualized instruction. Taken all together, the concerns that

emerge in Plato's texts signal that the possibility of practicing a philosophical *paideia* requires experiences, skills, and considerations that are far more complex than those required for the transmission of a theory. In the *Phaedrus* the question is at the centre of a vast examination of the possible efficacious use of words (starting with a brilliant parody of discourses aimed at a thesis), which leads to a total reversal of the two basic assumptions of rhetorical education: persuasion (or seduction) of the other, as the aim of communication; and indifference to the question of truth, replaced *tout court* by verisimilitude.[19] Before concentrating on writing, Socrates' criticism concerns the claims of words (in their most cultured and refined uses) to represent that which must be believed to be true, and which therefore asks to be transmitted, without variations or doubts, from one generation to another. This, in the sphere of traditional knowledge, was the strongpoint of poetry, the repository of knowledge well guarded in a formulaic and rhythmical structure, capable of impressing itself indelibly upon the memory. The same risk of formulaic repetition was to be found in rhetoric, producer of schemas and techniques of persuasion based on the use of shared convictions, while craftsmen of language such as Prodicus and Protagoras (but also the Socratic Antisthenes) taught their disciples to seek the foundations of the truth of discourse in etymology and in the correct use of names. Beginning with the *Cratylus* – where the Platonic Socrates settles accounts with this area of debate – the possibility of a perfect language based upon the correspondence between names and things is decidedly excluded as a form of human knowledge: since there is no 'divine legislator of names', truth is to be sought in the dialectical movement of discourses. The representational tension of language, as the demand to 'voice' the genuine reality of things, is most certainly at the heart of the problematic of *mimesis* developed in the *Republic*, where Socrates criticizes the poetic images that limit themselves to reproducing appearances and common opinions as educationally harmful (but, substantially, as false). However, the representational relation between words and things is only one part of the question that comes within the domain of *mimesis*.[20] In the Platonic texts, the one who is put to the test to speak the truth is always someone (the philosopher) who is seeking, in the dialogue with himself and with others, to experience it. And it is this experience – or, more precisely, the attempt to gain it through dialogue – that is concretely represented.

Understanding the background of the branches of knowledge and of real discursive practices, against which Socrates the philosopher measures himself concretely in the dialogues, is essential for understanding

the significance of the antithesis the *Phaedrus* presents between writing with ink and writing on the soul.[21] The image makes its appearance at the climax of Socrates' tirade against those who believe they do something serious by writing, because they are under the illusion that – with their writings – they conserve and transmit the things they think they know. But the only serious way of speaking, Socrates explains, is that of sowing 'seeds' of knowledge in the hearer, in order to imprint a discourse 'written with foundation (*episteme*) on the soul of the learner, which knows how to defend itself, and can distinguish between those it should address and those in whose presence it should be silent'. 'You mean the living and animate speech of a man with knowledge' – Phaedrus rejoins – 'of which written speech might fairly be called a kind of image' [shadow, *eidolon*].[22]

The antithesis expresses, then, Socrates' opposition to ancient and new teachers who transmit their presumed knowledge in repetitive formulas, while the philosopher wants to provoke a genuine learning experience with his words, capable of making an impression on the consciousness individuals have of their cognitions but irreducible to the definitory forms of a treatise or a compendium. Socrates' superiority, as a philosopher, does not lie in his possessing another truth, more deserving of being written and transmitted, but rather in his maintaining that the written formulation is not able to represent more than an 'image' of the experience of investigation that takes place in the soul and in the dialogue with itself in which the soul itself is at stake.[23] Writing, too, in this sense can play a supporting role, conserving the traces of pathways that are renewed in the live proceeding of the current investigation.[24] The thread of the metaphor 'writing on the soul' continues in the *Philebus* with the comparison between soul and book, where the responsibility for writing, correcting, and rewriting the interior discourse is entrusted to the soul's power to guide and to its dialogue with itself, which permits it to draw from experience its judgment on what is true and what is false, or only imaginary.[25] In the *Phaedrus* it is the philosopher's responsibility to occupy the center of the stage, instituting a first difference (in the name of the needs of the learner's soul) with respect to the irresponsibility of those (such as poets or rhetoricians) who speak or write without concern for the effects of their words. A second difference regards the methodological choice of the dialogue as a commitment to measure oneself continually against the other, giving preference to question-and-answer brachylogical discourse, which exposes itself to *elenchos* and avoids fixing attention on the production (and on the self-complacency) of

a definitively complete discursive formulation.[26] The *mimesis* of the dialogue thus seems to be the only way of representing philosophy, as a practice of engagement not only between individuals but between organized and codified areas of discourse. The philosopher moves between these areas, listening to their voices in order to weigh – in the present of the investigation – their claims to truth.

### 2.5 Dialogicity and conflict in Plato's anti-tragic theatre

Thus we have found the dialogue form to be constitutive of philosophy's field of action. And there is no doubt that with it Plato accepts at least some of the ambiguities he denounces in theatrical *mimesis*: the plurality of viewpoints, which cannot avoid acting in a competitive way on the spectator of the mise-en-scène; the literary density of the discursive fabric (inlaid with narrative segments responding to different linguistic codes), which intrudes on the transparency of the author's intentions of truth. How is one to decipher the interweaving of the dialogical structure? How is one to understand the gravity of Plato's engagement (through Socrates) with the figures of the great traditions of the past? In the Platonic texts there is no lack of hermeneutical indications (for example, the ones that in the *Phaedrus* point to the possibility of a heuristic use of myths) upon which it would be worthwhile to dwell, to ask how the philosopher wanted his dialogues to be read. However, the path Nussbaum (1986) traced when she called Plato's literary representation 'anti-tragic theater'[27] better serves the purpose of this essay. Reading his philosophical strategy in a (hyper) rationalistic vein, she proposed the idea that it consists in a form of well-pondered exorcism aimed at *Tyche*, Fate, and the 'fragility of goodness', in the direction of a philosophical *eudaimonia*, achieved by controlling the passions. From her point of view, then, Plato's is a theatre not of catastrophes but of resolutive dialectic, in which the philosopher is a *deus ex machina* capable of managing, through confutations and agreements, the non-tragic outcomes of a project of dominion over life.

In our opinion, the reading of the texts provides a more open and less reassuring image of the dynamic represented in Platonic theatre. The drama – which is not fictitious – resides in general terms in that conflictual dialogue that Plato, through Socrates, interweaves with the tradition present in his time, for the most part to refute it. This aspect, so characteristic of the representation of philosophy as critical knowledge, makes it difficult to apply to Plato the Gadamerian model of hermeneutic circle, which would make him an eminent part of the continuity of a tradition.[28] Here, the *homologia*, the not-to-be-taken-for-granted

anti-tragic outcome of philosophic dialoguing, appears to spring not from understanding, but rather from the fracture of the *elenchos*. What the philosopher is engaged in provoking is a genuine catastrophe, which, by overturning the meaning of key terms (such as 'justice' in the *Republic*, or 'eros' in the *Symposium*), makes it possible to find ways out of the aporias produced by the inner contradictions of the culture of the *polis*. The exposure to the risk of failure is clearly present in the difficulties of the Socrates character, whose mask is more often one of philosophic obstinacy than of the victorious and acknowledged winner of every dispute. Having Socrates enter a fray where he has to come into conflict with words charged with vital energy and intellectual resources (and not only with the meaning of names), Plato shows also the gentler aspect of his anti-tragic intention: namely, the will to reach a shared solution of reconstruction of the public memory, through the mediation of the philosopher who listens to the voices of the city. It is here that Plato sees the possibility of conserving and reawakening, through procedures of purification and making true, the good intentions (of truth and of the good) still latent in the tradition of the 'sick' city. This gives us a very serious reason for the intertextuality that characterizes Plato's writing – that is, for his parodic art deployed to conserve the expressive force of the protagonists of a great cultural age.

## 2.6  Civil society and scientific community

Let us return to *Letter VII* and to the claim made there that philosophy is a branch of knowledge different from all others. Having dealt with the negative paradox of philosophical writing, we can fit the text's positive indications on the distinctive characteristics of philosophical practice into a new framework. Before pronouncing himself peremptorily against the possibility that writings capable of 'voicing' the meaning of his philosophy exist, Plato tells us that he put the tyrant Dionysius to a 'test' (*peira*), to measure his aptitude for philosophical work.[29] The aspiring philosopher did not pass the test: he proved incapable not only of bearing the labour of the investigation, but also of understanding its logic and significance. Lingering on this high threshold of philosophical exercise, the author of the *Letter* highlights the distance that separates the area of philosophical dialogue in the strict sense from the discursive area of the *polis*, where we see the Socrates of the dialogues interacting with men very different than he is. Not unlike many other passages of the Platonic dialogues, *Letter VII* makes reference to the idea that the realization of philosophy requires particular conditions – pragmatic conditions that concern the

dialogical situation and, in a broader sense, the reciprocal inclination of the participants to search for truth. If the precondition for every type of constructive dialogue (repeatedly asserted by the character Socrates) is that the discussion be carried on 'without malice' (*aneu phthonou*), then the realization of a genuine philosophical experience of truth seems possible only on the basis of shared practices of investigation and of lifestyle, which make possible continued and heated discussion between subjects who dedicate their best energies to the quest for knowledge. The idea of a scientific community, indirectly expressed by *Letter VII*, recalls in many respects the ideal dimension of the *kallipolis*, where, however, the harmony – the symphonic unity of civil society – is the fruit of a cultural *synousia* that integrates different men. The elderly Plato of the *Letter* and of the last dialogues has an alternative reference in the academic community, a model of *synousia* that is purer but less complex than the political community, which remains an object of concern for the philosopher. What does not change is the meaning of philosophic practice, designed to create a situation of critical discussion between subjects involved in situations of a life in common, where the discursive exchange requires good intentions, but also a capacity of semantic rupture, reversal of meaning, and change of paradigm, in the wake of a shared tradition.

The *mimesis* of the dialogue is a model for both situations. Using it to represent the practice of philosophy in the civil sphere, Plato gathers the genuine voices of the city, its political culture and its branches of knowledge, to weave them into a mise-en-scène where Socrates plays the role of participant and rigorous critic. Using it to discuss complex theoretical questions, he shows the limits to which the philosopher can push language, working on the representational power of images with subjects who are most similar to himself, banishing that which cannot stand up to the impact of confutation, and thus fixing the borders of what can be said. Between civil society and scientific community the philosopher attends to different experiences of truth, he is the inner and outer voice of the enveloping situation of social culture, and the dialogical and linguistic mediator between the city and as much of truth as it is possible to speak.

## 3. Wittgenstein

### 3.1 Philosophical activity: philosophy as clarification

The Wittgensteinian theme of philosophy as activity (*Tätigkeit*) is well known: an activity of clarification, a descriptive – and

not transformative – acting that leaves everything as it is. While Wittgenstein employed different styles of analysis in the various periods of his philosophical activity, the conception of philosophy as activity remained constant.[30] It is a theme of the *Tractatus*: philosophy does not state propositions that portray (*Bilder*), but clarifies: 'Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. [...] The result of philosophy is not a number of "philosophical propositions", but to make propositions clear'.[31]

But it is also a theme of the *Philosophical Investigations*: philosophical description leaves the world as it is, unchanged; that is, orderly and made livable in forms of life: 'Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is'.[32]

This means that philosophy regards the form, not the existences of the world: it clarifies, puts in order, puts before us.[33] It is poetic composition, Wittgenstein writes decidedly in 1933–34, recognizing in philosophical activity an aesthetico-formal quality, of configuration: 'I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition* [*dichten*]'.[34]

Let us therefore take this verb, *dichten*, seriously – Wittgenstein does not use it fortuitously. The theme of philosophy as a nontheoretical activity of clarification of linguistic form is expressed in the *Tractatus* with antirealistic[35] and antifoundationalist tones: as pure 'clarification' of language, philosophy leaves the world in the contingency of what-ever 'is the case' (*Tractatus*, 1). Paradoxically, the antirealistic thesis itself underlies the 'depictive' conception of the language-world relationship elucidated in the *Tractatus*, whose first propositions speak of the contin-gency of the happening of events of the world (1: 'The world is every-thing that is the case.'; 1.21: 'Any one [fact] can either be the case or not be the case, and everything else remain the same.') and of the logical necessity by which the world is given to us in an order of possibility (1.1: 'The world is the totality of facts, not of things.'; 1.13: 'The facts in logical space are the world.'). The happening, which in itself is opaque, takes on the sense of 'world' insofar as it is configured in the logical space of language. Having a world is not having 'things', existences, but is having *things in language*, that is, configured in a possible horizon of sense, in a network of relations, in a 'how' (3.221). Thus we cannot distance ourselves from language, which has always been and is already there: language is both our *form* – that which opens up a meaningful world for us – and our *limit* (our *ethos*, in the Greek sense of the word: dwelling-place, seat, abode, the opening of a place for human beings on the earth). The aesthetic and – simultaneously – ethical theme of

language as opening and limit, as untranscendable space, realizes, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's antirealism: an antirealism we can read as the constitutive character of language in relation to the world, which will then be transformed into the theme of the co-belonging of language games and forms of life.

If sense is of the order of intralinguistic possibility and connection and not of the order of thing – if philosophy cannot act on the world, but only on form ('compose') – then Wittgenstein's perspective appears to be extraneous to any question of rational foundation of the orders (forms of life, normative horizons) in which we live. This is a constant theme in Wittgenstein; indeed, we can recognize in the later concept of 'form of life' a development of the antirealistic notion of 'world' of the *Tractatus*. The concept of form of life tells us that in Wittgenstein only qualified (regulated) life in a linguistico-communitarian horizon appears to be thinkable: there is no life that has not been elevated to its form, that does not become what it is (what it can be) through linguistic form. In this sense, in his philosophical perspective there is a connection between life and *polis*, between life and linguistic city, which recalls Aristotle's theme of politics as the human qualification of living beings – a theme we shall return to, because in our 'project for two voices' it will point to an important divergence with Platonism.[36]

There is thus a fundamental connection in Wittgenstein between philosophical activity and the question of form – a connection that he expresses through his celebrated distinction between saying and showing, *sagen* and *zeigen*. The sciences 'say' the world of objects in a representational way, they say *how* the world is (and establish what facts do subsist and what do not); philosophy, by contrast, concerns sense – the absolute, and therefore unspeakable, fact *that the world is*: it is an activity invested with the task of *exhibiting form*, showing configurations of sense, without being able to say them.[37] Showing the conditions of sensical saying from within: this, and nothing more esoteric or mystical, is what is said by the call for silence of proposition 7 of the *Tractatus*. It says that language in its articulation with the world, in its semantic force, is unrepresentable – it can only be shown. Hence the propositions of the *Tractatus* are unspeakable, because they claim to speak about language, where one can only show. Now, it is right here, in 'showing the form', that Wittgenstein's conception of communicating and writing philosophy resides. Thus, there is no esotericism in the call of the *Tractatus* for silence. In showing the unspeakability of philosophical propositions *he wants to communicate what the task of philosophy*

*is*: in other words, the *Tractatus* communicates the task of philosophy paradoxically, by showing that the propositions of philosophy are senseless, that they are not such. The propositions of the *Tractatus* are not propositions that can be enunciated, they are not images of states of things, as, by contrast, are the propositions of a scientific theory that speaks of the properties of a domain of objects. On the contrary, they are *elucidations* (*Erläuterungen*: *Tractatus*, 6.54) of the fact that language is as form; they belong less to the representational regime of *saying objects* than to the exhibiting regime of *showing form*.

Since philosophy is not written as a science, the writing of the work is nothing other than a gesture that renders philosophical practice present. After all, it is Wittgenstein himself who suggests this, when he presents the *Tractatus* as an ethical gesture of delimitation, of the opening and enclosing of spaces: the book 'shows' a language, and at the same time alludes to the unanalysable ethical background from which it comes. In this sense, the preface and the conclusions of the *Tractatus* exhibit *an ethical conception of logical form and of language*: in delimiting the speakable, the *Tractatus* prepares and opens to the experience of that which is not speakable as a fact – it opens in particular to life and to choices, which are not expressible in the language of facts.

For the aims of our analysis we shall not delve into Wittgenstein's period of silence after the *Tractatus*: he neither spoke nor wrote of philosophy until 1929–30, even if his existential pilgrimage in the 1920s through various places and professions in search of his proper vocation can appear as the attempt to trace symbolically that unwritten – and nevertheless most important – part of his book, consisting in that ethical delimitation of thought he had mentioned to Ficker, the publisher. What interests us, rather, is the transformation of the theme of the philosophical activity of *showing the sense* that is given in language when Wittgenstein returned in the 1930s to the exercise of the philosophic word. We shall examine here §§86–93 of *The Big Typescript* (written in 1932–3) – a chapter that Wittgenstein himself titled 'Philosophy'[38] (and indeed, it is a written laboratory of his mature conception of philosophy), as well as passages from the *Philosophical Investigations*. He writes in 'Philosophy': 'Philosophy simply sets everything out, and neither explains nor deduces anything.'[39] Philosophical description is always a work of exhibiting form: it is 'the clearly surveyable representation [*übersichtliche Darstellung*][40] of grammatical//linguistic//facts'.[41]

> What is the nature of our investigation? Am I investigating the cases that I give as examples with a view toward their probability, or their

actuality? No, I'm just presenting what is possible, and am therefore giving grammatical examples.[42]

This surveyable representation provides just that kind of understanding that consists in our 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding *connecting links*.[43]

Philosophy deals, then, not with objects that are given, but with those that we can call 'form-objects', or 'example-objects': possible, grammatical, relational objects – that is, objects seen under the aspects that connect them to other objects and seen in their possibilities of form. The 'form' sought by the philosophical gaze is not law, a class of objects with properties, but rather a context of sense, a figure that stands out against a background. This is the gestalt, configurative, non-lawlike idea of form, developed fully in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein often illustrates the philosophical description through the theme of 'physiognomy': what must be grasped is not immediately the thing, but rather the physiognomy, the 'face' of the thing. One comprehends when one inscribes things in an 'as', in a way of seeing, when one shows possible contexts, not when one collects facts. Philosophy deals, then, with objects that show form. In the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein calls the form that shows itself in an example 'aspect' (*Aspekt*): seeing an aspect, or 'seeing as', is the philosophical activity that shows the form in examples, letting us see connections; it is the metaphorical and schematic capacity to 'see something *as something*',[44] which is the basis of all conceptual work. Sensitivity to the aspect means having eyes and ears for the form, it is aptitude for 'seeing as' and 'hearing as': it is, we might say, intonation in general. This is the specific gaze of philosophy: not a purely theoretical (representational, optical) structure, but rather a gaze connected to an experience, and to *an execution of the will of philosophy*.

The method of the clarification of meanings through a synoptic view of the contexts of use can thus be interpreted as a variation in the realization of philosophy's task, which remains an exhibiting of the form of language. If in the Wittgenstein who returned to philosophic activity in the 1930s the idea of philosophy as clarification remains constant, how does he now endeavour to communicate this idea of philosophy? To communicate, that is, those communicative effects that in the *Tractatus* he had realized through the paradox of propositions that refuted themselves, but that were nonetheless set down in book form? When Wittgenstein begins to do and write philosophy again, a caesura appears to be definitively marked: he rules out every unitary

and systematic idea of philosophical writing, and looks with extreme ambivalence upon the idea of putting his reflections into book form.[45] As Marino Rosso showed, his philosophical work was in fact taking shape in that period according to particular rhythms and phases.[46] We know that, first of all, he took rough notes, recording the arising of his thought. Then he transcribed his notes in large notebooks, selecting and correcting them. Finally, he selected and dictated the notes to someone: at that point he had typewritten texts that he cut up with scissors, obtaining a disordered mass of clippings. The disorder of the slips of paper constituted the base for inventing – or, more precisely, for seeing – a possible order, capable of organizing a set of notations around a point. Indeed, the method of arranging the clippings and systematizing them in diverse configurations in order to *see* an order there seems to constitute a full and proper realization of the method of perspicuous representation, physically executed by the philosopher. At times Wittgenstein managed to come up with a long and orderly type-written text, ready to be printed; but he could always deconstruct this final text, in order to insert contaminations and rearrange the material according to other hypotheses of systematization, as in the case of *The Big Typescript*, which was revised twice and then set aside. In the making (or unmaking) of Wittgenstein's thought – by this time he had abandoned the hypotactic (but nevertheless open, not rigidly deductive) struc-ture of the *Tractatus* – this big typescript, still organized in a paratactic structure of unitary blocks, constitutes a unitary and coherent phase. In his subsequent book-hypotheses – and in *Philosophical Investigations* in particular – the book structure will be decidedly dissolved into a serial order of sections.

The serial structure that dominates Wittgenstein's mature works is what has come down to us both in the various posthumous editions of his editors, who attempted to create a book form by means of manipu-lations whose extent is not yet clear, and in the material of the *Nachlass*, which David Stern considers a full-fledged work in its own right.[47] But in this serial structure a style is asserting itself that can be consid-ered an attempted mimesis of the philosopher's operational knowledge and of the oral exercise of philosophy – the style of counterpoint and of a play of voices. It is significant that the exercise of perspicuous representation is realized in the writings of Wittgenstein's maturity through dialogical cues and by recourse to a polyphonic writing, with the formulation of questions and answers in direct and indirect discourse. The counterpoint of voices that take the floor in *Philosophical Investigations* – 'But suppose someone said: [...]' (I, §34); 'Consider for

example the proceedings that we call "games". [...] Don't say: "There *must* be something common, or they would not be called 'games'", (I, §66) – polyphonically realizes the philosopher's task, which, once again, is not a representation of contents, but rather the active game of showing meaning – that is, the form of language. These, then, are the voices that play the game of philosophy, a game designed to show the correctness of the games of the linguistic city. As Wittgenstein wrote in 'Philosophy': 'We're bringing words back from their metaphysical to their normal use in language'.[48] In a famous essay,[49] Stanley Cavell sees in the *Philosophical Investigations* a dialogical style based on the form of confession and of self-examination ('Do not say...'), designed to overcome the temptations connected with prejudices (such as the search for essence and for unitary images of the functioning of language)[50] and to lead to the acknowledgment of the familiarity of 'normal' uses. Cavell speaks in psychological terms of a Freudian type of therapy that 'wishes to prevent understanding which is unaccompanied by inner change'.[51] Now, the style of writing as self-examination and the mise-en-scène of voices, which are probably projections of as many alter egos of the philosopher – a full-fledged inner dialogue – authorizes us to say that the exercise of philosophy is, in Wittgenstein, a writing-transformation of the soul: of the soul of the individual who awakens to the philosophical 'word'.

### 3.2   The philosophical soul: philosophy as awakening and as recollection

Wittgenstein (like Plato) posited an essential connection between the problem of philosophy's task in relation to the world (what does philosophy do?), and the problem of the transformation of an individual who thinks and writes philosophically (what does the philosopher do?): a transformation that is not purely psychological, but rather connected to the assumption of a vocation and to a decidedly intramundane askesis conquered through active exercise. Awakening and recollection are the two traits of philosophical exercise that we now shall analyse.

The philosophical attitude of 'showing' sense, continually reproposed by Wittgenstein, is a dimension that is understood simultaneously as *Aufgabe*, task, the ethical exercise of guarding the limits of language, and as feeling (*aisthesis*), an affective tonality that is not passivity and immediacy, but that presupposes an active philosophical doing. In *Philosophy*, Wittgenstein refers this 'doing philosophy' to two related themes: philosophy as awakening and transformation of the

vital experience of sense, and as will that regards something that is already there. He writes, for example: 'One could also give the name "philosophy" to what is present [is possible//is there – *da* ist] before all new discoveries and inventions'.[52]

Philosophy has the task of showing *that which is already there*, which is given in a language. But before reflecting on the crucial character of this 'already' which is language, we need to analyse the theme of philosophic awakening and will. In §86 of 'Philosophy' Wittgenstein speaks of philosophy as work that deals with the difficulty and discipline not of the intellect – the understanding – (*Verstand*), as is the case with the sciences, but rather of feeling (*Gefühl*) and of will (*Willen*): philosophy leads to an *Umstellung*, a 'change of attitude', which overcomes the resistance of the will.[53] Certainly, in Wittgenstein *Umstellung* signifies conversion in the therapeutic sense of overcoming the metaphysical temptations and confusions that are harboured in language.[54] But we think that the therapeutic sense of philosophy can be better understood against the background of the idea of philosophy as an awakening of the philosophical soul. In 'Philosophy' Wittgenstein wrote that philosophical work does not concern more or less essential problems thematically, it does not propose a thesis, but 'is actually closer to working on oneself'; it is not a work on things but on our way of seeing things – like the compositional gaze of the architect.[55] Philosophical work is thus, first of all, an exercise that prepares for a transformation of the gaze. Elsewhere, Wittgenstein connects philosophizing with the inaugural themes of the wonder of language, and of the reenchantment of the world. Our relationship with language is connoted by feelings of wonder and surprise, which strike us when we perceive the enchantment (*Zauber*) of our adhesion to sense, and perceive it as an awakening:

> 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? [...] The characteristic feature of the awakening mind of man is precisely the fact that a phenomenon comes to have meaning for him.[56]

For Wittgenstein the awakening to sense is not a primitive condition, which is superseded in evolution and in scientific civilization (in Weber's terms, the epoch of the 'disenchantment of the world': *Entzauberung der Welt*); it is, rather, a condition of philosophico-poetic understanding, which makes one capable of perceiving the

horizon of sense, of 'feeling' language. We could speak of a capacity for reenchantment of the world: a condition that concerns all human beings, but that for the philosopher becomes an ethical and aesthetic exercise.

The style of philosophizing requires an education of seeing and of feeling, which ushers in a new way of thinking. Wittgenstein speaks of will, feeling, astonishment, wonder: they are themes that mark the beginning of philosophizing with a particular affective curvature, like a modification of attitude and of the modes of experience. The fundamental characteristic of these figures of the beginning is that they are anti-intellectualistic: in the movement of stopping, in the suspension that makes one aware of an unreflected adhesion and familiarity (stopping to perceive our adhesion to language as an originary phenomenon), there is an ineliminable affective root, a *pathos* that marks a modality of existence and of experience. As in many figures of philosophical beginnings (*thaumazein* in Plato and Aristotle, *epoché* in Husserl, the power of the negative in Hegel), Wittgenstein's figures of the beginning constantly represent less a growth of explanation than, rather, an affective modification of experience.

Now, in Wittgenstein the theme of philosophical opening has another significant feature. We have seen that, for him, philosophy does not explain, does not accumulate, and does not progress, like the sciences, but 'insists' on the same problems.[57] 'Saying' the world in objects and discovering new ones is the thematic and doctrinal task of the sciences. By contrast, the task of philosophy is to awaken the spirit to the unspeakable fact of sense: philosophy reenchants the world, showing it as an originary phenomenon. Hence the philosophical gaze that Wittgenstein calls *übersichtliche Darstellung* is not representational, ocular, reproductive; it is, rather, a gaze that has to be a sensitivity to a contextual and processual form, a form to be grasped with a theoretico-practical aptitude. The appearing of form presupposes a philosophical exercise of preparation for transparency and clarity (*Klarheit*), which is the actualization of a will to philosophy. It is in this sense that philosophy is therapeutic activity. It is therapy in that it does not solve problems, but dissolves them, leading us to a type of evidence similar to that of the word that opens, with ease, the lock on a safe that not even force could open.[58] Wittgenstein speaks of the dissolution of problems, of the destruction of grammatical idols,[59] and of archaic images embedded in language that have become traps for our thinking.[60] But what is at stake is more subtle: he understands philosophy as a work of deconstruction and of *anamnesis*, whose task is

to give us back that which is 'always (openly) before one's eyes'[61] – or, more precisely, 'has always been', as the passage quoted earlier suggests, where Wittgenstein says that philosophy is concerned with something that is already there: *da ist*. The crucial word here is 'already', which speaks of philosophy as a work of recollection and return, as the anamnesis of something that is there. *Philosophy is an anamnestic awakening, which regards an 'already'*. Philosophy is thus therapy as the awakening and recognition of the horizon that constitutes us. 'Learning philosophy is *really* recollecting'[62] – it is going back towards an origin that is actually a lateness, an 'already'. The themes of awakening and remembering ('The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose'[63]) reaffirm the aesthetic and ethical values of the philosophical: they mean that we have always been consigned to a form, to a temporal and figural horizon; that philosophical askesis is the (intramundane) path that makes us aware of the 'already' of language, of form's immanence in life.

### 3.3 Philosophy, existence, politics

Let us venture a last reflection: can the style of thought and of life of Ludwig Wittgenstein the man reveal something of the 'movement of thought' that secretly animates the Wittgensteinian conception of philosophy?[64] What existential and, in a broad sense, 'political' attitudes of the man can tell us something about his conception of philosophy? Wittgenstein's diaries and autobiographical texts, the accounts of those who knew him personally, along with many fragments of his philosophical writing, speak of his obstinate working on himself. Such work appears to be the necessary ethical implication of his descriptive conception of philosophy, and to be accompanied – at the ethico-political level of engagement and projection – by an attitude of renunciation and of impolitic abstention.[65] Or, more precisely: the philosopher's abstention from the normative and the foundational corresponds to the man's renunciation of utopia, and seems to account for his abstention from political projectuality (and to allow himself perhaps nothing more than individualistic dissent, with anarchical tones). Wittgenstein's concept of 'ideal' is significant here: it is exemplary of the abstention of the philosopher and of the man. For him, the 'ideal' is not – platonically – tension and utopia, a 'model' to attain, but, once again, it is that which holds us firm within our horizon, it is the model that give us eyes with which to see. In this sense, Wittgenstein's temperament appears to be more Aristotelian than Platonic, if it is true that his (philosophical and existential) 'search' aims to recompose the

*logos–ethos* relationship in a nonconflictual dimension (a relationship that in Plato, by contrast, is dramatic and shot through with utopian tensions, since it is dominated by the absolute transcendence of the Good, and thus by the tragic nature of the rift between the sensible and the ideal).

> The ideal, as we think of it, is unshakable. You can never get outside it; you must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe. – Where does this idea come from? It is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off.[66]

For that matter, Wittgenstein had already written in the *Tractatus*: there is no connection between good will and the realization of events, because the will is not a fact of the world: 'Even if everything we wished were to happen, this would only be, so to speak, a favour of fate, for there is no *logical* connexion between will and world, which would guarantee this, and the assumed physical connexion itself we could not again will'.[67]

Will not as a fact of the world, but, if anything, as adhesion to and a relationship of harmony with the world, in its noumenal aspect of totality.[68] This dimension, to which one does not accede with works and engagement, is the ethical dimension – that which in his diaries and conversations, in the moments in which, above all, he reflects on his 'being a man', Wittgenstein calls the 'spiritual' dimension.[69] The 'spiritual', for Wittgenstein, is neither intelligence and intellectual supremacy, nor is it intellectualistic sublimation of the body – rather, it is the education of feeling and ethical work on oneself, which are the signs of possible salvation. 'That man will be revolutionary who can revolutionize himself', he wrote in 1944.[70] He refers here to that obstinate project of self-perfection, which was the reason also for his journey in 1935 to post-revolutionary Russia, to which he was attracted by his interest in the new forms of labor. At bottom, if he was interested in the forms of religious thinking, or in life in Russia after the revolution, it was not to propose new models of life or a certain religion, or communism, as an ideal basis of ethico-political projectuality and institutional reforms but, if anything, to understand what *free work on oneself* those spiritual climes could offer the individual. In Wittgenstein there is a continuity between the philosophical search for ways of seeing and the search for ways of life capable of opening up forms of awakening and of intramundane *askesis*.

## 4. Concluding dialogue on convergences and divergences between Plato and Wittgenstein

*First voice*: Wittgenstein finds common ground with Plato in positing the active character of philosophy, which is not a doctrinal content but, rather, thought in act that invites one to think. For both, then, it is important that philosophy communicate itself. In this regard, both find themselves entangled in a paradox: the paradox of the rejection of philosophical writing. But, instead of fleeing this paradox, they place it at the centre of their strategies of communication. The action of truth, for Plato, must not be written down, because, when questioned, books do not respond. His strategy is, therefore, the imitation of his investigation in the dialogues and the construction of a character who carries the voices of the city with him on the scene, and teaches his hearers a new way of thinking. *Philosophy writes on the soul.*

Wittgenstein, for his part, insisted on the fact that the paradox of the book made up of propositions that refute themselves as scientific discourse and put themselves forward as elucidations that delimit the field of sense – of speaking with truth and falsehood – is not a simple strategy of communication but is, rather, an ethical revolution in our way of thinking. Solving the problems connected with the misunderstanding of language shows 'how little has been done when these problems have been solved'.[71] Also for Wittgenstein, then, *philosophy writes on the soul*. It has need of 'composition' (*dichten*) – a form of composition that in the mature Wittgenstein becomes a mise-en-scène of his investigation, which becomes dialogical and is meant to be responsible. Just as the Platonic philosopher distinguishes himself from sophistic irresponsibility and spurs on dialogically, so Wittgenstein's philosopher examines himself, analyses the temptations, confesses, presses the alter egos. He takes up the strenuous labour of the investigation – that labour (Plato recounts) which the tyrant Dionysius shirked.

Wittgenstein and Plato appear, by contrast, to distance themselves from one another in their concepts of community. For Plato, the recollection of truth means that the philosophical community must be rupture and the intent to transform the civil community. Also for Wittgenstein philosophy recollects: it teaches us to recognize and to comment on our belonging to a horizon of meanings, to an 'already' (*da ist*: 'Philosophy', §89), to an unspeakable 'that' ('that the world is', *dass sie ist*: *Tractatus*, 6.44). But his attention to communitarian discourse remains therapeutic – the treatment of possible degenerations – rather than attempting to invent possible futures.

*Second voice*: Consciousness of the limits of language (and, at the same time, of its untranscendability) is perhaps the most important trait that Plato and Wittgenstein have in common. But very different is the inflection they give it in order to project and practice forms of writing capable of respecting their common prohibition of the claim to 'speak' – with an act of simple *hybris* – the truth. Plato constructs complex semantic architectures to repropose (but in the form of ideal dialogue) the tumult of conflicting discourses and thoughts that, in the historical reality of a great civilization, was unable to find its *poros*. Wittgenstein experiments with the minimalist language of the *Tractatus* (excluding from philosophical showing everything that one cannot say), with deconstruction into discursive fragments, with the exhibition of that which one does with words, with the plurality of language games – but without supposing that a 'game of games' can truly reveal their form.

Both believed that doing philosophy meant always and only something for someone: an awakening from the torpid immersion in the language to which one fortuitously belongs in order to meet up with different forms of thought and of life, and thus to dig more deeply into the unreflected codes of one's consciousness.

The greatest divergence between them, in my view, is that Plato would not have subscribed at any level to the idea of 'leaving the world as it is'. For him, such an idea is incompatible with the perfectionist motivations of the philosopher (man of 'betterment'), with the tension imposed by the eidetic world on the world of generation, with the arti-ficialistic and constructivist trait of his vision of the human world.

*First voice*: 'Leaving the world as it is': Wittgenstein's abstention from a foundational projectuality is a theme that calls for deeper examina-tion. The fact that he never spoke of a political projectuality based on his criticism of and distancing himself from communitarian belonging does not mean that his view of community is assimilable to conformist perspectives of majority consensus, or to contractualist perspectives. The agreement between human beings (*Übereinstimmung*) of which he speaks is originary, primitive:[72] but that does not mean that this type of agreement refers to a community that has made a majority decision about something, or that it is contractually constituted. For Wittgenstein, the community is the primitive insofar as it is a vital community (a community not of beliefs and opinions but, rather, of action, or of the regularity of acting), and therefore cannot be repre-sented in contents or true propositions. It is a community that has not been projected or stipulated, but has been presupposed as immanent in

meaningful practices;[73] it is, then, a community of sense in constitution, not a set of behaviours predetermined by implicit communitarian agreements.

That Wittgenstein's 'communitarianism' is connected to the dynamism of sense is confirmed also by evidence that regards his thinking on the questions of doubt and of rational criticism. We wonder whether in Wittgenstein's model there was the possibility of critical and reflective distance, and of forms of decision that regard the very form of life. When he writes in *On Certainty*: 'The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift',[74] he seems to suggest that every form of life is renegotiable. As structure of agreement and of intersubjective recognition, the form of life is not to be thought of in a space of logical and historical priority; it is not a foundation in the sense of an agreement that happened in, and came to us from, the timeless place of the origin. The form of life *is among us*, it is the nomadic and dynamic structure of the agreement that makes it possible to constitute a community of sense and of thought. The form of life is, first of all, the structure of the agreement that is repeated and confirmed in the practice of communitarian language games: just as ceremonial repetition in a rite gives sense to a myth by reelaborating it in the life of the group, so too the playing of games confirms and actualizes the community. But the form of life is also the dynamic structure of the agreement as the place of formation of games and of changes: that is, of the situations in which, playing, we make the rules, we make use of them strategically, we change them, and we thus create new possibilities of communitarian connection, renegotiating consensus. Against the background of the vital dynamic to which it gives form, a language game can be criticized and prove to be unacceptable: it is then abandoned not as an opinion or a belief, but as a form that has ceased to constitute nature and necessity for us – has ceased to be the place of a possible community of subjects. The river-bed, the background, is not immutable – it is layered, and subjected to different times and rhythms of change: it is in process and intersubjective, and admits the temporal and relational renegotiation of the relationship. Doubting the rule is not, then, the same as having doubts about its application: it is, rather, an attempt to rethink community (connection, rule). But to rethink it in what way? Let us read the entire passage from *On Certainty*: 'The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other'.

It seems to me that Wittgenstein is speaking here of the mobility of the structure of the horizon (shift of the river-bed), and connects it to the practices and the games it contains (the movement of the waters). In this sense, he seems to refer every transformation of the common horizon to the spontaneous conflictuality within the practices, and to the facticity and the time of the action. Wittgenstein, then, does not appear to admit a separate and reflected rational critical function, an autonomous political projectuality, a utopia elaborated independently of the place to which we are consigned. He appears, rather, to refer only to the political effects of the spontaneous dynamic of intracommunitarian practices, and to exclude an autonomous theoretical dimension of debate, projection, and political deliberation. And it is in this sense that the dynamic of the sense put in common has in Wittgenstein a meaning that is more reformist than utopian-revolutionary. This is why I spoke earlier of his Aristotelian temperament.

*Second voice*: In this problematic domain, I think that the philosopher's role within the games is also important; that is, the relationship between scientific community and civil community. Both the therapeutic aspect and the aspect of the avoidance of misunderstanding, present in Wittgenstein, are clearly present in Plato too, beginning with the philosopher's responsibility in evaluating experience and the ways in which one speaks of it.

However, a subtle difference does seem to divide them on the theme of memory and of the conservation of knowledge: dynamic concepts such as *genesis, poiesis, eros* project the investigation of the Platonic philosopher towards ever new formulations, which conserve the iconic character of language but make remembrance the premise for the work still to be written. I alluded earlier to the point of convergence of 'awakening', which in Plato regards both the private dimension ('writing' on the soul) and the public dimension in which it is possible to revise one's judgment on the tradition of the past. The place of awakening is memory; its means is the catastrophe generated by the phenomenological consciousness of experience, in collision with its description within codified linguistic areas. Emblematic, in this respect, is the 'knowing one does not know' of Socratic consciousness, which prevails over the enigmatic response of the Delphic oracle on Socrates' wisdom (in the *Apology*); or, in the *Symposium*, the erotic cognition of 'lack', which prevails over the rhetorical concept of *eros* as fullness and possession of quality.

To show how this occurs, Platonic writing, instead of eliding fragmentary formulations or letting them subsist only through proximity,

takes up precisely the task of conserving the memory of the possible dialectical movements within the conflictual area of a never-anonymous language with a plurality of interlocutors. Platonic representation even takes up the ways that make it possible to dialogue at a distance with an author who is not there and cannot respond: if the one who confutes intends to do it correctly, he can engage a sort of public defender, as Socrates does in the *Theaetetus* with regard to Protagoras.[75] One wonders whether there is an analogous game in Wittgenstein.

*First voice*: To this question one can give a preliminary answer that is not incorrect, but is superficial. The propensity for the deconstruction and reconstruction of a scientific community of philosophers is most certainly extraneous to Wittgenstein. The Preface of the *Tractatus* is an ironic confutation of a possible future philosophical community if, indeed, the book is destined to be understood only 'by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it', and if Wittgenstein makes reference to the 'great works of Frege and the writings of my friend Bertrand Russell' simply as 'the stimulation of my thoughts'. And again: the dialogical structure of the writings of his maturity is a fiction in which Wittgenstein substantially faces off against alter egos, with objections and questions that he raises against himself and asks himself on his own, apparently just to put his own thinking to the test. And when he quotes from the philosophical tradition, he seems to do so without any dialogical interest as far as the author is concerned. What is in question is that which he himself is maintaining and discussing – as in §§46 and 47 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where he quotes 'primary elements' of the *Theaetetus,* which he assimilates to Russell's 'individuals' and to the 'objects' of the *Tractatus* – all this in order to discuss his notion of simplicity and to refer it to its various uses in various contexts.

But this preliminary answer is not fair to Wittgenstein. There is an essential propensity for decency and rigor that Wittgenstein expressed both in his life and in his philosophical investigations. On the one hand, Wittgenstein's life is a work, a construction, a continual attempt to symbolize it – that is, to make it rise to a level of 'decency' (as he put it), by means of working on himself. On the other, the style of his philosophizing presents his hearer or his reader with a work of deconstruction of the philosophical idols that are harbored in our words. His is the style of the example, which *summons all human beings as philosophical interlocutors* to the endless work on words that give form to life: 'The real discovery is the one that makes me able to stop doing

philosophy when I want to. The one that quiets philosophy down. [...] Instead, we now demonstrate a method with the help of examples. [...] But then we'll never get finished with our work! Certainly not, because it doesn't have an end'.[76]

*Conclusions for two voices*: Who, then, for Plato and for Wittgenstein, is the philosopher and what does he do, when he speaks or writes? Be he *atopos* like Socrates or projected in search of the rules of that putting things into form, which gives sense to the world, we think that for both of them the philosopher is distinguished by the fact of living through a recurrent experience of estrangement. It is this experience that gives rise to necessary engagement in the search that 'doesn't have an end'.

That the outlet of such a difficult training be imagined as a free work on oneself (Wittgenstein), or as the perfectionistic artifice that changes the world together with the way of being human beings in the world (Plato), perhaps makes all the difference between the two thinkers in the philosophic practice not only of writing but of life.

*Translated from the Italian by Giacomo Donis*

## Notes

1. The 'synoptic view' (*Übersicht*) that shows the form through comparisons is a recurrent theme in Wittgenstein, first broached in his texts of the early 1930s *(Philosophical Remarks, Remarks on Frazer's The Golden Bough, The Big Typescript).*
2. Section 1 was written by Fulvia de Luise and Section 2 by Silvana Borutti. In Section 3 the authors alternate as first (Borutti) and second (de Luise) voice.
3. Plato, *Letter VII*, part of a *corpus* of thirteen letters whose authenticity has long been debated, is today considered either authentic or, at least, reliable because it comes from a source very close to Plato.
4. Plato's absence from the dialogues (oddly emphasized by the character who narrates the scene of the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo*) has made it difficult for his interpreters to glean the point of view of the philosopher himself within the dialogical representation. For a – more or less defini-tive – critical review of the attempts to determine 'who speaks for Plato' and of the difficulties involved in the undertaking, see G. Press (ed.) (2000) *Who speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic anonymity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers).
5. Addressed to the relations and friends of Dion, the account explains the reasons for Plato's visits to the court of Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, in the hope of realizing his project for an alliance between philosophy and power. The *Letter* is an irreplaceable source of biographical information, bringing together the facts of Plato's life and the elaboration of his ideas.
6. Plato (1973) *Phaedrus & Letters VII and VIII*, trans. W. Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 341c5–d2.

7. *Letter VII*, as a justification of the overall failure of Plato's enterprise in Sicily, appears to be written after his third voyage to the court of Syracuse and after the tragic end of his friend Dion. For these reasons it is datable to around 354 BC.

8. Plato *Phaedrus & Letters VII and VIII*, 274b–277a.

9. It was in the second half of the fifth century BC that Greek culture passed from a form of cultural transmission focused on poetry, oral communication, and the memorizing of verses and formulas to the typical forms of the civilization of writing, in which education avails itself of texts in prose (the technical treatises of the various disciplines in particular). On this question see E. A. Havelock (1963) *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), D. Lanza (1979) *Lingua e discorso nell'Atene delle professioni* (Naples: Liguori), B. Gentili (1988) *Poetry and Its Public in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the Fifth Century*, trans. A. Thomas Cole (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press), M. Vegetti (1989) 'Nell'ombra di Theut. Dinamiche della scrittura in Platone' in M. Detienne (ed.) (1989) *Sapere e scrittura in Grecia* (Rome and Bari: Laterza), pp. 201–27, G. Cambiano (1992) 'La nascita dei trattati e dei manuali', in G. Cambiano, L. Canfora and D. Lanza (eds), *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica*, vol. I (Rome: Salerno editrice), pp. 525–53.

10. Schleiermacher is considered to be the initiator of the modern interpretation of the *Dialogues*, due to his linking of the analysis of Platonic philosophy with the hermeneutics of the texts. Philologist and Lutheran theologian, he translated Plato's works into German. In his *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato* of 1804 he presented an exegetical method founded on the philosophical value of the dialogical form, which distances the interpreter from research of a doctrinaire type and rejects, in the name of the autonomy of the written texts, the contribution of other sources for an esoteric reading of the dialogues. This is why Schleiermacher has become the negative reference for those who today propose a doctrinaire reconstruction of Platonic thought, supported and supplemented by the indirect tradition.

11. The expression, used in Plato *Phaedrus & Letters VII and VIII*, 278d6, indicates in that context the things that the philosopher holds to be comparatively 'more precious' than the ones he has written or is capable of writing.

12. Studies of the quantitative importance of the Socratic literature phenomenon – identified by Aristotle, in the *Poetics* (I, 1447b11), as a new literary genre – are relatively recent.

13. Beginning with the *Apology* (21b–22e), where the character, Socrates, singles out politicians, poets, and skilled craftsmen as the three categories of subjects suitable for his philosophical *elenchos*, the people of the dialogues present us with an astonishing variety of figures, identifiable as specific expressions of a great social culture, in its developments and in its conflicts.

14. The passages of the *Apology* in which Socrates attributes his commitment to philosophizing to a mission he received though the Delphic oracle are very well known. In the *Republic* the presence in Athens of a philosopher such as Socrates – who clearly could not have obtained his qualities from

the education he received in a 'sick' city, whose influence is a threat to the future of philosophy – is explicitly attributed to 'divine fate.'

15. A tendency to the anonymity of the characters and of the positions expressed in the dialogues is to be found only in late works such as the *Laws* and the *Sophist*, presumably written and put into circulation long after the Socratic epoch, the object of the previous representations.

16. On this argument see C. L. Griswold (ed.) (1988) *Platonic Writings Platonic Readings* (New York and London: Routledge), P. Vidal Naquet (1990) 'La société platonicienne des dialogues', in P. Vidal Naquet, *La démocracie greque vue d'ailleurs* (Paris: Flammarion), pp. 95–119, G. Cerri (1991) *Platone sociologo della comunicazione* (Milan: il Saggiatore), G. Cambiano 'La nascita dei trattati e dei manuali', pp. 525–53, G. Press (ed.) (2000) *Who speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic anonymity* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Lanham), G. Casertano (ed.) (2000) *La struttura del dialogo platonico* (Naples: Loffredo), M. Vegetti 'Nell'ombra di Theut. Dinamiche della scrittura in Platone', pp. 201–27, M. Vegetti (2003) 'Solo Platone non c'era', in *Paradigmi*, 21, pp. 261–77.

17. We find one example of this in the *Symposium* in the exchange of quips between Agathon and Socrates when Socrates enters the banquet hall: 'Come and sit here beside me, Socrates, and let me, by contact with you, enjoy the discovery which you made in the porch. You must obviously have found the answer to your problem and pinned it down; you wouldn't have desisted till you had.' At that point Socrates sat down and said: 'It would be very nice, Agathon, if wisdom were like water, and flowed by contact out of a person who has more into one who has less, just as water can be made to pass through a thread of wool out of the fuller of two cups into the emptier' Plato (1973), *The Symposium*, trans. W. Hamilton (Harmondsworth, Penguin), 175c4–d8.

18. The specific reference to *hyponoia* is in the *Republic* II, 378d–e; see F. de Luise and G. Farinetti (1998) 'Hyponoia. L'ombra di Antistene', in *Platone. La Repubblica Traduzione e commento a cura di Mario Vegetti*, vol. II, libri II e III (Naples: Bibliopolis), pp. 393–402. The criticism of the contents and forms of poetic communication, with particular regard to the representational technique of *mimesis*, takes up a good part of Books II and III, and gains further depth and complexity in Book X.

19. On this thesis and, in general, the questions of interpretation raised by the complex structure of the *Phaedrus*, see F. de Luise (ed.) (1997) *Introduzione* a Platone, *Fedro. Le parole e l'anima* (Bologna: Zanichelli), pp. 9–72.

20. Remaining on the epistemological plane, the representational problematic of language, which turns around the concepts of *eikon* (image) and *mimesis* (imitative representation), was considered the keystone of Platonic idealism, bound up with the use of the image because it was impossible to accede to a completely transparent eidetic language [see H. Joly (1974) *Le renversement platonicien* (Paris: Vrin)]. But in Plato an equally important extension is assumed by the ethical aspect of *mimesis*, connected with the production and assimilation of models of behavior through epic, lyric, and theatrical poetry. Only with Aristotle will the representational tension of language be limited to the clarification of the relation between words and things, isolating the declarative use of language from all the other linguistic uses

and thus limiting the point of reference of philosophico-scientific communication to the semantico- referential paradigm.

21. The reference is to Plato *Phaedrus*, 276a–277a, for the entire sequence of the comparison between written discourse and writing on the soul.

22. See *Phaedrus,* 276a5–9 (Plato *Phaedrus & Letters VII and VIII*, trans. modified).

23. Important for the interpretation of the Platonic position on writing is the hypothesis that the superiority of the philosopher's knowledge (alluded to as *timiotera*) with respect to the value of what he writes consists in an 'operational' skill, capable of intervening with respect to every closed formulation. On this theme, from an epistemological point of view, see W. Wieland (1982) *Platon und die Formen des Wissens* (Goettingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht).

24. On the role of writing as an aid to memory, see Plato (1973) *Phaedrus*, 276d and 278a.

25. See *Philebus*, 38e–39a.

26. This contributes to shifting the attention from the philosophic content to the person who presents it as part of a life choice and of a continual relation with the search for truth.

27. See M. Nussbaum (1986) *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

28. G. Cambiano (2010) *Perché leggere i classici. Interpretazione e scrittura* (Bologna: il Mulino) gives a definitive assessment of this theme.

29. Plato *Phaedrus & Letters VII and VIII*, 340b–c.

30. This thesis is supported, in different ways, by J. Bouveresse (1973) *Wittgenstein: la rime et la raison. Science, éthique, esthétique* (Paris: Minuit), A. Kenny (1984) *The Legacy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell), C. Diamond (1991) *The Realistic Spirit. Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

31. L. Wittgenstein (1922) *Tractatus logico- philosophicus*, bilingual, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 4.112.

32. L. Wittgenstein (1958) *Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen*, bilingual, third edition, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell), I, §124.

33. L. Wittgenstein (1958) *Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen*, I, §§126 and 127.

34. L. Wittgenstein (1980) *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright (ed.), trans. P. Winch (Chicago: Chicago University Press), p. 24e.

35. See J. Bouveresse (1988) *Le pays des possibles. Wittgenstein, les mathématiques et le monde réel* (Paris: Minuit), p. 24.

36. On the *bios-polis* nexus in Aristotle, G. Agamben (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press), p. 32.

37. Wittgenstein designates philosophical activity as 'showing' (*zeigen*), and with a constellation of terms connected to the theme of 'letting see', such as 'exhibit' (*aufweisen*), 'present' (*darstellen*), 'mirror' (*spiegeln*), 'elucidate' (*erläutern*), 'clarity' (*Klarheit*), and then, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, 'see as' (*sehen als*) and 'perspicuous representation' (*übersichtliche Darstellung*) – terms that take on meaning insofar as they are pitted against

the representational 'saying' (*vorstellen, sagen*) of the natural sciences, which speak of the objects of the world with truth or falsehood.

38. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', in *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, bilingual, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. C. Aue (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), §§86–93, pp. 300–18. Most of the observations on the nature of philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations* (I, §§116–133) are already present in these sections of *The Big Typescript*.
39. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', p. 308e.
40. *Darstellen* – to portray, also in graphic form – belongs to the same semantic field as *zeigen*, to show, and *aufweisen*, to exhibit; that is, to 'let see' in a nonrepresentational form; *Übersicht*, overview or synoptic view, takes up Goethe's morphological theme of the construction of series that show formal connections: see J. Schulte (2003) 'Goethe and Wittgenstein on Morphology', in F. Breithaupt, R. Raatzsc and B. Kremberg (eds), *Goethe and Wittgenstein. Seeing the World's Unity in its Variety* (Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang), pp. 55–72.
41. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', p. 306e.
42. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', p. 312e.
43. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', p. 308e.
44. L. Wittgenstein (1958) *Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen*, II, p. 213e.
45. He writes in 1937: 'If I am thinking about a topic just for myself and not with a view to writing a book, I jump about all round it; that is the only way of thinking that comes naturally to me. Forcing my thoughts into an ordered sequence is a torment for me. Is it even worth attempting now?' (L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*).
46. See M. Rosso (1988) 'Wittgenstein edito e inedito', in M. Andronico, D. Marconi and C. Penco (eds), *Capire Wittgenstein* (Genoa: Marietti), p. 33 ff.
47. On the problems posed by the lack of a critical edition of Wittgenstein's legacy, see D. G. Stern (1996) 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
48. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', p. 304e.
49. S. Cavell (1969) 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), pp. 70–2.
50. See L. Wittgenstein (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, I, §§108 and 115.
51. S. Cavell (1969) 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', p. 72.
52. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', p. 309e.
53. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', p. 300e.
54. On this theme see A. Kenny (1984) *The Legacy of Wittgenstein*, chapter 4.
55. L. Wittgenstein (2005) 'Philosophy', p. 300e.
56. L. Wittgenstein 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', p. 129.
57. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, pp. 6e–7e.
58. L. Wittgenstein 'Philosophy', p. 307e.
59. L. Wittgenstein 'Philosophy', p. 305e.
60. L. Wittgenstein 'Philosophy', p. 311e.
61. L. Wittgenstein 'Philosophy', p. 309e.
62. L. Wittgenstein 'Philosophy', p. 309e.
63. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, I, §127.

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64. L. Wittgenstein (1997) *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937* (Innsbruck: Haymon-Verlag).
65. See S. Borutti (2000) 'Wittgenstein impolitico?', in D. Sparti (ed.) *Wittgenstein politico* (Milan: Feltrinelli), pp. 127–52.
66. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, I, §103.
67. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus logico- philosophicus*, 6.374.
68. L. Wittgenstein (1965) 'A Lecture on Ethics', in *The Philosophical Review*, 74, p. 8.
69. L. Wittgenstein *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher*, p. 48.
70. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 45e.
71. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus logico- philosophicus*, p. 29.
72. 'Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a "proto-phenomenon". That is, where we ought to have said: *this language-game is played*' (L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, I, §654). On the theme of the primitive in Wittgenstein, see L. Perissinotto (2002) 'Wittgenstein e il primitivo in noi', in M. De Carolis and A. Martone (eds), *Sensibilità e linguaggio. Un seminario su Wittgenstein* (Macerata: Quodlibet).
73. '[Human beings] agree in the *language* they use. This is not agreement in opinions [*Meinungen*] but in form of life [*Lebensform*]' (L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, I, §241).
74. L. Wittgenstein (1969) *On Certainty/Über Gewissheit*, bilingual, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds), trans. D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell), §97.
75. See G. Cambiano (2007) 'Come confutare un libro? Dal Fedro al Teeteto di Platone', in *Antiquorum Philosophia. An International Journal*, no. 1 (Pisa and Rome), pp. 99–122.
76. L. Wittgenstein 'Philosophy', p. 316e.

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# 7
# The World Seen *Sub Specie Aeternitatis*: Wittgenstein's Platonism

*Begoña Ramón Cámara*

## 1.

The expression adopted as the title of this chapter refers to what is probably the most profound spiritual experience that some great philosophers of the Western tradition had in their lives. To trace its history would mean taking into consideration quite a number of great works of the human spirit, but the search will always end up in the work of Plato, the creator of what is essential in the set of ideas and feelings associated with that expression. It is a powerful and strange set of ethical, aesthetical and religious elements that was destined to exert a very profound influence not only on ancient and medieval philosophy, but also on the philosophy of modern times. The meaning that Wittgenstein attributed to the experience of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* can only be understood within the context of the Platonic tradition to which that experience essentially belongs. It is my aim, therefore, to examine his remarks on this matter in the light of the fertile words of Plato, to whom Wittgestein is connected by many links, especially by his ethics, his aesthetics, and by some essential features of his religious temperament.[1]

The general conception of the nature and ultimate meaning of philosophy that can be deduced from the work of Wittgenstein follows the path traced by the old Platonic concept of philosophy. The continuity between the philosophical proposals of both authors is supported by the influence on the young Wittgenstein of another thinker strongly linked to Platonic mysticism: Arthur Schopenhauer. For Plato, the aim of philosophy is to lead the human soul to ever greater heights along

the 'rough and steep ascent' of dialectics until reaching the point of view of the Good: a contemplation of the world from the point of view of eternity, or, to use one of the metaphors preferred by Plato to describe the nature of the philosophical exercise, and that we will find again in Wittgenstein, a 'flight' over the high and silent peaks of the *Phaedrus* from which to contemplate the totality of the essences in the whole of their logical relations to one another. This conception of philosophy survives in Wittgenstein: the global idea, indeed, that can be deduced from the whole body of his writings – and in this there is no 'first' or 'second' Wittgenstein, but one and the same man – is that the philosopher's task is an analysis and a critique of language that uplifts us to a vision of the world *sub specie aeterni*.

One of the tasks that Plato assigns to dialectics or philosophy is to clarify the essence of the *lógos* – the analysis of language in the *Cratylus* and the *Sophist* can serve as examples. One part of this work of clarification is carried out by exploring – and sometimes correcting – the grammar of expressions, the language-games, and the rules involved in them. A good example of this is the second part of the *Parmenides*, where Plato develops the same kind of philosophical exercise that will be practised by the late Wittgenstein. In this dialogue, as in the *Phaedrus* before and later in the *Sophist*, dialectics is presented as a procedure of conceptual analysis to incorporate each Idea into the higher genera to which it belongs and, inversely, to divide and subdivide each genus into the Ideas 'that are part of it'. Wittgenstein adopts this conception of philosophy as the art of 'seeing in unity and multiplicity' (*eis hèn kaì epì pollà … horàn*; *Phaedr.* 266b), in the sense that he sets up language-games as objects of comparison that, by way of their similarities and dissimilarities, can throw light on the essence of language.[2] This examination of the similarities and differences that might exist between language-games must show, among other things, that any use of language refers to a form of life, and that it is meaningful only as part of it, since, as Marx already remarked 'neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own … they are only *manifestations* of actual life' of men,[3] and it can be enriched forging imaginary usages aimed at clarifying the real praxis of language and the effective role of expressions in the lives of speakers. It is not surprising that von Wright felt that Wittgenstein's philosophical method was close to that of Plato.[4]

Finally, both in *Phaedo* and the *Republic* dialectics is characterized as a logical procedure aimed at the validation or refutation of propositions by way of an orderly analysis of their consequences and presuppositions, and, especially in the central books of the *Republic*, dialectics is

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also the knowledge itself in which that method fructifies. The most peculiar and outstanding features of that knowledge are its radicality and universality. The soul of the philosopher is characterized, says Plato, by its striving after truth and its love of wisdom, 'not love of a part of wisdom only, but of the whole' (*Rep.* 475b and 485a ff.). The philosopher, a lover willing to embrace the whole of being, cannot show the slightest touch of 'illiberality' (*aneleuthería*), because 'nothing can be more contrary than meanness to a soul that is ever to seek the totality and universality of all things both divine and human' (*enantiṓtaton gár pou smikrología psichê melloúsē toû ólou kaì pantòs aeì eporéxesthai theíou te kaì anthrōpínou*; *Rep.* 486a). In its task of gently attracting the eye of the soul, which is in this life sunk in a 'barbaric slough' (*Rep.* 533d), and lifting it upwards, dialectics uses the mathematical sciences as auxiliaries; they are most useful 'for the investigation of the beautiful and the good' (*pròs tḕn toû kaloû te kaì agathoû zḗtēsin*), provided that an overview of their mutual affinities is brought out (*Rep.* 531c–d).[5] These sciences, which certainly possess 'an extraordinary charm' (*Rep.* 528d), are nevertheless just the prelude to the melody that the dialectical art plays. Dialectics is the only method that can show what the absolute Good is, since 'no one will argue that there is any other method that attempts to comprehend systematically and in all cases (*hodōi perì pantòs lambánein*) what each thing really is' (*Rep.* 533b). While the different branches of mathematics only offer a fragmentary and maimed view of the world of eternal Forms, dialectics does not stop until reaching a perfect and total view of reality. By tearing their objects of study out of the total system in which they have their place and their *raison d'être*, the mathematical disciplines are unable to justify the presuppositions of their research. Mathematics 'only dream about being, but it is impossible for them to have the clear waking vision of it as long as they leave the hypotheses which they use unexamined and are unable to give an account of them' (*Resp.* 533c). Dialectics, on the contrary, treats its hypotheses 'not as first principles, but only as hypotheses, that is to say, as steps and springboards' raising to that which is the starting-point of all and requires no hypothesis – the Good – and, after attaining that, proceeds downward to the conclusion by successive steps through all the consequences that follow from it (*Rep.* 511b). Dialectics is, therefore, the science which participates in the highest possible degree of clarity, and it becomes *a total and systematic knowledge* in which every particular knowledge is justified by the place it occupies within the whole.

Plato agrees with the Pythagoreans in holding the existence of an essential kinship between man and deity by way of thought (*noûs*), the

noblest element in man, which makes him closer and alike to divinity, and he also attributes a salvific role to familarization with the mathematical language in which the universe is written. But for Plato the human way of life that has the greatest resemblance to the deity's life is the one devoted to the exercise of dialectics, understood as a kind of symphony of Ideas perfectly articulated. What brings man closer to the deity is, above all, the soul's capacity to apprehend the world with an all-embracing view. The soul trained in the hard instruction of dialectics is synoptic and able to gather in a comprehensive survey all the connections and the whole internal structure of the world of Ideas (*Rep.* 537c), and only with the deity does it share that capacity. Although, strictly speaking, only the god is wise (*Apol.* 23a, *Phaedr.* 278d), the philosopher becomes as divine as man can be in the measure in which he develops the dialectic power of the soul. Thus, the exercise of apprehending the whole with the 'winged thought' is the real *imitatio Dei* and, therefore, philosophy is the religious exercise *par excellence*.[6] For Wittgenstein, too, the commitment to philosophy has a religious overtone. It is very significant that he was eager to consecrate his work to the glory of God, a desire also characteristic of Plato, or that the idea that philosophical activity is a kind of service to the spirit (*Geist*) appears often in his writings, understanding that service, as we will see soon, in the same way as Plato: as a road to the highest possible level of generality in the analysis of philosophical questions.[7]

Schopenhauer always held the Platonic conception of philosophical knowledge that he adopted very early. Only philosophy lets us know, he maintains, 'the true inner essence of the world in a total and universal way'.[8] While sciences have as their object some specific part of the world, only philosophy rises to the level of considering it in its totality, going beyond the fragmentary and particularity from which both the scientific perspective and the common knowledge of the world suffer.[9] This conception of philosophy helps us, indeed, to establish a connection with Wittgenstein, since the same yearning for totality is found in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which preserves the desire of generality and the systematic character of Plato's dialectics: when, after using its propositions as steps, one climbs up beyond them, there prevails a view of the world *sub specie aeterni* – as a limited whole and, therefore, foreign to factic atomism – which Wittgenstein, as fervently as Plato, defends as the way to see the world 'aright' (*richtig*).[10] His pregnant formal Platonism is probably one of the keys that explain that, in a nuclear point of 'the work of his life', the young logician opposes his own philosophical activity to that of Fritz Mauthner,[11] another

philosopher concerned with determining the limits of language who takes his starting-point from Schopenhauer, but whose *Sprachkritik* lacks, in the eyes of Wittgentein, the systematic scope that philosophy, understood in terms of the Platonic *kathorân*, must have. While the critique of language developed by the Bohemian philosopher is rhapsodic in the measure that he centres his analyses in certain concepts especially significative, but purely particular – concepts such as 'nation', 'State', etc. – Wittgenstein's work deals with general formal concepts – such as 'object', 'fact', etc. – in order to clarify not this or that particular language, but the true essence of every possible language and of every being, because when we fly high enough the differences between the different languages fade away, and it becomes evident that they all are the same, since they are just different sign manifestations of a basically identical human activity: that of making figures of reality.

Although between the *Tractatus*' conception of language and the one held later by Wittgenstein a whole world opened up – the whole distance separating *Logik* from grammar – some general remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* concerning the nature of philosophy and of its method suggest that, in spite of its apparently dispersed character, this work continued gravitating around the Platonic category of 'synoptic representation' (*übersichtliche Darstellung*). It seems, in fact, that the aim of Wittgenstein in his second fundamental work was still to reach an overview (*Übersichtlichkeit*) of the nature of language by way of a 'wandering pilgrimage through all things' (*tês dià pánton diexódou te kaì plánes*; *Parm.* 136e) that can offer a description as comprehensive as possible of its function or structure, in order to reach a complete clarity and transparency of 'the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games'. The verb used by Wittgenstein, 'übersehen', suggests again the idea of gazing or examining in the sense in which one can enjoy the view of a place from the top of a mountain – it evokes the idea of 'the eternal eye of the world which sees everything'[12] – and it is called to make synoptically visible, by means of a rearrangement (*durch Ordnen*), the essence of language.[13] All the clarity and self-agreement that might exist in the philosophical analysis are due, as Plato warns us (*Phaedr.* 265d), to the work of synopsis, which Wittgenstein also considers the most characteristic activity of the philosopher: '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'.[14] The philosophical view is something similar to a *Weltanschauung*, but is not strictly the same thing; among other reasons, because in the *Philosophical Investigations* – as

was also the case in the *Tractatus* – the philosophical analysis of the 'countless different kinds' of uses and functions of language-games is centred on very general aspects and, therefore, common to many, if not all, the different forms of life. In connection with this important point of Wittgenstein's methodology, it is appropriate to recall the general character of the profound remarks with which Wittgenstein glossed a volume of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, because the critique of the analyses of the famous anthropologist is performed from the heights of a transcultural or universal view of life and of the behaviour of man on earth. In contrast with the narrowness of Frazer's points of view, Wittgenstein shows that the principle by which primitive manners, rites, ceremonies, etc., are ordained, is much more general than was supposed by Frazer, and the dialectic task of searching for similitudes is exemplified on this occasion by the presentation of the similarities that exist between primitive and modern life. Whoever has a good ear notices that there is something in us which speaks in support of the practices of savages.[15] If the synoptic view of grammatical facts were a kind of *Weltanschauung*, it could only be, in any case, of a certain kind of people: of philosophers, a kind of people who for Plato, for Schopenhauer, and also for Wittgenstein, lack a 'fatherland'. Exile is a constitutive dimension of Platonism; the dialectician and his soul live exiled from time and from any *pólis* on earth. Schopenhauer knew as well as Plato that melancholy and solitude are the fate of philosophy, and in the past century Wittgenstein said it forever: 'The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher'.[16]

If we now consider the aesthetic dimension of the contemplation of the world from the point of view of the eternal, we will enter a field which shows especially well how closely this experience of the world in Wittgenstein is related to Plato's thought. In the exposition of this new motif, Schopenhauer – undoubtedly the philosopher who has gone most deeply into the artistic charm of the view of the world that is present in Plato's philosophy – is again the thinker who will take us from Plato to Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein connects, indeed, the experience of seeing the world from the point of view of eternity – in agreement with the sense that the author of *The World as Will and Representation* gives to Plato's doctrine of Forms in his metaphysics of the beautiful[17] – with the liberation from the iron law of the principle of sufficient reason. As he writes in one of his diaries, when at the age of twenty-five he had the idea of the meaningless of the law of causality in itself, and that there is a consideration of the world that does not take it into account,

he had the feeling that a new epoch had begun.[18] This consideration of the world with which Wittgenstein initiated a new epoch arises when man, 'elevated by strength of mind',[19] stops following the leading thread marked by the principle of sufficient reason, from which neither common thinking nor science escape. It is a view of the world that arises all of a sudden, in an undetermined and unexpected moment (*exaíphnēs*)[20] – that is to say, it is a gift of intuition and feeling that can in no way be forced[21] – and, when that marvellous instant arrives, the *where*, the *when*, the *why* or the *wherefore* of things do not matter at all, but only the *what*, that is, the Platonic Idea, whose apprehension and expression is the origin and end of all true art.[22] The questions '*Wo, Wann, Warum, Wozu an den Dingen*' are the guidelines that the principle of sufficient reason imposes on every subject, and they always remit, by a shorter or longer way, to man's will. The pure *Was* to which both the philosopher and the artist are elevated implies a form of comprehension foreign to those questions. While both the common conception and the scientific view of the world are characterized by seeing things in their causal relations with each other in space and time, and in function of their utility, in the philosophical comprehension the object contemplated is released from the organic links that join it to the rest of reality, and both the place and the time in which the contemplator and the object contemplated are placed, are forgotten. Likewise, in that kind of comprehension, the craving for knowing the causes of the object, that hounds the mind once and again with the question 'Why?', and does not let it have any rest, is silenced.[23] And, lastly, the object is contemplated in a purely objective way, without any kind of interest. In the normal course of existence, man is engaged in the world and submitted to the regime of interest; but on some exceptional occasions he can free himself from the concern for existence and contemplate life with a detached and calm attitude. Such a state is reached when man succeeds in emancipating himself from that 'demanding' and 'terrible' governess, the will, in the same sense as the exercise of dying in relation to the body is celebrated in the *Phaedo*. Plato and Schopenhauer have described it, full of an immense gratitude, time after time in their works. It is that state of the subject in which the intellect rules the will, which, silenced and deprived of its power, happily surrenders, allowing man to have a purely objective or completely disinterested contemplation of 'the vast sea of beauty' (*Symp.* 210d). In that moment, man is no longer an individual and becomes the pure subject of cognition (*reines Subjekt der Erkenntniss*), 'will-less, painless and timeless'. He gains access to that form of knowledge that Plato calls *noûs* and

Spinoza *cognitio tertii generis*, *sive intuitiva*, and enjoys, in the silence of passions, the contemplation of the beautiful, which is what makes us happy.[24] This experience supposes a liberation from the heavy load of 'our individuality with all its sufferings', and produces a transformation of the representation that no longer opposes a subject to an object, but joins them in a rapture in which subject and object are completely confused. The eternal subject of pure cognition emerges when one forgets his 'annoying self', that by that stage has contracted himself until becoming 'an unextended point',[25] and now knows nothing of himself and is totally absorbed in the intuited object. All the strength of the spirit is then directed towards the intuition and sinks completely into it, in such a way that the whole of consciousness is filled with the calm contemplation of the object admired, with which it becomes confused.[26] Anyone who has become so engrossed and lost (*verliert*) in this experience, Schopenhauer concludes, will immediately be aware that he is, as a subject of cognition, the bearer of the world and of all objective being – a presupposition of the existence of the world, as Wittgenstein says[27] – that now presents itself as depending on him. And therefore – he says in a monistic *páthos* often connected with the eternalistic *páthos* – he draws nature into himself, so that he feels himself one with the world and becomes aware that truly All is One.[28]

In the central books of the *Republic* and in other places, Plato rejects the sensible world as something worthless; and Schopenhauer, in the course of presenting the meaning of Plato's metaphysics, goes so far as calling it something 'null in itself' (*nichtig*), using a rather harsh word, but quite usual among the philosophers attached to the Platonic tradition, since the animic state of mysticism naturally tends to express itself treating as a mere nothing the world from which it wants to grow apart.[29] With the background of the metaphysical condemnation delivered by Plato against 'this' world, the *Tractatus* presents an ontology of contingency that faces the world, no less gloomily, as a place which gives no room for the unconditioned and where no value exists.

> The sense of the world – 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.[30]

But in Plato and in the Platonic tradition this corrosive otherworldly state of mind coexists, however, with an exuberant type of this-world oriented mood more to the liking of those mystics and saints, both pagan and Christian, who found it very difficult not to plunge into earthly beauty. Even if the world is a cave in shadows, it is no less true that it is the sun itself which produces them, and which those shadows hint at, and in their own way reveal, the ideal. This can be seen in the same passage of the *Republic* in which Plato so insistently states the absolute transcendence of the Good with respect to the world, and it is expressly and more clearly developed in the *Timaeus*, where the sensible world is the masterpiece of a demiurge who could not but grant it existence because he is 'good' (*agathós*), that is to say, because he is generous and harbours no jealousy, meanness, envy or malice (*phthónos*), and he wants that the whole order of the possible enjoys the gift of existence.[31] Moreover, even if no true value can be ascribed to anything in the sensible world, it is supposed, however, that the approach to the Good is necessarily gradual. The stages are pointed out in the *Symposium*: the philosopher ascends, driven by his love of beauty and using the beautiful things of this world in the manner of ladders, going from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies, and from them to beautiful observances, and from beautiful observances to beautiful sciences, until arriving at that learning which is concerned with the beautiful itself and that alone, and getting to know at last, as if by a sudden flash of light, the very essence of beauty, a moment in life in which, more than in any other moment, the life of man acquires value (*Symp.* 211c–d). Thus, we have to acknowledge that the things of this world have at least the value corresponding to rungs, a provisional and instrumental value, and the soul can duly be concerned with them and find joy in them, as long as they are considered only as steps on the way to the union with the Good or Beauty which absolutely transcends the world.[32]

Therefore, it is not surprising that the programme of arising to a view of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* goes through the enjoyment of contemplating the splendour of nature and the beauty displayed by the beings of 'this' world – although, at the same time, it is held that every authentic good belongs to a supernatural order and the *contemptus mundi* is made an essential exercise of wisdom – and that it has as a consequence a religious joy expressed in a pious and ineffable sentiment of gratitude and in a profound content for the existence of the world.[33] When one contemplates the world with '*prejudice*', being 'enthusiastic in advance', it is seen, says Wittgenstein, as 'God's work of art' and, as such, it is certainly worthy of admiration.[34] 'As a thing

among things, each thing is equally insignificant; as a world each one equally significant'. But the most simple and ordinary things in the world become wonderful when they are seen in the right perspective, 'from the outside'.[35] Schopenhauer had also expressed the same idea: any existing thing is beautiful (*ist jedes vorhandene Ding schön*) if it is considered in a purely objective way.[36] It is not necessary that something extraordinary happens for our nature to be amazed: what is amazing is that there is something rather than nothing, and there is nothing more wonderful than life itself. 'The aesthetic miracle' – says another beautiful sentence of Wittgenstein – 'is that the world exists. That what exists does exist' (*Das künstlerische Wunder ist, daß es die Welt gibt. Dass es das gibt, was es gibt*).[37]

In his *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein, when trying to clarify what he understands as the 'absolute good', refers again to the ineffable experience of wondering at the existence of the world, and describes it as the experience of seeing the world as a miracle. This is a very important aspect of his religiosity, which links him with Plato and with one of the two opposing currents of the Platonic theological tradition. From the point of view of the Good, that is to say, from the final or absolute point of view to which dialectics leads, the world is seen as a miracle because its existence is superfluous and there is no reason that might support it. One of the notions about the nature of the deity gathered by Plato under his Form of the Good is an exaltation of the Socratic self-sufficiency and independence. This idea of the deity as absolute self-sufficiency, which is assumed by Aristotle and the neo-Platonists and constitutes one of the features of God in most later philosophical theologies, appears in the *Tractatus*, whose extramundane God, indifferent with respect to the world, is just a survival of this attribute of the Good in Plato. Such a conception of the deity, congenial of the contingent ontology characteristic of the *Tractatus*, explains the rejection by Wittgenstein of the notion of a Creator, an idea that 'had no intelligibility for him at all'.[38] There is nothing in the essential nature of God that it makes necessary or desirable for him to create the world, and therefore the existence of something other than God is, for the understanding and the heart of man, a miracle, an inexplicable accident.[39] This religious sentiment is, in a great measure, the origin of Wittgenstein's reticence about scientific activity, an exercise that, according to him, is based on 'that silly superstition of our time' consisting in the belief that everything can be explained.[40] Science presupposes the crude fact of the existence of the world, a facticity that it cannot explain and from which it cannot totally protect us however high the technological level of development of a

civilization might be.[41] Scientific practice, then, erodes man's natural capacity to feel the 'miracle' of the existence of the world, while the philosophical view, which precisely arises from that natural disposition (*Theaet.* 155d), is summoned to restore it.

The eternal view of the world is provided by philosophy, and it is also a gift that art presents to us. Without art, the object is a piece of nature as any other, without charm and value, but art lifts it up to an eternity of value, and compels us to adopt the right perspective, which arises from an enthusiastic mood.[42] We can condense the essentials of Wittgenstein's philosophy of art in one sentence: 'The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*'.[43] That means, as Schopenhauer taught us, that the work of art is the object seen in a perspective free from the principle of sufficient reason in its fourfold configuration. In the same way as for Schopenhauer, art is an *ontological* knowledge that discovers and brings to light the *being* of something, the Platonic Form – without confusing being with thing, *eón* with *chrémata* – Wittgenstein conceives art no less platonically as *light and disclosing of the essence of the object*. Art is, and must be, the expression of the object in its transparence, in what it is in itself and without relation to human designs and efforts. This is why, when evaluating Tolstoy's theorizing of the work of art as something that conveys 'a feeling', Wittgenstein corrects him saying that the work of art does not seek to convey something else, just itself.[44] True art – for example, the art that springs from Beethoven's magnanimous heart – is always a teaching about the essence of the world, about life such as it is, and that is why it can console (*trösten*) and redeem (*erlösen*) us from the world.[45] Being an expression of what is essential, the works of the great masters have a permanent value for all humanity and for every place and time.[46] And, precisely because true art shows what really matters, 'in art it is hard to say anything, that is as good as: saying nothing'.[47]

For this we can say that Wittgenstein's aesthetics and his philosophy of art move within that metaphysics of light that has come to us from Plato's dialogues. It is otherwise known that Wittgenstein was a man of a very classical taste, which suited his profound dislike for everything that was pompous and affected. For him, as for Schopenhauer, the essential law of all art and all beauty is the same one defended by Plato: naturalness, simplicity and austerity, since only under these forms a spiritual representation of any kind can be an expression of truth and rightness. I will illustrate this assertion, in the case of Schopenhauer, with an example taken from *Parerga und Paralipomena*, but many others could be adduced. The beauty of antique vases, he says, 'arises from the

fact that they express in such a naïve manner what they are intended to be and to achieve'. On the other hand, the richly-gilded porcelain vessels of his own time, that exchanged the style of antiquity for 'the miserable rococo style', exposed 'the contemptible spirit' of his epoque, which thus 'branded itself on the forehead for all time'. For that change in the style of vessels is, Schopenhauer concludes, 'by no means a small thing; but it stamps the spirit of our age'.[48] As regards Wittgenstein, we can bring to mind the sculpture that he made, which followed the classical canon; or the house that he built for his sister, of a Pythagoric sobriety and exactness; or the classical naturality and elegance of his writing; or, lastly, his greatest contribution to classical art: his own life. Wittgenstein's conception of art and beauty cannot possibly be more classical.

If we finally examine the ethical dimension of the contemplation of the world from the point of view of eternity, we will find out that it is in this aspect where Wittgenstein's Platonism reaches its highest intensity. The ethics of the Viennese philosopher is Platonism in almost all its pages. Wittgenstein says – as we have already seen – that 'the work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*'. He continues: 'and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connexion between art and ethics'.[49] In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein distinguishes two kinds of eternity: it can be understood as 'infinite temporal duration', but also as 'timelessness'. If we take eternity to mean timelessness, then, as he says in very classical terms, 'eternal life belongs to those who live in the present'.[50] This is one of the essential predicates of a good life: being able to live merely in the present, living a life free from the burden of the time that we leave behind and far from the uncertainties of a transient and unpredictable future. Hence, the solution of the riddle of life in space and time, far from residing in the temporal inmortality of soul – which is no solution – lies *outside* time and space.[51]

Another of the essential predicates of a happy life is undoubtedly living a life far from 'the business of this world', so to speak. This is the ideal of a contemplative life developed by Plato in *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Theaetetus*, and that would be so pregnant of significance for the subsequent history of philosophy. The philosopher, whose interest lies totally in the search for truth, 'does not know the way to the agora' and 'only his body is and dwells in the city', while his mind, considering that the things of this world are of little or no importance, grows apart from them all and flies above them disdainfully, 'investigating the whole nature of existing things, each one in its entirety, never condescending to anything that is close by' (*Theaet.* 173c–174a). It is not a question,

then, of changing anything, but of contemplating the world from the greatest possible height and remoteness. The way to capture the world *sub specie aeterni* is 'the way of thought which as it were flies above the world and leaves it the way it is, contemplating it from above in its flight'.[52] Work on philosophy is basically working on oneself,[53] acting intensely in one's own inner city (*Rep.* 592a), as did Socrates, whose *therapeía tēs psychēs* is the true political action: 'The revolutionary will be the one who can revolutionize himself'.[54]

We saw before that, in Plato and Wittgenstein, aesthetics is supported and comforted by a kind of asceticism. The softness of the contemplation of beauty, so to speak, is due to the fact that it gives us a satisfaction and a pleasure which do not have any reference to the dark world of desire, the world 'of pain and thousandfold woe'.[55] The same can be said of ethics: it also rests, inevitably, on a strict purifying asceticism. We can summarize this point saying, in Schopenhauer's words, that it is a maxim for the philosopher 'to wish as little as possible and to know as much as possible'.[56] The final end of Wittgenstein's ethics does not differ from the final end of Plato's ethics: to attain *the serenity and imperturbability of the soul*. And in order to reach that godly state which Plato extols in *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Philebus* – and which Wittgenstein also celebrates as the highest benefit that can be given to man – it is necessary 'to dry up' the appetites of the soul and avoid 'watering' and 'nourishing' them (*Rep.* 606d), since we can only be good and happy if we free ourselves from the prolonged torment of our appetites, the violence of our desires, and the uneasiness caused by our passions. That is why the opposition between the chaos of flesh and the order of the spirit appears in this philosophy in a bipolar, sharp and troubled way, as can also be observed in many places of Wittgenstein's personal writings – for example, in the mystical pages, purely Socratic, of his *Geheime Tagebücher* – and it makes him say that, in a certain sense, not wanting (*Nichtwünschen*) is the only good (*das einzig Gute*).[57] For Plato and Wittgenstein, the true well-being of man lies in the final rest and quietness of desire, in that state of mind that, as the ancients put it, is like the perfect calm (*galénē*) of a sea without any waves. It is otherwise evident that this ethics of the cessation of desire contributes best to the achievement of the ideal of the *bíos theoretikós* – such as that ideal is lived by Plato and Wittgenstein – in the measure that it tends to weaken 'our attachment to the body' and helps to 'detach our affections from the things of this world'. The will to truth depends essentially upon surrendering the helm of soul to reason: the man who is ruled by passions cannot be ruled by the love of truth. This point, however, implies in Plato a clear contradiction, since

it is also hinted that maybe reason is not strong enough to prevail over the irrational part of our nature, and to lead man to the necessary and healthy personal unity and coherence, unless it too becomes a passion. In any case it matters to observe that, for both Plato and Wittgenstein, becoming a master of oneself, by overcoming passions and imposing on them the dictates of reason, is a necessary condition for the cultivation of knowledge. Both philosophers display, in this sense, an intense eroticism of truth which opposes itself to falsehood, error and deceit.

The view of the world that raises man for some moments above time, space and concern, involves a deep feeling of inner freedom and an indifference to fate. This essential constituent of Plato and Wittgenstein's ethics is the disposition of mind which they thought was most adequate to help men preserve the peace of mind and that joy of living which is, perhaps, one of the most important elements of courage. We have seen that joy, which is a recurrent motif in their philosophies, has both a religious and an aesthetic sense. We are going to see now that it also has a deep ethical sense.

As all other philosophers in the Socratic tradition, Wittgenstein understands happiness in terms of virtue. His ethics follows in this fundamental point the same dialectics as Plato's ethics: it starts from the distinction between those things which depend on us and those which do not, and the latter are excluded from the definition of happiness. The man who makes every effort to be virtuous is happy because happiness lies in virtue, and, while virtue depends on us, everything else is indifferent. When we face life with this attitude, fate – the place of heteronomy and the mark of our impotence – has no power against our happiness. Happiness is reached on the *instant* of virtuous action, which amounts to an *eternity* of happiness. This is where the solution to the problem of life basically lies, both for Plato – who closes the *Republic* with the solemn promise of happiness for the man who has followed the road of justice in spite of the blows of fate – and for Wittgenstein: the only important thing is to do the good, however adverse, horrible and revolting one's circumstances might be, and by doing so to enjoy the happiness and spiritual serenity produced by one's own virtue.[58] For him who trusts in it, the sense of life is not problematic any more. The good man who faces life and accepts it as it comes, the hero – Socrates – lives with the intimate conviction that no harm could happen to him, and even faces an unjust death with the absolute confidence of being safe, since, come what may, no evil can happen to a good man (*Apol*. 41c–d). Wittgenstein made of war a *materia virtutis*, an occasion for the exercise of excellence, and he faced it with the same

temper which characterizes Socrates: without fear of being shot dead, he says to himself, but with fear of not doing his duty well.[59] He will return to this idea some years later, when he appeals to the experience of feeling *absolutely* safe, to that state of mind in which we are inclined to say 'I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens', in order to express what he understands for good in an absolute sense.[60] That is why we cannot understand – understand 'with the heart' – the fall of the hero, and why Plato, after having written the *Apology*, still had to write a second trial – the *Phaedo* – which this time has a happy ending in a Wittgensteinian sense.[61]

This takes us to the attitude of both philosophers towards death. For Plato, philosophy is a preparation and a concern for death. The man who ascends to a view of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* does not deem human life 'a thing of great concern', and therefore he will not suppose death to be fearful (*Rep.* 486a–b). When arguing against Callicles that doing injustice is the greatest evil the soul can suffer, Socrates distinguishes two kinds of life: a licentious and insatiate life (*apléstōs kaì acholástōs bíou*) devoted to the satisfaction of desires and passions, which he condems as 'awful, shameful, and wretched' (*deinòs kaì aischròs kaì áthlios*; *Gorg.* 494e), and the orderly life of the philosopher, a life that has enough and is always contented with what it happens to have got (*kosmíōs kaì toîs aeì paroûsin hikanôs kaì exarkoúntōs échonta bíon*; *Gorg.* 493c), a happy or harmonious life which seeks self-government, moral perfection, and the rule of justice in the soul.[62] The first kind of life makes one forget the most serious thing that exists: reflection on how one must live his life, however long or short it is, since

> who is truly a man should not care about living any particular length of time, and not be very attached to life; but having resigned all this to the deity, and believing what women say, that no man can escape fate, he should then proceed to consider in what way he will best live out the span of time he might live (*Gorg.* 512d–e).

This Socratic attitude towards life and death is also one of the pillars of Wittgenstein's ethics. Fear in face of death, writes Wittgenstein, is the best sign of a false, that is, a bad or unreasonable life.[63] For him who strives to live a good life – a life entirely consecrated to the 'spirit' (*Geist*) – death does not mean anything, because, as we already saw, for life in the present there is no death, and also because it must be understood that, as Epicurus said, death is not part of life.[64] The freedom

of man demands that he is always ready to die, that he frees himself once and for all of the fear of having to abandon life. It is only in this classical sense that Wittgenstein holds that it is death what gives life its sense.[65] When the world is seen with the right perspective, one enjoys the good hours of life thankfully, as a mercy, and otherwise is indifferent to the course of time and to its essential uncertainty.[66] We can die at any moment, we do not know when, and nothing can be done, neither for nor against, what is not in our power. Let us say it one last time: in order to succeed on each instant we must only care about that which does depend on us and is the only necessary thing: 'to live in the good and the beautiful until life ends by itself' (*im Guten und Schönen zu leben, bis das Leben von selbst aufhört*).[67]

In the exercise of 'doing my duty just because it is my duty', we can make a virtue of necessity, that is to say, to endure with resignation the blows of fate. This is a basic ethical motif on the subject we are dealing with that often appears in the pages of Plato and Wittgenstein, and I will close with its reminder. In misfortunes, say Plato and Wittgenstein in unison, man must try to bear pain calmly and not surrender to sadness and despair. What one should never do is 'to split up and start fighting against oneself', so as to be 'better and happier', a tear that we would suffer if we try to quarrel with fate's blows. These must be endured patiently, steadfastly and without sorrow. For Wittgenstein, as we have seen, man lives in a world that does not respond to his will,[68] and that is why he can only make himself independent of the world, and in a certain sense master it, by renouncing any influence on happenings.[69] The fight against a world which in any case is going to run over the subject and prevail on him, would only lead him to waste in vane his inner strength, a strength that the philosopher needs to cultivate a life of knowledge, which is what wards off the misery of this world and makes him happy.[70] A good man, therefore, must live in harmony and agreement with the world[71] and try to contemplate whatever comes to him with a noble impassivity, 'without ever losing himself', almost as if he were the spectator of his own life,[72] and so being able to preserve, in spite of fate's blows, that supreme good of a calm and cheerful spirit. He must not explain, but describe,[73] and rise up to an overall view of one's own life – a global view that is expressed in the philosopher's last words – and measure it with the yardstick of eternity, that is to say, to consider one's life as part of the higher whole of the life of the 'spirit', working with all his strength for the life of knowledge. It could not be otherwise in a Platonic philosopher.

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## Notes

1. I do not pretend to offer here an exhaustive study of all the features present in the view of the world from the point of view of eternity in the work of both philosophers; I will just highlight some of the links that exist between them.

2. L. Wittgenstein (1958) *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed., transl. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell), §130. His *Lectures on Aesthetics* [in C. Barrett (ed.) (1967) *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press)] are a sample of the use by Wittgenstein in the academic practice of the dialectical method, which is used there, further-more, in close connection with the motif, also central in Plato, of the art of 'making us see things in a certain way' in the field of aesthetics.

3. I will quote *in extenso* the passage to which this statement belongs, in order to appreciate the extent of the agreement between Wittgenstein and Marx in their critique of 'the secret of philosophical language': 'Für die Philosophen ist es eine der schwierigsten Aufgaben, aus der Welt des Gedankens in die wirkliche Welt herabzusteigen. Die unmittelbare Wirklichkeit des Gedankens ist die *Sprache*. Wie die Philosophen das Denken verselbständigt haben, so mußten sie die Sprache zu einem eignen Reich verselbständigen. Dies ist das Geheimnis der philosophischen Sprache, worin die Gedanken als Worte einen eignen Inhalt haben. Das Problem, aus der Welt der Gedanken in die wirkliche Welt herabzusteigen, verwandelt sich in das Problem, aus der Sprache ins Leben herabzusteigen ... Die Philosophen hätten ihre Sprache nur in die gewöhnliche Sprache, aus der sie abstrahiert ist, aufzulösen, um sie als die verdrehte Sprache der wirklichen Welt zu erkennen und einzusehen, daß weder die Gedanken noch die Sprache für sich ein eignes Reich bilden; daß sie nur *Äußerungen* des wirklichen Lebens sind.' K. Marx and F. Engels (1969) *Die deutsche Ideologie*, in *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz), Band III, pp. 432–33.

4. 'It is significant that he did read and enjoy Plato. He must have recognized congenial features, both in Plato's literary and philosophic method and in the temperament behind the thoughts' (G. H. von Wright (2001) 'Ludwig Wittgenstein, A Biographical Sketch' in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4, 543–44). About Plato's literary method and that followed by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* I will simply make three very short remarks: dialogue is chosen by both philosophers to transmit their thought because it is the literary genre closest to spoken language (it is also noteworthy that both philosophers were reluctant to develop a philosophical technical termi-nology), it also prevents the reader from avoiding having to think by himself, and lastly (and this does not necessarily contradict the previous remarks), because it can serve to filter intellectually aristocratic readers from ordinary ones. See L. Wittgenstein (1998) *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), third remark on p. 10 (MS 109 204: 6–7.11.1930), where he offers the key to this matter both in Plato and in his own work. As regards 'the temperament behind the thoughts [of Plato]', we will see later on that it also coincides with Wittgenstein's temperament.

5. It goes without saying that for Wittgenstein, too, the study of mathematics is a precious possession for the soul; see the entry of 9.11.1912 in G. H. Von Wright (1990) *A Portrait of Wittgenstein as a Young Man: From the Diary of David Hume Pinsent 1912–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell). The mathematical sciences which constitute the prolegomena for dialectics are arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy and harmonics.

6. See the religious digression of the *Theaetetus* (172c–177c).

7. This is immediately noticeable in the *Geheime Tagebücher* and in different pages of the personal writings of Wittgenstein. It is also remarkable that he calls the solution that he wishes for the logical problems 'the redeeming thought' (*der erlösende Gedanke*) and 'the only redeeming word' (*das eine erlösende Wort*) [L. Wittgenstein (1991) *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, hrsg. und dokumentiert von Wilhelm Baum (Wien: Turia & Kant), entries of 17.10.1914 and 21.11.1914].

8. A. Schopenhauer (1913) *Metaphysik der Natur, des Schönen und der Sitten. Vorlesung über die gesammte Philosophie. Die Lehre vom Wesen der Welt und vom dem menschlichen Geiste* (*Arthur Schopenhauers handschriftlicher Nachlass*), in *Arthur Schopenhauers sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. von P. Deussen (München: R. Piper), Band. X, p. 258. See, for example, his early aphorism, with clear Platonic resonances, entitled 'Gedanken auf der Reise', in which Schopenhauer reflects on the perspective of the highest generality – a bird's-eye view – which is proper to philosophy (in A. Schopenhauer (1966) *Der handschriftliche Nachlass*, hrsg. von A. Hübscher (Frankfurt am Main: Waldemar Kramer), Band I, Frühe Manuskripte (1804–1818), p. 14.

9. A. Schopenhauer *Metaphysik der Natur, des Schönen und der Sitten*, p. 201.

10. L. Wittgenstein (1961) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with a new translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. MacGuinness (London-New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul-The Humanities Press), propositions 6.54 and 6.45. In Wittgenstein we also find very early a concern for making his philosophical work reach that essential status of being an overview. Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entries of 21.9.1914, 25.9.1914, 29.9.1914, 14.10.1914, 29.10.1914, 31.10.1914, 1.11.1914 and 6.7.1916; L. Wittgenstein (1961) *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. by G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe with an English translation by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell), entries of 1.11.1914, 15.11.1914 y 22.1.1915. Plato's influence on Wittgenstein regarding the ineffable character of the view of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* and the transcendental status of ethics cannot be dealt with here; I have discussed those subjects in my essay B. Ramón Cámara (2010) 'Sombras y penumbras del lenguaje. El pesimismo lógico en Platón, Schopenhauer y Wittgenstein', in Á. J. Perona (ed.) *Los peldaños de la escalera. Wittgenstein y la tradición filosófica* (Valencia: Pretextos).

11. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.0031. It is well known that Wittgenstein calls the *Tractatus* 'die Arbeit meines Lebens' in a letter

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to Bertrand Russell dated 12.6.1919, included in L. Wittgenstein (1995) *Cambridge Letters. Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa,* eds. B. McGuinness and G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell).

12. A. Schopenhauer *Metaphysik der Natur, des Schönen und der Sitten*, pp. 247–48.

13. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §92.

14. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §122. In L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 14 (MS 153a 90v: 1931), he writes: 'A thinker is very similar to a draughtsman. Who wants to represent all the interconnections'. On the equivalence between *verstehen* and *übersehen*, see also §125 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. One-sidedness is a main cause of 'philosophical disease' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §593). For clearness, accuracy and the greatest amount of truth (*tò saphès kaì tacribès kaì tò alēthéstaton*) as the ends that guide the exercise of dialectics in Plato, see *Philebus* 58c.

15. L. Wittgenstein (1967) 'Bemerkungen über Frazers *The Golden Bough*', *Synthese*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (New York: Springer), p. 240 ('…in uns etwas für jene Handlungsweisen der Wilden spricht'). As regards the idea that true philo-sophical reflection is aimed at essence, see, for example, *Culture and Value*, p. 24 (MS 112 139: 1.11.1931).

16. L. Wittgenstein (1981) *Zettel*, 2nd edn, transl. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell), §455.

17. The metaphysics of the beautiful is a seminal moment in the thought of Schopenhauer. Its foundation is the doctrine of Ideas. Cf. the third book ('Representation independent of the principle of sufficient reason: the Platonic Idea: the object of art') of A. Schopenhauer (2010) *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, transl. by J. Norman, A. Welchman, C. Janwaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 191 ff.

18. L. Wittgenstein (1997) *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, hrsg. von I. Somavilla (Innsbruck: Haymon), p. 21.

19. A. Schopenhauer *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, p. 201.

20. See *Symposium* 211a and *Letter VII* 344b.

21. Schopenhauer also insists on this point; see, for example, *Der handschriftliche Nachlass*, Band I, aphorism 143, p. 84, or *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, §34, p. 200.

22. A. Schopenhauer *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, §34, and *Metaphysik der Natur, des Schönen und der Sitten*, p. 202.

23. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 46 (MS 124 93: 3.7.1941) and p. 65 (MS 134 27: 10.-15.3.1947).

24. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 21.10.1916.

25. L, Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 5.64.

26. A. Schopenhauer *Metaphysik der Natur, des Schönen und der Sitten*, pp. 192 y 194. For Plato see, for example, *Republic* 490a–b, where he describes how the philosopher consorts lovingly with the Idea.

27. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 2.8.1916.

28. A. Schopenhauer *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, §34. Cf. Wittgenstein's reflections, on this same line of thought, in the *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entries of 12.10.1916, 15.10.1916, 17.10.1916 and 2.9.1916.

29. A. Schopenhauer *Metaphysik der Natur, des Schönen und der Sitten*, p. 184.

30. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.41.

31. Cf. *Republic* 509b and *Timaeus* 29e ss.

32. 'Good' and 'Beauty' can confidently be treated as interchangeable words, since in Plato's mind they are equivalent ideas. In this regard we might observe the use made of the words *kalón* and *agathón*, for example, in *Lysis* 216d, *Protagoras* 358b, *Gorgias* 474c–475e or *Symposium* 201b and 202b. For Wittgenstein, too, there is no beauty where there is no goodness, and goodness is that which is truly beautiful to see. 'Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same', it is said in *Tractatus* 6.421. 'Good life is beautiful', says the entry of 30.3.1916 of the *Geheime Tagebücher*.

33. That is the sentiment that predominates in the *Timaeus*, and a commonplace in the Platonic tradition. Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 218.

34. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, pp. 6 and 7 (MS 109 28: 22.8.1930).

35. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 8.10.1916, and *Culture and Value*, pp. 6 and 7 (MS 109 28: 22.8.1930).

36. A. Schopenhauer (1986) *Metaphysik der Natur, des Schönen und der Sitten*, p. 255.

37. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 20.10.1916. Cf. also *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.44.

38. N. Malcolm (1984) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 59.

39. It must be observed that Wittgenstein does not differ from Plato and many other philosophers in having several gods under only one name. In his work this conception of God coexists with at least two other ideas of God, of different origin, that are incongruous with the transcendent, self-sufficient, impassive and ineffable God of the Platonic tradition.

40. L. Wittgenstein 'Bemerkungen über Frazers *The Golden Bough*', p. 239.

41. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.371–6.373.

42. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, pp. 6 and 7 (MS 109 28: 22.8.1930).

43. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 7.10.1916.

44. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 67 (MS 134 106: 5.4.1947).

45. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 42 (MS 162b 59v: 1939–1940, second remark); *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 42.

46. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 23 (MS 111 194: 13.9.1931); A. Schopenhauer, *Metaphysik der Natur, des Schönen und der Sitten*, pp. 218–19.

47. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 26 (MS 156a 57r: ca. 1932–1934).

48. A. Schopenhauer (1926) *Parerga und Paralipomena*, §214; English translation in E. Belfort Bax (ed.) *Selected Essays of Schopenhauer* (London: G. Bell and Sons), pp. 288–89.

49. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks* 1914–1916, entry of 7.10.1916.

50. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.4311; *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 8.7.1916. For the contrast between temporal immortality and timeless life in Plato see, for example, *Symposium* 208a and *Timaeus* 37c–38b.

51. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.4312.

52. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, pp. 6 and 7 (MS 109 28: 22.8.1930).

53. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value,* p. 24 (MS 112 46: 14.10.1931).

54. L. Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 51 (MS 165 204: ca. 1944). Cf. *Republic* 496c–e and 592a–b.

55. A. Schopenhauer *Parerga und Paralipomena*, §205; English transl., p. 275.
56. A. Schopenhauer (2006) *Die Kunst, sich selbst zu erkennen*, hrsg. von F. Volpi (München: C. H. Beck), p. 27.
57. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 29.7.1916.
58. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entries of 6.4.1916 and 7.4.1916. The same conjuction of ideas can be found, for example, in *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 161, where the solution to the problem of the sense of life appears in close connection with the idea of the happiness produced by one's own goodness.
59. L. Wittgenstein *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entry of 12.9.1914.
60. L. Wittgenstein (1965) 'A Lecture on Ethics', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1, p. 8. We have already seen one of the other two experiences of which he speaks in that lecture, that of wondering about the existence of the world. The third one is the experience of feeling guilty, with which it is not necessary to deal here.
61. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 89, and Plato, *Phaedo* 63a–64a.
62. The same conception can be found in Wittgenstein; see for example the entry of 29.7.1916 in the *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*.
63. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 8.7.1916.
64. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 8.7.1916. Cf. also *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entry of 6.5.1916. He writes in another place that being dead in life, feeling that life is deprived of any value or sense, is the real death that must be feared, because the mere 'end of life' is not lived, as he had written in the *Tractatus* 6.4311 (L. Wittgenstein *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, p. 199).
65. L. Wittgenstein *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entries of 9.5.1916 and 4.5.1916. Cf. Plato *Republic* 386a–387c, and Epictetus *Discourses*, IV, i, 30 (quoting the saying of Diogenes that 'the only way to secure freedom is to be ready to die cheerfully'). 'It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won…. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness', G. W. F. Hegel (1977) *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 114.
66. Cf., for example, L. Wittgenstein *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916,* entry of 12.10.1914.
67. L. Wittgenstein *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916,* entry of 7.10.1914. Cf. also the entry of 12.2.1915.
68. L. Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.373 and 6.374.
69. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 11.6.1916.
70. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916,* entry of 13.8.1916.
71. L. Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, entry of 8.7.1916.
72. L. Wittgenstein *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916,* entry of 25.8.1914.
73. L. Wittgenstein *Denkbewegungen. Tagebücher 1930–1932/1936–1937*, 183. Cf. also pp. 54, 73, 177–184, 193 and 218 of this same work; *Culture and Value*, p. 91 (MS 138 4b: 19.1.1949), and *Geheime Tagebücher 1914–1916*, entries 26.8.1914, 29.8.1914, 6.9.1914, 30.12.1914, 30.3.1916 (already mentioned), 6.8.1916 and 11.8.1916.

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# 8
# Plato, Wittgenstein and the Origins of Language

*Antoni Defez*

**1.**

Many think that question of the origins of language seems to be a problem that our scientific knowledge will be able to solve sooner or later. However, it might be that this is not the case because, unlike other similar issues, perhaps the question of the origins of language has no solution: in fact, whatever hypothesis we construct may never be verified. Now, we do not need to worry about this, and we need not follow the example of the Société Linguistique de Paris, which in 1866 decided to remove this question from its meetings because it was obscurely metaphysical and insoluble given the state of empirical research. No, there is no reason for it. First, philosophy largely feeds on problems without solutions. And secondly, if we take this drastic step we would miss what is really important from a philosophical standpoint.

It is true that this decision was influenced by the fact that during the two previous centuries many speculative hypotheses on this subject had followed one another – let us think, for example, of the theories of E. Condillac, J. J. Rousseau or J. G. Herder.[1] Yet, this prohibition was insensitive to the fact that, beyond the problem of its empirical solution, what is really important in a matter like this is just the speculative stuff, that is, the conceptual and philosophical assumptions that inevitably come into play when we deal with it. For instance: the way we understand what kind of things human beings are, what language and linguistic meaning are, how learning of words happens, what the connection between linguistic behaviour and non-linguistic behaviour is, or what the relationship between language and thought is, and so on.

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Well then, driven by speculative interests such as these, in this chapter we will analyse what Plato and the mature Wittgenstein thought about the origins of language. We will not try to show that Wittgenstein was right and Plato was wrong. It would be out of place and would certainly be anachronistic and unfair. We shall simply show that Wittgenstein's approach, at least for some of us, is a way of looking at the question of the origins of language that is much more fruitful than Plato's strategy, which however has been the most widely accepted throughout the history of Western thought both in philosophy and in the field of linguistics.

**2.**

As is known, Plato paid attention to language in the *Cratylus,* a dialogue that he wrote when he was about forty years old, and once the Academy had been created.[2] This is a work in which, discussing the problem of correctness of words, the theory of Ideas is announced: Socrates does not yet assert its separate existence and archetypal character, but only says that he dreams sometimes of the existence of essences (439c. and ff.). Moreover, he also sets the ontological, epistemological and logical-semantic requirements that prepare the subsequent appearance of the Ideas in *Symposium, Phaedo* and *The Republic*. In particular: the immutability of essences is established as a necessary condition for knowledge and language; the thesis of linguistic immanence and the subjectivism and relativism of the Sophists are rejected. Lastly, Plato asserts that language is not a secure means of knowledge and that knowledge should not be the task of the linguist, who is lost in fanciful etymologies, but of the philosopher as long as he possesses the art of asking and answering. In short, we can see the *Cratylus* as Plato's reflections on the language that his posterior – for the moment, imagined – theory of Ideas demands.[3]

The focus of this work – the dialogue between Socrates, Hermogenes and Cratylus – is the correctness of words, or rather names, because Plato thinks about words as if they were names. And the main question is whether there is an accurate and right description of things depending on their nature, or whether we have to think of names being a result of conventions and our uses, that is, of human agreement. Put in another way: do things require a particular type of name or are all names casual and arbitrary? The problem, as we see, is not only semantic, but ontological as well, since what is at stake is whether

there is also a permanent and stable nature of things. And here we have four possibilities:

a. Essences do not exist, and names are entirely arbitrary and conventional.
b. Essences do not exist, but names are right and accurate.
c. Essences exist, but names are entirely arbitrary and conventional.
d. Essences exist and names are right and accurate.

At first Hermogenes seems to defend (a), because he proposes the conventional nature of names and an ontological relativism in the way of Protagoras. In turn, (c) might have been argued by Democritus – a character who does not appear in the dialogue – in saying that the objects were random combinations of atoms, and to defend a linguistic conventionalism. On the other hand, Cratylus proposes (b): in ontology he is a disciple of Heraclitus, however, and advocates for the natural correctness of names – in his opinion, there would be a right and accurate way of naming common to all men. Finally, who defends (d)? It's hard to say. This option seems to be in line with an onomatopoeic interpretation of language: words express with sounds the essence of things. Obviously, it is not Plato's position: he does not defend it in *The Seventh Letter,* where he accepts the linguistic conventionalism; moreover in the *Cratylus* he openly criticizes the method of etymologies.

As we see, a name can be accurate and right either by nature or convention. Thus, for Cratylus, there is an exact description of objects that is identical both for Greeks and Barbarians because, despite the disparity in conventions, the nature of objects would be the same for all: Heraclitus's permanent movement. By contrast, according to Hermogenes, the names would be accurate in a conventional or arbitrary way because there is nothing in names or in objects that force both of them to go together: simply, when a word is the name of something, it is its name. Now, whether by nature or convention, what lies behind the opinions of Hermogenes and Cratylus is the logical-semantic theory of the impossibility of speaking falsely: because conventions are the ultimate criterion for correctness; or because by natural correctness all names would be true and there are not false names – names that are not names – nor false combinations of names. And this is not an accident: the thesis of the impossibility of speaking falsely, and the subsequent linguistic immanence, is what accompanies

both Hermogenes's relativism and the defence of Heraclitus's ontology and the method of the etymologies made by Cratylus.

In turn, Plato's strategy is not to deny the idea of correctness because it would destroy the true–false nature of language, but to criticize the naive interpretations of correctness and their harmful consequences. Moreover, it is possible to discover in the *Cratylus* an interpretation of the correctness of words that seems to attempt a synthesis between conventionalism and naturalism. In fact, Socrates appeals to the mental representations of things we have, and so words, even whether they are a result of social conventions, would designate things through what we think of them, and these affections of the soul would have the natural correctness sought (434e–435b). Therefore, anticipating what Aristotle wrote later in the *Peri Hermeneias* (16a 3–8), Plato seems to have in mind the idea that words designate things in an immediate and conventional way, while mental affections do it instantly with a natural correctness.

But let us turn now to the criticism of the naive interpretations of correctness, and begin with the answer of Socrates to Hermogenes. As we have said above, the issue is not only logical-semantic; it is not enough to show that arbitrary conventionalism contradicts the existence of a true–false speech (385a–387d), but also an ontological and epistemological one. It is necessary to show that relativism and subjectivism do not work either: if we can speak truly or falsely is because things have a permanent essence that is independent of our language (386d–e and 439b–440c). Moreover, men are neither the measure of things, nor is it certain that anything we say is always true. On the contrary, far from the linguistic immanence, things exist in themselves and in accordance with their essence, and we can tell truths or falsehoods about them. But what explains this true–false nature of language? To answer this question, Plato analyses the act of naming and the figure of a legislator in the origins of language (387d–391a).

Naming, as any activity in general, would have its own essence: things have to be designated according to their nature, so we cannot make words mean what we want. Names designate objects according to their essences – that is, names serve to highlight and describe things that exist by themselves and according to their nature. Language, therefore, does not create these distinctions, but these distinctions exist before language, and language only records prior ontological divisions. But how might names do it? In fact, we have only the names that social use has given us. Now, names might have another origin, though we possess them as our social inheritance. In this sense, Socrates calls on the work of a legislator, an architect of names that in the beginning would have

established them starting from sounds and syllables in order that they conform to the essence of objects (388e–390b).

This resort to this ideal and mythical theory of language seems to obey a double purpose: to subordinate philology (linguistics) to dialectic and, in the second place, to subordinate language and knowledge to ontology. The idea is the following: whatever the origins of names are, names have some natural correctness because they are tools of ontological training. Now, this original correctness would not be strong enough and we cannot leave ontological research in the hands of etymologists; this research corresponds to dialectics, the philosophers (390c). In fact, if we interpreted the hypothesis of the legislator literally, the task of the etymologist could be in order: maybe the reconstruction of origins carried out by the study of etymologies might exhibit the correctness of names that the evolution of language had disguised. So, it is not a surprise to see that Socrates recognizes that there is some truth in the theory of natural correctness, and yet afterwards, when he debates with Cratylus, tries to demonstrate the useless role of the hypothesis of the legislator understood as a rational explanation of the origins and correctness of names.

For its part, the criticism of Cratylus is already implicit in the rejection of the etymologies as a means of access to the essences of things: this is a useless approach and, besides, is open to the risk of talking for the sake of talking typical of sophists, young people and poets. Moreover, we have to take into account that, for Cratylus, etymologies were not the same thing as they are for us – historical reconstruction of words from their previous significance. No, in that time etymologies surely had a transcendent value: to uncover the meaning that words would have had originally when *ex hypothesi* language and reality fit each other, that is to say, to reveal the true meanings that had been disguised in their use by spurious elements. In this way, Cratylus, from his linguistic immanence, thought that etymologies would confirm Heraclitus's *panta rei* (402a and ss., 411b–c, 436e and 437d).

On the contrary, Socrates uses the method of etymologies ironically: he cannot recognize the huge and wonderful display of wisdom that apparently this procedure involves on its own, and he considers it necessary to ask the help of some god to explain it (386c–e, 401e and 428c–d). But not only that: Socrates also tries to show the implausibility of this practice and the theory of the legislator that sometimes accompanies it (421c–427d). For this purpose, he distinguishes between primitive and derived names, being the explanation of the correctness of the first, which is necessary because the primitive names

would be the perfect candidates for imitating the essence of things through the onomatopoeic value of sounds. Socrates, sometimes comically, discusses the imitative value of 14 letters of the 24 that made up the Greek language.

Now, the true criticism of the naive conception of natural correctness consists of two stages. First, Socrates discusses the concept of likeness, which would be the ideal candidate to explain the imitation, and his conclusion is that likeness is always incomplete and imperfect because if it were not so, the imitation – words in this case – should only be a duplicate of the thing imitated. And this need for a difference in the representation, according to Socrates, destroys the supposed natural correctness of words based on likeness or imitation (432d). In this sense the response of Cratylus is significant: the legislator is infallible – or if you will, the necessary difference in the representation only affects the accidental features of things represented. In fact, Cratylus concludes, for this reason there are no incorrect names and it is impossible to speak falsely.

But this answer, and we are already in the second moment of the critique, is precisely the loophole that Socrates will not leave to Cratylus: granting that imitation happens through a complete and perfect likeness, yet it might be that the legislator had acted incorrectly making an improper use of names, that is, attributing mistaken names to objects. In other words: Socrates does not accept the infallible divine nature of the legislator, but he humanizes him: why might the legislator not have committed systematic errors? Thus, the hypothesis of a legislator, which could have some value as a myth that goes where our rational capacities are not able to arrive, becomes useless when it is used philosophically as an explanation of the origins and correctness of the names.

And this is not the worst difficulty. The action of a legislator – infallible if you wish – might not explain the correctness of names because he should already know in advance the nature of things, and this knowledge is only possible, according to Cratylus, throughout the very names (438a–e). Put another way: to create an onomatopoeic language, it would be necessary to understand this very language previously, since to decide whether a name has a specific meaning it is necessary to know what kind of things this word might designate. In other words: to know if a name reflects the essence of a particular type of object with natural correctness, we should already know what this essence is. And it is illuminating that this argument, which certainly brings to mind Wittgenstein's critique of the ostensive definition, is

precisely the only one that Cratylus accepts as reasonable, an argument that Cratylus can only answer with his *ad hoc* resort to an infallible divine force (431e and 436c).

To sum up, Cratylus was not right to say that to know how to use words is the same as knowing the essence of objects (435d). No, to know things we have to go to the things themselves, to their essences (439b). And this is precisely what Plato tries to do in interpreting the natural correctness and conventionalism in a non-naive way. If something in the word does not represent anything in the thing and, nevertheless, contributes in some sense to the meaning, then it corresponds to the social use of language, the conventions of the polis – not subjective and arbitrary decisions as Hermogenes thinks (434e–435c). As we saw above, according to Plato, words would be linked conventionally to what we think, so that conventions make us recall the thought – the affection of the soul – that directly represents the essence of things. Put in another way: the name–object relationship is mediated by the affections of the soul of the speakers, that is, the mental states we have when we use words. Now, how should we interpret the concept of affections of the soul and correctness that Plato seems to give them?

In the case of Aristotle the semiotic triangle is made up of words, affections of the soul (the sensible and intelligible forms of the objects captured by the soul) and the objects themselves or any of their qualities. In particular, the relationship 'word-affection of the soul' would be conventional, and the relationship 'affection of the soul-object' a causal one. The ontology and epistemology of Aristotle permits the conception of the affections of the soul as effects of the action of objects upon the soul, and words as effects of the affections of the soul, although physically built in a conventional manner. To sum up: the sensitive forms and the intelligible forms are both present in the objects and they would be the formal cause of the affections of the soul; in turn, these affections would be the formal causes of words, and the linguistic conventions the material causes of words. Now, what can we find in the *Cratylus?*

Well, it is obvious that we cannot find in the *Cratylus* a philosophy of language as we understand it in the present, but simply, as we have noted before, the reflections on language that the Ideas – for the moment only dreamed – demand. However, without forcing Plato's thoughts too much, it is possible to say the following. For the case of individuals, names would designate objects through the corresponding mental representations of speakers and the appropriate social conventions. In turn, the case of universal and abstract words should not

have to be different. For Plato – the Plato of the theory of Ideas – the affections of the soul would be caused not by the sensible and intelligible forms present in the objects, as Aristotle would say, but by the Ideas that the soul knew before its current life in the body: the traces that the Ideas would have left upon it.

Now if this might be the solution of Plato's late philosophy, it is not entirely clear what his position in the *Cratylus* is. As we said in the beginning, in this dialogue Plato still does not recognize a separate existence for the essences, and besides the theory of reminiscence and the immortality of the soul do not play any role. In fact, the *Cratylus* would be a tentative work: Plato would still be developing his theory of Ideas and the epistemology and the metaphysics that this theory needed. In this sense, it is not surprising that Plato does not make it clear in this dialogue how to understand the relationship of natural exactness – non-naive, non-onomatopoeic – between words and essences: essences are only a requirement and they have an existence only dreamed of.

**3.**

We have said before that Plato's criticism of the hypothesis of a legislator of language brings to mind Wittgenstein's criticism of the ostensive definition. However, the affinities have to be properly understood. First, we should have in mind that Plato's approach to linguistic meaning is precisely what is behind the view that the origins of language, both individually and in the human species, have to be understood according to the ostensive definition. In the second place, we should not forget that Plato's rebuttal of the hypothesis of a legislator is not the rejection of the myth itself, but the dismantling of the use of this myth with any explanatory intention. For Plato, there are issues beyond human capabilities, and this would be the place for myths. Now, myths cannot claim to be rational explanations – in this case, reason would destroy them as easily as Socrates does – but they must remain as myths, and as a reminder of our limitations. In fact, is the theory of reminiscence less mythical than the hypothesis of a legislator of names?

What is more, it would be possible to raise against the theory of reminiscence the same criticism that Plato uses against the hypothesis of a legislator of names. In effect, why would the soul not make systematic errors in the contemplation of Ideas? And how could the soul distinguish, identify and understand the Ideas – their meanings – without

the help of language and the activities carried out by the souls from her embodied existence? Let us, for the moment, leave aside this problem and see how Plato's criticism of the hypothesis of the legislator belongs to a philosophical scenario very different to the scenario of Wittgenstein's criticism of the ostensive definition.

First, we have the paradigm of names and so the assimilation of all semantic functions to the *nomen–nominatum* relationship in which the meaning of a name is its reference, the designated object. Two: an incipient ideationism to the extent that words would refer to things through a mental intermediary, which fits things with natural correctness, but conventionally attached to words. Moreover, we have metaphysical realism, which is what semantic realism needs. Indeed, to assert that the basic function of language is to describe reality and that the basic function of words is to name its components, we need to assume that reality is already segmented and structured in entities – Ideas, in the case of Plato – and that they exist by themselves and are what they are regardless of language. Only in this way can we say that words become names of these entities and that the language describes reality.

Lastly, these theses also presuppose the idea that it makes sense to think about the existence of one knowledge of reality which is prior and independent (previous in time and in a logical sense) to the language – for instance, the soul contemplating the essences or Ideas – because only in this way would it be possible to distinguish, identify and understand the components of reality and then give them a name according to the uses and conventions of the polis. This epistemological thesis is clearly an intellectualism and it is an inseparable companion of metaphysical realism.

Well, once these assumptions are accepted – semantic realism, ideationism, metaphysical realism and intellectualism – what one would expect to happen in fact, in the *Cratylus,* does not happen: a defence of the ostensive definition, and an initial baptism of components of reality. However, in this context we should remember that Plato seems to mean that there is not a rational explanation of the origins of language, and that we cannot say anything about it other than through myths. Obviously, we might also ask whether it is necessary to speak about the origins of language in this way with its platonic presuppositions. Why should we imagine the origins as an initial baptism or a set of ostensive definitions, although we later say that it is only possible to construct myths: in fact, would it not be possible to imagine the origins of language in another way.

Wittgenstein does not accept Plato's assumptions; nor does he defend any linguistic idealism, despite what has sometimes been said.[4] In his opinion, reality exists and is structured in entities and facts, but it only makes sense to say so from our natural ways of acting (sometimes mere reactions, but often spontaneous, symbolic, intentional, creative actions) and, of course, from the ways of speaking that have grown, and still grow, from this natural behaviour; interwoven with it, continuing it, replacing it, enriching it, etc. Therefore, it would be meaningless to go, as metaphysical realism proposes, beyond this 'in such a way human beings act and speak', because only these ways of acting and speaking – not any intellectual contemplation – is what makes it possible to distinguish, point up, identify, and make meaningful the entities that we say constitute reality. So, it would be meaningless both to speak about reality itself – the concept of reality itself is a senseless – and to claim that there is a non-human way of knowing reality itself. There is nothing to say or think about.[5]

As Wittgenstein's criticism of private languages shows, only inside our ways of acting and speaking are we able to distinguish, point up, identify, and make meaningful the entities that we say constitute reality. And so, it is only inside this reality, that is always a human reality – and it does not make sense to think of another – that the words come at times, but not always or primarily, have a reference value. In short, what Wittgenstein seems to mean – and to say this is a bit risky because it has the appearance of a theory and Wittgenstein denied that philosophy had the role of building hypotheses, theories or explanations – is that language is part of our natural and social history – the natural and social history of the animals we are – and that in this process nothing resembles an initial baptism, as the platonic view suggests, in which things are in front of us waiting to be labelled with words.

Rather, what we find is the oldest geological strata: deeper, more primitive language games, in which words above all have primarily an expressive function. In fact, in our languages such expressive uses still survive in a fossilized way; and not so fossilized, because they are still in use. Moreover, the learning of language – as it is known, Wittgenstein thought that the description of how people learn to use words was of vital importance to understanding their actual uses – shows how the referential and descriptive functions of language in many cases develop from its expressive features.

Now, the expressive function of words would not be the end of story because language creates fields of meaning – worlds – within which

human existence takes place. And not only how culture performs this function, but in the most basic and primary sense that humans beings do things with words (situations, relationships, intensional realities) – because the primary function of language is not to name and describe reality – we have seen that naming and describing only happen inside language and through language. In this sense, we have to notice that to speak of language in the case of Wittgenstein might be misleading: it would be better to speak of linguistic action and symbolic activities.

And this detail is of paramount importance for understanding the philosophical distance between Plato – Platonism, if you wish – and the later Wittgenstein. For the latter, language is action, a self-constitutive activity that generates its own rules – it takes care of itself and does not require anything external to justify its regulations – and whose origins should not be understood throughout intellectual acts of recognition of entities or rules – the entities of a mythical initial baptism, involving the rules that speakers should understand if they are to be able to use words. As we have seen, language for Wittgenstein, by contrast, is a self-contained activity developed from the common natural and spontaneous way that human beings act.

In the beginning we said that our intention was not to demonstrate that one of the two authors about which we were going to speak – Wittgenstein – was right about the other – Plato – but simply to show that Wittgenstein's approach was much more fruitful. Likewise we can now add that this approach also frees us of philosophical responsibilities in relation to the origins of language since, from Wittgenstein's position, this question seems to fade or dissolve. First, because we can leave off seeing this problem as something in need of a philosophical explanation. And in the second place, because we can remove from our philosophical agenda questions such as the following: how did an intellectual being – man – begin to talk in a referential and true–false way of a reality, a reality that exists in front of him and apart from him and is ontologically organized by itself?

Wittgenstein thinks about the matter otherwise, and seems to give us these two pieces of advice. On the one hand, that we should contemplate language as an evolution and development of the natural and spontaneous action of human beings; and on the other, that philosophy should only make a very general description – not hypotheses, not explanations – of this evolution and development. Better yet: descriptive observations of the uses and the learning of words that permit us

to imagine transitions between linguistic and non-linguistic actions, and also between linguistic and non-linguistic primitive actions. And in this way we arrive at a very well-known place: before the current eggs and chickens, there existed even more primitive chickens and eggs.

## Notes

1. For a treatment of the hypotheses of these authors, see A. Defez (2003) 'Llenguatge i Pensament in Rousseau' in *Comprendre. Revista catalana de filosofia*, no. V, 2 (Barcelona Universitat Ramon Llull), 181–195. You can consult this work at *www.defezweb.net*
2. For instance, see Plato (1996) *Cratylus, Parmenides, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias* (Cambridge Harvard University Press).
3. For a more comprehensive analysis of the *Cratylus* and a discussion of the relevant literature, see A. Defez (1997) 'Llenguatge i Coneixement en el Cràtil de Plato' in *Enrahonar. Quaderns de filosofia* no. 28 (Barcelona Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), 123–143. Also in *www.defezweb.net*
4. See L. Wittgenstein (1958) *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell); L. Wittgenstein (1964) *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell); and L. Wittgenstein (1969) *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).
5. I have dealt these aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy in: A. Defez (1994) 'Realism without empiricism' in *Anales del Seminario de Metafísica* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense), pp. 13–26; A. Defez (1998) 'Racionalitat, llenguatges privats i ontologia' in *Taula* no. 29–30 (Palma: Universitat de les Illes Balears), pp. 65–74; A. Defez (1998) 'Realismo esencialista y nominalismo realista. Acerca del conocimiento del mundo' in *Pensamiento* Vol. 54, no. 210 (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas), 417–442, and A. Defez (2010) 'De qué sujeto habla el segundo Wittgenstein?' in J.M. Ariso (ed.) *El yo amenazado. Ensayos sobre Wittgenstein y el sinsentido* (Madrid Biblioteca Nueva), pp. 111–128. Also in *www.defezweb.net*

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# 9
## Plato, Wittgenstein and the Definition of Games

*Catherine Rowett*

**1.**

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein urges that one may know what a game is without having any definition. Such knowledge *does not consist of a definition*, he argues, but is fully expressed in things that we *can* do, even without a definition, such as giving examples, explaining which things count and why, and adding unforeseen examples.

Wittgenstein was challenging the idea that any clear concept must have a single definition, and that to know what an F is one must know the *essence* or common feature of all Fs. Using the example of 'knowing what a game is', Wittgenstein suggests that such knowledge does not amount to knowing a definition, even an implicit one:

> What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean, to know it and not be able to say it? Is this knowledge somehow equivalent to an unformulated definition? So that if it were formulated I should be able to recognize it as the expression of my knowledge? Isn't my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in the explanations that I could give? That is, in my describing examples of various kinds of game; showing how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of these; saying that I should scarcely include this or this among games; and so on.[1]

In this chapter I argue that Plato's *Meno* offers the same account of this matter as Wittgenstein. This is controversial because Plato is usually taken to be an essentialist. Most people read the *Meno* as saying that if you know something you must be able to define it, and if you can't

define it, you can't investigate any other questions on the topic. I argue that Plato shows *Socrates* assuming such a position (like the interlocutor in Wittgenstein), only to have it knocked down by what happens in the dialogue. The dialogue then shows just what Wittgenstein sought to show, that to grasp a concept is to be able to apply it, (or, for virtue, to act in a certain way, pass certain judgements and so on). Furthermore, to explain why this or that counts as an example we don't have to name a single common feature, or necessary and sufficient conditions. What we usually do is appeal to normal practice.

To defend my interpretation, I start in the middle of the *Meno,* at the point at which the truth starts to emerge. I shall first sketch how the second half of the dialogue works, on this reading (although I shall not deal fully with the last part, on the relation between knowledge and *orthe doxa*).[2] Then, turning to the beginning of the dialogue, I shall consider what Socrates means when he asks 'what is virtue?' and show that, like Wittgenstein's question about games, it asks about grasping a concept (or type) *as the type that it is*.

## 2.

To understand any Platonic dialogue, we need to distinguish what Plato the author thinks from what Socrates the character in the dialogue says. Plato the author could be showing that what his Socrates character typically says is muddled. Sometimes he might allow the character Socrates to learn something about the topic, or about his methods, that he had not seen at first. These possibilities are live possibilities in the *Meno*, and I shall suggest that Plato makes Socrates do a u-turn part way through the dialogue concerning the requirement that a concept must be defined before we can be said to know it, and before we can investigate other questions on that subject.

Part way through the dialogue, Meno is reduced to perplexity, after failing to find any satisfactory definition of virtue (80a–b). At this key turning point in the dialogue, he makes two moves that question the way Socrates was proceeding.[3] First he attacks Socrates for acting like a stingray fish that numbs its prey.[4] And then (80d5), in the 'paradox of enquiry', he asks how anyone can discover anything, since you either know it already or you don't know what you're looking for.

Does Plato have an answer? According to one widespread interpretation, his answer is that enquiry can start from mere true beliefs without knowledge, and since Socrates never said that he had no true beliefs about virtue, he is unfazed by Meno's challenge.[5] So (they say)

after Meno's paradox, the second half of the dialogue reveals what was already implied, that Socratic enquiry can proceed successfully by using true beliefs. This reading treats Plato as speaking through Socrates: it suggests that both think that one can investigate things *without* knowing the answer to the 'what it is' question.[6]

But this would be very odd, would it not? For that was what Meno (evidently rightly) supposed in the first place, and it was Socrates, not Meno, who insisted (irrelevantly, it now seems) that they must first *know* the subject of enquiry before beginning the enquiry.[7]

Clearly this makes a nonsense of the drama. It makes Socrates look like a knave or a fool. It also makes a lie, or at least a misleading untruth, of his claim that Meno's uneducated slave recovers existing *knowledge* out of himself (85d). For if he could use true beliefs, why say that he found the right answer because he had *knowledge* in him?

The dialogue makes more sense, surely, if Socrates never relaxes the rule that you must *know* what you are talking about, but now realizes that knowing does not mean giving a definition.[8] On this reading, he does not turn to the second question ('Is virtue teachable?') *without knowledge of what virtue is*. He does not resort to *true belief* for lack of knowledge, since knowledge of 'what virtue is' turns out to be there already, only not as a definition.

After Meno's paradox, Socrates introduces the idea of 'recollection', which he illustrates by getting a slave to solve a geometrical problem.[9] If we thought that Plato believed that knowing a concept is knowing a definition, we might suppose that Socrates means that recollected knowledge consists of essential definitions. This fits badly with the text, however, since no definition is ever sought, or produced, in the geometry episode that supposedly illustrates knowledge being recalled. Furthermore, if Plato's point were that a definition of virtue exists in Meno's soul, and can be brought to the surface by the elenchus, Socrates and Meno should be all the more vigorous in searching for it – for clearly that search would not be vain, if the definition is latent in us all. Socrates would be the more justified in insisting on it. But in fact no more definition-hunting happens. So again this idea fits badly with the text. Socrates immediately does exactly what he said they should not do: he considers whether it is taught, without finding the definition.[10] Does Socrates show one thing and immediately do the opposite? Surely not.

We need a better way to make the dialogue talk sense. Surely the passage does not show that there is a definition in the student's soul. It shows that even if *neither* the pupil *nor* the teacher can define the

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relevant terms – even if no one could possibly define them – nevertheless the teacher can lead the pupil to point to the right object, identify it as an example of what is sought, and understand why it counts, all without having a definition.[11] That is what Socrates does with the square on the diagonal. So also, in Wittgenstein's example, someone who cannot define games can still bring someone to understand what a game is and why this or that counts as a game. So it makes sense to stop looking for a definition, and to behave as if we already know the answer to 'virtue, what it is'. The recollection episode justifies Socrates' striking volte-face.

Socrates advises the boy to try pointing to a line, if he can't say what it is as a number.[12] We know he couldn't possibly *say* what it is: for it is an irrational, something that is literally 'unspeakable'.[13] There is no *logos* that will give the ratio of the line they are looking for in relation to the line that they are starting from. It can be done visually (or, I suggest, 'iconically'[14]) using a diagram, but not in words or numbers.[15]

So it is not because he has a *definition* of the target item that the boy can identify the various proposed lines as right and wrong, Were Socrates to insist on a *logos*, as at the start of the dialogue, the boy would never come to know it, however long he continued to think about it. Yet now (85c) Socrates says that the boy can reach complete knowledge that is second to none, simply by repeating things such as he has just done, with no theoretical tools at all.

Admittedly Socrates says, at 85c9, that the boy does not yet know, but has merely true *doxai*. Some would doubtless be inclined to say this is because he cannot yet supply the *logos*. But this will not do. For no one can give that *logos*, not even someone who knows all there is to know about the ratio of the side and the diagonal. Socrates asked the boy to identify an irrational ratio: something *alogon*, unspeakable, indefinable, infinite. Surely this is not accidental: he means for us to see that a *logos* is not necessary for knowledge, and is sometimes not possible. The boy's ability to accept and reject examples consistently, tracking a correct application of the concept, is proof that he has a grasp of it. Pointing to a diagram is sufficient evidence that he grasps what the questioner had in mind.

So Meno was quite right to challenge Socrates' earlier intolerable assumption.[16] If you don't know what you are looking for unless you already have the definition fully articulated, then it is useless to seek the definition while you still lack it. Socrates changes tack, by allowing that enquiry need not start from a known definition. Instead, as in the geometry example, scrutinizing proposed tokens of the type F,

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and rejecting those found wanting, employs implicit knowledge of the type, and enables one to articulate the constraints on what counts as F, even when all the examples fail so that one ends in perplexity with no example successfully meeting the constraints.[17] One may even come to realize that a complete definition of F cannot possibly be obtained.

**3.**

If, as I am suggesting, Socrates no longer thinks that knowledge is absent until he gets a definition, and if he thinks there is no *logos* to be had in this case, what does he mean by saying that the boy possesses true *doxai*, but does not yet know, though he will come to know after some more practice? Notice that so far the boy has identified a particular token of the requisite type, one of the squares on one of the diagonals. This is like pointing to a game of croquet, when the question was 'what is a game?' For sure, there is nothing wrong with the boy's grasp of 'double' – this is what enables him to see why this square is a double one. But so far, he has not expressed his knowledge of 'doubleness', except in correctly picking out one instance and rejecting some others. This competence at applying it is evidence of the boy's implicit grasp of the deeply contextual notion of double, because selecting the right square and rejecting the wrong ones *employs* the knowledge. But saying 'This square is double' is not saying 'what a double square is'. So we can understand why Socrates describes the boy's current epistemic condition as true *doxa,* not *episteme*, if he means that the boy has correctly identified a token, not a type, but that his performance shows that he relies on an implicit grasp of the type (a grasp which, Socrates suggests, would become more available to the boy with nothing more than further practice at applying it).[18] This kind of 'learning' requires no teacher at all.

**4.**

After the passage with the slave boy, Socrates changes tack: he goes on to consider how virtue is taught; he doesn't stop for a definition. Why not? Some have supposed that he still maintains the old principle, but weakens under pressure from Meno.[19] This seems wrong to me. Socrates has *just shown* that you can start by pointing to the square you were looking for, even without a definition. He has just shown that one knows things of which one has no articulate account. So he cannot any longer think that knowing virtue involves giving an account of it, as he

did before Meno's challenge and the geometry episode that debunked that view. Since that old rule no longer applies, he can henceforward ignore it.

Admittedly, Socrates still favours investigating 'what virtue actually is' over other questions (86d). He may still be serious, not ironic, in saying that Meno has diverted him from that proper question, but this need not mean searching for a *definition* (since we have now discovered that 'knowing the F' does not after all require a definition). Nor would he say any more that it is *impossible* to consider whether it is teachable, without an articulate account of what it is. These changes are clearly not accidental. He has good reason to think now that anyone who can apply the term 'virtue' appropriately in practice already knows as much as is required for the second question to be meaningful.

Socrates now resumes the investigation into how virtue is transmitted, using what he calls a 'hypothetical method'.[20] On this method, instead of answering the original question directly, one starts with a claim that *might* be true, and which (if true) would help one to answer the original question. For instance, suppose that we know that if p is true, then q will be true. Then, one way to find out if q is true is to find out if p is true.

The method is most effective when the *same* result must follow on either of two alternative hypotheses: e.g. knowing that a certain number must be either even or odd, we can show that on either hypothesis it will evidently be even when doubled, so we can conclude that regardless of what the original number was, the double of it will be even. Since all integers are either even or odd, you can prove that the double is even, despite not knowing what the original number was, nor whether it was even or odd. So, more generally, without knowing whether x is F or G, if any x is bound to be either F or G, then anything true of both Fs and Gs will be true of x.

The hypothetical method can also be used when there are two possible outcomes (e.g. if the given number is even, one result follows, but if it is odd, a different result follows). We don't have to determine what the number is. Instead we either continue with both options in play (it might be even or odd, so one of two results is true), or we can turn to investigating whether it is even, still without determining what number it is. The latter is the attempt to confirm the hypothesis ('that it is even'), so as to establish which of the two alternative results follows.[21]

Why does Socrates propose the hypothetical method? Some would say it is because he has not bothered to finish finding out what the feature common to all virtues is. But there is a better reason, less lazy

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and intellectually sloppy. Socrates may choose it because it is the method that works for investigating things that *have no common feature*. If an item must have some one or more of several possible features (as numbers are either even or odd), the hypothetical method can achieve secure results none the less. For instance, using Wittgenstein's example of games, if we hear of a game but don't know what kind of game it is, we could use the hypothetical method and say, 'Well, it might be the kind that has winners and losers, or it might be the kind that has no winners and losers but is just played for amusement (like ring a ring o' roses). If it is the first kind then there will be at least one player who is not a winner. If it is the second kind then none of the players is a winner. So it follows that whatever kind of game it is, at least one player will not be a winner'. This we can work out without needing a unitary definition of games, and without discovering which of the various characteristic features of games this one has.

So the hypothetical method need not be a second best procedure, where the proper procedure would be to find the unitary definition. It can also be the *best possible procedure* for investigating concepts which have no unitary definition, or where the features that could count for making x count as a Y are disjunctive or vague or underdetermined or expanding, cases where the search for a common factor, or exploring the limits of the concept's application would be quite unfruitful. In fact, it is perfectly suited to investigating such concepts. Even if the various virtues differ, disjunctive hypotheses may be sufficient for enquiring into how it is taught. Socrates would be right to suggest this method of enquiry, if he has realized that 'virtue' is an open concept of this type, and that it would not be useful to continue the search for a single common factor. He can proceed instead with a different approach, more suited to open-ended concepts, where various features seem relevant to why x counts as a Y.

So Socrates, I suggest, has realized that one cannot necessarily have a clear definition of why we call something a virtue.[22] But we can move on in philosophy by using a method that works without a definition.

Socrates proceeds to apply the hypothetical method to the question whether virtue is transmitted by teaching or some other way. He suggests that one could show that it was passed on by teaching if one could assume that it was a kind of knowledge (87c). This is not adequate, however. He really needs a pair of exhaustive possibilities – say, either every virtue is a kind of knowledge or at least some virtues are not kinds of knowledge – and then (as in the examples above) ideally he needs to show that his desired conclusion follows *either way*, or, second best, that

different conclusions follow on the two alternative assumptions. Then, if it was materially important which result applied, he would need to discover which disjunct applied.

But Socrates does not do any of that. He considers just one disjunct (that virtue might be knowledge). He fails to show that his desired conclusion follows even from that one possibility that he does consider. He has himself already questioned the inference from 'it's knowledge' to 'it's taught' – indeed that was explicitly rejected in the previous section of the dialogue, where the slave boy discovered unexpected knowledge without having been taught. So Socrates *already knows* that not all knowledge comes by teaching, and not all learning requires a teacher who knows what he is teaching.[23] So the conclusion does not follow from the hypothesis, even if the hypothesis were true.

In any case, nothing can be proved from just one hypothesis like this, unless one has reason to suppose that the hypothesis is true (which makes it not so much a hypothesis as a premise). Granted, Socrates does offer some support for his hypothesis, and for two pages the discussion begins to look promising, though not very hypothetical.[24] But after this initial progress, Socrates loses confidence. He begins to doubt that his hypothesis (that virtue is knowledge) is plausible after all (89c–d). His reason for doubt is as perverse as the inference it was supposed to support, however. He doubts that virtue is knowledge because if it were, one would see it being taught; but Socrates sees no such thing (89d–e).

The difficulty is both perverse and ill-specified. It is perverse for two reasons: first because (as we just observed) we already know from the immediately preceding discussion that knowledge need not be taught and can be acquired without teaching, as in the case of the slave boy's grasp of geometry,[25] so the absence of teaching is no evidence against the hypothesis that the commodity is a kind of knowledge; and second because the enquiry assumes that we do not know whether it is taught, so we can hardly use the evident falsity of the conclusion to disprove the premise invoked to support its truth. It is ill-specified because there are several other reasons why one might not see anyone teaching virtue, even if virtue is knowledge. The hypothesis need not be false, as Socrates suggests.[26] Be that as it may, Socrates naively takes the doubt seriously. Because he has not used the method correctly, and has posited a premise that needs to be proven, not a pair of hypotheses that exhaust the options, progress becomes impossible once doubt arises. Socrates and Meno fall into perplexity again (96c–d). The hypothetical method appears to have failed.

Yet had the method been properly applied, they might have made more progress. As it is, Socrates offered only one hypothesis, which would help the enquiry only if they could discover for sure that all cases of virtue did have that one feature. Once again, Plato shows Socrates making no progress while his method falls back once again to presupposing essentialism.

Yet this is not the end of the dialogue, and quite rightly so. For Socrates had already seen the solution to the perplexity, earlier, when he asked the slave boy to point to a line. Whether or not virtue admits of a definition, and whether or not it is a circumscribed concept, it may still be perfectly possible to practise it, apply it, and engender knowledge of it, without ever being in a position to give an account of it, and without it passing from one knower to another by teaching (what Socrates calls teaching at various points).[27]

After a bit, Socrates suggests that correct *doxa* is actually no less effective as a guide to conduct than knowledge. So it seems that the claim at 88b that things are done well if they are done rightly and they are done rightly if they are done with knowledge or wisdom, and not without, was too quick. We can be right about which road goes to Larisa without knowledge, and we can live a successful life without knowledge, by just getting things right. If we link this to the way that the slave boy points to a line on the diagram we can see what Socrates means. The boy could pick out a line on the diagram that is the right one. Although this proved that he *also* had knowledge of the concept double, on which he was drawing, what he did was pick out a particular example that fitted, by pointing, and Socrates describes that as a case of bringing out his correct *doxai* from his own resources (85b). Similarly, even if we have deep-down knowledge of what virtue is, we don't need to bring that to the fore in our habitual practice of picking out particular virtuous choices and actions in ordinary life. We just need to do what the virtuous person would do, such as recognize, without being told, which is the right thing to do here and now (96d–97a).

When Socrates says that right *doxa* is just as good as knowledge for real life, we need not take this conclusion to be ironic. It is the right conclusion to draw, now that Socrates has stopped requiring us to define the relevant concept prior to asking any other question. We can both live our lives successfully, and also start our investigation of a concept, by first pointing to tokens of the right type (virtuous actions, or virtuous characteristics, in this case). Only later (if at all) do we move towards articulating our implicit, and perhaps increasingly explicit, grasp of the type that they instantiate (virtue), which Socrates

calls 'knowledge'. We can make that progress towards understanding the type from attending to the particular instances even when it is not a circumscribed concept (i.e. there are no necessary and sufficient conditions to be taught by rote). So evidently virtue need not be transmitted as a definition of 'what counts as virtue' from someone who knows the definition to someone who does not; nor do we have to learn it from someone who knows how to define it, or has even reflected at all on their practice. For it is indeed possible to get things right in virtuous action, in the way the slave worked towards a reliable choice of a suitable line from the diagram, and only later fathom why this and this count as virtuous, and how to go on, for unfamiliar cases. But what one first learnt was only 'that this and this and this, and things like them, are all virtues'.[28]

This makes it seem as though Socrates' hypothesis, that 'virtue is knowledge', was seriously vacuous or trivial. Finding the double square requires some implicit grasp of what double is, and finding the virtuous thing to do requires some implicit grasp of what virtue or goodness are, and finding the road to Larisa requires some grasp of what a road is. For any concept F we talk of *knowing* what Fs are, and picking out examples seems to involve applying that knowledge. So you need to know what an F is to see one. That is true of spotting virtues, or roads, or doubles and everything else: someone who can identify virtues reliably expresses a knowledge of what virtues are. But that does not make virtue knowledge. It tells us only that, as with other concepts like 'game' or 'double', grasping the concept is a kind of knowledge. The fact that a competent user of the concept 'game' is said to 'know' what games are doesn't make games a kind of knowledge, and similarly the fact that those who are competent at applying the term 'virtue' in the right contexts can be said to 'know' what virtues are doesn't make virtue a kind of knowledge. When Socrates concludes that people operate effectively with nothing more than correct impressions about what counts as virtuous (or good), that does not turn virtue into a set of correct impressions either. All it shows is that we can act, and direct others to act, quite well enough, with either a profound grasp of why things count as virtuous (knowledge) or with a much more impressionistic or unreflective grasp of certain cases that do.[29]

Could Socrates have meant something else by the claim that virtue is knowledge, other than that someone virtuous has to *know virtue, what it is*? Perhaps we might think that he does not mean that, but rather that virtue is knowledge of, say, the good, or what is best. Virtue leads to more success (88b–d), because the virtuous person chooses what is

truly good, not what merely seems good. So it might seem that the knowledge in question would be of goodness, and indeed not *grasping the concept 'good'*, but knowing *which things are good*. I think this seems plausible, but only for a moment. It seems plausible if we think that knowing *what virtue is* involves knowing the necessary and sufficient conditions for virtues, and grasping the concept *good* means having a definition or necessary and sufficient conditions for goodness. But actually, once we've given up that idea of what it is to know virtue, or goodness, and realized that there might not be a definition or necessary and sufficient conditions, grasping the concept appears to be nothing different from the competence to carry on identifying instances reliably and for the right reasons, and (perhaps) eventually having a reflective understanding of those reasons. And now it appears that grasping the concept 'virtue' is really exactly the same thing as habitually choosing the good course of action under the right description, acting courageously, not foolishly and so on, because of an implicit understanding of why this is the virtuous thing to do. So to be virtuous *is* to know what the virtuous thing is, and why one would value it, like someone who knows what games are and knows what attitude one takes to a game. And one can grasp the whole of virtue so that one knows how to go on as an independent virtuous agent, or one can merely have a true opinion about whether this or that is a virtuous thing. That is the difference between acting on knowledge, and acting on mere *orthe doxa*.[30] So actually, when we say that virtue is knowledge, we do really mean that the virtuous person knows what is virtuous, and when we say that opinion also serves, we mean that you can also succeed at a virtuous life by doing things that seem virtuous, if the choices you make are indeed the right ones. Indeed it looks as though the reason they seem virtuous is because we do actually know what virtue is, implicitly, in the way that the slave knew what double is; and that's how we can think in those terms.

So that ill-chosen hypothesis, that 'virtue is knowledge', was indeed a false trail. It could deliver no more useful results than if we supposed that 'games' might be knowledge because you must know what a game is in order to recognize games when you see them, or to teach others to use the concept 'game'. Plato uses it not to solve Socrates' question about what virtue is, but to help us to see how *knowing* 'virtue, what it is' relates to another way of being virtuous, which is operating with correct propositional claims such as 'this is virtuous', that are as good for getting practical results as a correct identification of the road to Larisa is for getting you where you want to be. Plato's interest in the

difference between full conceptual knowledge and mere propositional claims about particulars is not the same as Socrates' interest in the definition of what virtue is.

If this is right, Plato has been suggesting that someone manifests conceptual understanding even when they cannot give definitions of the kind that Socrates initially wanted. The dialogue shows Socrates abandoning his search for a definition of virtue, and looking instead for ways in which a person is capable of using a concept without defining it, either because they do in fact know it, or because they can at least use it rightly in practice.[31] In the remainder of this chapter I shall support this interpretation with some reflections on what Socrates meant at the beginning by asking 'what the F is'.

## 5.

In the opening lines of the *Meno*, the young visitor from Thessaly dives straight in by asking Socrates how virtue is passed on: is it something 'teachable'? Is it not taught but instilled by practice? Does it come naturally? Or what?[32]

Socrates won't answer that question. He says he doesn't even know *what virtue is*.[33] He thinks you must know *what it is* before you can say 'what kind of thing it is'.[34] Otherwise (he says) it would be like trying to tell whether Meno is beautiful or rich or well bred ('what kind of thing Meno is') without knowing Meno, or *who Meno is* (71b4–7). [35]

Much has been hung upon this exchange.[36] Most of the disputes are reducible to an issue about whether we know objects or propositions,[37] which, in turn, boils down to a dispute about the formula 'knowing x, what it is'. Bluck thinks this means knowing x;[38] Fine thinks that it means knowing what x is.[39] Both alike think that these options are disjunctive and exhaustive, and both assume that on one reading Plato refers to Forms and on the other he thinks of propositions. They differ on which is preferable.

I think we need to reject that dichotomy. Perhaps neither is right. It will help to go back to the idea of conceptual competence, of 'knowing what a game is'. Is that knowledge of an object? Is it knowledge of a proposition? Or is it neither?

Surely it is neither.

So we should turn again to the dialogue, and consider what Socrates actually means, when he speaks of 'knowing Meno, who he is'.

Using Wittgenstein' illustration, *knowing what a game is,* there are two things we could say we 'know'. Knowing that the croquet

happening on the lawn is a game is recognizing a token of the type, classifying the croquet as *a* game. Knowing what games are is knowing the type. Wittgenstein was talking about the latter. So was Socrates when he asked 'what is F?'[40] Socrates typically insists that pointing out a token of the type, or even several such tokens, is not a good answer.[41]

So Socrates wanted to know 'what a virtue is', not which things are virtuous. If you want the necessary and sufficient conditions for applying the term 'virtue', answers like 'bravery is a virtue' or 'managing your affairs well is virtue for a man' will not do. 'x is F' does not answer the question *what Fs are*. And even for a non-essentialist, 'croquet is a game' would not be *the answer* to 'what is a game?', though it might be part of the answer. It illustrates what games are, by mentioning a paradigm case. Someone who says 'this is a game' is not saying what a game is.

Yet knowing *what games are* has something to do with knowing that *this is a game*. We would not expect the two to come apart. But still, the distinction between them is crucial for understanding what Plato is doing, I suggest. On the whole, when he speaks of 'knowing' he means knowing *what the F is,* whereas correctly identifying a case of (seeming) Fness is usually called *doxa*.

Many of the 'what is F?' questions that Socrates asks are about 'middle terms' that can serve on more than one ontological level. Courage, for example, is a *token* of the type 'virtue', as well as a *type,* of which 'standing firm in battle' would be a token. So we cannot expect a fixed dichotomy between concepts and objects, or classes and the members of those classes. Grasping a concept (the knowledge that Plato and Wittgenstein were talking about) is a kind of knowledge that applies only to concepts, not to objects, *but* there is no fixed division between things that are concepts and things that are objects. The same things (virtue, bravery, games, croquet) can be the classes (or concepts or types) whose definition is up for investigation in a 'what is Fness?' enquiry in one context, and can be the members (or objects, or tokens) of other classes in another context. Discovering that you know Fness as a token of some other type does not mean that you know Fness *for what it is,* as the type that it is in itself. To know that bravery is a virtue is not to know what bravery is. In fact, Socrates probably thinks that any proposition of the 'x is F' kind is not knowledge but *doxa*, not *ti esti* but *poion esti*, not knowing (e.g.) bravery for what it is but saying what it is like. So claiming *that virtue is a kind of knowledge* is not the same as *knowing virtue, what it is*.

In addition, some types may have only one token. 'The sun', for instance, which Socrates defines, at *Theaetetus* 208d, as 'the brightest of the heavenly bodies that circle the earth'. The successful definition would describe a class containing (at any one time) only one member, and our sun would be the one item that currently satisfies the description.[42] Yet even for classes with only one member, we should distinguish between knowing what a sun is (knowing the role) and finding which item occupies the role (our sun, Sol).

We can do the same thing with knowing what it takes to be Meno. Meno too, like the sun, is the sole member of the class of things that are Menos – not the class of people who happen to be called Meno, but of people who meet the requirements for being this individual (who happens to be called Meno). Outside science-fiction, only one thing meets these requirements, namely this man Meno.

Just because there is only one occupant of the role, it does not follow that knowing that this man is Meno is the same thing as knowing what a Meno is, just as knowing that this bright object is the sun is not the same as knowing what a sun (or the sun) is. Knowing that this activity is a game is not the same thing as knowing what games are, even if there is only one game. It's because we know what games are that we can identify this as a game, and because I *know who Meno is* I can see that this is Meno. I know that this is Theaetetus, because I *know who Theaetetus is*. That is, I have, and can competently use and apply, the concept 'Theaetetus son of Euphronios of Sounion'.[43] That concept is not the boy Theaetetus, and the concept 'Meno, son of Alexidemus, of Pharsalus' is not the man Meno. So both Bluck and Fine were mistaken when they took 'Meno' in 'know Meno, who he is' to be the man Meno.[44]

Other examples follow the same pattern. One might know what would count as a road to Larisa, if there were one, but not know whether this is it. This line AC is one of the diagonals of the square ABCD. Diagonals of ABCD is a class with two members. Realizing that this line, or one like it, is what you were seeking is like recognizing Meno as the man you had in mind.

This should be sufficient to deflect people's surprise that Plato illustrates conceptual knowledge with 'knowing who Meno is'. Knowing *who Meno is* is just like knowing *what a virtue is*. After all, for all we know there could be only one thing that qualifies as a virtue too, and that would not change the structure of the knowledge involved. It follows that when Socrates speaks of 'knowing Meno, who he is' he does not speak of knowing the man Meno. Meno the man is a (or the) token of

the type, but 'knowing Meno, who he is' is like 'knowing virtue, what it is'– and seeing that this is Meno is like seeing that generosity is a virtue, and seeing that croquet is a game.

So we can settle the puzzle about what Plato means by 'knowing Meno, who he is' in a third way, by taking neither Bluck's view that he means acquaintance with the man, nor Fine's view that he means some proposition about the man. The phrase puts the concept 'Meno' as direct object of the verb 'know'; and then specifies that grasping it in the relevant way is knowing it *for what it is* – that is, precisely *not* knowing it as a token of some other type, bearer of some other property etc, but *as the type that it is*. So also for 'knowing virtue, what it is'.

When Socrates asks a question like this about a type, the interlocutor often responds by listing instances of the type.[45] At 71e, Meno describes what counts as virtuous for a man, woman, child, and so on, pointing to tokens of the type 'virtue'. These tokens are middle terms, since they are also types of conduct, and would themselves have tokens.[46]

As usual, Socrates rejects Meno's answer (72a). He complains that Meno has given him a veritable swarm of virtues. But this multiplicity should surely be no surprise, since 'virtue' is a generic term and many types of virtue fall under it. Meno's answer is like the one Wittgenstein imagines giving, if asked what a game is. Croquet, football, I-spy, chess and other things like that are all games. It is not a bad way to illustrate the extension of the class, note the focal or paradigm cases, and show your competence with the term.

An earlier attempt to link this discussion to Wittgenstein's remarks, in this section of the *Philosophical Investigations*, can be found in Dominic Scott's book on the *Meno*. Scott notices the similarity between Meno's response and Wittgenstein's, and concludes that Meno had a *theory* about value terms, that values such as 'virtue' are, as he puts it, 'family resemblance terms'.[47] But this depends on three unwarranted assumptions. First, Scott assumes that Wittgenstein's remarks constitute a *theory* of non-unitary definitions.[48] Second, he assumes that Meno's answer is grounded in a *theory*, and that it is a theory about values in particular, and does not extend more generally. And third, he assumes that Plato is *rejecting* Meno's theory.

Why should we think that Meno has a *theory about value terms*? He readily grants that natural kind terms, like 'bees', would have a unitary definition, and that health, size and strength mean the same for different genders and ages (72b–e). Momentarily he thinks virtue might be different (73a4), but not for long. By 73c9, he is happily hunting for its unitary definition. He offers no theory to justify his list of virtues; he

was just explaining virtue as you do – as Wittgenstein thinks you would explain games: 'I imagine that we should describe *games* to him, and we might add: "This *and similar things* are called 'games'"'.[49]

Wittgenstein does not mean that we would do this *if we had a theory of non-unitary definitions*. He means this is what you do (no matter what your theory of concepts is). Reminding ourselves that we do this helps us to resist the temptation to think that we do something else – say what they have in common for instance.

Meno does what ordinary people do, so long as they have not studied with Socrates. Wittgenstein reminds us to look at what ordinary people do (when not in the grip of a theory). Meno is a good example of someone doing that. Neither is offering a theory.

Socrates was in the grip of a theory of the kind that Wittgenstein was challenging. That theory is carefully problematized and rejected in this dialogue. Surely Plato does not endorse it when Socrates does.

Socrates imagines asking Meno to say what all bees have in common (72a–b). Meno agrees that there is an easy answer but, strangely, Socrates does not make him say what it is. Why not? Hardly because it is difficult (as many commentators say).[50] Probably it is just too obvious: bees are insects that make honey.

So Socrates is right: there are cases – bees are one – where we can easily identify a common factor without circularity or disjunction. But virtues need not be like that. Wittgenstein did not say that *all* concepts are hard to define, but that some are, and that we do understand the concept without defining it. For sure, Meno could easily define 'bees', but 'virtues' may be less easy. And it won't prove that he knows what bees are. Looking for the definition is only *one way* of expressing one's grasp of what they are, among many others (e.g. one's behaviour towards bees). We should not infer that knowing what bees are is knowing the definition.

What is it, then? As we saw, the second half of the *Meno,* after Meno's paradox of enquiry, investigates cases where someone is trying to identify a token of a type they have in mind. The boy searches for a square that is double the size of ABCD. Someone else (Gorgias?) must find the road to Larisa. In both cases, an abstract grasp of the type precedes the discovery of a token, although one's initial grasp of the type may be hazy. We see this as Socrates helps the boy to refine his notion of the double square. Gradually the requirements it must satisfy become clearer, and he can see whether the one he has chosen will do. There are several potential squares on Socrates' diagram that would do – in particular the squares that one can construct on the two diagonals of

the original square, and on the diagonals of all the similar squares that Socrates added during the discussion. The boy must find one of them. He might also realize that the square on the diagram is merely an exemplar. He is really looking for the *length of line* that will produce a certain result when squared. But to find such a line, he must be guided by a grasp of what it must be like, if it is to work. He started with some moderately sensible ideas about it, but his grasp improves as he tries and fails the first few times.

First the boy tries a square with double the length of side (82e). It is not that he has no idea what he is looking for. He knows what Socrates means, but as he makes mistakes and corrects himself, the constraints which, in a way, he already knew, become apparent. He sees at once that the four-fold square is too large (83b). He never thought that a double square was a four-fold square: that idea is laughable (83b). The same with the three foot square. In each case the boy brings a sound grasp of double, and on closer inspection is disinclined to accept the proposed square as a token of the target type. So Socrates is right to say that the episode shows that knowledge of that target was latent within his soul.

As we saw above, Bluck supposed that knowing *what virtues are* is like knowing an object, as though 'virtue' were a thing, and each virtue were another thing of the same kind. It is true that any *token* that meets the criteria will be a thing: the square that Socrates draws on the diagonal satisfied the description 'double square', and the road that Gorgias took from Athens to Larisa was a 'road to Larisa'.[51] But the concepts or types that these items instantiate are *not* objects, and grasping one is not knowing a thing.

Nor are they definitions. On the contrary, we search for a definition to express what we already know. Nor are they the ability to pick out examples (though being able to do so may also be evidence that we know). Nor are they the ability to utter the word in sentences of the right kind that seem to be true.[52] Someone with the requisite knowledge can typically do all these things, but that does not mean that the knowledge *is* the doing of these things, or the ability to do these things. Rather – as the slave boy passage suggests – these capabilities are *evidence* that the knowledge is there already, grounding the increasingly articulate and accurate application of it in practice.

So Wittgenstein was surely right that knowing what Fs are is compatible with not being able to say what they are.[53] Searching for a definition is one way of trying to express the knowledge. Failure needn't mean that we don't know what we are looking for. My suggestion is that Plato was not denying that insight, but rather bringing us to see

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it, by dramatizing an episode in which Socrates first *makes* and then *withdraws* the demand that we find a definition or common feature before we try to apply the concept or make any other claims about either the type or its tokens. Plato himself recognizes – and shows, in the *Meno* – that offering a definition will come as a mature expression of the knowledge, if it comes at all.[54]

## Notes

1. L. Wittgenstein (1976) *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 75.
2. But see Note 18 and C. Rowett (forthcoming) *Knowledge and Truth in Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
3. Some scholars observe the apparent reversal, but most explain it away. See D. Charles (2006) 'Types of definition in the *Meno*' in L. Judson and V. Karasmanis (eds) *Remembering Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 110–28; R. Sternfeld and H. Zyskind (1978) *Plato's Meno* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press) and references in note 5.
4. *Meno* 80c3–d1. Socrates rejects the comparison. See V. Politis (2007) 'Is Socrates paralyzed by his State of *Aporia*? *Meno* 79e7–80d4' in M. Erler and L. Brisson (eds) (2007) *Gorgias-Menon: Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag), 268–72, and A. Nehamas (1985) 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a teacher', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* 3, 1–30, reprinted in A. Nehamas (1999) *Virtues of Authenticity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 3–26, 7.
5. G. Fine (1992) 'Inquiry in the Meno' in R. Kraut (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 200–26, reprinted in G. Fine (2003) *Plato on Knowledge and the Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 200–26, 45–50, R. Weiss (2001) *Virtue in the cave: moral inquiry in Plato's Meno* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), 22 and 24 n. 20, J. T. Bedu-Addo (1984) 'Recollection and the argument "From a Hypothesis" in Plato's *Meno*', *Journal of Hellenic Studies,* 1–14.
6. This is (as A. Nehamas (1987) 'Socratic Intellectualism', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy,* 2, 275–316, reprinted in A. Nehamas (1999) *Virtues of Authenticity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 27–58, 281 observes, the usual response to the 'Socratic fallacy' charge, levelled by P. Geach (1966) 'Plato's *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary', *The Monist,* 50, 369–82. Nehamas traces it in T. Irwin (1977) *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 41 and G. Santas (1979) *Socrates* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul). See also T. Irwin (1995) *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 132. Fine, 'Inquiry in the Meno', 56–7 supposes that Socrates and the boy can make progress because both have, and do not disavow, true beliefs. This assumes a silent distinction between *knowing* something and merely *talking about* it, where Socrates actually distinguishes between *ti esti* questions and *poion esti* questions. But at 70b–71a Socrates clearly assumes that one cannot answer a question without *knowing* the answer. Meno's boy makes progress only once he disavows even the faintest belief, after all his existing beliefs have been faulted;

which suggests that enquiry becomes successful not when we have true beliefs, but especially once we have *no* beliefs, correct or incorrect. Members of the Oxford Ancient Philosophy Workshop helped me to clarify where my view differs from these more standard accounts.

7. 71b; cf 86d.

8. A. Nehamas 'Socratic Intellectualism' also dissents from Irwin's view (as I do), but thinks that definition is needed for knowing some specialist things about virtue. Questions about its transmission require a definition, he thinks.

9. *Meno* 81b–86b.

10. *Meno* 86d. According to the popular reading sketched above, the experiment reveals latent true beliefs (not definitions), and knowledge follows only once we reach a definition. But (a) this saddles Socrates with a ludicrous view, that *a* who can buy a horse but not define it does not know what a horse is, while *b* who can define 'horse' but buys a donkey, does know what a horse is; and (b) despite Socrates saying that the boy will draw existing knowledge out of himself, he would in fact draw only belief, with no evidence that his belief came from prior knowledge or could deliver future knowledge.

11. I speak of 'teacher' and 'pupil', since the teacher in Socrates' scenario knows as much as the student will discover (though no more); but the process is not really teaching, and the teacher is not really a teacher, as Socrates says. For they would reach the same result if both were enquiring from mutual ignorance, using the method that Socrates employs. The teacher gives no information that is not equally available to the pupil from his own resources; the pupil always assesses the proposed answers from his own resources. He takes nothing from the teacher, except suggestions of where to look.

12. 83e11–84a1. He is also invited to say or show of '*what kind of* line' (ἀπὸ ποίας) it would be the square, 83e11, 83a4. That is, he is invited to say or show the line not by specifying *what it is* (its definition or number) but by saying something more generic (e.g. that it is a diagonal) or showing where it is on the diagram.

13. It is tempting to think that inferring from the fact that it is technically ἄλογον (irrational) in the mathematical sense, that we therefore can't *say* (λέγειν) what it is verbally, must be equivocation on Plato's part. But (a) the sense in which we can say what it is turns out not to be the right kind of saying what it is (it neither says what its number is, nor what its ratio to the given line is, but only something else that is a way of describing some accidental relation to other lines); and (b) even if we want to make a distinction between the idea that it is incommensurable and the idea that it is indefinable, there needs to be a reason why Plato has chosen an example in which the task of giving a logos is technically impossible. The unattainability of the required *logos* is not accidental.

14. That is, using a sensible token as an exemplar for thinking about an abstract type, as geometers use diagrams.

15. Describing it as a 'diagonal' is possible but does not give its length relative to the side (see note 12). Furthermore the boy can point to it, and see why it fits, even if he knows no geometrical terms. So even if there were a way to explain it in words, the procedure shows that we do not need to do so,

the proof does not depend upon doing so, and the first person to find the answer would not have done so.

16. The entire first part of the dialogue has been taken up with illustrating and repeatedly failing to achieve for virtue the kind of definition that would suffice as an answer for the 'What is it?' question that comes before anything else. A. Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox' 8–9 agrees that Plato treats the paradox as a serious, not eristic, challenge. D. Charles, 'Types of definition in the *Meno*', 120, takes Socrates to be *confusing* two defini- tional questions, or use and mention, but for conceptual knowledge the use/mention distinction is vacuous, and the two definitional questions collapse to one.

17. Since false *doxa* can assist the beginning of enquiry, the point is not that we use correct *doxa*. You have to know which ones are correct, by applying existing conceptual knowledge, sorting correct answers from mistakes, as the boy does with the squares.

18. I take Plato to mean that recognizing that 'x is an F' is true *doxa* while knowing 'what Fs are' is *episteme*. See my forthcoming Rowett, *Knowledge and Truth in Plato*. The boy identifies a certain line as one of a target kind. See below.

19. *Meno* 86c–d. D. Scott (2006) *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 131–3, 140–2 thinks that Plato still seeks a definition, so the hypothetical method is a compromise, because the purist approach is *inef- fective,* not unnecessary, for knowledge.

20. *Meno* 86e.

21. The details of what Plato has in mind are much discussed, see the appendix in R. S. Bluck (ed.) (1961) Plato *Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 441–61 and H. Benson (2002) 'The method of hypothesis in the *Meno*', *Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 18, 95–126.

22. Note that Wittgenstein (1976) *Philosophical Investigations* §67 is about *enlarging* the concept of 'number' in unforeseen ways, and christening (*nennen wir*) an item that has no name yet. Compare *Theaetetus* 147d4– 148b3 on calling a certain set of newly encountered irrational numbers '*dunameis*'.

23. How can Socrates think (89d), that if something is learnt there must be teachers and pupils, given how he insisted that the slave boy attained knowledge with no teaching at all (82e4, 85d3)? D. Scott, *Plato's Meno*, pp. 142–4 makes Socrates consistent by taking 89d to mean the kind of teaching that was described as *not teaching* in the earlier passage, namely maieutic teaching. But such 'consistency' amounts to incoherence. Socrates' claim that 'teachable' and 'recollectable' are interchangeable expressions (87b7) cannot help, because the use of teachers to guide enquiry, whether maieutic or didactic, is a contingent feature of current ways of learning. The absence of teachers could never show that the knowledge was not teachable in principle.

24. Socrates posits a further hypothesis to support the first at 87d, suggesting that virtue is something good, and that actions are good iff accompanied by wisdom (87d–88c). This lends prima facie plausibility to the premise 'virtue is knowledge', because 'virtue is good' seems intuitive, though it is not a

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    definition of virtue but only a necessary condition. Still, taken thus, the premises seem not at all hypothetical.

25. See notes 11 and 15.
26. It might be true of only some virtues; Socrates might not recognize genuine cases of teaching (if he has a faulty concept of teaching); there may be other ways of transmitting knowledge besides teaching; virtue might happen not to be transmitted where Socrates lives, though if it were, it would be taught.
27. 82e4; 85d3; probably 89d–e. See note 23. Socrates mentions those most experienced in the subject (89e7), and crafts transmitted from master to apprentice for payment (90c–e), as though he conceives of 'teaching' as handing over a body of knowledge, from expert to pupil. Factual knowledge may be transmitted in this way (see B. A. O. Williams (1972/2006) 'Knowledge and Reasons' in A.W. Moore (ed.) *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 47–56 and A. Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox'), but surely not *seeing this activity as a game*.
28. Cf L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, 69.
29. This would explain Socrates' contrast between Teiresias and the flitting shadows (*Meno* 99e4–100a7). Someone with a developed understanding of a concept is better placed to help others to become virtuous, even though what he knows is no different from what others practise unreflectively. There are not two kinds of virtue, but two levels of grasping it.
30. See further in C. Rowett *Knowledge and Truth in Plato*.
31. Contrast my view with R. Weiss (2001) *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, who agrees that Socrates gives up demanding definitional knowledge, but not on principle. She seeks a moralizing account, based on Meno's character as one who cannot attain knowledge and must settle for mere opinion. I claim that Meno has a perfectly sound grasp of what virtue is.
32. 70a1–3.
33. ὡς οὐδὲ αὐτὸ ὅτι ποτ᾽ ἐστὶ τὸ παράπαν ἀρετὴ τυγχάνω εἰδώς. *Meno* 71a6. Notice the neuter in the first part of this sentence, taking 'virtue' as an abstraction or logical entity, not as *a virtue*, which would be feminine.
34. ὁποῖόν ἐστι, *Meno* 71b4.
35. I translate γιγνώσκειν 'knowing' and εἰδέναι 'tell', but they are probably just idiomatic variations. See R.S. Bluck (ed.) *Meno* ad loc.
36. For the 'Priority of Knowledge What': G. Fine (2003) *Plato on Knowledge and Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 2, G. Fine (1992) 'Inquiry in the Meno' and R. Robinson (1953) *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), chapter 5. For whether Meno is knowable, and knowledge by acquaintance see R. S. Bluck (ed.) *Meno*, 213–4 and Fine, 'Inquiry in the Meno'.
37. R. S. Bluck (ed.) *Meno,* p. 213, G. Vlastos (1965) 'Anamnesis in the *Meno*', *Dialogue*, 4, pp. 143–67, 164–5; H. Cherniss (1936) 'The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas', *American Journal of Philology*, 57, 445–56. For propositions not Forms, G. Fine, 'Inquiry in the Meno', especially note 42. J. C. B. Gosling (1973) *Plato* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) and M. Burnyeat (1987) 'Wittgenstein and Augustine's *De Magistro*', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary volume 61, 1–24.
38. R.S. Bluck (ed.) *Meno.*
39. G. Fine, 'Inquiry in the Meno'.

40. Wittgenstein correctly saw this in the *Theaetetus* (the only dialogue he knew, apparently). The *Meno* would have served him as well if not better (or *Euthyphro*, *Republic* I etc). At *Meno* 73d–e Socrates explains the difference between 'virtue' (ἀρετή) and 'a virtue' (ἀρετή τις) with reference to 'shape' and 'a shape'.

41. For this objection (naming tokens before defining type), see *Euthyphro* 7b–c, *Hippias Major* 286c–d. At *Meno* 72a it is not explicit, but Socrates coaxes Meno to grant that the virtues he has listed must have something in common. Contrast this with the objection to saying something *about* the type (what it is like) before saying *what it is* (at *Gorgias* 448e, 463c, *Republic* 1, 354 b–c, *Meno* 71a–b). A. Nehamas, 'Socratic Intellectualism', p. 279 tries to excuse Socrates from the Socratic fallacy using this distinction, but is surely wrong that Socrates meant only to object to the second error.

42. Aristotle *Metaphysics* Z, 1040a27–b4 suggests that the class (which can be defined) is 'sun' (no article) while the occupant of this role is 'the Sun'; were the role occupied by a different individual, it would be a sun, but not this one. I thank Victor Caston for reminding me of this.

43. *Theaetetus* 144c.

44. Whereas 'virtue, what it is' was neuter at 71a6 (see note 33), Meno is masculine in 'know Meno, who he is'. Perhaps this need not preclude *being Meno* from being a role, since 'what it is' would surely sound very strange.

45. *Euthyphro* 5d; *Theaetetus* 146c (the focus of M. Burnyeat (1977) 'Examples in Epistemology: Socrates, Theaetetus and G. E. Moore', *Philosophy*, 52, 381–98, against the Socratic fallacy).

46. A. Nehamas (1975) 'Confusing Universals and Particulars in Plato's Early Dialogues', *Review of Metaphysics*, 29, 287–306, tries to defend Plato's interlocutors on the grounds that they cite types of action etc, not particular instances. But these 'x is F' or 'cases of G are (cases of) F' answers are still predicating F of something else, whether tokens or subsets (middle terms). Propositions with 'F' in predicate position do not define Fness.

47. D. Scott, *Plato's Meno*, pp. 24–5.

48. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §66 is very widely misunderstood in popular discussions and Scott is not alone in thinking that the games example is to be generalized to everything, and that Wittgenstein means that a 'family resemblance' approach replaces the unitary definition of a term with a disjunctive definition. Wittgenstein explicitly warns against that mistake at L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §67. My take on this passage is not designed to be controversial nor loyal to some one school of Wittgensteinian interpretation. I merely appeal to what the text actually says, against a popular misuse, in the non-specialist literature, of what many non-Wittgensteinians *think* it says.

49. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §69.

50. E.g. D. Bostock (1994) 'Plato on understanding language' in S. Everson (ed.), *Language (Companions to Ancient Thought 3)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 10–27, 10.

51. D. Charles, 'Types of definition in the *Meno*' rightly distinguishes between knowing what makes all shapes count as shapes, and knowing what we call by the name 'shape'. These are different wherever there is a real referent of the name, not merely an idea. Socrates is not asking for a list of things that are called shapes, nor does he need to know which thing is Meno. He can

ask about what makes something count as 'Meno', not just which thing the name Meno names. See note 16.
52. One can sometimes do that without knowledge (e.g. *Phaedrus* 260b–c).
53. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §78.
54. I am grateful to audiences at the Oxford Ancient Philosophy Workshop, Trinity College Dublin and the Nordic Wittgenstein Society, and to David Charles and Brad Inwood for written comments.

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# 10
## Wittgenstein, Plato and the 'Craving for Generality'

*Franco Trabattoni*

**1.**

One could say that the main feature of Plato's metaphysics is the priority of universals and of knowledge of universals (as stressed, for instance, by the theory of recollection) over particulars and the knowledge of particulars. This view, which has provided a basic starting point for western metaphysical thought up to the 'renversement du platonisme' shared by a great part of contemporary philosophers, has been seriously challenged by Ludwig Wittgenstein. This chapter aims at showing that this opposition is not so simple and neat as it might at first appear. Even if from a general point of view Wittgenstein's position provides a typical case of anti-Platonism, a deeper analysis reveals a much more complex situation.

On the first page of his *Blue Book* (henceforth BLB) Wittgenstein writes: 'The questions "What is length", "What is meaning", "What is the number one"' etc., produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something'.[1]

As can be easily seen, the wording of this passage is quite directly reminiscent of the typical atmosphere of the so-called 'Socratic dialogues of definition'. And this is the case for at least two reasons, one of which is utterly evident, whereas the other is slightly more hidden. The evident reason is the way in which the questions used as examples are here formulated. In fact, this is the typical way in which Plato's Socrates starts his enquiry into the 'what it is' of something. The less evident reason is the observation according to which this kind of question provokes, in those who ask them, a sort of 'mental cramp'. Now, it is certainly true that this mental cramp reminds one of

the image of the torpedo, which is used by Meno in the homonymous Dialogue (80c) to describe Socrates' peculiar capacity to embarrass his interlocutors (who find themselves surprisingly unable to answer even the apparently easiest questions). But, in addition to this, a large part of contemporary Platonic scholarship maintains that the cramp at issue or the torpedo-effect mentioned by Meno are merely the transient condition affecting non-philosophical (or pre-philosophical) thought; the goal of Plato's philosophy would then be precisely the individu-ation of a method (conceived of as dialectic, which is presented in the *Republic* and developed in the following Dialogues) to overcome such a situation of *impasse* and to find a scientific way to answer the Socratic question. According to this interpretative line, philosophy would then turn out to be that rigorous science (possibly a sort of logic or of purified language) capable of disclosing to human intellect the knowledge of the universal. In other words, philosophy would provide the access to a domain of knowledge which is immune, in particular, from all imprecisions and contradictions characterizing the sensible world and, in general, from any kind of vagueness, impurity, and approximation.

What is particularly interesting in Wittgenstein's claim is that the cramp derives from two contrasting tendencies: at the same time, we have the feeling that the Socratic question cannot be given an answer and yet that such an answer should be found. This is an interesting observation, because according to this view we do not face a realistic form of ignorance (to which an equally realistic form of knowledge *must* correspond); rather, we face an antinomy without solution, which must therefore be tackled through a radical modification of the terms in which the question has been cast.

I believe that in this way Wittgenstein has exactly grasped a funda-mental aspect of Plato's use of the Socratic question – albeit without being aware of this and with a very different solution in view. Had Plato formulated Socratic questions with the intention of finding answers, his enquiry would have been entangled in those very difficulties and contradictions that Wittgenstein himself (as we shall presently see) effectively enlightens us about when he proposes to show that such answers are, indeed, not feasible. One can therefore say that, at a first superficial level, Wittgenstein's anti-Platonism primarily hits a certain way of interpreting Plato's philosophy and his conception of the universal more than Plato himself. If what I am claiming is correct, then this means that there exists a Plato, at least a possible Plato, who *for now* escapes Wittgenstein's remarks. Which Plato is this? It is the Plato

according to whom the Socratic question is not asked in order to find a fully adequate answer to the demanding requirements (for instance, the display – in the ways that we shall see – of an essence in itself, pure from contamination, always the same as itself, applicable to all cases, clearly delimitated etc., which, considering how Socrates develops his confutations, are connected with that question). Rather, the question is set precisely with the 'Wittgensteinian' aim of inducing reflection on the 'cramp' that that question produces and that is generated from the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of providing an answer and of finding a satisfying interpretation (i.e. an explanation) for this state of affairs. It is on the very nature of this interpretation/explanation that Wittgenstein's views appear in sharp contrast with Plato's views. This means, then, that Wittgenstein's anti-Platonism has in itself something decisive, because it attempts to strike a fatal blow, which does not leave any room for compromise, to the heart of the fundamental meaning of 'Platonism'. It is not a matter of opposing to Plato a different view of reality or a different way of describing things, as is the case for all other forms of anti-Platonism, from Aristotle to Deleuze. In all these cases, the Platonist could reply both by improving his own arguments and by attacking those of his opponents. In our case, instead, the very same state of affairs from which Plato starts is assumed as basic (i.e. the cramp produced by the Socratic question) to show that this can be reasonably ascribed to a conceptual framework which is completely different from the one within which Plato used to think. Wittgenstein's challenge to Plato seems therefore to be a matter of life or death: since Wittgenstein's objections are based on the same Platonic premises, if the Platonist does not manage to tackle them directly, she will fall short of any materials out of which she could strengthen her own position.

## 2.

Just after the passage quoted above Wittgenstein adds: '(We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: We try to find a substance for a substantive)'.[2]

The *bewilderment* at issue is clearly to connect with the quotation from Augustine (and relative comments) which opens the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (henceforth PU), where Wittgenstein outlines the idea that words are *rerum signa*:

These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in

> language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names. – In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. The meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.[3]

According to Wittgenstein this idea is obviously wrong, but it is not essential for us to indicate the reasons for such a view now. Rather, it is more important to underline the unpleasant consequence of this situation as it is enunciated by Wittgenstein a few pages below, toward the end of §36: 'Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a spirit'.[4]

The word *spirit* should not – I think – be overloaded with metaphysical implications. It rather indicates something like a mental meaning (or object).[5] To start with, one can think of correlated objects which are accessible to an ostensive act, as the perception of 'colour' or of 'blue'. But Wittgenstein has probably in mind also other words for which 'in our language there do not seem to be ostensive definitions: e.g. for such words as "one", "number", "not", etc.'[6]

Accordingly, what Wittgenstein criticizes is the idea of the existence of a sort of mental object, which in the one case (i.e. in case the linguistic expression has a physical object as its referent) stands between language and the physical object, whereas in the other case (i.e. in case the linguistic expression does not refer to a physical object) comes to be the merely spiritual (i.e. immaterial, mental) referent of that very linguistic expression. This much can be inferred from a page from the BLB, where Wittgenstein sets forth the difference between propositions that 'describe facts in material worlds (external world)' and 'propositions describing personal experiences, as when the subject in a psychological experiment describes his sense-experiences'. Hence – he goes on – one might infer 'that we have two kinds of worlds, worlds built of different materials; a mental world and a physical world' (pp. 46–47).

As one can easily realize from the allusion to two worlds, the background of this idea can be traced back – quite apart from Augustine – to Plato. Wittgenstein himself quotes with reference to this point[7] the passage from the *Theaetetus* (189a) where Socrates pushes his interlocutor to admit that whoever thinks must think of something that exists. This rule acquires utmost generality in the *Sophist*. In this Dialogue, the Eleatic Stranger, setting himself in the wake of Parmenides, claims that any meaningful linguistic expression must necessarily refer to something that is. Accordingly, if, for instance, the expression 'not big' is meaningful, one must say that the not-big (i.e. the referent of the

corresponding linguistic expression) belongs to the domain of what is precisely as much as the big does (*Soph.* 258a).

A further element of connection between Wittgenstein and Plato is that at least part of the 'mental objects' which are supposed to be the referents of language are 'universals'. Such are the one, the number and 'not' (i.e. the expression of negation) in the above mentioned passage (nor can the 'Platonic' flavour of Wittgenstein's examples be missed; this holds true also for the negation, for which cf. the *Sophist*). We can therefore make sense of Wittgenstein's thought in this way: when we use language, we make a common mistake based on the incorrect or pretentious use of seeming analogies. In particular, having observed that in many cases language has the ostensive function of indicating determinate objects, we think that this must always be the case; for instance, when we say 'one' we think that there must be a corresponding object which is the referent of that linguistic expression.[8]

Beside the analogy with other uses of language, the existence of universal objects seems to be supported by the experience of similarity. So writes Wittgenstein in the *Brown Book* (henceforth: BRB): 'Surely a similarity must strike us, or we shouldn't be moved to use the same word'.[9]

Here, too, we find an (implicit) reference to the Platonic way of setting up the problem of universals. For, the typical start of the Socratic reasoning consists precisely in determining the existence of a universal (which becomes the object of the question 'what is it?') based on the fact that we use the same linguistic expression to refer to several things. For instance, if we use the adjective 'beautiful' with reference to different objects, these different objects must have something such as 'beauty' in common; accordingly, it makes sense to ask 'what is the beautiful?' The problem, sharply underlined by Wittgenstein, is that all our attempts to pick out, define and somehow delimit without vagueness or ambiguity this common element are doomed to failure: 'Why do you call "strain" all these different experiences?' – 'Because they have some element in common.' – 'What is that bodily and mental strain have in common?' – 'I don't know, but obviously there is some similarity'.[10]

According to Wittgenstein, this ignorance characteristically qualifies our experience of similarity: 'If someone said: "I do see a certain similarity, only I can't describe it", I should say: "This itself characterizes your experience"' (p. 136).

Faced with a hypothetical interlocutor who strongly stresses the experience of similarity and who accidentally (and almost with surprise)

points out her incapability of describing it, Wittgenstein emphasizes that this incapability is an essential feature of this experience.

According to the traditional and current picture of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology, this aspect of Wittgenstein's position would already taste as markedly anti-Platonist. It is claimed that Plato not only assumes the existence of the universal on the basis of the experience of similarity, but he also sets there the grounds to provide an exhaustive definition of it. In other words, this incapability to grasp and define similarity would be the transient *impasse* that characterizes the early Dialogues (also due to the poor philosophical skills of Socrates' interlocutors) and that can be fully overcome once the correct method of enquiry (namely: dialectic) has been found. On the contrary, I maintain that there is a deep affinity between Plato and Wittgenstein on this point: for, according to Plato, too, the incapability to describe similarity is a decisive (and not secondary) aspect of that experience – an aspect, of course, which forces us to go beyond it and to see how this incapability must be interpreted. It is only then, and not before then, that the divergence of Wittgenstein from Plato reveals itself in all its virulence. In fact, Wittgenstein's interpretation simply consists in saying that this form of ignorance does not imply anything: 'To say that we use the word "blue" to mean "what all these shades of colour have in common" by itself says nothing more than we use the word "blue" in all these cases'.[11] Again we might be inclined to say 'He must have seen something that was common both to the relation between two colours and to the relation between two vowels'. But if he isn't capable of specifying what this common element was, this leaves us just with the fact that he was prompted to use the words 'darker', 'lighter' in both these cases (p. 136).

The underlying idea evidently recalls one of the best known theses of the later Wittgenstein, namely the thesis that in order to determine the meaning of determinate linguistic expressions it is enough to check the different uses of those expressions within the corresponding linguistic games (accordingly, there is no need to individuate objective referents in every case). But how is this 'sufficiency' of use accounted for? Perhaps by the ascertained inexistence of a common element? No. Rather, it is accounted for by the incapability of describing the common element. Wittgenstein, in other words, does not deny that there are 'experiences of similarity', but he demands that these experiences imply the existence of a common element if and only if such a common element can be described. If, on the contrary, this is not

possible, then this means that, necessarily, the common element at issue does not exist.

Here again we are led back to a pervasive (and much discussed) topic in the later Wittgenstein, namely to the criticism of private language, of not communicable mental experiences etc. We shall not linger on this point, at least not for now. I shall confine myself to specifying that these remarks too do not necessarily have anti-Platonist force. At least this is true if we accept the assumption – for which I cannot argue here[12] – that Plato's epistemology is *not* intuitionistic in character. In particular, Plato would agree with Wittgenstein that there is nothing anterior to language and its uses in *verifiable* human experience. Nonetheless, Plato, in contrast to Wittgenstein, wonders (with a typically regressive method) about what we can provisionally call 'transcendental' conditions of language and of its uses as they can be empirically observed. In other words, this is a matter of starting with determinate facts and of hypothetically reconstructing the conditions which make them possible. Now, according to Plato the salient facts of language which prompt this kind of enquiry are mainly three:

1) The fact that the same linguistic expressions are used to designate correlates which are different from each other;
2) The fact that universal terms are immediately intelligible (when asked 'what is justice according to you?', each interlocutor immediately sets herself on the way of providing an answer, whereas no-one replies 'I don't know what you are talking about');
3) The fact that, nevertheless, people do not manage to find a univocal definition of universal terms such as 'justice'.

According to Plato, and in contrast to Wittgenstein, evidence of fact (3) does not automatically eliminate the problems raised by (1) and (2). Even less can (2) by itself establish that the meaning of words is determined just by their use within a linguistic game. In fact, use, according to Plato, is always preceded by the goal toward which it is directed. If we want to understand what a hammer is, we must obviously understand how it is to be used. But in order to understand how it is to be used, we must know what the goal of its use is (cf. *Resp.* 601d). The goal of this use (e.g. hitting nails) is there before the hammer's existence; or better still, the hammer is crafted precisely with the purpose of being useful for that goal. A similar account can be given for such universal notions such as 'justice'. Words, like

hammers, are there as tools for determinate goals. Therefore, if there is no goal preceding the use, it is not possible to establish how words are to be used. In other words: use as such does not tell us anything, if there is no reference to a goal; but the goal is in its turn prior to use; it follows that, in the case of those particular tools that words are, the goal must be external to the linguistic game. We venture to say that the example of the chess game, to which Wittgenstein resorts almost obsessively, would be particularly misleading for Plato. It is true that the meaning of the piece of chess that we call 'king' is exhausted by the rules that determine its use in the game. But the same can hardly be said for language. For, if the game of chess as such does not refer in any way to the external world, not only language has the ambition of referring to the external world, but it also has an immediate performative efficacy with respect to it.

### 3.

For now this conclusion must be taken in the weakest and most general possible way, i.e. to the effect that according to Plato language cannot be self-sufficient. There must be something outside language, which makes it possible, determines it and rules it (even if we do not mean to commit to any particular interpretation of this 'outside'). But how can we be sure that this difference can undermine Wittgenstein's point of view? When Wittgenstein writes[13] that the question 'What is a word really?' is analogous to the question 'What is a piece in chess?', can we really say that there is a (Platonic) point of view which could shake this symmetry? What reasons do we have to claim that there exist mental objects independent from linguistic games or that there exist meanings which are prior to their use within linguistic games? Wittgenstein has all reasons to claim that the attempt to grasp these alleged 'mental objects' by means of language does not make any sense at all. In this case the issue would be that of finding a 'definition'. And this is what Wittgenstein writes on this point: 'We are unable clearly to circumscribe the concepts we use; not because we don't know their real definition, but because there is no real "definition" of them'.[14]

And why is there no real definition of the terms we use? Because in any case a definition includes other terms which, in their turn, must be defined, and so on to infinity: 'Consider as an example the question "What is time?" as Saint Augustine and others have asked it. At first

sight this question asks for a definition, but then immediately the question arises: "What should we gain by a definition, as it can only lead us to other undefined terms?"'[15]

The same idea, even if in a more elaborate way, is deployed by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Invetigations*, §§28–29 (pp. 13–14). Ostensive definitions, such as 'That is called "two"', escorted by the pointing at a group of nuts, are naturally subject to several interpretations. And yet if we read the claim above in the sense that 'This *number* is called "two"' (or, analogously, 'This *colour* is called so and so') it will then be necessary to define 'number', 'two', 'colour', 'red' etc. And how can they be defined unless we use words, which in their turn need defining? All this means that there is no ultimate definition (*Philosophical Investigations*, p. 29) or ultimate interpretation (*The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 34; *Philosophical Investigations*, 87).

Still, the question 'What is it?' ('What is time?', as Augustine asks, or 'What is knowledge?', with explicit reference to Socrates' questioning) makes us misleadingly suppose that we are looking for a definition and that, accordingly, 'a definition is what will remove the trouble' (*The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 27). By saying this, on the one hand, Wittgenstein admits that the question of universals raises a genuine problem (this is the mental 'cramp' of the beginning, which corresponds to Augustine's ambiguous feeling when facing the slippery nature of time), but, on the other hand, he thinks that this problem cannot be solved through definition. We have already talked about Wittgenstein's proposal to recover from the cramp (i.e. by recognizing that the meaning of terms is given by their use in the linguistic game). A more precise statement should be recalled here:

> Philosophers very often talk about investigating, analysing, the meaning of words. But let's not forget that a word hasn't got a meaning given to it, as it were, by a power independent of us, so that there could be a kind of scientific investigation into what the word really means. A word has the meaning someone has given to it.[16]

Reading this passage one might almost get the impression that, in writing these words, Wittgenstein has Plato's *Cratylus* in mind. Since words acquire their meaning only on the basis of their use within language, it is impossible to think of an enquiry aiming at establishing what a word *really* means. In order to do this, one should assume that the meaning of words has been established *a priori*, by some external power independent of us. But since such a power does not exist, such

an assumption would amount to extending our language beyond its own boundaries, looking for a perfect language which ascribes roles to words before we use them. Even if such a power existed, the definitions established by it would still be built out of linguistic terms (and, therefore, out of signs which must be interpreted) and the infinite regress could not be avoided. Accordingly, what Wittgenstein claims is that, given that language is structurally vague and imprecise and given that we do not have access to extra-linguistic sources of knowledge, there is no way to find out the true (real, absolute, ultimate) meaning of words. Therefore, if there is nothing to investigate outside language and if language is resistant to definition, the enquiry into the definition makes no sense at all.

Again, this seems to be a very anti-Platonist move, at least if we think – as a large part of Platonic interpreters (in particular of analytic interpreters) used to do and still do – that the goal of Plato's philosophy is that of finding definitions (the Socrates of the aporetic Dialogues, who asks the questions, is later matched by the Plato of the mature Dialogues, who provides answers). That this is not true can be immediately gathered from the twofold fact that there are no definitions in Plato, neither as a matter of law nor as a matter of fact. There are no definitions as a matter of law because not only no 'theory of definition' appears in Plato, but there is not even a word for it (whereas both can be found for the first time in Aristotle). There are no definitions as a matter of fact because Plato never defines the noetic content of an idea and, even in the only case in which he seems to do so, he unmistakably declares that he is just providing a provisional definition.[17]

## 4.

This misunderstanding on definition, which depends on an erroneous reading of Plato's text, has prompted the appearance of a further seeming opposition between Plato and Wittgenstein, perhaps the most famous one. Again, this is a false opposition which, exactly as all other seeming oppositions, has unfortunately ended up concealing where the genuine disagreement between the two philosophers lies. In order to clarify this point, let us go back to the first pages of *The Blue and Brown Books*.

Here Wittgenstein argues that Platonic universals are the result of an inaccurate and confused interpretation of what really happens when we use universal terms and of what he calls a 'craving for generality' (p. 17): a craving, he goes on, that is 'the resultant of a number of tendencies

connected with particular philosophical confusions'. He then enumerates four of such tendencies:

a) 'the tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term';
b) 'a tendency rooted in our usual forms of expression, to think that the man who has learnt to understand a general term, say, the term "leaf", has thereby come to possess a kind of general picture of a leaf, as opposed to pictures of particulars leaves';
c) 'the confusion between a mental state, meaning a state or a hypothetical mental mechanism, and a mental state meaning a state of consciousness';
d) '"our preoccupation with the method of science". Moreover, the "craving for generality" can be described in short as "the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case"'.[18]

Commenting on (a), Wittgenstein introduces the well known example of the general term 'game':[19] while the Platonist is inclined to think that such a general term refers to a single property that is common to all games, Wittgenstein claims that the most we can get from the use of such a general term is that all games 'form a family the members of which have family likeness. Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking' (p. 17).[20]

The very fact that a genuine common element justifying the similarity does not exist is what makes the search for the definition impossible. In other words, it would be possible to reply to a Socratic question such as 'What is knowledge?' by giving a genuine definition if and only if there existed a common element, which is exactly the same in all cases. According to Wittgenstein, though, as we have said, there are only 'family likenesses which are not clearly defined'.[21]

What we want to stress now is that, according to Wittgenstein, in order to reach the correct point of view (the one that, let us recall this, eliminates the 'cramp'), it would be enough to admit that the satisfying answer to Socrates' question is precisely the answer which Socrates tended to exclude:

> The idea that in order to get clear about the meaning of a general term one had to find the common element in all its applications, has shackled philosophical investigation: for it has not only led to no result, but also made the philosopher dismiss as irrelevant the concrete cases, which alone could have helped him to understand the usage of the general term. When Socrates asks the question 'what

is knowledge?' he does not even regard it as a *preliminary* answer to enumerate cases of knowledge.[22]

In this passage we find a hint to a problem, which after a famous article by Peter Geach (one of Wittgenstein's pupil) has been labelled Socratic Fallacy.[23] The 'fallacy' presupposes in the first place that, in order to recognize whether something is (for instance) beautiful or not, one needs to have a definition of what beauty is; in the second place, it presupposes that such knowledge (as Wittgenstein writes) cannot be gained through the enumeration of particular cases; this, according to Geach, is wrong from the empirical and performative point of view, because human beings are manifestly able to say whether something is beautiful or not without being able to provide a general definition of beauty.

Geach's article started a lively debate among scholars. The object of the debate is whether the Socratic Fallacy is a genuine fallacy and whether such a fallacy can be rightly ascribed to Plato (rather than to Socrates or to both).[24] In general, the starting point of the discussion is the fact that Socrates, in formulating his question, aims at obtaining an answer; or, more precisely, that Plato, by attributing this method of enquiry to the character Socrates, is actually indicating the procedure one must necessarily resort to in order to attain knowledge of reality. In other words, the basic idea would be that, first of all, one must obtain definitions. We have already seen how this idea is very unlikely to be correct from a general point of view. In fact, from the whole of Plato's work one gathers that definitions cannot be found, if by definition we mean the ultimate and definitive knowledge of the essence of a certain thing.[25] And this corresponds precisely to what Wittgenstein thinks. But if this is how things are, then what is Socrates' goal when he keeps on asking about definitions and insisting that the mere enumeration of examples is not a satisfying answer? This way of proceeding aims at, first of all, prompting that very 'cramp' Wittgenstein talks about and, secondly, at starting an enquiry into the source of such a cramp (i.e. at picking out its conditions of possibility).

Let us consider the example of Augustine's reflections on time, alluded to by Wittgenstein himself: apparently, one believes oneself to know what time is, but, as soon as she tries to provide a definition, she realizes that this is impossible. This is, as Wittgenstein has it (*The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 26), a 'contradiction'. And since a contradiction must be solved, the reader of Plato is invited to think about it with the precise aim of finding a possible solution. To understand what I mean, let us consider a 'Platonic' example. As a matter of fact, we realize

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that we have a *certain* knowledge of what justice is (in general). For, if someone asks us whether justice is something or nothing – referring to justice in general – we reply that it is something without hesitation. In the second place, we are actually able to apply the notion of justice to events that occur to us or that we witness with a certain degree of confidence. Finally – and this is the most important thing – we are more than convinced that the justice that we have in mind must be equally and indiscriminately applicable to all cases (double standards should not be used!). Now, all these premises seem to point quite naturally in the same direction: Since these conditions are given, we should also be in a position to produce a definition of justice such that the definition is unique, simple, absolute and ultimate. It is at this point that the shock provoked by the Socratic question strikes us (according to the intentions of Plato's Socrates): we realize, probably with surprise (Augustine's surprise), that we cannot do it.

This incapability is evident, first of all, from the practical point of view. When asked about the nature of justice, human beings attempts different definition, on which it is impossible to find an agreement. But, most of all, for any definition which might be produced, it is possible to find an exception or to show that it does not cover all instances in which we use the word 'justice' (or both at the same time). For instance, if I define justice through the expression 'to pay one's debts', I can find cases in which paying one's debts is not just[26] as well as cases of justice which are not covered by this definition. The definition is therefore deficient since it does not comply with the requirement of complete generality which is an essential feature of the knowledge we have of it.

At a deeper and more technical philosophical level we can also spot the theoretical reason why it is impossible to give a definition. And this is the same reason given by Wittgenstein, namely that any definition includes terms which must be defined in their turn and so on to infinity. Accordingly, there is a genuine 'cramp', i.e. a problem (a contradiction), which we must try to solve. How is this ambiguous state of affairs, i.e. this apparent contrast between knowledge and ignorance, possible at all? What could be its conditions of possibility, at least in theory?

## 5.

One possible solution corresponds, broadly speaking, to Wittgenstein's view. When we talk of justice in general we must reject the idea that this

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notion has such a universal value as to be indiscriminately applicable to all relevant cases. We should therefore admit that we have to do with a mistake of our language, since there is no universal justice; rather, there are several meanings of this term. These meanings are determined on each occasion by the role that the term at issue plays in the linguistic game and are connected to each other by family likenesses. On the basis of this principle, one could propose a Wittgensteinian (or Protagorean) version of the Socratic question. The goal in asking for a definition would not be the pseudo-Platonic goal of finding an answer, but that of showing on the one hand that certainty and universality in the application to specific cases could follow just where the definition has been found, and, on the other hand, that such certainty and universality are but optical illusions, given that definition is impossible. So human beings, when applying such notions as justice to their own lives, must content themselves with a relative, pragmatic and circumstantial use, possibly determined by the place that the word 'justice' occupies in the linguistic game, or in the vocabulary, adopted by a determinate community (and on this point Protagoras joins, apart from Wittgenstein, Richard Rorty).

This solution, though, is liable to some difficulties. Wittgenstein insists much on the fact that universal notions have a vague, imprecise and blurred character (cf. e.g. *Philosophical Investigations*, 67–71) – which is undoubtedly true. Nonetheless, it is easy to realize that we are not dealing with an indifferent and uniform vagueness, utterly deprived of any structural articulations. The notion of justice is vague both in the sense that its borders are indefinite (there are border areas where it seems impossible to distinguish neatly what is just from what is not just) and in the sense that it is not possible to provide an ultimate definition of it. For instance, if I say that the definition of justice is 'not to kill other human beings', this definition cannot be accepted both because there can exist limit cases such that it is just to kill someone and because there exist cases of justice which do not fall under the given definition. Nonetheless, if I say that 'it is unjust to kill an innocent person without a reason', we get the impression that this rule has universal value. So, if it is true – in Wittgenstein's words – that a linguistic game is logically possible such that the meaning of the word 'justice' is in some sense associated to the faculty of killing arbitrarily, we are practically sure that we do not want to take part in that game. Why? Because language – in contrast with chess – is not a self-sufficient game in which the meanings of the elements of the system are only supposed to obey the rules of internal consistency. Language, as we observed above, entertains a

specific set of relations – of both descriptive and performative character – with extra-linguistic reality. For, even if, in theory, there are no reasons preventing me from playing chess according to different rules (it is enough that we enjoy the game), there are very good reasons to reject a language that determines the meaning of its elements in such a way as to be incompatible with my attitude (and my expectations) toward external reality.[27]

Furthermore, if it is true that general terms have blurred and vague boundaries so that it turns out that it is impossible to find definitions of them, this does not imply that all definitions are perceived as equivalent. Let us suppose that two different definitions of justice are provided. The first one says that justice consists in 'abusing one's power at the expense of other people'; the second one says that justice consists in 'giving to everyone what is her own'. We agree that both definitions are vague and that neither of them is able to give the essence of justice. Nevertheless we perceive very clearly that the second definition is much more plausible than the first one. The very perception of this difference of degree, though, according to Plato necessarily implies that there must exist the highest degree, namely a 'justice' which is fully and absolutely such; if this weren't the case, a comparison between the two definitions would not be possible in the first place. And this is true, according to Plato, even if we are not in the condition to produce any precise definition of such a perfect justice or of justice 'in itself'.

The situation that we have just described represents the basic theoretical kernel of the whole philosophy of Plato. The Platonist – contrary to what is often believed – is not the one who possesses a clear and stable knowledge of the essence of things. Rather, the Platonist is the one who perceives, as anyone else, the differences in degree, i.e. the one who, in the example from the *Phaedo*, realizes that partial equals are never perfectly equal,[28] and who, from realizing this, infers the existence of standard models, even if such models cannot be clearly grasped with thought. In other words, the Platonist is perfectly aware that words, in the way she uses them, do not have nor can have a fixed meaning (cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, 79). In fact, if we tried to find in Plato the possibility of elucidating the meaning of a word by staying outside the linguistic game (which, for Plato, is clearly the dialogue) in which such word is used, we would be left with empty hands. For Plato, too, the question of the meaning of words cannot but be set within language and its rules: to use a famous saying of Neurath's, later taken over by Quine, the philosophers are like sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea, without being able to leave the ship.[29]

However, Plato adds that this is not the end of the story (this would be too easy!), because the analysis of meaning does not exhaust the domain of 'explanation'. For, there is a kind of explanation, which does not seek for definitions or for the progressive clarification of our concepts, but rather asks about the (hypothetical) conditions of possibility of determinate events. These are hypothetical conditions not in the sense that they are arbitrary, but in the sense that, on the one hand, they are not known and, on the other hand, they must be presupposed as conditions of possibility of the facts to be explained. This seems to be a decisive difference between an arbitrary game such as chess and the game which is constituted by our language. Given that language is the place no-one can get out of (not even the Platonist), if, nonetheless, language is analysed, one can find in it the traces of a structure, magnetic points, lines of force, drafted orientations, etc., which prevent us from treating language as a mere game that autarchically determines its own rules. Are there no precise extra linguistic conditions on the basis of which our language abides by a determinate grammar and determinate rules instead of others? It seems, in other words, that there is a place outside language from where the particular organization of language and its grammar somehow derive.

And yet this impression is, for the moment, so empty and vague that it makes Wittgenstein's objections look apparently very reasonable. Obviously, Wittgenstein cannot attack this point of view directly; this would be like contrasting metaphysics with metaphysics. Rather, he would ask the question: how can you know what comes before language? Can you really devise a not misleading and not illusionary way of speaking of what comes before language?

The Platonist could say, for instance, that what comes before language is thought. Thought would be the place where meanings are formed and language would be the means to express them. But, according to Wittgenstein, this hypothesis does not allow us to elude language: 'The phrase "to express an idea which is before our mind" suggests that what we are trying to express in words is already expressed, only in a different language; that this expression is before our mind's eye; and that what we do is to translate from the mental into the verbal language'.[30]

One can already see here what Wittgenstein's difficulty amounts to. If thought is a form of language, all considerations that apply to language apply to thought as well. In this way, as in language 'language' and 'expression of the language' are the same thing, so in thought 'thought' and 'expression of thought' will be the same thing in their turn: 'If we scrutinize the usages which we make of such words as "thinking",

"meaning", "wishing", etc., going through this process rids us of the temptation to look for a peculiar act of thinking, independent of the act of expressing our thoughts, and stowed away in some peculiar medium'.[31] In other words, thought is still language (cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, 326–330).

What can we then say of the other hypothesis, also often presented as Platonic, that there would be a sort of pre-discursive intellectual intuition behind language? It is plausible to assume that Wittgenstein would have contrasted this tenet with his arguments against private language.[32] A pre-discursive intuition is, by definition, a private piece of knowledge: the means of communication is language and what cannot appear in language is, by its own nature, incommunicable. Obviously this is not the place to explain how Wittgenstein attacks the notion of private knowledge. We shall therefore confine ourselves to two observations. First, private knowledge cannot enjoy any objectivity: one cannot follow a rule in private (*Philosophical Investigations*, 202) and the notion of correctness simply disappears in the private dimension (*Philosophical Investigations*, 258). For, in the private dimension there is no criterion to tell the difference between entertaining the belief that a word is being used correctly and actually using it correctly.[33] In other words, in the private dimension, all we have are our beliefs. Secondly, there are ordinary cases of pieces of knowledge such that I happen to be the only one who has them, but other people could have them under determinate circumstances (e.g.: knowing whether I have a golden tooth in my mouth). But the case of private knowledge is completely different. The person who says: 'You cannot know whether I have a golden tooth in my mouth', assumes that such a lack of knowledge makes sense, given that it has to do with something that, on occasion, someone else might come to know. But the person who says: 'You cannot know whether I feel pain', does not refer to a lack of knowledge which might turn into knowledge; rather, that person is talking about a case in which neither knowing nor not knowing makes sense (*The Blue And Brown Books*, pp. 53–54). Private knowledge, in other words, is not knowledge, but a case in which it doesn't make any sense to speak of knowledge or of lack of knowledge.

Let us now ask again whether these two moves of Wittgenstein's (i.e. the rejection of the hypotheses that there is something like thought or like private knowledge before language) are genuinely anti-Platonist. Also in this case the answer is: no. Plato would agree with Wittgenstein in saying both that thought never goes beyond the boundaries of

language (i.e. thought always has discursive/propositional character) and that speaking of pre-linguistic private knowledge doesn't make any sense at all (and, as a matter of fact, these two aspects are strictly connected to each other in Plato as well as in Wittgenstein).

I cannot go into too many details here, but a few brief remarks should do. Sameness of thought and language is stated in two passages of Plato's Dialogues, which have been understandably emphasized by the enquiries of hermeneutic scholarship (in particular, by Gadamer).[34] More generally, Plato always appears to believe that thought is shaped in the form of *logos* and that there are no other reliable methods to gain knowledge of reality.[35] At the same time, one cannot find in Plato's writings any case in which a problem is solved by resorting to intuition (as for the apparent concessions to intuition through the use of *verba videndi*, these are just due to the use of metaphor).[36] On this point I actually believe that Plato is very close to Wittgenstein's position. If there is knowledge, there must be parameters of correctness such that knowledge necessarily has an inter-subjective character. People who claim to have private knowledge do not have knowledge of something which is known to them alone, but have no knowledge at all (to say it with Wittgenstein, these people use the word 'knowledge' in the wrong way).

But if this is the way things are, where is the difference between Plato, and Wittgenstein? If we look at things objectively, it is clear. According to Plato the partial structuring of language, which makes for the possibility of dialectic not as a mere linguistic game but as knowledge of reality, is ruled by prenatal and pre-linguistic experiences, which the soul has had before her embodiment. Here Plato imagines that the soul has had access to a kind of knowledge that is intuitive (i.e. not discursive) without being private: all souls, which are embodied in human beings, have had direct knowledge of universals in their absolute purity in the Hyperouranios. This original event blocks both the circularity of language and the alleged circularity in the theory of reminiscence. Wittgenstein writes in *Philosophical Investigations* §30: 'One has already to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of asking a thing's name. But what does one have to know?'

This is the problem raised by Plato in the *Meno*[37] (the so-called eristic problem), which will always be there if previous knowledge is intended as linguistic in character. But at the bottom there lies, according to Plato, a form of non-linguistic of knowledge, and yet this form of knowledge is immune to Wittgenstein's remarks against solipsism.

Through this route the analysis has heavily crossed the borders of metaphysics. For according to Plato it is an evident feature of language that it displays an inner structure, which denies its self-sufficiency and refers to the metaphysical dimension as its necessary condition of possibility. It is very interesting, I think, that, in Plato, this necessity imposes itself precisely on the basis of considerations basically similar to those put forth by Wittgenstein. Such considerations show that, if one wants to go beyond the limits of language, one inevitably falls into metaphysics. It is clear that the next step should be that of establishing with what metaphysics we have to do (and it is out of question that Plato's metaphysics, along with his theory of reminiscence which constitutes its basis, is archaic and out of fashion). But the first thing to assess is whether the analysis of language really leads to outcomes which, as Plato claims, force us to go beyond language itself.

It would probably be inexact to say, without much reflection, that Wittgenstein has not seen the substantial difference which distinguishes a game such as chess from the linguistic game. In the first case, the game is determined by convention and arbitrariness, whereas in the second case the game is determined by the nature of external reality. This external reality, according to Wittgenstein, is constituted of forms of life (cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, 23). If it is true that to different forms of life there correspond different linguistic games (*Philosophical Investigations*, 295, 299), it is also true that forms of life are not the results of mere arbitrariness. More simply, Wittgenstein just observes that forms of life, being foreign to language and, therefore, to the domain of meaning, do not provide a domain about which it makes sense to ask questions, to start an enquiry, to look for answers etc. Forms of life are such just because they are so and there are no questions to ask and no answers to give.

Still, the very analysis of language perhaps gives some signals, which might be differently interpreted. Let us go back very quickly to the 'craving for generality' that Wittgenstein talks about at the beginning of *The Blue And Brown Books*. If this 'craving for generality' is a matter of fact, it is worth asking whether it could be simply dismissed as a mere misunderstanding based on our linguistic practice or if some subtler justification is required. After all, why are we troubled by such a 'craving'? Take, for instance, the Kantian attitude towards metaphysics: if the idea that metaphysics is a science is clearly misleading, it is nevertheless true that metaphysics is a natural tendency of human beings. Can we really maintain that the 'craving for generality' is not natural at all? As rightly pointed out by David Bostock, there are some cases in

which the knowledge of particulars is not as ambiguous and confused as Plato is inclined to say.[38] For instance, it is hardly true that every case of particular equals is at the same time a case of inequality: if you have five coins in your right pocket and five in your left pocket, the two groups of money are perfectly equal. But, as Socrates says in an important passage in the *Phaedo* (75c), what matters for Plato are not such things as the equal, but such things as the right, the beautiful, the good, etc. But if such cases are taken into consideration, then we have both a loose understanding of them and a widespread disagreement on definitions, without any real possibility of 'setting these disagreements'[39] – or, in Wittgenstein's terms, of disambiguating the 'confusion' of 'generality' by switching to the particulars and enumerating them. It seems, in other words, that a 'craving for generality' is at work here, but such craving can be hardly minimized as a mistake or confusion. If this were so, though, the Platonic argument would be back in play. How is the 'craving for generality' justified? How does one explain that our forms of life are these and not different ones (even if they could be different)?

There circulates a picture of Plato – according to me, a much distorted one – in which metaphysics and dogmatism are strictly connected. According to this picture, Plato's philosophy is based on three assumptions:

1) before any form of experience (linguistic or non-linguistic), there exists a world of essences, rules,[40] pure and absolute concepts;
2) this world is a possible object of knowledge;
3) one should start the necessary preparation in order to achieve such knowledge, because only in this way we would be able to behave correctly, both from the theoretical point of view of knowledge and from the practical point of view of action, within experience.

Now, Wittgenstein's criticism shows that human beings do not act – nor could they do so – in accordance with (2) and (3). For, on the one hand, there is nothing that can be known *a priori*, independently from experience, and, on the other hand, it is never the case that, for example, the sense of a rule (of an essence, of a concept) can be fully grasped independently from its paradigmatic application. The point is that Plato (what I take to be the 'true' Plato) would not have anything to object to this. His remark would rather be to the point that all these conditions are not sufficient to show that (1) is false; on the contrary, the analysis of experience suggests – even if not in an ultimate way, but through

ongoing recurrence – that (1) is true. In fact, if it is true that I cannot describe experience as the application of rules *a priori* independently from experience itself, this does not exclude that my behaviour within experience *de facto* and implicitly complies with determinate external rules. In a more Platonic wording: even if it is true that I cannot know or define any essence which is capable of gathering under itself all particular cases, this does not imply that all particular cases cannot be brought back *de facto* to an essence which is unknown (or only partially known) to me.

There is, therefore, a much more correct picture of Plato than the traditional one, and this can easily dodge the charges of dogmatism without giving up metaphysics. This is the 'hermeneutic' picture of Plato, in which language (or logos) has at the same time the function of a means and of a hindrance (as Kant's air and Wittgenstein's friction);[41] no absolute and ultimate knowledge is attainable in it (neither in the form of definition nor in the form of intuition) and yet some metaphysical provocation has miraculously survived all cuts. What metaphysics is this? This is a metaphysics which does not aim at being a rigorous science of a purely intelligible reality and which does not incur in the dogmatic vice of individuating *a priori* 'a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond' (*Philosophical Investigations*, 131). Rather, this is a metaphysics which starts with experience and moves backwards to formulate (therefore: *a posteriori*) some hypotheses on its own conditions of possibility. The idea governing the enquiry is that, on the one hand, where indifference, interchangeability, arbitrariness and convention rule (as, for instance, in the game of chess) there is nothing to enquire into and one must therefore content oneself with saying that things are like this simply because they are like this, without a reason. On the other hand, where lines of force, asymmetrical tendencies, articulated structures – even if partial – are detectable, not only is the question why things are like this and not in another way (e.g., why there is a 'craving for generality') not meaningless, but it deserves an answer. And therefore, contrary to Wittgenstein, a philosophy, which has as its primary (although not only) vocation that of tackling these problems, is worth being there.[42]

The underlying motive of Plato's philosophy is that it is necessary and possible to find a model of explanation for the described situation such that it takes into due account both sides of *aporia* and *euporia*, which are only apparently incompatible. When stress is laid on the fact that we *are incapable* of finding a general concept to apply to *all* particular cases (*aporia*), at the same time it is said that we *are capable* of finding

general concepts which can be applied to *a good number* (or rather to the majority) of particular cases (*euporia*). This circumstance, it should be stressed, is not denied by Wittgenstein. He completely agrees that human beings do have some 'forms of life' in common and this fact is reflected by an agreement which concerns both definitions and judgements (*Philosophical Investigations*, 241, 242). It is also plausible that according to Wittgenstein such an agreement is theoretically extensible to the whole human species.[43] However, according to Wittgenstein the fact that other forms of life are, in general, logically possible, and that, in particular, it is logically possible that there exist individuals within our own community who do not abide by the usual agreement on definitions and judgements, shows that the agreement of forms of life is a contingent fact, a mere state of affairs which does not open to any further field of enquiry which might justify it.

Here, I think, we reach the heart of the discrepancy between Plato and Wittgenstein. According to Wittgenstein, the fact that, in a community of a hundred people, even just one individual escapes the general agreement which holds for the other ninety-nine individuals shows that such an agreement is contingent. According to Plato, on the contrary, the very same quantitative datum (*euporia*) grants that contingence is highly unlikely, and that therefore exceptions, be they real or possible, must be justified in some other way. This other way consists in finding a plausible explanation not just for the *euporia*, but also for the *aporia*. If the agreement on definitions and judgements were grounded in the possibility of knowing essences in a transparent and ultimate way, the exception would be contingent and one might think of a time when philosophical clarity might be inter-subjectively achieved so that all forms of life as well as all definitions and all judgements could be unified (in this case, the *aporia* would be contingent and Plato's philosophy would become that dogmatic metaphysics which is so often ascribed to him or at least to his expectations). But the fact that the exception is structural and not contingent does not affect the status of the exception as an exception; the agreement of the majority on forms of life, definitions and judgements, is by far the more interesting philosophical fact.[44] The existence of the exception, in other words, does not have the power to make the rule contingent; rather, it obliges us to explain why there are, and there are by law, exceptions at all, despite the fact that rules are usually and universally respected (in other Platonic words: why the widespread existing agreement on universal terms cannot issue definitions that are valid in all cases). According to Aristotle's famous definition, accidental

(or contingent) is what does not happen always or for the most part (*Met*. V, 1025a14–15). Now, it is certainly logically possible that what happens not necessarily but only for the most part is accidental (or contingent); but it is highly improbable. This is why Plato thinks that it is necessary that this state of affairs deserves the effort of asking a question and attempting an answer. The 'metaphysics' of Plato is not, therefore, a farfetched and dogmatic theory, with absurd pretensions, contrary to both reason and experience, and completely deprived of critical caution. Rather, it is the most economical and the most plausible explanation he has found to make sense of the data of experience. These data, surprising as this might be, are more or less the same as those admitted by Wittgenstein. The explanation simply consists in saying that a certain pre-comprehension of essences implicitly guides our cognitive activities, but is never clear enough to determine *a priori* the rules of what can be done and of what can be said. Since experience is characterized by incomplete processes of generalization and since, in experience, there is no case of complete generalization, one must suppose that the conditions of possibility of such experience are outside experience itself. The situation is more or less the same as that of one who sees the footprint of an animal in the forest without seeing the full animal and infers by necessity the existence of the full animal (whereas he is not prompted to draw any inference by unarticulated signs that do not sketch any pattern, just because he does not see anything there). This is still not all. The hypothetical existence (justifiable as the condition of possibility of experience) of a vanishing point outside the contingency of forms of life and linguistic games suggests that within the linguistic game there is a way to approach a non-contingent truth, be it in a partial, tiring and approximate way.

## 6.

In a recent work, Luigi Perissinotto has remarked that not only has Wittgenstein not always been insensitive to the 'chants of the metaphysical mermaids', but the very diatribic course of his inedited writings (among which *Philosophical Investigations*) at least in part reflects the two souls of the philosopher. More generally, it is not the case that his voice can always be automatically recognized in his anti-metaphysical soul.[45] Perhaps we can add that the very same way in which Wittgenstein expresses his thoughts,[46] extremely elaborate and entangled as it is – often (sometimes obsessively) going back to the same

themes, taking over the same or analogous problems in various writings, reflecting different stages of elaboration, without ever reaching the point of regarding his work as accomplished – could be a sign that his fight against metaphysics is constitutively doomed to being never-ending. It is as if the metaphysical provocation arose always over and over again, as the hydra from whose cut heads new ones always sprout. But it is also true that Wittgenstein always sets himself on the side of those who cut those heads. It is possible, I think, that this attitude depends on a deeper reason than cogency of arguments (in truth, as we all know from Popper, there are no scientific methods to verify or falsify metaphysical theories). This deeper reason can be found in the famous proposition 6.4321 of the *Tractatus*:

> The temporal immortality of the soul of man, that is to say, its eternal survival also after death, is not only in no way guaranteed, but this assumption in the first place will not do for us what we always tried to make it do. Is a riddle solved by the fact that I survive for ever? Is this eternal life not as enigmatic as our present one? The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies outside space and time.

Note that the immortality of the soul here hinted at is the central element of the 'heavy' metaphysics, grounded on the doctrine of reminiscence, which Plato regards as necessary to trace the conditions of possibility of the fact that our language (or our *logos*) is the way it is. However, there do not seem to be alternatives to *this* metaphysics. For if we think of replying to Plato's questions through a 'light' metaphysics, such as the logical-mathematical Platonism of Frege and Russell, this metaphysics would be precisely what Wittgenstein has shown to be meaningless. As I have tried to show, it seems to be the case that this metaphysics *was meaningless for Plato as well*: it is precisely for this reason that according to Plato the problems presented by experience can be solved *only* on the basis of 'heavy' metaphysical theorems such as the immortality of the soul or the existence of Forms in the Hyperouranios.

According to Wittgenstein, though, this 'heavy' metaphysics is as ineffective as that 'light' metaphysics, even if for a different reason. The opposition between 'heavy' metaphysicians and anti-metaphysicians usually unfolds in this way: given a determinate problem, shared by both, the metaphysicians propose a metaphysical solution, whereas the anti-metaphysicians object that the corresponding metaphysical

data (such as the immortality of the soul or God) do not exist – without explicitly denying that, if those data really existed, the original problem would probably be solved. Wittgenstein's position is much more radical. The drama of existence does not depend on the uncertainty concerning the reality of those metaphysical entities which, if these existed, could solve our problems. Rather, it depends on the fact that not even the most unconstrained imagination can picture a *metaphysical* state of affairs in which our problems would be actually solved. This is then the reason why, according to me, Wittgenstein systematically rejects all metaphysical provocations. Even if we admit that experience, be it linguistic or not linguistic in character, recurrently produces hints and appearances suggesting the existence of an external dimension, out of experience and out of language, for those who reason as Wittgenstein does the temptation to explain this state of affairs with a metaphysical hypothesis always appears together with the conviction that *no possible metaphysical hypothesis* would be adequate to the goal. Accordingly the metaphysical temptations, in Wittgenstein's thought, disappear as soon as they appear, over and over again. As in the case of private language, where the problem is not ignorance, in our case, too, the problem is not the incapacity to find an answer: it is the way more radical incapacity even to imagine an adequate and meaningful answer to the question. If this is the situation, then philosophy cannot really do anything but correct, as far as possible, the mistakes in our language. Apart from this, it must be silent – and yet at this point it is never completely clear whether silence is commanded by the requirements of a sober mental hygiene only and not *also* from those of preserving what words, necessarily falling into error, could not but contaminate.[47]

## Notes

1. L. Wittgenstein (1958) *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 1.
2. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books,* p. 1. Cf. G. Hallett (1977) *A Companion to Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations'* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), p. 31: 'The Blue Books speaks more explicitly about the causes of this fallacy that does the Investigations'.
3. L. Wittgenstein (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 2.
4. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 18.
5. Cf. G. Hallett *A Companion to Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations'*, pp. 111–12.
6. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 1.
7. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §518.

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8. Cf. G. Hallett *A Companion to Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations'*, p. 526.

9. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 130.

10. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 131.

11. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 135.

12. Cf. F. Trabattoni (2003) 'Il sapere filosofico', in M. Vegetti (ed.) *Platone. La Repubblica*, vol. V, libri VI–VII (Napoli: Bibliopolis), pp. 151–186; F. Trabattoni (2006) 'L'intuizione intellettuale in Platone. In margine ad alcune recenti pubblicazioni', *Rivista di Storia della filosofia* 61, 701–19.

13. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §108, p. 47.

14. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 25.

15. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 26.

16. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 27–8.

17. As Paul Shorey had already observed more than a century ago, Plato never tries to define the noetic content of an idea [P. Shorey (1903) *The Unity of Plato's Thought* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), p. 28]. The definition of justice provided in the *Republic* as 'doing one's things' (*oikeiopragia*) is explicitly regarded as provisional by Socrates (443c).

18. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 17–8.

19. This example is taken over and further discussed in L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, 69–71.

20. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, 65–67.

21. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 20. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, 67.

22. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 19–20.

23. P. Geach (1966) 'Plato's *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary', *The Monist* 50, 369–82.

24. A list of the main contributions can be found in D. Scott (2006) *Plato's* Meno (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 22 n. 32.

25. If this is how things are, then the idea that the duty of philosophy is to answer the questions concerning the essence by providing answers that hold true 'once and for all; and independently of any future experience' (*Philosophical Investigations*, 92) is not Platonic at all. On the contrary, Plato's ambition consists in the attempt to answer these questions in an acceptable, approximative and plausible way, i.e. so that the answers can resist the objections raised *so far*. In doing this Plato is aware that in the future new difficulties might rise, which shall prompt the philosopher to improve and to update the answers so far provided (whereas the attempt to find at a certain time *t* an answer that is valid at any time would be a complete illusion). On these themes see F. Trabattoni (1994) *Scrivere nell'anima. Verità, dialettica e persuasione in Platone* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia); F. Trabattoni (2005) *La verità nascosta. Oralità e scrittura in Platone e nella Grecia classica* (Roma: Carocci Editore).

26. Cf. Plato, *Resp. 3*31c–e: it can happen that someone, who has gone mad in the meantime, asks to have his weapons back from someone else, who had previously borrowed them. In this case, it would not be 'just' to do this.

27. The existence of this problem is utterly evident in Richard Rorty (who moves from, broadly speaking, Wittgensteinian presuppositions). As Richard Bernstein has rightly pointed out, Rorty's vocabulary is only

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apparently free from any bond, because as a matter of fact '*his* vocabulary depends on all sorts of controversial universal claims – for example, we *all* have the capacity for self-creation, we should *all* try to avoid cruelty and humiliation of others, we should *all* strive to strenghten liberal institutions and increase human solidarity' [R. Bernstein (1991) *The New Constellation* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 278]. Cf. on this topic the essays devoted to Rorty in my F. Trabattoni (2009) *Attualità di Platone* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero), pp. 40–91.

28. *Phaed.* 74d–e.
29. W. V. Quine (1953) *From a Logical Point of View. Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 78.
30. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 41.
31. L. Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 43.
32. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, 243 ff.
33. Cf. A. Voltolini (1998) *Guida alla lettura delle* Ricerche Filosofiche *di Wittgenstein* (Roma-Bari: Laterza), pp. 103 ff.
34. *Theaet.* 189e–190a, *Soph.* 263e. The latter passage is quoted by H.-G. Gadamer (1990) in *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr), p. 411. Nonetheless the first to draw the attention to these passages and to the idea there presented that thought is a sort of inner language was F. Schlegel (cf. T. Kobusch (1997) 'Platon nach Schlegel, Schleiermacher und Solger' in Th. Kobusch – B. Mojsich (eds), *Platon in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte: neuen Forschungen zum Platonismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), pp. 211–225).
35. Paradigmatic in this sense is the classical paper by R. C. Cross (1965) 'Logos and Forms in Plato' in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul), pp. 13–31; references are to the latter source). Cf. also F. Trabattoni 'Il sapere filosofico'.
36. Cf. Cross, 'Logos and Forms'; F. Trabattoni 'Il sapere filosofico'.
37. *Men.*, 80d–e.
38. D. Bostock (1986) *Plato's* Phaedo (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 101–110.
39. D. Bostock *Plato's* Phaedo, p. 108.
40. As is well known, one of the most relevant arguments used by Wittgenstein in order to reject mentalism is to show that there is no way to determine the nature of a rule before its paradigmatic application (cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, 185–242).
41. I. Kant (1911), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1787$^2$), 32; L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 107.
42. On the ambiguity of the notion of 'philosophy' in Wittgenstein, cf. A. Kenny (1982) 'Wittgenstein on the Nature of Philosophy' in B. Mc Guinned (ed.), *Wittgenstein and His Times* (Oxford: Blackwell).
43. Cf. A. Voltolini *Guida alla lettura delle* Ricerche Filosofiche *di Wittgenstein*, p. 113.
44. As I have tried to show elsewhere (F. Trabattoni *Attualità di Platone*, p. 31) what causes surprise in the analysis of experience is not difference (the plurality of subjects and objects makes this completely ordinary), but similarity (or even identity) which is still to be found there: *this* is what must be explained.

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45. L. Perissinotto (ed.) (2007) *Introduzione a L. Wittgenstein. Esperienza privata e dati di senso* (Torino: Einaudi), p. X.
46. An accurate description of Wittgenstein's method (or, better: methods) can be found in M. Rosso (1988) 'Wittgenstein edito e inedito' in M. Andronico, D. Marconi, C. Penco (eds) *Capire Wittgenstein* (Casale Monferrato: Marietti), pp. 31–61.
47. Cf. Plato's silence in Damascius (1986) *Traité des premiers principes,* texte établi par L. G. Westerink et introduit, traduit et annoté par J. Combés (Paris: Les Belles Lettres), 9, 16–18.

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# 11

# On Philosophy's (Lack of) Progress: From Plato to Wittgenstein (and Rawls)

*Rupert Read*

> Uberhaupt hat der Fortschritt das an sich, dass er viel grosser ausschaut, als er wirklich ist.
>
> *Nestroy; used by Wittgenstein as the motto*
> *for his later master work, Philosophical Investigations*

**1.**

There is a wonderful, ironical remark in Wittgenstein's *Culture and Value*, which runs as follows: 'I read: "philosophers are no nearer to the meaning of 'Reality' than Plato got…" What a singular situation. How singular then that Plato has been able to get even as far as he did! Or that we could get no further afterwards! Was it because Plato was *so* clever?'[1]

Wittgenstein thought that it was a kind of ghastly and mythologically grand error to think of philosophy as a subject that progresses; at any rate, *if* 'progress' is to mean anything resembling its meaning in the case which tends to be our paradigm-case for the meaning of progress, namely (normal) science.

The above remark of his parallels another – earlier – remark, this time from the *Tractatus*:

> The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena.
>
> Thus people today stop at the 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 *every-*
> *thing* were explained.[2]

These (in my view) very deep sentences from Wittgenstein's early
masterpiece deeply provoke readers: they seem to suggest that there has
actually been the very *opposite* of progress, in (roughly) the philosophy
of science and the metaphysical 'foundations' of 'the modern system'.
That, far from moving on from the days of Plato et al., we have in an
important respect moved *backward*, precisely because we have combined
a lack of moving on with an illusion of having moved on. We are thus
less clear than we used to be that (as Wittgenstein puts it at the very
opening, in Section 1 of, *Philosophical Investigations*), 'Explanations
come to an end somewhere'.[3]

Plato's writings themselves are somewhat equivocal[4] when assessed
according to these 'Wittgensteinian' criteria: the 'later', less 'Socratic'
and more didactic dialogues in some cases certainly seem to want to
explain 'everything' in their field of view; the 'early' dialogues tend
to be more content to leave their field in a state of *aporia*, reflecting
Socrates's celebrated claim to know only that he did not know, and his
unmasking of others' pompous claims to know.[5] Wittgenstein aims to
inherit this attitude of unknowing, of unknowingness, in his 'thera-
peutic' thinking and writing (he aims to 'midwife' something *of his*
*readers' own volition*; to place centrally *their* autonomous acknowledge-
ment of the possibilities that he aims to make figural. One might even
say then that Wittgenstein aims to realize the promise of Socrates, in
rigorously and truly dialogical terms). But even these (early) Socratic
dialogues might not be wholly to Wittgenstein's liking: for instance, did
Plato's Socrates sometimes make his co-conversationalists feel a need
for or the lack of a foundation for their beliefs or practice that was in
fact not genuinely *missing* (because it had never really been *needed*) in
the first place?[6]

This, in my view, is indeed at times a pertinent question, with regard
to Plato's Socrates. By my lights, there has certainly been progress of *a*
*kind* in the move from Plato's Socrates to Wittgenstein, in philosophy.
Progress, roughly, not in knowledge, but in method and style. But what
about since then? If we look at the most significant figures to have
succeeded Wittgenstein, in philosophy, do they hold true to his insights
about the character of philosophy, and about how not to fall into the

illusions of scientism? That is one way of couching the overarching question of this chapter: *has philosophy after Wittgenstein succeeded in manifesting a 'metaphilosophy' which successfully follows Wittgenstein in not overstating or mischaracterizing the actual extent or nature of progress in philosophy?*

But this is a very large question; I shall restrict myself, in the compass of the present chapter, to considering just one particularly significant aspect of the philosophy of one such philosopher, a leading recent philosopher sometimes alleged indeed to be an inheritor of a Wittgensteinian mantle: John Rawls.[7]

Why Rawls in particular? Primarily because he is the widely-acknowledged father of contemporary liberal political philosophy, the dominant political philosophy of our times (dominant in the academy *and*, as discussed below, fairly dominant in actually-existing world-politics, too). He can therefore justly be taken as an exemplar of liberal political theory in general. What I argue here through engaging with the texts of John Rawls is, I submit, true in large measure of broadly social-contractarian-influenced liberalism. For instance, of Dworkin, Scanlon – and even of Locke (or at least: to the extent, whatever that extent is, that what I argue here is true of the likes of them, too, then this chapter is of indefinitely wide interest).

Furthermore, I believe that Rawls's highly-influential philosophy at what should be its heart is in fact deformed by scientistic ambition, an ambition that dangerously masks its real intention – namely, the rhetorical promulgation of and an obscuring apologia for a specific vision of society (or, in a sense, of its – *society's – absence*), and, concomitantly, of the self (I address this vision towards the close of the present chapter). Thus there is particular interest in juxtaposing Rawls's bold theoretical liberal vision with (the import of) the remarks above of Wittgenstein's.

There are further reasons for focusing on Rawls in the present context, in a book on Wittgenstein and Plato. One is the epicentre of this chapter, the central research-finding of it, the central reason for thinking that Rawls goes (if anything) backwards relative to Plato, not forwards. I shall reveal this only when we reach it, in a few pages' time, and shall for the moment only offer the following hint: that it has to do intimately with 'the *Euthyphro* paradox'.

Mine is then a challenge, based in the history of our subject, and undertaken by way of a 'metaphilosophical' reflection informed by historical, philosophical and political considerations, to Moral (Philosophical) Theory, and to the 'dominant [liberal] paradigm' in

political philosophy. To Rawlsian philosophy as theory – as an extravagant version, indeed, of the project of theory: 'grand' theory in political philosophy.[8]

One might contrast here most of the perhaps-comparatively-unambitious (though in my view *still* over-ambitious) field of 'Cognitive Science'; most Cognitive Scientists spend much of their time in effect running around after real scientists (brain scientists, physicists, etc.).[9] Whereas the scale of Rawls's ambition is evident from the very first sentences of the first section of *A Theory of Justice*: 'Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust'. This supposedly direct and precise analogy makes clear that Rawls's *modelling* of his project on science – what might reasonably be taken to be scientism on his part – is (indeed) 'grand' and bold. I would characterize it as at least as dangerous as it is fertile. The placing of justice above all other virtues, for society, turns out to be an enterprise that may result in the fragmentation of society itself and that may in practice privilege present-society over future-society.

Of course, I cannot hope to fully justify that last claim here. But I believe that it counts not only against Rawls, but equally perhaps against Plato: for it is Plato, in *The Republic*, who founds the tradition of thinking that the central question of political philosophy is 'What is just? (What would a just city/country be like, what would its principles be?)'[10] The centrality of this question seemed obvious to Plato, as it seems obvious to Rawls, who in this regard is a straight inheritor of Plato: as we have just seen, Rawls famously opens his masterwork by stating that 'Justice is the first virtue of social institutions'.[11] This notion can be seen then as springing not just from scientism, but also from Platonism. But my (broadly Wittgensteinian) work in political philosophy (for references to which, see various footnotes to the present chapter) aims to bring into question the alleged centrality of justice, by posing another possibility: isn't it the taking *care* of the defenceless – including, strikingly, of our children (and of their children) – rather than *justice*, that ought to be the primary focus of political thinking?[12] This is perhaps becoming obvious, in an era of drastic anthropogenic ecological threats to the hordes of voiceless future generations (and to the non-human world).

I would even go so far as to claim that we can date the birth of the political philosophy of liberalism – and in particular, liberal political

theory, the 'social contract' etc., that very peculiar way of reasoning about distributive justice and political institutions – further back than Rousseau, than Locke, and even than Hobbes. I think it goes right back to Plato! (and I think it likely that Plato influenced these figures: that liberal social and political theory is yet another – and in this case a regrettable – massive series of footnotes to Plato ... )

The first several books of *The Republic* are remarkably liberal-theoretic in a number of respects which have tended to escape attention amidst the scandal of Plato's strong authoritarian streak, in his promotion of unelected elite 'guardians' to rule the just city. Book two is where it all starts, in passages like this one taken from Plato's Socrates's mouth, in the course of the discussion of what justice is (i.e. of what principles the just city would be based upon):

> The origin of a city ... is, in my opinion, due to the fact that no one of us is sufficient for himself, but each is in need of many things. Or do you think there is any other cause for the founding of cities? ... And when [men] exchange with one another, giving or receiving as the case may be, does not each man think that such exchange is to his own good? ... Come then, let us in our argument construct the city from the beginning.[13]

Passages like this indicate the conception and early gestation of the social contract ... Plato envisages here humans *starting* as individuals. It is an economistic conception, and an adult-centric one (which is part of my worry about taking justice, rather than care, as one's first concern). What we have here, in short, is the idea of man as basically a rational egoist, as in Hobbes, as in all liberals (Locke, Kant and Rawls claim otherwise – but their texts give the lie to their claims, as we shall see further, at least in Rawls's case, below).

In the idea of humans as coming together for mutual benefit, and as this as the origin of cooperation and social living, we have the essence of the social contract. As if we were separate and then *chose* to live together for mutual benefit. At this fundamental level, Plato and Rousseau *et al.* all have the same weakness: an absurd, obscene, masculinist individualism (and 'rationalism'). Plato's felt need for a motive for why cities come to be in the first place is the problem, the origin of a long disaster of individualism in Western political philosophy whose latest 'great' expression is Rawls. *Starting* with the individual, Plato finds his motive in the individual's lack of self-sufficiency and the need for self-protection in the form of food-security, shelter, etc. and

eventually protection from other people/states once there is competition for resources, after growth … so people do in a sense (absurdly, and anti-historically) 'choose' or 'decide' to band together, for Plato. This is not the very explicit expanded account along these lines which we later find in Epicurus – but it is its genus.

So much for the pre-birth of contractarianism. What I aim chiefly to do in the present chapter is to focus in principally on just one – crucial – issue in Rawlsian liberalism: a difficulty in understanding what the force of the famous neo-contractarianism – the 'original position' – in Rawls is supposed to be. I shall, in the course of my discussion (as already hinted), consider a direct analogy to Plato's 'early, Socratic' Euthyphro dialogue, an analogy perhaps suggested already by my quote from the *Tractatus*, above. This analogy will explicate more fully the sense in which we can justly find Rawls to be possessed of (or by) an overly-grand (implicitly scientistic) vision.

John Rawls, in his major, early work, in *A Theory of Justice*, looks to 'the original position' as something like an 'Archimedean point'; a point *from* which, ideally, everything in the target area can or could be explained. He seeks to find a point or 'place' from which principles of justice can be determined, *and justified*. This 'place' should be neither merely some place in the world – which would fail to provide the independence sought for in an Archimedean point – nor somewhere wholly removed from it – as it had been, to the point of metaphysical dubiety, in Kant (and Plato).

It is worth quoting at length from a key statement of this aspiration – beginning with a telling analogy of Rawls's own – from p. 47 of Rawls's text:

> A useful comparison here is with the problem of describing the sense of grammaticalness that we have for the sentences of our native language. [Here, there is a footnote to the grand 'scientific' ambition of the father of Cognitive Science, Noam Chomsky.] In this case the aim is to characterize the ability to recognize well-formed sentences by formulating clearly expressed principles which make the same discriminations as the native speaker. This is a difficult undertaking which, although still unfinished, is known to require theoretical constructions that far outrun the ad hoc precepts of our explicit grammatical knowledge. *A similar situation presumably holds in moral philosophy.* There is no reason to assume that our sense of justice can be adequately characterized by familiar common sense precepts, or derived from the more obvious learning principles. A

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correct account of moral capacities will certainly involve principles and theoretical constructions which may eventually require fairly sophisticated mathematics as well. This is to be expected, since on the contract view the theory of justice is part of the theory of rational choice. Thus the idea of the original position and of an agreement on principles there does not seem too complicated or unnecessary.[14]

Thus, if such a 'point' or 'place' can be found as Rawls seeks, an 'original position' (even if just in our minds or in a representational/symbolic system) – if there's a *there* 'there' – then it will enable us to determine rationally what is just.[15]

Here is how Michael Sandel sketches the aspiration – and a central difficulty that arises with it:

[Rawls needs] to find a middle way between conventionalism and arbitrariness, to seek a standard of appraisal neither compromised by its implication in the world nor dissociated and so disqualified by detachment. With contract theory, the challenge posed by the Archimedean point takes … determinate form. Clearly, justification involves some sort of interplay between contracts and principles. Actual contracts presuppose principles of justice, which derive in turn from a hypothetical original contract. But how does justification work *there*? Is recourse to yet a further layer of antecedent principles required? Or is contract at that stage morally self-sufficient, and fully self-justifying? At times the search for the ultimate sanction appears an infinitely elusive dance of procedure and principle, each receding in turn behind the other. For given the assumptions of contract theory, neither seems to offer a stable resting point on which to found the other. If the parties to the original contract *choose* the principles of justice, what is to say that they have chosen *rightly*? And if they choose in the light of principles antecedently *given*, in what sense can it be said that they have *chosen* at all? The question of justification thus becomes a question of priority; which comes first – really, ultimately first – the contract or the principle?[16]

This seems to me an excellent question. I shall suggest below that closely reading Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (and closely reading his subsequent corpus) takes one if anything *further* from an answer to it than one already probably is.

However, we should address first the worry that Sandel has perhaps read Rawls uncharitably, before we seek to draw morals from or gain

inspiration from his question(s). For it might be submitted that Sandel reads Rawls too literalistically, here (as if he, Rawls, were someone like David Gauthier on one interpretation of his – Gauthier's – work, someone who *does* take there to be something awfully like a real contract, real bargaining, in his account of 'justice').[17] For isn't the contract idea really only an attempt to *model* our sense of justice, as part of a project of (following Chomsky) modelling the universal human 'moral capacity', and (equally) as part of a project of (perhaps following Plato) giving a 'natural' [*sic*], 'intuitive', appealingly metaphorical rendition of what the just is, of what this 'model' amounts to?

Well, but if the quotation from Rawls that I gave above is to be believed, his is not merely a model in the sense of a (Wittgensteinian) 'object of comparison' (see L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, §131). If Rawls is indeed (as he says) *following Chomsky*[18] then the legitimate question(s) that Sandel is aiming to raise can at least be reformulated roughly thus: isn't there a sense in which we should indeed (if we are to follow Rawls) think of this 'contract' as (aiming to be) determinative and justificatory? – but then, what is the *status* of Rawls's contract idea, and what justificatory *authority* does it (and what goes on 'in' it) have? If it were something very like a real contract that occurs in Rawls's 'place', as perhaps it is in Gauthier's, then we would understand how to assess it. Given that it *isn't* (i.e. that it isn't anything like a real contract that Rawls has in mind), then what *is* it?

It might be objected against me that I am wilfully ignoring the way that Rawls's 'modeling' is understood as being validated, by him – the way in which what goes on in Rawls's 'place' attains real, human meaning. The way in question is thought to be the method of reflective equilibrium. But once more this simply raises Sandel's question: where/ how does *this* yield (any) justification? Where in what Sandel calls the 'elusive dance of procedure and principle'[19] do we find anything in the slightest Archimedean? Is Rawls's anything other than a cleverly-disguised (but ultimately *merely* circular) bootstrapping operation?

So, I think we are justified in starting to follow through on Sandel's dilemma: 'If the parties to the original contract *choose* the principles of justice, what is to say that they have chosen *rightly*? [...] And if they choose in the light of principles antecedently *given*, in what sense can it be said that they have *chosen* at all?'

I have now reached the heart of my chapter. For I want to remark now on an extremely striking parallel between these fundamental questions Sandel raises for Rawls, and the questions Socrates raised, near the very beginning of Western philosophy, for Euthyphro. The

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latter questions may conveniently be put thus: if the Gods *choose* what is right and wrong (etc.), then what is to say that they have chosen *rightly*?

And if they choose in the light of principles antecedently given, in what sense can it be said that they have *chosen* at all?

The dilemma for Rawls is *the very same one* that faced Euthyphro. I suspect that we have on balance seen here the very opposite of progress in philosophy since Socrates's/Euthyphro's time – because at least Euthyphro did not in the end claim to be able to solve the paradox.[20] Pretending to have solved a paradox when one has not done so is worse than doing nothing at all.

Now, thinking back to our quotation from the *Tractatus*, above: Wittgenstein, presumably, would remark that the best option to take might be simply to say that what the Gods chose was, as a result, right: *for this would at least make the terminus clear*. While Rawls (who is it seems in the position designated by Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.372 as that of the scientistic thinker – and, as we saw above the opening of and certain key moments in his *Theory of Justice* making clear, more or less *willingly* so) somehow, utterly misleadingly, gives the impression that, in the field of political philosophy, *everything* fundamental has been explained by his intervention.

But let us explore the options a little more, before settling on that judgement on Rawls. Could Rawls not follow Wittgenstein; couldn't he say that what his 'gods' (people) choose/chose is/was as a result right?

As we discussed above, choosing in the original position is meant to be a 'model' of moral judgement; but this surely would make the model *too* strong. Rawls wants something to be discovered, un-covered – not just 'invented'.[21]

Could Rawls perhaps say that there isn't really any *choice* in the original position; that 'rational choice' or *whatever* happens when we correctly go about 'modelling' our moral and political thinking is really just the un-covering of the dictates of reason?[22]

This would fit with the science-analogy that I have suggested implicitly structures much of Rawls's thought (and that perhaps has its birth in Plato's founding political-philosophic invocation of the rational egoist, as we saw above[23]). Rational choice theory, as science, yields discovered truths, and so, presumably (to use the terminology that Rawls comes to prefer to that of 'rational choice'), does right reasoning about the Reasonable. The original position would then, I suppose, be a mere device which enabled the exercise – more, the *discovery* – of true reason. But this very much seems to remove the

sense, repeatedly emphasized by Rawls, that individuals actually engage in an active process of *figuring out, deciding*, even *agreeing on* the principles of justice. Rawls doesn't want *his* 'g/Gods' to be mere computation-devices, devoid of any powers of choice or deliberation. (This would, among other things, make them too remote from *us*; and us is who 'they' – the would-be entrants to the 'original position' – are supposed to *be*.)

(Early) Rawls believes that there has been progress in philosophy since Locke's and Rousseau's and Kant's time (and presumably still more so since Plato's), in significant part because he, along with others, has successfully found a role for the theory of rational choice in moral and political philosophy. He remarks on p. 16 of *A Theory of Justice* that 'the merit of the contract terminology is that it conveys that principles of justice may be conceived as principles that would be chosen by rational persons, and that in this way conceptions of justice may be explained and justified'. If we were to 'translate' this into the language of the Euthyphro dialogue, it would read roughly as follows: 'The merit of speaking of "the Gods" and what they would choose is that it conveys that principles of morality (piety, etc.) may be conceived as principles that would be chosen by Gods, and that in this way conceptions of morality (piety) may be explained and justified'. But put in that way, this sounds distinctly underwhelming. The lack of clarity Rawls is bringing to the situation is now, I think, clarified.

The denizens of the original position surely *are* as good as (being) g/Gods. They are utterly abstracted from circumstance; while they are omniscient concerning the *range* of circumstances they might eventually find themselves in; they make no errors of reasoning; and so forth.[24] But what my 'translation' of Rawls's explication of the original position contract-terminology back into 'Socratic' terms makes clear is that this helps Rawls not one jot.

Socrates, in his discussion with Euthyphro, allowed that what the Gods agreed on would be right. But he raised a worry about whether it would be right because they agreed on it, or agreed on because it was right. Has Rawls advanced our understanding at all about which of these, if either, we should say? Rawls wishes, through 'the original position', to express 'the idea that moral principles are the object of rational choice'.[25] Very well; but does that take us any further, either? Couldn't Euthyphro happily have said as much, on the Gods' behalf?

It might of course be replied once more that Rawls's concept of 'reflective equilibrium'[26] finesses this problem. Could Rawls say that it is neither exactly that his gods choose what is just, nor exactly that

what is just is prior to their discovery of it, but some subtle composite or superposition of the two, worked out over time, by each and every one of us? But I would counter that all that 'reflective equilibrium' does is find a way of *marrying* what 'the original position' yields with our 'considered judgements'[27] about justice etc., or (alternatively put) of compromising between the two. It does not itself give *any* weight to the original position itself (if I don't/can't really *understand* 'the original position', if it isn't in the end coherent or possessed of a coherent aspiration or place in one's thinking, then 'reflective equilibrium' can't help me!). And so our problem remains: *does* the original position (when suitably reflected on and in) have *any* justifying force whatsoever? When we reflect as fully as possible, and imaginatively enter this 'place', what helps us to make any real progress with our moral/political-philosophical thinking, there? Are Rawls's principles of justice right because the denizens of the original position would choose them; or would they choose those principles simply because the principles are right? What *is* the status of Rawlsian 'contract theory'?

It seems to me that when Wittgenstein's 'Ancients', such as Euthyphro at a certain point in his discussion with Socrates, say that it is what God chooses that is *as a result* right, this at least has the virtue of clarity (incidentally, it makes no difference here whether one says 'God' or 'the g/ Gods' – just as in the original position, where Rawls eventually makes clear that there wouldn't *really* be any *discussion*,[28] as all the 'beings' there are identical, and so one could just take any one of them, and the rational choice made would be the same as if one took a thousand of 'them'). It is clear that there is no real justification or explanation in the *Euthyphro*; and that's a good thing, inasmuch as it is at least honest. In Rawls, by contrast, the situation is more or less endlessly obscured. Rawls precisely claims to give us a justification – only what is in fact at best a systematically obscure one.

At times, in his celebrated *Theory of Justice*, it very much appears as though Rawls, like Kant, has the self be prior to the ends it affirms, or *chooses* (for discussion, see e.g. M. J. Sandel *Liberalism and the limits of justice*, p. 120), and that the original position is a way of laying bare the constructive and voluntaristic powers of the true – liberal – individual. At other times, it appears as though Rawls and his individual in fact discover antecedently true principles, and that 'the original position' is nothing more than a convenient device for making this discovery perspicuous (see e.g. M. J. Sandel *Liberalism and the limits of justice*, p. 128f., and pp. 177–8). My suggestion is that Rawls's 'great' text is and must be simply unclear, and so it does not enable philosophic progress,

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and certainly it does not constitute it. In more or less Wittgensteinian terms: it merely, systematically, hovers, and (therefore) obscures.

We cannot delay any longer considering in the body of this chapter what those readers familiar with Rawls's *oeuvre* will undoubtedly be impatiently rehearsing in their minds by now: Rawls's gradual move in the years after *Theory* away from 'metaphysics' and from a deep reliance on rational choice theory and toward a more historically-relative 'political' schema. As there is a later and an early Plato; and (allegedly – see my paper in my new book for a 'resolute' argument somewhat to the contrary: http://rupertsread.blogspot.com/2011/08/my-new-book. html) an early and a later Wittgenstein; so, it will be said, there is an early and a later Rawls. Can this move help us resolve Rawls's quandary? My argument will be that the changes in Rawls from early to later have not unmuddied the waters, and, moreover, that they have once *more* exhibited no progress. For they have simply, I shall contend, made it (even!) less clear whether Rawls is attempting to offer a *justification* of a set of moral and political principles, in any sense worthy of the name, at all. He has not, as he was in effect urged to do by Richard Rorty,[29] simply admitted a terminus to explanation/justification, in the spirit of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* remark on the Gods given above, or in the spirit of section 1 of *Philosophical Investigations* ('Explanations come to an end somewhere'). He has not, that is, come right out and said that these his 'principles of justice' are simply free-standing suggestions for liberal individuals *qua* political animals to help them interpret themselves at this point in history and geography. He has continued to maintain that his 'theory of justice' is to *some* degree *justified*, and that 'the original position' has *some* justifying force. He has insisted, that is, that 'political liberalism' and 'justice as fairness' are no mere *modus vivendi*, but are more reasonable than their alternatives. But in what sense 'more reasonable', or 'justified' – and with *what* justifying force – it is entirely unclear. Even more unclear, I will submit, than it was in his earlier work.

It will no doubt be countered that this verdict is too harsh: it will be claimed on behalf of the later Rawls that *political* liberalism, as opposed to the *metaphysical* liberalism that some saw the early Rawls as putting forward, precisely gives up the claim to any Archimedeanism, of the kind that has been a central aspect of what I have questioned, above, and that Rawls now concedes openly that a certain set of conceptions of the good or of the reasonable is already assumed, by and in his proposed polity. It will be suggested on behalf of 'political liberalism' that it is *based on a framework* that is not itself

argued for. Dreben calls it a 'conceptual analysis', but one that takes *as given* a certain background: e.g. the U.S. Constitution, or something much like it.[30]

This may be *roughly* right (although Rawls continues to claim quite explicitly that his framework can be 'neutral' or 'impartial' between conceptions of the good (we shall worry about this shortly), and he claims that there is no reasonableness outside of his framework (I contest this claim in my http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000394/article.pdf; and also below)). *If* this account *is* (roughly) right, then later Rawls has certainly made some progress: something has been clarified. An impossible task is no longer being attempted. Rorty's rendering of later Rawls is to some degree right, after all.[31] This might perhaps be seen in effect as plumping for one horn of the *Euthyphro* paradox: it might perhaps amount to saying that the 'Gods' just choose, and that what they choose *is* (therefore) the rational (the reasonable), that that must be tolerated. It could then be said that they/we, the denizens of a modern liberal polity, then choose our individual conceptions of the good etc., and that what we so choose, in all its (reasonable) pluralism, *is* what is rational (reasonable). It could be added that one is mistakenly holding on to an old-fashioned conception of rationality if one supposes that 'the normal result of a culture of free institutions' would be a monistic comprehensive doctrine.[32] And finally it could be urged that 'a continuing shared understanding on one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power',[33] and that the flowering of human reason therefore will *not* yield such a continuing shared understanding.[34]

But three (inter-related) questions naturally arise:

1. Most obviously: What about the unspoken framework *for* such 'flowering'? Why should the choice of later Rawls's replacement for Euthyphro's Gods be structured and constrained by the *particular* frame that 'political liberalism' provides?
2. What about (allegedly) *'unreasonable'* pluralism? Is it clear that what falls outside the constraints of 'political liberalism' is really intolerable, unreasonable, not-to-be-welcomed? As Sandel puts it, at p. 1776 of his Book Review of *Political Liberalism*:[35] '[Is it always] reasonabl[e] to bracket, or set aside for political purposes, claims arising from within comprehensive moral and religious doctrines'? He argues, drawing on the words of Lincoln no less, and of Abolitionist voices, that it is not.

3. What is so great about *choice*, anyway? Isn't being *good* or high-quality, good enough? Choosing is a paradigm of the good *for liberals*, but not for most creeds or belief-systems. Might it not be that later Rawls's quasi-solution to the Euthyphro dilemma, plumping for the choices of persons as defining what is rational, is only likely to be attractive to one who is *already* convinced of the merits of a liberal solution to the problems of political philosophy? In which case, is Rawls doing *nothing* more than preaching to the choir?

I shall focus in what follows primarily on the first and second questions, largely leaving the third, intriguing and important though it is, for some briefer thoughts that emerge from the discussion of the first two. My strong suspicion, though I cannot argue this in full here,[36] is that the perhaps-sympathetic reading of later Rawls that I sketched above, a reading of him as genuinely moving forward from a conceptual impasse in a way that early Rawls could not do, is *not* right. The reason is this: that it is not clear that the problem that Rawls above all sets out to solve in his later work, the problem of *political legitimacy*,[37] is actually progressed at all, in that work, if that work is interpreted as we have so far interpreted it, striving to make sense of it, as an embrace of the voluntarist 'The Gods just choose' horn of the Euthyphro dilemma (this is, in effect, the burden of question (1), above). For sure, if we (all) simply accept the framework of political liberalism, then we can all get along, and have a society which is 'congruent', but that is little more than begging the question. Again: Rawls claims to provide more than merely a *modus vivendi* (see *Political Liberalism* p. 147), more than merely a reflection back to us of what we currently do and how we currently just about muddle along – he evidently does not accept Rorty's strong misreading of him as nothing more than a pragmatist ethnocentrist about justice (see p. 1775 of Sandel's review). But what is the 'more' than this that later Rawls can intelligibly be offering? Is there any there 'there' that can be sustained?

The real issue – of whether the later Rawlsian framework *invites* such a shared sense of stable congruence, of legitimacy, of self-transparency, as Rawls suggests we need – depends upon whether or not we determine it to actually and genuinely find, accommodate, *foster* and (in any way) *legitimate* an 'overlapping consensus', or whether in reality it fails (or would fail) to facilitate genuine toleration of 'minorities' (e.g. of religious believers who are not willing to have their religion privatized), genuine toleration of different conceptions of the good

(see question (2), above). I would claim, as I argue in detail elsewhere,[38] that it so fails (as intimated in both (1) & (2), above). My suggestion is that *all the important questions (that will impact heavily and negatively on many conceptions of the good) about the organization of society have already been 'begged', or pre-judged*, by the 'political liberalism' framework. I would therefore suggest that those of us who dissent from the framework that Rawls presumes and proposes *can hardly be* morally or even *politically bound* by it. The same point arises with regard to the 'intuitive' reasoning in Book 2 of *The Republic*, which aims to get us to think of the just city as being constituted as from out of something like a 'state of nature' and as therefore being somehow to our *actual* advantage. Those of us who believe, for instance, that our human – and animal – and living-oneness with one another, with future generations, and with the planetary ecosystem itself, is such as to demand systematic and impactful conscientious objection to war *and* to ecologically-deleterious activities (such as much of industrial-growth society), will not be satisfied to privatize our spirituality and our conscientious objection, our *conscientious civil disobedience*, in the manner required by early Rawls and reinforced at length in the deliberations of later Rawls.[39] And (we) are not convinced that there is anything in the slightest bit *unreasonable*, at the end of the day, in our refusal to accept 'political liberalism'. On the contrary, many of us perhaps suspect strongly that the 'public reason' beloved of Rawls will in fact hasten societal and ecological fragmentation – and so deserves in reality to be judged as *itself* unreasonable as a mode of life for human beings.[40]

But liberal-inclined readers, fans of Rawls's 'justice as fairness', will probably not yet grant that. To have a chance of meeting them, of convincing them, I need to be confident that I am doing all I can to present Rawls's side of the story... *fairly*, charitably. Let me have one more go, then, at the most charitable rendering it is I think possible to give of the later Rawls in this connection, in relation to his chosen central problem, of political legitimacy in a time of pluralism, and then see where we have reached in relation to it.

The original position (the defender of later-Rawls may claim) models *values* that Rawls maintains are implicit in the political culture of liberal democratic societies. The original position has no independent justificatory force. Its role is simply to clarify the implications of certain widely shared values. As for whether those values are contingent historical artifacts/products of choice, or eternal truths – Rawls need

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be committed to neither view. That is why his account is 'political, not metaphysical'. It neither claims nor denies that the values it embodies are objective. Rawls's view on this matter is that it is a matter of reflection for each member of a liberal democratic society to decide what the ultimate basis of liberal values are. Different individuals will regard those values as grounded in different ways, and some may regard them simply as strongly held preferences. That is the underlying idea of an 'overlapping consensus'. *Rawls's claim is simply to have identified and drawn out the implications of certain widely-shared values which he believes can form the basis of a political justification of political institutions.* To help make this drawing-out more convincing to *us*, he tells a historical story about how we have come to recognize and value toleration and liberties, a story beginning with the wars of religion and 'ending' in the present day.

Say for the sake of argument that all of that is right (leave aside even the fact that Rawls's historical story 'explaining' the centrality of liberalism to its heirs and denizens is desperately thin and vague, hobbled by his abstract framework and method. And leave till later the worry that the values that Rawls intends the original position to model are part of a controversial comprehensive vision of society). My deepest worries about this, the most generous version of later Rawls that I think it possible to give, others having failed, are still live.

They are the following two:

1) Is the privatization/individualization of reflection (of conscience?) envisioned here tenable, something that *makes sense*?[41] The denizens of this 'society' seem not to be able to have a real and rational *conversation* [42] about justice, let alone about any deeper values: is this really a picture of a *society* at all (it seems a 'society' formed from agglomerating quasi-emotivist quasi-relativist consumers; exactly the kind of 'society' put into question by Alasdair MacIntyre's work)?
2) Even if, contrary to the suggestions I have made in this chapter and that I draw conclusions from below, question (1) can somehow be answered in the affirmative, then the key question, the central question of my entire chapter, is really just repeated in the italicized penultimate sentence of the paragraph above beginning 'The original position (The defender of later Rawls may claim)...' (and here we return to the kind of worry I raised for Rawls by means of my analogy with the central two questions of the *Euthyphro*): what does it *mean*, to say that what that paragraph sets out amounts to anything worth calling a *justification* (or *legitimation*) of certain political institutions? *The meaning of this claim seems now entirely to have evaporated.*

Let us explore further why and how this is so. The later Rawls's central worry can be usefully put in this way: '[A] version of liberalism that insisted that it was the one true comprehensive doctrine would not be able to provide the kind of social stability that is part of Rawls's conception of a truly just, well-ordered society'.[43] Thus Rawls thinks that we have to resort to a purely political liberalism. The problem of the legitimacy (cf. p. 217 of *Political Liberalism*) or justifiability of the state cannot be solved, at least not any longer, he thinks, through a comprehensive doctrine (such as even that laid out in *A Theory of Justice*); 'the fact of reasonable pluralism' sees to that. The justification must be public, via 'public reason'; the state must be *publicly justifiable*. But: why even worry about stability, to this extent and in this way? The worry goes, as we have seen, beyond that necessary to attain a mere *modus vivendi*. Rawls in his later work seeks stability achieved in the right way and for the right reasons – the public good of justice as fairness publicly and reciprocally endorsed by reasonable individuals. The only answer to the question just asked, then, must be that Rawls worries like this about stability *because of a* tacit, *comprehensive commitment*.[44] Given the unavoidability, as it now seems, of comprehensive commitments, the only questions really are questions such as whether the comprehensive commitment(s) tacitly or explicitly underlying a given conception of society or proposal for governance actually does effectively promote stability. There are reasons for suspecting that Rawlsian political liberalism will not: for instance, because it is likely to increase societal atomization (as people feel increasingly indifferent to one another's comprehensive commitments, if the liberal scheme with its rigorous division between public and private works out as it is supposed to). The alternative to seeking an 'overlapping consensus' would be to find an explicit comprehensive doctrine that as many of us as possible can sign up to, as un-partial a *comprehensive* doctrine as possible – *but (later) Rawls quite explicitly points us in the* opposite *direction to this*.

Meanwhile, and decisively, Rawls's claim that only unreasonable views are excluded from the overlapping consensus allegedly underlying liberal society (see qu. (2), above) completely begs the question. Rawls has tacitly *defined* any conceptions that do not accept political liberalism as unreasonable.[45] Thus political liberalism has no justificatory or legitimatory force at all. It *only* appeals to those who already agree with it. It therefore cannot help settle the question of social stability, cannot help to justify publicly anything not already felt to be justified.

In short, I submit that 'political liberalism' no more answers the question which it was designed to answer, the question of stable political

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legitimacy, than Rawls's (early) theory of justice answers the question which *it* was designed to answer, the question of (the nature and grounds of) justice. The later Rawls repeats the ruse of the early Rawls. While *the early Rawls tried to make it seem as if rational choice 'in "the original position"' settled the problem of justice, so the later Rawls tries to make it seem as if the alleged existence of an overlapping consensus with which every 'reasonable' person should be satisfied settles the problem of legitimacy.* If one then asks the question as to *why* the original position models values already present in our society, the answer is obvious: because that society is indeed to some extent created around liberal individualist ideas. But this provides no *legitimacy* to it *at all*. It simply means that Rawls's device reflects back at us an implicit hegemonic ideology – and refusal to accept that hegemony is simply *defined* by Rawls as being unreasonable.

The kindest thing to say is, then, that at the end of the day the appearance of progress hereabouts (this time, in Rawls's thought) has once again proved *very* much greater than the reality. I say 'the *kindest* thing to say' because my actual view is that Rawls's later philosophy is *more* confused in this regard than his early philosophy. For even the (very limited) amount of clarity entailed in the justificatory force of rational principles or rational choice vanishes in the later work. The later Rawls tries to the end to pretend that his theory does not entail any comprehensive commitments. This stance is even less clear than early Rawls's was: it is unwilling to consider the possibility of there being a mote in its own eye.

My own view is that what the ruses of early and later Rawls *alike* partly conceal is what Sandel aims to establish and perhaps makes manifest by the end of his impressive book,[46] with its remorseless, more or less Socratic line of questioning of Rawls: that Rawls is necessarily implicitly putting forward in his work a theory of the (liberal) individual, or rather of the self as paradigmatically a consuming (consumerist, choosing) liberal individual[47] whose interest if any in community is only a preference, and never anything constitutive of their self-identity.[48] This is, contrary to general belief, so at *least* as much in the polity of later Rawls as in the society of early Rawls. Later Rawls does *not* really involve the kind of *concession* to so-called 'communitarianism' that it is so often thought to, but rather expresses an effort to cope with and to live with and regularize a still *greater* degree of societal fracturing![49] Later Rawls moves in this sense in *precisely the opposite* direction to communitarianism. The self in later Rawls is *split* between a political self, which regards as unreasonable

everything that falls outside a very narrow range of political-space and communications-methods, and a wider self that is privatized and forbidden to interfere with that essential but narrow range. Early Rawls at least expressed (even if not at all clearly) a comprehensive moral and political conception, the kind of thing that communitarians think at least could be the basis of a society of some kind. Later Rawls tries to abstract even from this (and mostly fails). Later Rawls, in other words, is about how to think political philosophy in a setting that cannot be baldly predicated, as Rawls came to recognize the *Theory of Justice* covertly was, on an explicit shared liberal political philosophy. 'Political Liberalism' is a political philosophy for a world which lacks even the (thin) mutual ties of the denizens of *A Theory of Justice*. It is a political philosophy (if that is the right word) for a world of individualized consumerism gone wild, a world where one thinks even of the choice between philosophies as a quasi-consumer-choice (this is the real meaning of Rawls's famous later idea of applying 'the principle of tolerance to philosophy itself').[50]

To re-focus our minds, in closing, on the quasi-Euthyphroic dilemmas of how to take 'the original position' that have been my main concern in this chapter: what Sandel never really fully considers is the possibility that the way in which the 'concealment' of which he speaks – by Rawls, of his 'ruse' – happens is that 'the original position' is neither really a contract, an agreement *between* parties, nor even a voluntaristic or deterministic agreement by the thin god-like agent in the original position *to* a set of propositions[51] (i.e. to the two principles of justice that Rawls puts forward), but rather something more basic: such as the kind of 'agreement' that Wittgenstein sets out in *Philosophical Investigations* sections 240–2. What Wittgenstein speaks of there is agreement in 'form of life'. This is 'agreement' neither in the sense of an actual agreement (treaty, contract), nor an unstable 'hypothetical' version thereof, nor again agreement in the sense of agreement with a certain opinion, but deep 'agreement' in *form* of community life. This could be usefully rephrased here as 'agreement' in conception of the good at a level so fundamental that it escapes any (easy) conceptualization or expression from within itself. Such 'agreement' comes *before* actual explicit agreements or agreements in opinions. That is what makes it peculiarly invulnerable to challenge – or understanding. It is really, an 'agreement' of *that* kind, I would submit, in a final effort to be 'charitable' to Rawls, and as much as possible to save him from the problem I have laid out in this chapter, that is present in the original position: *'agreement' in the 'form of life' that is*

*liberal individualism.* That is, agreement in that form of life in politics, but also by extension across the realm of the good, because what is agreed upon is the privatization of that realm. This implies directly a very particular form or tradition[52] of social reason, a 'community' – albeit at another level of description a pseudo-community, I would say, were I asked to judge it – of rigidly autonomous selves, opaque to one another, but having interests and preferences that make them above all desiring-machines, whether what they desire is more fine food or fast cars or charity for their fellow men or what-have-you.[53] This *image* of humankind is to some degree beyond argument (and is, I suggest, tacitly but precisely behind the later Rawls's thought that we may all be able to agree on something to found our political community that he thinks need not be able to be agreed in the form of an explicit philosophy) – but this image is also, it should now be clear, decidedly uncompulsory. Alternative possible forms of community life are imaginable, in which for instance the denizens have values and commitments involving each other which are constitutive of their identities; or in which in their taken-for-granted mutual dependence they lack strict boundaries and 'individual identities' altogether. In such alternative forms of life as these, the post-Platonic 'contractarian' premise of the voluntariness of society[54] that Rawls wants to embrace would appear not so much unattractive or false as *absurd* (as, in literal or historical or biologico-anthropological terms, *contra* Plato, it most certainly is). My suspicion, then, is that all that Rawls's long, involved and inconclusive arguments concerning the nature of his 'contractarianism' establish, at best, is a *vision* of the self and its society (or 'society') – a vision, reflective of its time, that may tempt others, but is, at least to the present writer, at least as unattractive, when seen clearly, as it is uncompulsory (Rawls's official vision of a 'well-ordered society' in the end boils down, I would claim, to what I have just indicated).[55]

And now I can only say this: what an *unperspicuous* way of attempting to achieve the goal of promulgating such a vision Rawls's writing is.

In sum: philosophy does indeed tend to exhibit a lack of progress, as Wittgenstein (following Nestroy – see my epigraph, above) suggests. The very effort to achieve progress in philosophy roughly after the fashion of science, in fact, *is* what very frequently causes philosophy to move in a *retrograde* direction.[56] It is this effort in Rawls – most glaringly, his wish to come up with a *'theory'*, by means of introducing 'rational choice theory' into moral and political philosophy,

without his having addressed the fundamental, 'timeless' philosophical problems which were actually at the root of the ethical issue he was concerned with; but then equally, his effort to continue the same unclear process of producing an (at least political) conception that will satisfy and cover us all, even once the quasi-scientific way in which this was earlier promised has been abandoned – which ensures that, on the most fundamental issue of his entire work, *he shows less wisdom and produces less clarity than was already present in Plato's* Euthyphro. He succeeds only in pushing moral (and political) philosophy back to a stage on balance inferior to that which it reached with Socrates. In neither his earlier nor his later work does he make any progress at all; on the contrary.

The moral of the story so far as real politics goes, then, is surely this: so much the worse for any actual liberal politics that depends on Rawlsian liberalism or which draws upon him for inspiration. For Rawlsian liberalism is both ill-founded and inferior to other available philosophical inspirations. Moreover, this is of course not just a problem for Rawlsians. If Rawls's philosophy gets into trouble as I have argued above, then other liberal philosophers committed to social-contractarianism and/or to 'neutrality' between conceptions of the good are doomed to find similar trouble. Most liberal philosophers and philosophies[57] will thus suffer the same fate as Rawls. In this sense, Rawls has been in this chapter merely an example, and the ramifications of the chapter stretch far, across most of liberalism broadly-construed, including certainly those neo-liberals who exhibit any alleged fealty to broadly-Rawlsian ideas.[58] To put my point in more general terms, then: any 'liberal' politics that would draw its programme from some general (and as it turns out question-begging) assumptions about reason (whether that be cashed out as 'rational choice theory' or 'public reason' or what-have-you) is here put severely into doubt.

Rawls functions here as a central example of a more general story, whose 'metaphilosophical' moral, then, is this: that if there is progress in philosophy, it consists chiefly in realizing how it is in the nature of such progress that it almost constantly seems greater than it is. To return one last time to the case with which we opened this essay: we could certainly call the coming of Wittgenstein a kind of progress. But then we ought to recognize still how little Wittgenstein advanced on what was already present, when seen aright, in the great works of Kant and Frege; how little the *Investigations* advances upon the *Tractatus*; and how little in fact the latter advances on Plato, or indeed on the best

common sense. But at least there was *some* progress, in these cases, a *kind* of progress.

   If philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato (in the case most-focally under discussion in the present chapter: to his enduring 'Euthyphro' dialogue), nevertheless it would be better if some of these footnotes had never been written. Some such footnotes do not advance matters *at all*, but rather make things worse. In that category, albeit with some regret, one must place the central elements of the works both early and late of the dominant figure in political philosophy in our time, John Rawls, that I have here put into question.[59]

## Notes

1. L. Wittgenstein (1998) *Culture and Value*, Revised Edition (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 22.
2. L. Wittgenstein (1961) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by F. P. Ramsey and C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul), sections 6.371–2.
3. L. Wittgenstein (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition (London: Macmillan), §1. To avert a possible misunderstanding here: Wittgenstein is saying here that *not 'everything'* gets explained, which (of course!) doesn't mean that *nothing* gets explained. In other words, there is no attack on science, here, whatsoever. The point of my chapter is to do with the sense of talking about – and the degree to which recently there has been any – progress *in philosophy* (e.g. in philosophy of science – or in moral and political philosophy). Not about the perfectly-fine and reasonably-straightforward sense in which there is normally progress in science itself (on which, see R. Read, W. Sharrock (2002) *Kuhn* (Oxford: Polity)).
4. It might be objected here that all dialogues are necessarily 'equivocal', since they don't make any statements of their author's views on any topic. They do more in the way of reflecting on what it would be to explain something, than actually offering any explanations that are to be taken as proposals. But this of course depends on how genuinely the dialogues in question are dialogues. Many philosophical 'dialogues' are *faux*: They only appear to be dialogues in surface form. (We 'therapeutic', Cavellian readers of Wittgenstein buck the standard reading by regarding *his* dialogues with himself as having to be taken very seriously *as* dialogues.)
5. Thus, by Wittgensteinian lights, the move from early to later Plato is far from exhibiting progress (though let me be the first to say that I am no Plato scholar. It is thus entirely possible that I am being unjust to Plato, in respect of the critical elements of my reading of him in the present chapter. I take that risk).
6. I don't have space here to consider the possible view, put forward by Cathy Rowett, that there really is a crucial distinction, even in the later dialogues, between Plato and Socrates.

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7. For one important account of Rawls as a (would-be) Wittgensteinian, as (allegedly) a true follower of, a worthy successor to, Wittgenstein, see B. Dreben (2003) 'On Rawls and Political Liberalism' in S. Freeman (ed.) *Cambridge Companion of Rawls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). For my response to this claim, see my R. Read (2010) 'Wittgenstein *vs* Rawls', in V. Munz, K. Puhl and J. Wang (eds) *Proceedings of the Kirchberg Wittgenstein Symposium, Language and World: Essays on the philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag).

8. Rawls is particularly important of course because his theory is taken to be the basis for (or a grand apologia for) how roughly the basic institutions of actually-existing 'liberal democratic' societies such as ours are or are to be justified. This matter therefore has an importance that cuts some considerable way beyond merely intellectual or scholarly dispute. It is often said that our very political leaders today (at least, the 'liberals' among them, on a *broad* interpretation of that term) are Rawlsians. Take for instance this useful and influential discussion of Obama as a Rawlsian (in particular, as an advocate of Rawls's concept of the overlapping consensus, discussed below): http://www.talkleft.com/story/2009/6/13/03244/1940.

9. The obvious exception to these 'mosts' and 'muchs' is Noam Chomsky, who allegedly provided the 'existence proof' for cognitive science, in his 'discovery' of 'syntactic structures'. I come (briefly) to Chomsky, with his truly theoretical ambition, below.

10. The question how we might imagine a state coming into being, in order to look and see where its justice is instantiated, is Plato's methodological route to discerning the nature of justice as such (i.e. to discern what the just is, what justice ought to amount to).

11. J. Rawls (1971) *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap), p. 3.

12. Of course, we need to be careful not to over-read the word 'justice'; we need some basis upon which we can be confident that that is a fair translation of the word that Plato uses. Otherwise, we will be connecting Rawls with Plato only by virtue of a 'false friend'. And there are some elements of Plato's discussion – such as his emphasis on guardianship, which I find congenial (see my proposal here: http://rupertsread.blogspot.com/2011/02/new-proposal-for-green-future-how-house.html); and such as his ultimate interest in morality, in the inner 'sources' of good behaviour – which suggest that possibly for him 'justice' as such is not the central interest of *The Republic*, and even possibly (as Rowett holds) that the state constructed in *The Republic* is intended only as one picture, an icon to think morality with. But I think that there are enough elements of Plato's discussion – such as the profound extent to which he believes that the just city *parallels* the just person; and such as the specifically 'proto-liberal' and present-day adult-centric (and tacitly masculinist) – elements of his account (which I am coming to shortly), which justify us in taking seriously Plato's use of the term 'justice', and finding in it a deep (and troubling) antecedent for Rawls. In any case, for space-reasons, I assume so in what follows: this chapter is not a detailed exercise in Plato-exegesis, but rather in exploring some possible connections between Plato, Wittgenstein and Rawls, with a view to offering a critique of Rawlsian liberalism as exhibiting a distinct lack of progress, relative to Plato.

13. Plato (1992) *The Republic* (London: Everyman), p. 46. My care-based alternative to the social contract and to justice, as found in Plato and Rawls alike, can be found in my R. Read (2011) 'Care, Love and Our Responsibility to the Future', *Arena*, 35/36, 115–123.

14. J. Rawls *A Theory of Justice*, italics added. Rawls has of course more recently qualified and partially-retracted the claim with which this quotation closes: see J. Rawls (1989) 'The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus', *New York University Law Review*, 64 (2), 233–255, p. 60 and also J. Rawls (1996) *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia), n. 7 on p. 53. I deal with the later Rawls below. But this localized partial-retraction in any case makes, I will argue, few odds with regard to the claim that I am making *here* about the basic problem with Rawls's method (at least, with his early method), a problem summed up beautifully in the following quote, from P. Johnston (1989) *Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy* (London: Routledge), p. 71: 'Rawls is caught between a recognition that reasons come to an end and a belief that reasonable moral argument must aspire toward proof and a Euclidean-type system'.

15. Again, it might be objected against me here that the later Rawls has a less 'rationalistic' approach. This is true – see below for my response to the later Rawls in respect of the subject matter of this paper. However, we shouldn't in any case *exaggerate* the change between 'early' and 'later' Rawls: J. Rawls *Political Liberalism* still fully endorses the original-position-style-approach (and the veil of ignorance; see e.g. 1: 4), and only 'clarifies' that it is a 'device of representation' (p. 25).

16. M. J. Sandel (1998) *Liberalism and the limits of justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 119. Now, the following objection might here be made against me: isn't there something good about the project of finding 'a middle way' between dogmatic poles, at least from a Wittgensteinian point of view? Doesn't John McDowell for example do something like this in his J. McDowell (1994) *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard), in seeking to 'oscillate' such as to find a way between empiricism and idealism? But there is all the difference in the world between seeking as Wittgensteinians (perhaps including McDowell, at least at his best) do to dissolve the nonsensical poles of most philosophical debates, and in that way find a way 'between' them, on the one hand, and merely seeking to compromise between them or find some (illusory, incoherent) middle ground between them, on the other. It is some version of the latter that Rawls appears to be doing; and that leaves him, I am claiming, falling badly between two stools.

17. A useful tool for gaining clarity on how to place Rawls in relation to other thinkers, and indeed on how to see how widely the implications of the critique in the present chapter reaches, is provided by S. Darwall (ed.) (2002) *Contractarianism/Contractualism* (Oxford: Wiley). The titular distinction is between (what he calls) 'contractarianism', where the focus is on the self-interest of the participants in the 'contract', and 'contractualism', where reasonableness and justifiability to others are what is central. The dialectic of my text hereabouts might be described as worrying whether Rawls and other liberals are (and can possibly be) really *clear* about *which* of these strategies/methodologies/philosophies they are pursuing. I think that

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this dilemma is particularly stark *vis-à-vis* 'the original position', and also incidentally *vis-à-vis* most libertarian thinking (the question for which is: what is the *force* of this thinking for those other than oneself?).

18. For my Wittgensteinian critique of Chomsky, see R. Read (2000/1) 'How I learned to love (and hate) Noam Chomsky', in *Philosophical Writings* 15 & 16, 23–48.

19. This immediately raises the worry that I explore further below: that there is what Wittgenstein would see as a kind of constitutive unclarity, a 'conjuring trick', in the movement, via 'reflective equilibrium' 'in' 'the original position', from 'widely accepted but weak premises to more specific conclusions' (J. Rawls *Theory of Justice*, p. 18).

20. What of Plato's Socrates's *own* stance? In the *Euthyphro* dialogue, Socrates very much seems to present the notion that the pious is not pious because it is loved by the gods, but rather the 'essence' of the pious is prior to the gods loving or choosing it. So it's not P because the gods choose it; it was P already. He seems very confident on this point. But the answer to the question of what precisely makes it P, the explanation, is still unclear – we know we need to look prior to the gods, but that's it. So, in terms of the Rawlsian context, Socrates would perhaps say that choosing rightly relies on the prior or antecedent existence of the principles of justice (the rightness of the choice is judged against what is actually right and wrong already – but how one is to judge this when one is ignorant of what the right and wrong are *is* the problem...).

   Now, does Rawls think along the same lines as Socrates: that the principles of justice are 'just' already, before the deliberation in the original position? If so, then he's in the trap: how would one judge this? Or, are the principles only 'just' because they are chosen by those in the original position? In this latter case it would seem that the principles are 'just' by virtue of the agents in the original position – by virtue of *their nature* – so we're not getting a 'new' thing but merely an implication of what we've fed into the system. A different sort of people might choose different principles. Then: is the nature of the people in the original position an accurate reflection of actual people? Or of people as they should be? But...*should* they (we) actually be like that (e.g. non-caring toward others, *qua* public/political beings)? I say not. And now it seems that Rawls has nothing of any force to say as to why one should say otherwise. This is another way of describing how Rawls is landed in the 'Euthyphroic' dilemma whose formulation is my perhaps central original move in the present chapter. Rawls is no better off than Socrates, and, in his lack of clarity about this (whereas at least the Ancient in this case was reasonably clear, as Wittgenstein might put it, about the terminus of his thinking), is actually thereby worse off.

21. Which is surely 'invented' by virtue of the nature of the agents in the original position, as many critics of Rawls have claimed. Any 'discovery' is merely the uncovering of what is implied by the nature of the people in the original position.

22. Sandel tends to lean toward this interpretation of Rawls, in the latter part of his book.

23. Though, again, it seems that Plato is if anything better off than Rawls: because Plato does at least have a powerful and beautiful account, gradually developed as *The Republic* progresses, of why it is allegedly in the interests of a rational egoist to do the right thing. This argument may defeat the Ring of Gyges; Rawls seems to lack any comparable argument, in part because of his deliberate rejection of perfectionism.

But I do think it very striking and troubling that, seemingly precisely against his own intentions, Plato is apparently committed, in his idea of the founding of the city, to a rational-egoist presumption. Plato has fallen into a trap of assuming individualism in his founding of a community. As with the question 'Why be moral?', there is something fishy about the very effort to answer it. There is a fishiness in the very desire to prove to a rational egoist why they should do the right thing, or to seek to prove to an individual why they should be part of a community. Rather, we have to presuppose community and morality to a greater extent than such desires make visible, or indeed possible (and this is why Wittgenstein proceeds as he does in *Philosophical Investigations*, 240–2).

The underlying problem is that Plato thinks that there is anything here to explain. Why does sociality need explanation at all? The very desire to explain it implies a tacit individualist starting point.

Plato is trying to figure being-with-others, and similarly being good, as in our *actual* interest – but this presupposes us *having* an interest prior to being moral agents inter-being with others. That is the fatal, proto-liberal-theoretic move.

24. In short, they do not seem to escape having the metaphysically dubious status of Kant's 'noumenal selves', the legislators in the 'Kingdom of Ends'. Little indeed has changed since the time of G/gods, indeed since Euthyphro's and Socrates's time.

25. J. Rawls *A Theory of Justice*, p. 251.

26. See J. Rawls *A Theory of Justice*, p. 20. If it be asked why the *Theory of Justice* remains worthy of attention *at all* on its own, given Rawls's later move away from it, part of the answer is that it is because many avowed *Rawlsians* – notably for instance 'left' Rawlsians such as Brian Barry (see for instance B. Barry (2001) *Culture and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard) and 'Kantian' Rawlsians such as Onora O'Neill (see for instance O. O'Neill (2003) 'Constructivism in Rawls and Kant' in S. Freeman (ed.) *Cambridge Companion of Rawls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)) – continue to follow/support it, and do not much care for Rawls's later philosophy (the situation thus neatly inverts that of Wittgenstein: virtually no-one doubts that the *Tractatus* is worthy of scholarship on its own terms, even though the majority of 'Wittgensteinians' do not care for Wittgenstein's early philosophy. ... Their judgement is *not*, incidentally, one that I share – along with other 'New Wittgensteinians', I believe, and have argued extensively in print, that Wittgenstein's later work shows progress relative to his early work *less* than is commonly believed – for I believe his early work to be far superior to the caricatural understanding of it that still tends to prevail. And, in support of this reading of later Wittgenstein as only improving to a certain limited degree over the (genius of) early Wittgenstein, I would of course cite the motto of the *Investigations*, my epigraph, above).

27. Now, what if these 'considered judgements' stably differ, reflecting an enduring pluralism? This is a key problem that Rawls's later work addresses: see below for some discussion.

28. See J. Rawls *Theory of Justice*, p. 139. All the talk of 'the parties' and of 'agreement' is thus rather bizarre: if the Theory turns out to be about an *individual* reasoning (the individual who reasons in the original position cannot, for Rawls, have an *identity* that matters. Once we think of the occupant of the original position as (if h/He were) a g/God, this indeed becomes pretty obvious: a g/God just reasons, *unencumbered* by an identity with others, and not, presumably, co-constitutive with any others. That, presumably, is *what makes 'h/Him' a g/God*).

29. See the latter's R. Rorty (1990) 'The priority of democracy to philosophy' in A. Malachowski (ed.) *Reading Rorty* (Oxford: Blackwell).

30. See again B. Dreben 'On Rawls and Political Liberalism'; this of course explains why some 'Rawlsians' don't much like the position of the later Rawls – it threatens to remove the sense of quasi-scientific explanation with which they hope to take on and beat their opponents. It also threatens to leave Rawls highly vulnerable to a worry about *why* he is supposedly entitled to regard himself as anything more than (MacIntyre's characterization of him as) merely the latest example of a liberal *tradition*. See the relevant chapters of A. MacIntyre (1981) *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press) and A. MacIntyre (1996) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth)].

31. Take the following striking remark, from J. Rawls *Political Liberalism,* p. 53: 'To see justice as fairness as trying to derive the reasonable from the rational misinterprets the original position. Here I correct a remark in *A Theory of Justice*, where it is said that the theory of justice is a part of the theory of rational decision … this is simply incorrect'. Reading remarks such as this, one can see why some theoreticistically-minded Rawlsians were dismayed by the revisionary claims of later Rawls …

32. See J. Rawls (1999) 'The idea of public reason revisited' in S. Freeman (ed.) *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard), p. 573.

33. J. Rawls *Political Liberalism*, p. 37.

34. See B. Dreben 'On Rawls and Political Liberalism', p. 319f., for amplification.

35. M. J. Sandel (1994) 'Political liberalism', reviewed by M. J. Sandel, *Harvard Law Review*, 107, 1765–1994. Furthermore, as Sandel argues (at p. 1782f.), there is pluralism too concerning the content of justice (and also concerning the reach and the centrality or otherwise of justice). Is it really remotely plausible to hold, as Rawls seems committed to holding, that the rejection of political liberalism amounts *ipso facto* to an unreasonable view, part of an unreasonable pluralism, concerning the proper nature of justice in societies such as ours? Is it remotely plausible that holding rival views about justice (to Rawls's) is *less* reasonable than holding rival views about morality, philosophy, and religion? As Sandel puts it at p. 1788: 'Is Milton Friedman's objection to redistributive policies a less "reasonable pluralism" than Pat Robertson's objection to gay rights?' (see especially also p. 1783 of Sandel; and further discussion in the body of my text, below).

36. I do so, in R. Read 'On Rawls's failure to preserve genuine (freedom of) religion', forthcoming, and in chapter 3 ('Religion without belief') of R. Read

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(2007) *Philosophy for Life* (London: Continuum). Cf. also n. 38 & n. 39, below.

37. Summed up by Dreben thus: 'under what conditions will someone properly accept a law as legitimate, even if he differs with it, even if he thinks it unjust' (B. Dreben 'On Rawls and Political Liberalism', p. 317).

38. See my publications on Rawls and religion, including http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000394/article.pdf

39. See the argument of my R. Read (2009) 'The case of John Rawls *vs*. the refuseniks', *Practical Philosophy,* Vol. 10.1, Nov., 56–63. Much as Sandel argues in his Review of *Political Liberalism* that the later Rawls would have badly hobbled the Abolitionist movement and Lincoln's Presidency, so now Rawlsian liberalism is implicitly assisting the kind of hospitality our institutions show to environmental profligacy and theft from the future, to systematic animal torture and murder, etc. What this boils down to, in my opinion (and not just mine – see Raymond Geuss's polemic against Rawls in R. Geuss (2008) *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)), is this: political liberalism is a small-c conservative doctrine. It is fine if you believe that our society has very roughly got things right; if, roughly following Fukuyama, you think we've *arrived*. It is no good if you think that we need to tear up any of our basic institutions and start again, and place different values centrally. In this regard, the later Rawls provides a quasi-Hegelian apologia for the status quo, just like the early Rawls does.

Some will find this an odd take on Rawls, who is normally thought of as a figure on the Left. And indeed, it is of course true that there are many on the political Right who are unreasonably excluded from Rawls's 'public reason': such as Muslim and Christian Fundamentalists, and also probably some real libertarians. But this is not incompatible with my suggestion that Rawlsian liberalism is *in the current political context* a fundamentally conservative doctrine, which undercuts the possibility of radical egalitarian or green political and social change. (Cf. n. 44, below.)

However, I cannot support this claim further here; I do so, in my R. Read (2011) 'The difference principle is not action-guiding', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 01 September 2011.

40. See Hutchinson's argument in his 'samizdat' unpublished manuscript, P. Hutchinson (unpublished) *Climate change and the liberal programme.*

41. Drawing on an analogy with Wittgenstein's anti-'private-language'-considerations, I argue otherwise in my R. Read 'Wittgenstein *vs* Rawls'.

42. In roughly Rush Rhees's sense of 'conversation' (or 'discourse'); see R. Rhees (1988) *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

43. S. Mulhall, A. Swift (1996) *Liberals and Communitarians*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 175.

44. This point is made at length in the fascinating, incendiary work of Paul Treanor on Rawls's *Political Liberalism* (http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/rawls.html): 'Rawls has a specific view of what liberalism is for: essentially, long-term stability. His work is explicitly intended to provide a basis for transgenerational stability, a goal which he restates several times. At no time does Rawls consider whether transgenerational stability

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is a desirable goal: apparently he finds that self-evident: "…the problem of stability has played very little role in the history of moral philosophy…the problem of stability is fundamental to political philosophy…" (*Political Liberalism*, Introduction, p. XVII). I also think the problem of stability is central: political philosophy should be about how to *overcome* stability. That is a value orientation opposite to that of John Rawls, but you will find no trace of it in Rawls' work. He writes as if no-one could think such a thing. Rawls also has a clear picture of what he wants to avoid: civil strife. Again he gives no justification for making the avoidance of civil strife a primary social goal. He simply assumes it to be self-evidently necessary that societies are like this.

In other words, Rawls is presenting what he often claims to avoid: a comprehensive quasi-religious doctrine. It is politically a conservative doctrine. It has two underlying principles: that stability is good in itself, and that society should be structured to avoid civil strife, and promote stability' (italics added).

45. For argument to this conclusion, see pp. 237–8 and p. 245 of S. Mulhall, A. Swift *Liberals and communitarians*. And this passage, S. Mulhall and A. Swift (2003) 'Rawls and communitarianism' in S. Freeman (ed.) *Cambridge Companion of Rawls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 484: 'There is, in short, no…principled difference between political liberalism and the comprehensive liberalisms it condemned as sectarian – no form of liberal anti-perfectionism that is not founded on a comprehensive and controversial vision of human well-being'. From friends of Rawls such as these, this is a devastating judgement.

46. And compare also Sandel's later remarks on later Rawls, for instance in his 'A response to Rawls's *Political Liberalism*', in the 2nd edition of his J. Rawls *Liberalism and the limits of justice*.

47. As depicted powerfully in the *oeuvre* of Zygmunt Bauman, as well as in and around chapter 14 of A. MacIntyre (1996) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

48. Saying this would perhaps seem to ignore the important concession that Sandel can seem to make to Rawls at p. 1770 of his M. J. Sandel 'Political liberalism reviewed by M. J. Sandel'. In n. 17, Sandel points out that Part III of *A Theory of Justice* already contains a Kantian conception of the person. Sandel then allows that, in *Political Liberalism*, 'Rather than defend the Kantian conception of the person as a moral ideal, [Rawls] argues that liberalism as he conceives it does not depend on that conception of the person after all. The priority of the right over the good does not presuppose any particular conception of the person, not even the one advanced in Part III of *A Theory of Justice*'. However, and the remainder of Sandel's review bears this out, there *is* still a theory of the person tacitly presupposed in Rawls: it is presupposed that persons are the kind of beings that can 'tolerate' and indeed embrace the kind of extreme split between public reason and private comprehensive conception(s) – the latter entirely conceived of as merely the person's *interests* – that the later Rawls demands. I think that they (we) do not and mostly cannot. Often, when we stand somewhere morally, philosophically, or religiously, we can and would do no other. As Sandel in effect points out towards the end of his Review, it would be so much the worse for our political culture, if this were not so.

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49. Rawls is living in a time in which society splits apart more in the direction of individualism under the strains of 'liberal capitalism'. The real trajectory of his work, I am suggesting, is a response of kinds to that change. His work is a *symptom* of its times, and in no way a *remedy* for their desperate defects.

50. At p. 246 of J. Rawls (1985) 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical' in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14, 223–252.

51. Sandel suggests that this is really what is happening (at p. 130 of his *Liberalism and the limits of justice*).

52. Here I am thinking especially of Alasdair MacIntyre's work on the 'tradition' of liberalism: particularly of his three powerful post A. MacIntyre (1981) *After Virtue* books.

53. See e.g. J. Rawls *A Theory of Justice*, p. 417. It would be of considerable interest to undertake a thorough compare-and-contrast exercise between Rawls's theory of the self and the Buddhist 'theory' of the (non-) self that has finally emerged into some prominence in the West over the last generation. In my R. Read (2011) Beyond an ungreen-economics-based political philosophy: three strikes against "the difference principle" in the *International Journal of Green Economics*, I begin this task, suggesting that liberalism is actually a paradigm-case of the (*anti*-Buddhist) Western doctrine of the 'hungry' self, a doctrine that has been perhaps-terminally destructive of both solidarity and the planetary ecosystem, over the past few centuries.

54. 'No society can, of course, be a scheme of cooperation which men enter voluntarily in a literal sense; each person finds himself placed at birth in some particular position in some particular society … Yet *a society satisfying the principles of justice as fairness comes as close as a society can to being a voluntary scheme*, for it meets the principles which free and equal persons would assent to under circumstances that are fair. In this sense *its members are autonomous and the obligations they recognise self-imposed*' J. Rawls *A theory of justice*, p. 13; italics added.

55. This suspicion of mine is, I hope to have made clear, a well-motivated one; albeit hardly one that I can claim to have supported decisively through textual exegesis (that would of course require a much longer piece of work).

56. For directly analogous arguments with regard to the so-called human or social sciences, see pp. 126–130 of R. Read and W. Sharrock *Kuhn*.

57. Though not, of course, all: for instance, 'perfectionist' liberals such as Joseph Raz will to some extent need separate treatment.

58. For instance, the leading Conservative intellectual David Willetts, now a prominent member of David Cameron's Cabinet, in Britain, who goes so far as to suggest implicitly in this intriguing piece in *Prospect* magazine that Rawlsian thinking is *too inegalitarian* for the contemporary Conservative Party! http://tria.fcampalans.cat/images//Articulo_thatcher.pdf

59. Thanks, for important points of clarification, to Cathy Rowett, Juliet Floyd, Thomas Wallgren, Paul Johnston, an anonymous referee, and the editor of *Philosophy*. Thanks also to them and to the *R.I.P.* for permission to republish this paper, which was originally published in *Philosophy* 85 (2010), pp. 341–367. The version published here is specially revised for this volume on Wittgenstein and Plato; thanks to Phil Hutchinson, Sean McConnell and

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# 12
## How Wittgenstein Refused to Be 'The Son Of'

*Antonia Soulez*

### 1. (Philosophical) Grammar is not philology

Was Wittgenstein a historian of philosophy? The answer is bluntly NO. He did not care about predecessors, nor whether he was faithful or not to what they wrote. Let's say he was totally indifferent to the original text as a historical matter to be interpreted. Yet, Wittgenstein did not think that his predecessors deserved less attention or that they were less good than modern thinkers: 'Philosophy makes no progress', he wrote in 1931.

In an earlier colloquium on the *Philosophical Investigations*, I presented a paper in which I showed how he mentions Plato in a remark in the *Philosophical Investigations*. This chapter now gives me the opportunity to deal with the matter in more depth and from a slightly different angle. My paper in Bordeaux was on *Du chariot d'Hésiode au balai des* Recherches philosophiques*, en passant par Russell. Les 'éléments' du* Théétète *d'après le § 46 des* Recherches philosophiques *de Wittgenstein*.[1] My topic here takes a step towards understanding what Wittgenstein meant by declaring in his *Big Typescript* that 'grammar is not philology'; because, he writes, the philologist is not interested in rules for trans-lating a language into another language. Grammar deals with language. Philology, we should say (but Wittgenstein does not say anything precise about it), deals with the textuality of philosophy. How different language is from textuality!

My aim was to elicit the role that Plato's anticipatory critique of logical atomism in the *Theaetetus* played in Wittgenstein's own argu-mentation against Russell's 'individuals'. At the time, I mainly had in mind Ryle's own, very different reading of the explanatory power of Plato's analysis of logos in his middle dialogues. Ryle was more

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concerned with comparing the methods of analysis in Plato with those in Frege and Russell. He reconstructed Plato in such a way that one could fairly speak of 'Ryle's Plato'.[2] I will show that there is no such thing as 'Wittgenstein's Plato', that there is, however, a Platonist *Urbild* which Wittgenstein discusses.

Wittgenstein, for his part, does not worry about comparing methods of analysis and their models, for instance. The difference of treatment, of vocabulary, and of keys of interpretation does not concern him. He uses Plato against Russell, as Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker have already emphasized,[3] yet he aims at demarcating his new conception of meaning from the one he first propounded in his *Tractatus*. There is a sort of puzzle; it now looks like a ballet with a change of positions between the three protagonists: Plato, Russell, and Wittgenstein himself in a new sort of dialogical space, devoid of chronological plausibility and contextual and linguistic affinities. Without being polemical, it is a strange strategy which leaves aside problems of languages of interpretation, philological aspects, and understanding what Plato or Russell really meant.

According to the classification drawn by Hide Ishiguro in her article on 'Analytical philosophy and history of philosophy',[4] although she does not mention Wittgenstein in her lists, Wittgenstein would belong to the family of philosophers who read predecessors in order to extract from them what their work means to the contemporary reader rather than what they wanted to say: but then would he have to be placed besides Peter Strawson (author of *The Bounds of Sense*), or J. Bennett also on Kant, Michael Dummett on Frege, Davidson on Aquinas and Aristotle about the weakness of the will? – Certainly not!

I see one reason for answering no: in contrast with the above-mentioned readers of predecessors, Wittgenstein refuses both to 'understand them' and to reconstruct them in any fruitful manner. Yet the distinction he draws between grammar and philology shows something else: not only that language does not intersect with textuality (or analysis of language, hermeneutics), but that what he intended mainly to do was to invent linguistic objects of comparison in order to expand various language games.

## 2. Wittgenstein and Ryle

In this sense, Wittgenstein's strategy vis-à-vis the ancient philosopher is quite different from Ryle's, who, as a professional Hellenist and logician, builds a comparative reading around the 'same logical problem'. The logical problem that is shared by Plato and Frege–Russell, he says,

consists in the relations between naming and meaning, the meanings of words and the sense of sentences, the composition of falsehoods and truths, the role of 'not', the difference between contradictories and opposites, and finally, what is expressed by 'if and "therefore"'. This problem appears to have been passed down from Plato to the moderns in spite of the heterogeneity of the models of methods of analysis: the alphabetic model in Plato's case (the phonetic elements or 'stoicheia', in syllables), and the algebraized logical method in Frege–Russell's case.[5] It will be noticed that Ryle does not consider that the use of modern logic is necessarily more helpful than the alphabetic model. Plato is said to have understood better than Frege the 'notion of independency-variability-without-separability of the meanings of the parts of sentences'. On the other hand, the apparatus of symbolic logic with its variables as placeholders enabled Russell to 'extract implications from their particular contexts and codify patterns of implication', which amounts to writing notational schemata 'on a blackboard, a practice that would have been of no use to Plato'.

The problem–argument continuity that Ryle advocates is even more striking in Wittgenstein's contribution, as it was not Russell but Wittgenstein, he writes, who, developing arguments of Frege, showed that

> the sense of a sentence is not [...] a whole of which the meanings of the words in it are independently thinkable parts, but, on the contrary, that the meanings of the parts of a sentence are abstractable differences and similarities between the unitary sense of that sentence and the unitary senses of other sentences which have something but not everything in common with that given sentence.[6]

Russell indeed missed the relating force of what Ryle called the 'Live-predicate', in which the latter sees a semantical contribution to the meaning of what is asserted.[7] The fact that Wittgenstein did see it motivates Ryle's preference for Wittgenstein in these matters.[8]

That is what Ryle says when reading and comparing Wittgenstein with Russell, but note that Wittgenstein would probably not even have cared about that superiority which Ryle attributes to him. Yet, the remark bears on the same passage of the *Theaetetus* that Wittgenstein quotes in *Philosophical Investgations*, §46.

In his 'Review of Wittgenstein, Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics',[9] Ryle points out that 'the nature of the relation between the *Philosophical Investigations* and the *Tractatus* is that of a conversation

between himself with his own refractory self. It appears at the time of the Investigations, and from the Rylean standpoint, that in the *Tractatus* we only deal with 'the discernable differences between sayables in their degrees and patterns of compositeness. Any other differences had been algebrized away'.[10]

In this latter remark, Ryle mentions what brings Wittgenstein and himself closer to the important question: the expressions for life that Russell had neglected. Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* has indeed focused on 'live expressions' with the help of which one really says something, and which go beyond the narrow scope of the logician who is only concerned with truths and falsehoods.

Russell's deficiency, as Ryle sees it, lies in his resolute lack of sensitivity to 'life'. In contrast, Wittgenstein gives importance to 'life' and this is why Ryle praises his contribution to meaning 'beyond the scope of formal logic'. But what is 'life' in the logical context of such a discussion?

Ryle does not approach 'life' in the same way as Wittgenstein. Not only, he says, did Wittgenstein invert the traditional theory of concepts and propositions by renouncing the myth of 'object-description' and disentangling the notion of elucidation from intuiting such object-entities, but he introduced the negative idea that the sense of a sentence is not describable because it is not a thing. In other words, he writes, 'sense and nonsense, for Wittgenstein are not a philologist's objects'.[11]

As a matter of fact, the grammar Ryle was looking for is indeed different from Wittgenstein's grammar. Wittgenstein, who introduced forms of life, shifted away from the attempt foreshadowed even by Plato, namely the contributions to meaning that are made by live-predicates such as tensed verbs. Plato's theory of forms, Ryle says, contains embryonic aspects of such a contribution which will become Ryle's central interest for the assertive (as opposed to the naming) power and features of dispositional and activity concepts in the process of 'starting and ending with thoughts' when we utter a sentence. This rather comes from the Stoician logic.[12]

The anthropological aspect of Wittgenstein's inquiry, by contrast, brings the notion of rules in language-games to the foreground: the meaning of an expression is the rules for the employment of that expression, to which he should have added, 'in life' as Cora Diamond says.[13] By doing so, Wittgenstein shed a new light on meaning by relating it to rules rather than by calling for the intuiting of parts of meaningful wholes in an analytical examination. Ryle failed to pin down the role of rules 'in life'.

Ryle adopted a 'reconstructive' but also 'propositionalist' reading which in turn helps us to see what Plato's *Theaetetus* could contribute to Wittgenstein's point against Russell, which Wittgenstein himself had perhaps missed.

### 3. How Wittgenstein did not read Plato's *Theaetetus* as Ryle did

In contrast to Ryle, let me now show how Wittgenstein is neither a purely propositionalist nor a reconstructivist reader.

At this point, we see to what extent and how Wittgenstein's style indeed differs from a historical or genealogical approach to his predecessors like Ryle's reconstructivist propositionalist reading. Yet I have come to see that, by different means, both Wittgenstein and Ryle were greatly concerned with retrieving life in language through forms of language. This is in fact an argument for life that was not absent in Plato's inquiry into the kind of mobility life would introduce to Being (*Sophistes* 248–249a), in so far as Beings are sorts of 'dynameis', or capacities or powers that things are made of. Using alphabetic elements as a model, that which gets associated with Forms or Ideas requires a quality which makes these elements cohere as a complex whole and thereby achieve or accomplish ('perainein')[14] a terminal act of uttering an assertable. The verb, even when added to other names, is essential to that function which the name alone cannot achieve – for instance the function of Hesiod's chariot, in *Theaetetus* 207c.

Being influenced by the Stoics, Ryle was calling for life-predicates (e.g. his 'dispositional concepts') and considered Plato to be an anticipator of this motto of life in the analysis of meaning. According to the alphabetic model which was the only apparatus available in the Greek context, Plato's stressing the linking function of the verb as a model of the linking of Forms in a proposition could therefore well be seen as an important contribution to the modern problem.

In so far as it was not really life-predicates that Wittgenstein was in fact seeking, such a comparative approach as Ryle's retrospective examination is not relevant. For the same reason, he would have shown but little interest in Ryle's own strategy of 'comparing' as 'a method that deals with concurring theories for a same problem'.[15] What Wittgenstein did not care to dig out was the germs of important insights in older theories. If ever he acknowledged a philosophical concern in an older theory, it was not at all in order to show that

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there was a genealogical thread that led from the ancient form of the problem to the modern one. He would rather transplant the older view to his own terrain without trying to excavate the real truth lying in it, in other words, without any concern for the hermeneutical aspect of the textual presentation of the older argument. His reading of the ancient text was unrefined, indifferent to authenticity, careless about the historical distance between the ancient and the contemporary. What then did he look for?

Did he look for a better model of the analysis of meaning? As we know from Baker and Hacker, Wittgenstein would rather attack 'Plato's Betrachtungsweise', including Russell and himself with Plato, in order to reshape his method of 'comparison' with paradigms. To his eyes, Plato's problem illustrates a misleading model or picture of logical analysis that he wanted to get rid of. This illustration in turn could be addressed to and against Russell's conception. His contention in §48 is rather constructing a new language game in order to confute logical atomism than, in the spirit of a critical method, trying to discuss Russell's distinctions one by one. Wittgenstein was as little interested in critical arguments or analytical sorts of discussions with ancient authors as with modern or contemporary ones.[16]

## 4. How Wittgenstein 'decontextualized his sources'

It is true to say that Wittgenstein 'decontextualized his sources'?[17] 'Decontextualize' in two senses: (1) to cut them from their roots. In Wittgenstein's presentation, it is as though Plato were speaking at the present Urne to Wittgenstein and his contemporaries. There is absolutely no place for the past tense of what was said and thought, no theory in the past. Plato's theory does not belong to the history of thought. He is one possible voice in the dialogical space of the *Philosophical Investigations*, besides Russell, a variation of Russell's voice, another 'aspect' of what could be said of elements, composition, and whole of meaning. The only difference is that Plato wrote and thought in Greek. But the reader hardly notices that. His voice therefore belongs to the epoch of the contemporary debate about the elements, at the same level as that of Russell's point, no matter whether the logical atomism is an ancient Greek version like Antisthenes' version of the same problem, or a modern one. And (2), it is difficult to distinguish between Plato's or Socrates' voice on the one hand and the thinker that Plato criticizes (Antisthenes) on the other. Wittgenstein blurs the original context of discussion and argumentation.

We know that when he died, Wittgenstein possessed the complete Preisendanz (a Hegelian reader and translator of Plato[18]), a 5-volume edition of Plato's dialogues.[19] Yet he reveals himself as a rather bad reader who projects his own (critical) vocabulary of explanation upon the Greek problem of what is, for instance, 'logon' and 'alogon'. In Plato's text, are 'aloga', the physical elements that compose names of which a discourse would exclusively be made up, if one thinks (a materialist-atomist 'dream') that such a proposition composed of names only could be analysed into its elements? The paradoxical situation in the *Theaetetus* would then be that the 'aistheta' elements, graspable by our sense organs, would be expressible, knowable and at the same time irrational (aloga). Wittgenstein holds that the thesis of his *Tractatus* states the same thing about the elementary signs for objects but his emphasis marks the contrast between naming and knowing or describing, not a Socratic contrast between rational and non-rational aspects of such 'elements'.[20]

Interestingly enough, it is this physicalist aspect of Socrates' 'antionar', ('counter-dream') mentioned in those lines of the dialogue, that is neglected by Ryle because it escapes or, maybe, goes over the edge of the propositionalist reading he wants to offer.[21]

The names of which propositions are made up can be uttered but not described, as stated in the *Tractatus*.[22] 'Alogon' predicated of names in Plato's discussion, meaning 'irrational' in Plato's context, is here applied to entities for which there is 'keine Erklärung' in Wittgenstein's text. Obviously, 'keine Erklärung' is not synonymous with 'alogon' in Plato's context; it refers to the impossibility of explaining elements because they are 'aloga'. Not in Wittgenstein's context, which seems to abandon the method of 'Erklärung' in favour of a different method, that is: throwing light on projected expressions in the paradigmatic method of comparison. 'Erklärung' is an expression for explanation in the *Tractatus*, and a parte post refers to an earlier method called 'ostensive elucidation'. Wittgenstein keeps attributing this earlier method to himself as a problematic thesis that he was not clear about in the beginning (see *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis*, ca. 1929, Conversations noted by Fr. Waismann, ed. Br. McGuinness, Blackwell/Suhrkamp, 1967). His self-critical gesture here consists in rejecting the thesis he has just acknowledged as having been his own in earlier times. It is a kind of afterthought mentioning, so to speak, an *erreur de jeunesse*.

However, the ostensive elucidation does indeed apply to perceptual elements as well, especially for Russell. Ryle, on the contrary, privileged, and has been criticized for, the purely propositionalist conception of

the knowledge of things, excluding perceptual particulars among which 'we' find ourselves, (according to the *Theaetetus* 201c–210b).[23] The distinction even appears so sharp that one could be tempted to draw a Russellian demarcation in Plato's text between 'knowledge by description' and 'knowledge by acquaintance'. That would clearly be a projective kind of reading. The central problem of Plato, Ryle says, in the *Sophistes* and the *Theaetetus*, 203a and 207a, remains: 'how *Epistémè* in the sense of propositional knowledge (knowledge-that) is possible'.

But for Plato, the two sorts of knowledge certainly coexisted without a clear-cut distinction even if it seems odd to us, from a logical point of view, as John McDowell acknowledges as well as, in different terms, does Julia Annas.[24]

Note that an aesthetic interpretation of the 'stoicheia' as perceptual elements, while indeed meeting the Greek sense of 'stoicheia', especially when applied to 'us' and the 'parts' of which 'we' are composed, would in 201e 2 at first glance allow for the comparison with Russell's 'objects of acquaintance', and would thus corroborate the controversial reading of the objects in the *Tractatus* by Hintikka.[25] Maybe Plato would therefore not object so much if he saw his 'objects/elements' treated as identical with Russell's individuals. McDowell, who so carefully reads Ryle's article on 'Letters and Syllables',[26] says so, arguing that the lines 188c show that the context was from the beginning, before the 'anti-onar', clearly that of the aesthesis.[27]

Yet Plato mixed the two orders of things, propositionalist and perceptual, without demarcating them clearly. The demarcation is meant to be logical in a modern sense, which Plato could not imagine. Although Wittgenstein has no obsession with extracting from Plato's text some original truth, he leaves open the possibility of reading the two interpretations, propositionalist and empiricist not by decision, but because he is careless about the 'nature' of these elements. As a distanced reader of Plato, he does not miss the point so much! His carelessness meets with Plato's indifference about a clear-cut sort of demarcation.

Strategically, the benefit is obvious: Plato serves as a mediator between the early objects of the *Tractatus* and Russell's 'individuals', a kind of link or bridge vouching for the juxtaposition without deeper analysis, even though it is doubtful that his Tractarian objects were intended to be objects knowable by acquaintance. In fact, as regards these elements, I would rather take the character of 'logical requirements' to be primary according to Wittgenstein himself in the *Tractatus*. As to the relation of 'ostensive elucidation',

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which rather takes Schlick's method of ostensive verification as a target, Wittgenstein's afterthought assumes only in retrospect that to consider them phenomenological objects – Hintikka adds: comparable to Russell's – would be a mistake.

## 5. Dismantling a misleading model of analysis of meaning (Wittgenstein): elements and compound, a misleading 'language'

Does this mean that for the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, that it was also paradoxical to consider names of objects to be utterable, expressible yet indescribable? Not really. This was his thesis in the *Tractatus*, and on this point, the resemblance with the *Theaetetus* is striking. Irrespective of whether elementary objects here are empirical or linguistic, Wittgenstein simply does not bother with contradictory argumentation presented as a paradox. He thus evidently passes over the Socratic demonstration of the contradictory aspect in reducing a whole of knowledge to its elements. It is enough for him to use the discussion in order to refute the thesis that naming is meaning.

By contrast, what was at stake for Plato, who also objected that naming is not meaning something in the *Sophistes*, is that the materialist-atomist thesis according to which the *orthé doxa* could judge a particular object that is aesthetically grasped but not knowable, is to be rejected because it is a contradiction. Wittgenstein rejects the names for objects, but not because the thesis of names is contradictory. In the *Tractatus*, the non-describable character of the nameable atoms of meaning does not contradict the fact that the meaning of which the names for objects are components (the proposition), depends on the meaning of these names. A name has a *Bedeutung* only in the sentence which means (*Sinn*) 'through' ('durch') names and their *Bedeutungen*. This is a good circle, and not as strange as Anthony Kenny once suggested, or an absurdity. Therefore, the reason why Wittgenstein renounces his earlier assumption about meaning 'through' names is the presupposition underlying his first tenet: he does not believe any longer in self-subsisting independent objects as logical preconditions or requirements for the meaningfulness of language.

As to the physicalist aspect, Wittgenstein of course disregards We or 'wir' in Plato's text because his scope is linguistic and does not extend to other things such as bodies – our bodies for example. As we have seen, there is a problem for a purely propositionalist reading of Plato (Ryle's, for instance) if the compounds are not only meaning wholes but also physical bodies. Yet, by neglecting this physical aspect that meets

Russell's concern, Wittgenstein does not take advantage of one more affinity between Plato and Russell. This proves that he does not look for an exhaustive confrontation and remains careless about the details.

Strangely enough, Wittgenstein also neglects paragraphs 204e–205c where Plato distinguishes a whole of countable parts ('to pan') from a synthetic whole ('to holon') as 'not composed of parts'. It contrasts with the way in which Ryle grounds his argument about live-predicates on the superiority of the synthesis over the whole as composed of parts. This omission shows that Wittgenstein does not need the distinction because he is not concerned with solving the meaning-analysis problem in terms of elements and compounds.

His disregarding this passage demonstrates his voluntary deafness to Plato's problem in the *Theaetetus*: Plato's problem was how to solve the logical equivalence between the *definiens* and the *definiendum* while what one needs to define is precisely what kind of science, if it were known, would help to define it; it is this logos which, added to *orthe doxa*, would provide the definition of science we are still looking for. The problem Plato tackles is 'analytical' before the term had been coined, it is 'analytical' by simulation. It says: let's try to define science as an analytical task. The attempt is dismissed because of the 'obscure character' of the inquiry (209 e): how is it possible to succeed in defining what is lacking for defining what science is, while what is lacking for science to be science is precisely what would makes us succeed in defining it? One needs science to define it. It is circular on an analytical basis and this circularity is shown with the use of the alphabetic example.

Wittgenstein does not worry about what could help to circumscribe this circularity and put it in the terms of a 'dilemma of an informal sort'. Such is Ryle's view. What, then, does Wittgenstein care about when he mentions Plato? David Stern gives us a clue. He notes that Anscombe's translation of the first line of §46 is wrong when it says that Wittgenstein wonders about 'what is behind the idea that names really mean simples'. One should rather translate in the following way: 'what is the position with regard to whether names really stand in for what is simple?' (Rush Rhees), a passage to which correspond these lines of the manuscript BEE, Ts 226, 31: 'what about this matter of names really standing for something simple?' In short, what does this position mean? Rather than 'what is the idea that lies behind it?' There is no behindness of a hidden thing for which names stand. What is thus at stake is the very use of such expressions as parts and wholes, of the vocabulary of compositeness, and that s why they are put in quotation marks.

Whether it was Plato's conception or that of his atomistic adversary, is of no importance. The way in which Wittgenstein reverses the question is evidence for the use he makes of Plato's case: 'what are the constituent parts of which so-called reality is composed?', he asks. The question bears on the use of 'compound', which is a typically Russellian one. There is some grammatical prejudice lying behind this type of language. The problem is the language of elementarity, using words such as 'elements' and 'compounds' (which are Russell's expressions), not how to solve Plato's analytical circularity of the argument about whole and parts better than Plato himself. This language is dismantled in the example of the broom in §59. It does not make sense to speak in terms of elements of meaning, just as little as it makes sense to ask for having an elementary piece of a broom for sweeping the room. Therefore the critique of elements of meanings is as absurd as the thesis of which the critique is the critique. Yet it remains true that there is such a strong similarity between the *Tractatus* and the *Theaetetus*, 202 b and 4.0311, so that these passages could be read as two versions of the same assumption. However, as I have said, in 202 b the ability of the elements of being only named contrasts with the 'alogon' character of these elements, while in 4.0311, names are not 'aloga' but admit 'keine Erklärung'. That is Wittgenstein's own use of the German translation and interpretation of the Greek, of course implying a reappropriation of the Greek problem.

As I have shown, the problem is a 'problem of language', not of a philological question. It is exactly what Ryle dislikes. Let us remember that the main objection he raised against the later Wittgenstein was that he had given too much importance to 'language' as the source of philosophical problems. What does 'composed' (*zusammengesetzt*) in *Philosophical Investigations*, §47 mean, as well as 'das Wort "einfach"' Wittgenstein asks. One could conclude that no form of life could correspond to such expressions except what is transformed into a possible 'language game'[28] which 'applies' (*anwenden*) the method of §2 to the account (*Darstellung*) in the *Theaetetus*. What is to come out of this application'? A new language game in which 'object' means some 'representing' entity, a 'means of representation' playing a role in the game, a mere sample, and no longer some 'represented entity'.

Therefore, the 'tableau vivant' of a state of affairs constituted by names in combination (see the expression 'Das *Ganze*', in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 4.311), has been denounced as 'dead' and 'static'. It is not 'living'. It therefore needs to be re-evaluated as – if not converted into – a 'technique of using language', a *Praxis* corresponding to a possible form of life.

## 6. Conclusion. '...Not a difference of logic, but a difference of life...'?

Wittgenstein's position here should be compared to what Waismann earlier noted in a Dictation around 1931:

> My conception of elementary propositions is connected with my previous mistaken conception of analysis. I was not clear about what was supposed to be meant by 'a proposition has to be analyzed in terms of elementary propositions' [...]. One can also formulate the question in this way: Whether one can talk about a 'hidden' elementary proposition or about a 'hidden' truth function.[29]

The following section on 'Complexity' (*Zusammengesetztheit*) in the English posthumous edition by Gordon Baker,[30] which corresponds to the right column in our French edition of Wittgenstein's Dictations,[31] adds precision regarding the status of these elementary propositions in connection with Wittgenstein's earlier understanding of what a complex (*Komplex*) was: at that time, a 'Komplex' had to be seen as a spatial arrangement of spatial objects (an armchair: back, seat, legs). The analogy with composition of ordinary language expressions ('it is raining today' = four words) is misleading. Thus what is denounced in 1931 is the misleading analogy with a kind of alphabetic model of arrangement of units into a whole. 'Words in a dictionary are not propositions'.[32] A 'proposition' is something with which I can work. A dictionary does not contain 'propositions'. Being part of a dictionary is one thing; the use of the expression in a context is another. In the latter case, one should not strive for replacing language with reality. From the point of view of the rule applying to 'f(a)' ('Today it is raining'), 'a' has lost its autonomy as an element and become a mere unnecessary 'ornament'. What is the difference between the two? Waismann notes that 'it is not a difference of logic, but a difference of life'.[33]

The reader will then notice an interesting reversal of the situation regarding the Platonic argument based on the alphabetic model. When reading Wittgenstein's disavowal of his earlier conception of composition, which, as we have said, meets his critique of Russell's vocabulary of compositeness, one also notices that Plato's text that is used against such a picture of meaning analysis, is itself revealed to be misleading. In contrast to Ryle, far from extracting from Plato's alphabetic model an interesting insight into what will become the relating force of verbs as life-predicates in logical analysis, as Ryle does, Wittgenstein dismisses

the alphabetic model as being not only misleading for his own conception of meaning as a practice in forms of life, but even an obstacle. The end of §48 eliminates as irrelevant the grammatical fact of a sentence being composed of letters or of nine elements 'RRBGGGRWW' (the arrangement of names of colours in a chromatic square of samples rather than simples). This language game with elements (the famous §2), when applied to the account in the *Theaetetus*, develops the considerations on complexity formulated around 1931, and shows how the rule for using expressions makes up the meaning of the proposition *in life*. But by showing it at the expense of the Platonic alphabet, it would also implicitly undermine Ryle's logical conception of life-predicates based on an analogy between meaning analysis and the alphabetic device.

What counts against life in language is the 'object represented'. There is no 'tableau vivant'. Tell me how you point to this object and I will tell you not what this object is, but how you point to it, an attitude. Language is a living document on how men use signs. The viewpoint is that of an ethologist observing the life of signs in situations. It is in this respect that Wittgenstein remains ancestorless. Plato, then, as a predecessor? Yes and no.

Yes, as the forerunner of 'logical atomism', a method that he uncovers and at the same time Urne criticizes as unable to give an account of meaning.

No, as a doctrinal forerunner of an embryonic Wittgensteinian conception which would also incarnate a promising filiation. Wittgenstein did not want to be the 'son of'.

### Editorial note

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### Notes

1. A. Soulez (2011) 'Du chariot d'Hésiode au balai des *Recherches philosophiques*, en passant par Russell. Les 'éléments' du *Théétète* d'après le §46 des *Recherches philosophiques* de Wittgenstein' in S. Delcomminette et A. Mazzù *L'Idée platonicienne dans la philosophie contemporaine*, Jalons (Paris: Vrin).

2.  M. Dixsaut (2003) A French philosopher, specialist in Plato's philosophy, and author of the foreword to the French translation of *Plato's Progress* by Gilbert Ryle: G. Ryle (2004) *L'itinéraire de Plato* (Paris: Vrin).

3.  G. Baker, P. M. S. Hacker (2005) *Wittgenstein. Understanding and Meaning* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), p. 254.

4.  H. Ishiguro (1980) 'Analytical philosophy and history of philosophy' in H. Ishiguro and John Skorupski (eds) *Possibility. Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 743.

5.  G. Ryle (1971) *'Abstractions' in Collected Papers*, 1, 54–71 (London, Hutchinson), p. 71.

6.  In the English (later) translation of 'La Phenoménologie contre the Concept of Mind', G. Ryle *'Abstractions' in Collected Papers*, 1, p. 184.

7.  In French in the original text, see footnote hereafter: *Russell a en effet manqué de voir la fonction relatante du verbe comme contribution sémantique a la signification de ce qui est asserté.*

8.  In French: 'Ce ne fut point Russell mais Wittgenstein qui, poussant plus loin les arguments de Frege, montra que le sens d'une phrase n'était pas, ainsi qu'on l'avait tacitement supposé jusque là, un tout où les significations étaient des parties pensables isolément; qu'au contraire, les sìgnifications des parties d'une phrase étaient les différences et ressemblances abstractibles entre la signification globale de cette phrase et les significations globales d'autres phrases ayant avec cette phrase là, quelque chose de commun mais pas tout' [G. Ryle (1962) *Concept of mind*, V (New York, Barnes & Noble), p. 701; see also G. Ryle *'Abstractions' in Collected Papers*, 1, ch. 11, 179.] See above what Russell wrongly considered as hearing sense at a time when he was not clear about his logic and his theory of concepts.

    Russell was very 'embarrassed' with the verb. He realized that 'Brutus assassinated Caesar' is meaningful while 'Brutus, Assassination, Caesar' is not, but is rather a simple list. Yet he was unable to see the difference between the meaning of a 'live-verb' 'assassinated' and the meaning of the corresponding verbal name 'assassination'. Ryle's remark, to which is added a critique of Russell's appeal to a kind of intuition of the concepts: 'the', 'not', 'assassinated' – as if these words designated an additional external entity – is followed by the avowal of his marked preference for Wittgenstein (G. Ryle *'Abstractions' in Collected Papers*, p. 183).

9.  G. Ryle (ed.) (1971) *Mind*, Vol. LXVI, No. 261, January 1957: *A Quarterly review of Psychology and Philosophy* (London, Macmillan & Co. For The Mind Association).

10. Cf. In the original French 'seulement les differences discernables entre dicibles résident dans les degrés et modèles de compositionnalité et [que] ces différences peuvent étre formalìsées (algebrized away: éliminées par formalisation). Mais Wittgenslein voyait encore les choses a travers l'écran perforé de la logique: ce qui n'est plus le cas plus tard. Plus tard, les différences entre dicibles ne se laissent plus réduire au degrés de compositionnalité'; repr. in G. Ryle *'Abstractions' in Collected Papers*, 1, p. 266.

11. G. Ryle *'Abstractions' in Collected Papers*, 1, p. 273: Ryle's review of a symposium on Austin in 1970.

12. Là où Aristote plaçait les catégories, les Stoïciens ont mis le verbe' [J.-J Duhot (1991) *La conception stoïcienne de la causalité* (Paris: Vrin), p. 221].

13. An example of the role of rules in life is Thucydides' one, when the Greeks felt the need to have their calendar changed, which made them change their grammar by passing from an abstract agreement to rules having a role in life (C. Diamond (1989), 31f.). See Thucydides' example of a 'change of grammar' in reply to a second objection, in her article.

14. An important verbal expression to mark the achievement of an action which Plato employs, for instance, to say that the essence of Hesìod's chariot' is thereby fulfilled (207e). J. McDowell comments on that expression in his studies of the *Theaetetus*.

15. G. Ryle *'Abstractions' in Collected Papers*, 1954, 5.

16. G. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker *Wittgenstein. Understanding and Meaning*, §40, 255.

17. Esther Ramharter, ref. to the 2nd stage of her project proposal on 'Wittgenstein's (re-)sources'.

18. Preisendanz is the German editor of Plato's dialogues. of which Wittgenstein owned a copy. I am indebted to W. Kienzler for this information.

19. G. Hallett (1977) *A Companion to Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations'* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), Appendix, p. 771.

20. This, of course, purports some anti-physicalist remarks, typical of Plato's position.

21. See my book on Plato's philosophical grammar A. Soulez (1991) *La grammaire philosophique chez Platon (Philosophie d'aujourd'hui)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France). I have already stressed what I once called 'Ryle's sacrifice' of a part of Plato's dialectics, which consists in deliberately omitting the vertical relations of participation of perceptual elements in Forms, and retaining only the 'koinonia'-horizontal relations of association between Forms at the level of their syntax: in Greek, a 'methexis' logic different from the 'power of association' of Forms. That was the cost for his resolute propositionalist re-reading.

22. See L. Wittgenstein (1977) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul), 3.261.

23. L. De Rijk (1986) *Plato's Sophist* (New York: North Holland Pub. Co.) against Ryle and Hamlyn.

24. See J. Annas (1981) *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

25. J. Hintikka and M. Hintikka (1986) *Investigating Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 51.

26. G. Ryle (1960) 'Letters and Syllables in Plato', *Philosophical Review* 69 (4), 431–451.

27. J. McDowell (1998) 'On Plato and the Logical Atomists', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society lxx* (1969–70), I57ff. By advocating naturalization of Plato's paradox, he attributes to Plato a 'minimal' form of empiricism compatible with Russell's view.

28. L. Wittgenstein (1976) *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell), §48.

29. A. Soulez (1997) *Dictées de Wittgenstein à Waismann et pour Schlick, (Philosophie d'aujourd'hui)*, vol. 1 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France), p. 124; in our French translation: 'Jadis, je pensais que chaque proposition était composée. Cette opinion allait de pair avec ma conception d'alors du complexe'.

30. G. Baker (2003) 'Friedrich Waismann: A Vision of Philosophy', *Philosophy* 78 (2), 163–179.
31. A. Soulez (dir.) *Dictées de Wittgenstein à Waismann et pour Schlick*, vol. 1, p. 124.
32. G. Baker 'Friedrich Waismann: A Vision of Philosophy', p. 251.
33. G. Baker 'Friedrich Waismann: A Vision of Philosophy', 251/right column of A. Soulez *Dictées de Wittgenstein à Waismann et pour Schlick*, p. 129. These critical developments aim at Russell's *Principles* of Philosophy and also at Ramsey's *Foundations of Mathematics*.

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# 13
## Radical Enlightenment Optimism: Socrates and Wittgenstein

*Thomas Wallgren*

Socrates and Wittgenstein are the strangest of heroes in our philosophical canon. Both used a very simple language and were sure that they would be understood only by a few. Both sought for friendship through philosophy and both were certain that they would be rejected by many. Both practised philosophy as dialogue between different voices about the meaning of concepts. Both thought that the investigation of concepts is an examination of how we should live. Both claimed that such philosophy may be of the most ambitious kind that we may conceive of, that it does not serve progress or power, that it does not deliver new truths and that it may still serve wisdom better than any other kind of search for knowledge or truth. For anyone interested in the dialectics of enlightenment – in the relation of the crises of our times to the idea that the pursuit of reason will bring progress – the awkward enlightenment optimism of Socrates and Wittgenstein merits attention.

I will do the following. In the first section I will take note of some of the complexities of my topic and explain how I will deal with them. In Section 2 I present my sense of how some of the best recent Socrates- and Wittgenstein scholarship has failed to bring out the full potential of their challenge to standard conceptions of philosophy and how I believe the Socrates–Wittgenstein comparison may be helpful to bring this potential to the fore. In the longest section (Section 3) I provide an explorative discussion, with some comparison, of select aspects of Socrates' and Wittgenstein's views on the nature of philosophical inquiry, its methods, its results and its worth.

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## 1.

My leading claim is that Socrates and Wittgenstein are deeply similar but different from most other great Western philosophers in their vision of philosophy as a pursuit of freedom. The proposition should seem unlikely. At least two kinds of sceptical questions stand in its way: (a) the claims that Socrates and Wittgenstein are deeply similar and that freedom is what they pursued is non-standard in scholarship on both Socrates and on Wittgenstein, so how could it be true? (b) There are so many interpretations. Which Socrates is assumed and with what right? Which reading of Wittgenstein is assumed and with what right? I do not know how one could deal briefly and still adequately with the intricacy of these issues. But I do sense a need to indicate how I am placed with respect to some of the main issues of debate.[1]

With regard to (a): Wittgenstein's own dismissal of Socrates has, I believe, served as a major obstacle to discussion among Wittgenstein-scholars of the two philosophers in the same breath. There are a fair number of references to Socrates' philosophy in Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*. However, the remarks always revolve around the same idea. According to it the purpose of Socrates' philosophical investigations was to arrive at a universal definition of concepts. This image of Socrates goes back to Schleiermacher, and ultimately to Aristotle, and has found wide following. Wittgenstein often used it to mark the contrast between a certain conventional idea of philosophy as a field where we generalize and his own philosophy, a philosophy that will 'teach us differences'. Beyond that contrast, Wittgenstein, who admired Plato and reread some of his dialogues many times, had little interest in Socrates as a philosopher distinct from Plato.[2] We can, I believe, clear this obstacle with a discussion that brings Wittgenstein and Socrates together by simply noting the incredible flatness of Wittgenstein's main reaction to Socrates. The obvious thing that escaped Wittgenstein, and that is missing in the Aristotelian–Schleirmacherian take on Socrates, was what it was that drove Socrates' search for definitions (if we accept, for a moment, that way of characterizing Socratic investigations): not the goal, but the road, not what the concept ultimately means (if anything), but the different things it may mean to us, the duties and obstacles, guidance and opportunities it carries for us now.

Wittgenstein was of course no scholar, and for many of his purposes giving a conventional response to Socrates is no problem. But one problem stands out. Wittgenstein once said of himself that he is a

'kink' in the history of philosophy.[3] The image of Wittgenstein as a lone genius with no real predecessor in the philosophical tradition has been reinforced by many of his interpreters.[4] Yet it seems to me to be a mystification with detrimental consequences for the reception of Wittgenstein. If we can see that Wittgenstein is in important respects an heir to Socrates, and arguably also to Sextus Empiricus and others, and hence one who continues a great tradition of Western philosophy – one that may for us still be a custodian of dormant resources of reason – his and Socrates' challenge to us will, I believe, be felt more acutely than if we agree with Wittgenstein's own idea that his claim on philosophy requires acceptance of a contingent rupture.[5]

If Socrates is a rare reference in Wittgenstein scholarship so, too, is Wittgenstein a rare reference in Socrates scholarship.[6] Again it is easy to see why this should be so. Often contemporary analytical philosophy has related to the past as colonial and 'developmental' Europe has related to the cultures of the South. The past has been seen as an underdeveloped present and its philosophers, at best, as surprising us by the extent to which their results and insight match ours. Reacting to this, many Anglophone historians of philosophy have wanted to read past philosophers anti-anachronistically. Here too, the past easily becomes harmless to our self-understanding, this time through its otherness. Hence, in Anglophone scholarship there has been little room for bringing Wittgenstein into the picture when Socrates is discussed. Conversely, philosophers trained in continental traditions and who read classics as contemporaries are mostly not deeply familiar with Wittgenstein's work. Hence, in their work on Socrates Wittgenstein would rarely be an accessible referent.[7]

For the reasons given it follows that even if it is true, as I maintain, that Wittgenstein is perhaps the closest follower of Socrates in contemporary philosophy, there are straightforward reasons why this should not have been much noted and discussed in recent studies of Socrates or of Wittgenstein.

Now to (b): There is probably no issue that is more controversial in either Socrates or Wittgenstein scholarship than the question of how to understand their conceptions of philosophy. In the case of Socrates the difficulty is that we do not even seem to know whether we have any access at all to a specifically Socratic conception of philosophy. If not, i.e., if the so-called Socratic problem does not admit of good answers, we simply do not have a basis for the Socrates–Wittgenstein comparison that I am interested in. Some scholars think the lack of agreement on the Socratic problem shows that the problem is

insoluble.[8] Others insist that it can be solved and that a rich portrait of the historical philosopher Socrates can be reconstructed.[9] Here is my position on this in outline. (1) Athens convicted and executed Socrates. The death sentence is decisively linked to his philosophical work and life – to the unity between the two. We could hardly imagine that Plato would have suffered the same fate. This is a sufficient reason to think that there is a Socratic conception of philosophy distinct from that of Plato. But do we have access to it? (2) Many scholars agree that the two first parts of Plato's *Apology* provide our least controversial keys to understanding what is distinct about Socrates as a philosopher. All we need for present purposes can be found there. (3) In describing the specifically Socratic conception of philosophy I am much indebted to Vlastos. In particular, I agree with Vlastos's main thesis: the most important aspects of the specifically Socratic conception of philosophy have to do with his vision of how certain very specific philosophical practices are practices of freedom. (4) My interpretation of the Socratic conception of philosophy differs from that provided by Vlastos (and many others) in the following respects.[10] One, epistemological issues are on my view central to Socratic philosophy, and they are not separable from ethical issues. Two, methodological issues are a primary concern in Socratic philosophy. Three, Vlastos's Davidsonian treatment of the tension between Socrates' claims to knowledge and to ignorance is unhelpful if we want to understand what kind of wisdom Socrates thinks philosophy can offer, and how this wisdom differs from any ordinary notion of knowledge. Four, I do not see Socratic piety as closely related to modern rationalized piety and hence, I think Vlastos's notion of Socratic autonomy makes Socrates more of a contemporary, liberal humanist than the sources allow.[11]

What about Wittgenstein? Most philosophers who refer to his work ignore the question of the relevance of his conception of philosophy for the interpretation of it. They read Wittgenstein simply as one who presents arguments that serve the criticism or establishment of philosophical positions, theories, theses or doctrines. This way of using Wittgenstein is all right, but only as long as we are not interested in interpreting Wittgenstein and his possible challenge to our idea of philosophy. Other readers of Wittgenstein have taken on the challenge of trying to work out a view in which what Wittgenstein says about his philosophy, how he writes and what he says about the issues he discusses form an integrated whole. Among them the idea of a 'therapeutic Wittgenstein' has been of particular importance during the past decades.

**2.**

The decisive achievement of the therapeutic interpretation of Wittgenstein is to have brought attention to two ideas. One, that Wittgenstein is in his philosophy getting at something other than theories or theses, and two that what he is getting at does not undermine philosophy but takes it to new heights.[12] The therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein has mostly been derived from interpretations of the conception of philosophy in Wittgenstein's early work. Whatever the truth of these interpretations as interpretations of the *Tractatus* (Cora Diamond and James Conant) or Wittgenstein's work in the early 1930s (Baker), the focus on the therapy idea there has precluded, it seems to me, attention to important later changes in Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy.[13] The essential source for the study of Wittgenstein's later and most mature conception of philosophy is the first part of the *Philosophical Investigations*.[14] In our study of this conception of philosophy we have two main options.[15] One is to read the so-called philosophy chapter in the *Investigations*, i.e. remarks 89–133, as a kind of systematic presentation of what philosophy, as Wittgenstein saw it, is. The other option is to consider it in close relation to the form of the presentation and the preface to the work. The latter option allows us to see that Wittgenstein does not offer the remarks of the philosophy chapter, or any remarks in the *Investigations,* as remarks authorized by the author and recommended to others.

Hence, we will no longer read the remarks by Wittgenstein which suggest that philosophy is a kind of therapy that liberates us from illusion as the foundation, or methodological basis, for further interpretation. Nor will any other individual remarks serve us as a basis. Instead the dialogic style, most notably, its polyphonic or, as I will prefer to say, its *heteroglossic* procedure, and how it fits the remarks of the Preface, will be seen by us as holding keys to the interpretation of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy.[16] Alois Pichler has, on the basis of detailed investigation of the textual genesis of the *Investigations*, given strong arguments to support the heteroglossic reading that informs the substantial considerations developed below. Let me here bring attention to just one textual consideration that I think is particularly striking and that has often escaped the notice of those who subscribe to the idea that the later Wittgenstein is essentially a therapist: in the so called *Big Typescript* by Wittgenstein there is a chapter entitled 'Philosophy.' When Wittgenstein uses some of this material in his *Investigations* the chapter heading has disappeared; the

Preface stresses that the *Investigations* does not have the form of a book in which 'the thoughts should proceed from one subject to another in a natural order'; the individual remarks undergo many changes and, most importantly, Wittgenstein does a lot of painstaking work in re-arranging the order of material that is hard to make any sense of unless we see heteroglossia as the intended result.[17]

The emphasis on the importance of heteroglossia provides some advantages, as I believe, with regard to therapeutic readings. The idea that philosophy is centrally nourished by illusions of sense and is successful when it liberates us from illusion that is central to therapeutic renderings of Wittgenstein will not be rejected, but it will be displaced. The discussion in Section 4 will serve to exemplify the relevance of this shift of emphasis.[18] Here I will provide some introductory notes on the theme.

It is crucial to a heteroglossic reading that we do not assume that the point of any specific remarks, or set of remarks, in the *Investigations* is that we should identify a view endorsed or recommended by the author. The idea that the remarks have 'a point' – e.g. that of liberating us from the spell of a certain illusion – is problematic.[19] Similarly, we do not assume that many, or at least some, of the questions in the *Investigations* are intended as rhetorical questions, leaving readers with the task of just taking the final step for themselves in order then to find agreement with Wittgenstein, themselves and truth.

The therapeutic readings of Wittgenstein offer to us a Wittgenstein who promises clarity. In this respect therapeutic readings are more similar to the grammatical and other competing readings of Wittgenstein, which they have offered themselves as alternatives to, than has usually been observed. The very emphasis in therapeutic interpretations on arriving at results – results that are not theses, theories or doctrines, but results concerning what makes sense and what does not make sense – seems to us to domesticate Wittgenstein for the world of academic, analytical philosophy in a way that does not cohere with the heteroglossia of his work. It makes Wittgenstein too similar to any philosopher trading in the business of getting things right.

In heteroglossic interpretations of Wittgenstein we need not assume that the mark of success in a philosophical investigation is how well it serves the task of purifying language from nonsense. We will not think that it is a basic idea of Wittgensteinian philosophy that some uses of our words are no uses at all – and that philosophy helps us withdraw uses of words that have no use from circulation. We will also

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not say that later Wittgenstein thought that the central goal of philosophy is that our problems go away, e.g. by 'imploding' in the sense that the philosophical investigation elucidates that what we thought was a problem was due to confusion.[20]

It may seem, then, that we will be advancing a reading of Wittgenstein that goes in one of the following directions. The first is that of conventionalist or postmodern readings of Wittgenstein. Here the tendency is that we affirm, with any measure of irony or self-reflective manoeuvring that we find appropriate, that with Wittgenstein, and perhaps with Socrates, we can take to heart the unavoidability of accepting a void, a groundlessness, of our being. The other direction is that of pragmatism. Here we claim continuity between Wittgensteinian (and/ or Socratic) groundlessness with the legacy of analytic philosophy and with the project of defining, in a radical realization of Kant's critical turn, a fallible, pluralist, post-metaphysical, historically aware idea of reason that plays a moderate but basically affirmative role in the self-understanding of modernity as a progressive enlightenment enterprise. But we are not advancing any of these readings. My suggestion is that there are essential aspects in Wittgenstein's conception of the nexus between freedom and philosophy, between enlightenment and emancipation, that are not adequately captured in any of these ways of appropriating Wittgenstein, the therapeutic, the postmodern or the pragmatist. For brevity I will refer to all of these together as anti-positive readings, referring to their common opposition to interpretations of Wittgenstein according to which he aimed at positive, conclusive results.

Anti-positive readings of Wittgenstein and Vlastosian readings of Socrates converge in thinking of their heroes as alerting us to the idea that there is nothing outside philosophical examination of our words, neither world, nor community (history) nor self that gives us a ground. But none of this is, as I believe, what Wittgenstein and Socrates had in mind. They ask: what is the concept of having a ground, or that of not having a ground, or that of either having or not having a ground? As long as this is not appreciated the event of Wittgenstein and of Socrates is still before us.

The anti-positive readings of Wittgenstein and Vlastosian readings of Socrates also converge on a second point. They give us a Wittgenstein and a Socrates who have lessons up their sleeves, who think everyone must get to these lessons by their own lights – that is how they explain that Wittgenstein and Socrates refrain from stating conclusions – and who think, nevertheless, that the lessons are there for everyone

to reach – that is why they think that the trade of Wittgenstein and Socrates is irony that implies a message.

**3.**

Where have we now reached? Far enough perhaps to invite the reader, if she bears with us, to examine the notion that the agreement between Socrates and Wittgenstein on the utterly aporetic nature of philosophy is the similarity between them that is most remarkable and that also presents the greatest difficulties for us. 'Aporetic' can mean many things. It is not a code that hides a secret but an invitation to further examination. In the rest of the essay I will provide some glosses on the topic: on how to make sense of the idea of Socrates and Wittgenstein sharing an aporetic notion of philosophy and having nothing to excuse philosophy for when it is aporetic.

(i) Sextus Empiricus distinguishes between three kinds of philosophers; some claim to 'have discovered the truth', others 'have asserted that things cannot be apprehended' and the third kind 'are still investigating'. Sextus calls these three 'fundamental kinds of philosophy … the Dogmatic, the Academic, and the Sceptical'.[21]

In modern philosophy scepticism has often been seen as a negative kind of philosophy; one that undermines the ambitions of constructive philosophy. But such negative results are, from Sextus's point of view, typical of the second, 'Academic' type of philosophy, not of sceptical philosophy. We can think of two kinds of problems or tasks that we may have. Some are such that we think that we know what it will be like when the problem is solved or the task accomplished. The building of a bridge over a stream or the calculation of the probability of winning in the national lottery are examples. Other tasks are such that we do not assume that there will be a clear difference between dealing successfully with the problem or task and not doing so. The task of understanding another person or of learning how to play football are examples (I do not suggest that all tasks fall interestingly in one of these categories, nor that the border between the two groups is clear). Scepticism in Sextus's sense is naturally at home with respect to the second kind of task. To the extent that philosophers today tend to think – sometimes by instinct, sometimes after reflection – that scepticism in philosophy is bad, that it 'destroys everything', this attitude is a symptom, it seems to me, that they have already accepted an idea of philosophical problems and tasks according to which they typically belong to the first type of problem or task just described. As long as that is what we think (and perhaps: what

we want to think) then the scepticism that Socrates and Wittgenstein may have in common with Sextus will seem out of place (and perhaps: unwelcome).

(ii) Socrates says: 'This…I have accepted, as I said, in obedience to God's commands given in oracles and dreams and in every other way that any other divine dispensation has ever impressed a duty on man'.[22]

I think this passage is fundamental to any understanding of what is important in Socrates' claim on philosophy. It shows, it appears to me, that Socrates has no problem with understanding and accepting any of the following: there is divine wisdom; people can have access to divine wisdom in a variety of ways; when people have divine wisdom about something they cannot be mistaken.[23] In all these respects Socrates' views are conventional for an Athenian. But the way he places these views in his life is not conventional.

Socrates is adamant that concern for perfection of our soul is the paramount concern for every person (e.g. *Apology* 29e). This is why the narrative of Socrates' final testimony, the *Apology,* turns around the question introduced at 20b: 'Who is the expert in perfecting the human and social qualities?' And we have Socrates' epochal response to the question.

In his response Socrates first tells us (at *Apology* 20c–d) that he has gained the reputation of being 'abnormal' 'from nothing more or less than a kind of wisdom'. This kind of wisdom is defined as 'human wisdom'. In a remarkable passage it is contrasted with something else. I quote: 'Presumably the geniuses whom I mentioned just now are wise in a wisdom that is more than human. I do not know how else to account for it. I certainly have no knowledge of such wisdom' (*Apology* 20e).

This may seem puzzling at first as we have seen already that Socrates has no problem with the concept of divine wisdom, i.e. with wisdom that is more than human, or with the idea that divine wisdom can be delivered to us. In fact we know that Socrates himself thought he quite often had received his share of divine wisdom. The text seizes to be puzzling if we take the quoted passages as comments to the question introduced just before, at *Apology* 20b. Then the quote will be seen as addressing not any question about wisdom, but the much more limited question of a wisdom that is more than human wisdom and that serves the perfection of people.[24] The peculiar idea we see here is this: Socrates does not say that he has or does not have wisdom of the kind discussed, namely divine wisdom (or: more than human wisdom) that will help us to achieve perfection of the soul. Nor does he doubt that others have it.

His doubt is a reflective doubt about the intelligibility of the concept of a divine wisdom such that it will help us achieve perfection of the soul. The contrast is with the (merely) human wisdom for which Socrates has gained a reputation.

So this is my conclusion so far: the passage I quoted from *Apology* 20e leaves us with no confidence in the notion of a wisdom that is more than human and that could be a promising source of the perfection Socrates searched for. But it leaves open the possibility that there may be human wisdom that carries such promise. Indeed, the immediate continuation of the discourse of the *Apology* is centrally an explication of Socrates' idea that philosophy as he practised it meets the bill.

The text at 21a–21b introduces the tools Socrates will use in examining and answering the question how his limited kind of human wisdom is a wisdom that serves our perfection. We have here, first, Chaerephon asking 'whether there was anyone wiser than myself [Socrates]' and the oracle answering that 'there was no one'. The way of responding is first presented hesitantly and soon more affirmatively:

> When I heard about the oracle's answer, I said to myself, What does the god mean?…After puzzling about it for some time, I set myself at last with considerable reluctance to check the truth of it in the following way. I went to interview a man with a high reputation for wisdom…From that time on I interviewed one person after another…After I had finished with the politicians I turned to the poets, dramatic, lyric, and all the rest…I used to pick up what I thought were some of their most perfect works and question them closely about the meaning of what they had written…So I soon made up my mind about the poets too. I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled them to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean.[25]

In the last part of the quote Socrates juxtaposes two things; one is wisdom – we can again make maximal sense of the passages if we assume that not any wisdom is intended, but that, again, wisdom that can serve the perfection of the soul is at stake. The other is 'inspiration'. The latter gives its receivers no knowledge about 'what they mean'. This contrast is the clue to the examination that follows and culminates at *Apology* 38a with its injunction: '[philosophical] examining of myself and others is really the very best thing a man can do'.

All of the text, from *Apology* 20e to 38a, is, then, a treatise on what it may be to have a form of wisdom that allows us to know at least something about what we mean. The upshot is that such wisdom is not a possession of a something – that is why divine wisdom that has the form of inspiration does not help; its form is a commitment to the practising of philosophy that the treatise explicates by way of example.

One aspect of the Socratic discussion of wisdom is its sensational combination of complete piety and complete upheaval of piety as traditionally conceived. We have no reason to doubt Socrates' sincerity when he claims to be as pious as anyone in Athens. But when he says that philosophical examination is the very best thing a man can do we also understand fully why he gets the death sentence. It is not lack of piety but reversal of authority that is his crime. Socrates dethrones the gods and puts philosophy in their place for what, as he maintains, is most important in our lives: the perfection of our souls.

I think we can see in Wittgenstein's work on logical necessity a parallel to Socrates' piety. The young Wittgenstein was attracted by the Frege–Russell endeavour to find in the philosophy of logic a cornerstone of rationality; an answer, perhaps to Plato's quest for absolute, unassailable foundations of all knowledge. He soon found that the kind of solutions Frege and Russell tended to be satisfied with seemed to him utterly dubious. At the end of the day Frege and Russell both rested all of logic, its ultimate validity, on something else – on self-evidence (Russell) or on the idea that there is something that lies outside it that we must always already have accepted (Frege). It is in this context that Wittgenstein cries: 'logic must take care of itself'.[26] This craving for a logic that is not dependent on anything outside it is worked out in the discussion of logical form in the *Tractatus*. Scholars disagree on where the *Tractatus* takes us. For us the important step is the step to grammar. Wittgenstein transforms the question 'what is it to have logical form?' to the questions 'what is it to be a sentence? what is it to have sense?', 'which sentences have sense?'. This transformation comes with a change in the perception of the problem.[27] The story of the transformation is complex, and only one feature of the end-point needs notice here. I would like to say: when Wittgenstein discusses logical necessity in the *Investigations* the discussion is no longer pained as it was in his early years.

In the work leading up to the *Tractatus,* or at least in the early phase of that work, one has the sense that Wittgenstein found it almost unbearable that Frege, Russell and he himself had not proven or shown that it is right to trust logic.[28] We can compare this with Wittgenstein's

later discussion of set-theory, Hilbert's programme and Gödel's incompleteness results. Here the question that raises Wittgenstein's passion is no longer the validity of what Hilbert suggests or Gödel claims to have proven. His interest is in what we make of the notion that Hilbert or Gödel are either right or wrong. So, Wittgenstein does not criticize Hilbert's programme or Gödel's proof. He discusses critically the idea that the programme and the proof are *great*. One way of putting it is to say that his criticism is borne out of his post-Tractarian sense that the question whether we can or cannot perfect mathematics or logic is a shallow question. In the *Investigations* part 1, no 89, Wittgenstein writes:

> These considerations bring us up to the problem: In what sense is logic something sublime? For there seemed to pertain to logic a peculiar depth – a universal significance. Logic lay, it seemed, at the bottom of all the sciences. – For logical investigation explores the nature of all things. It seeks to see to the bottom of things and is not meant to concern itself whether what actually happens is this or that. It takes its rise, not from an interest in the facts of nature, nor from a need to grasp causal connexions: but from an urge to understand the basis, or essence, of everything empirical. Not, however, as if to this end we had to hunt out new facts; it is, rather, of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand.

My sense of this is: Wittgenstein is not dismissive or critical of the notion that logic is pure, that it is a perfect form of rationality. His interest is in how we entertain this idea, in, so to say, *wie wir mit ihr umgehen*. The idea at stake is the idea that the best thing reason can do with respect to the purity of logic, or the highest and finest thing philosophy can do with respect to it – and one of the finest thing people can do as rational creatures – is to try to perfect logic. The perfection of logic should include as one element a validation of the idea that logic has 'crystalline purity' *(Investigations* part 1, no 107), that it is right to say so. This was the idea on which Frege, Russell and the young Wittgenstein agreed. Wittgenstein's suggestion now is that we can do other, perhaps better, things with the idea of logic's crystalline purity. These 'other things' can open up, become available, if we ask, and examine, what it means to say that logic is of crystalline purity.[29]

Wittgenstein can be upsetting to philosophers, logicians and all others who want a foundation or validation of their idea, or perhaps, their conviction (their 'requirement' to speak with Diamond), that when we are in touch with the foundations or mathematics or the necessity of logic we are in touch with something that serves our needs as rational creatures in a superior way. If Wittgenstein is upsetting it is not because he questions the fineness of logic. He questions the fineness of the obsession with this fineness. As if people would pump air into the fineness, thereby making it lesser, not greater. This form of being upsetting is, I suggest at this point, similar to the way in which Socrates was upsetting when he said both that he is pious and that for the things we need most badly – for our perfection – piety and communion with the gods do not help much. No matter how inspired we are, no matter how often and strongly the gods speak to us, we should be careful that we do not pump air into the occasion. This is, once more, Socrates in exchange with the Athenians at his trial: 'seers and prophets ... deliver their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean'. And this is Wittgenstein in exchange with his students:

> [This] can be explained ... partly by a quotation from Hilbert: 'No one is going to turn us out of the paradise which Cantor has created'. I would say, 'I wouldn't dream of trying to drive anyone out of this paradise'. I would try to do something quite different: I would try to show you that it is not a paradise – so that you'll leave of your own accord. I would say, 'You're welcome to this; just look about you'.[30]

Socrates has no difficulty with giving it to the seers and poets that what they say is true or that it comes from the gods and is beyond doubt and criticism. His difficulty is with how what the gods have given is important, with how we can place it in our lives. Similarly with Wittgenstein. Not whether Cantor is right is the issue. The issue is what to make of it, if we give him everything.[31]

(iii) To say that Socrates and Wittgenstein share an aporetic conception of philosophy is not to say that they did not hold strong beliefs, including beliefs about matters that other philosophers have found contentious. When Socrates says that his daemon often spoke to him he is not unaware that the idea that there are daemons, and that they are of a higher order than humans, has been the target of much criticism in philosophy and elsewhere. But the authenticity of the daemon, or what it means when he says that he has a daemon, or can hear a 'prophetic voice' (*Apology* 40a) was not a question for him. Similarly,

when Wittgenstein was concerned about his honesty his questions were not the philosopher's questions: 'Is there honesty?', or 'What is honesty?', or 'How important is honesty in ethical life?' His concern was: How can I be more honest?[32] The examples show that Socrates and Wittgenstein did not advocate any general scepticism about meaning. They also show that Socrates and Wittgenstein did not give philosophy a general task of questioning any issue that is problematic or important in our lives. Socrates and Wittgenstein found a place for philosophical examination when our difficulty is with what concepts mean. It is only when there is real difficulty about this in life, – in their own life (and) or in the life of others – that the notion of aporia gets any interest at all. But what kind of interest? Let me go back to the *Apology* 38a:

> If on the other hand I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living, you will be even less inclined to believe me. Nevertheless that is how it is, gentlemen, *as I maintain*, though it is not easy to convince you of it.(Italics added by author.)

How does this fit with my notion that Socratic philosophy is aporetic about the subject matters it discusses? Did I not say earlier that the *Apology* is centrally a treatise on human wisdom? If so, is what we have here at 38a, not a clear case of a conclusion that we achieve thanks to the treatise? No, the quote is fitting for us in the following way. Socrates asks: What is his claim to wisdom? He investigates. He finds an answer. But of what kind is the answer? Is he convinced of it? Yes. Does he think he has proven it true in such a way that others who understand his examination ought to agree with him, lest they prove their lack of reason? No. This is what *he* maintains, as is made clear by the phrase that I have italicized in the quoted passage. What others will maintain Socrates cannot prejudge.

   Now, compare this with Wittgenstein. Here are two memorable passages in the so called private language argument, the first from *Investigations* part 1, no 201 the second from no 217. Both are frequently quoted:

> What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule that is *not* an *interpretation,* but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases.

> 'How am I to obey a rule?' – if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do.
>
> If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned.

Interpreters have found it tempting to read the remarks as an endorsement of a philosophical view, namely of the view that there is a limit to what reason can do, and to what we should ask reason to do (the first of the quotes may then be taken as support of conventionalism, the second of subjectivism). But there are three obstacles to non-aporetic renderings. One: Wittgenstein uses the first person. He says 'my spade is turned', not 'the spade' or 'every spade' or even 'our spades'. Two: it is not clear what Wittgenstein's relation is to the fictive character who says 'my spade is turned'. Is the character saying this someone Wittgenstein thinks critically of and invites others to think critically of? Is it someone whose views he endorses?[33] Three: in the Preface to the *Investigations* Wittgenstein says that he in his text has sketched landscapes, that he has been travelling criss-cross in them, and that he would like to 'stimulate someone to thoughts of his own'. None of this is easy to square with the notion that Wittgenstein would have thought that there is one reaction in response to the idea of a spade turning, of reaching the end of an investigation, that is correct and everyone should agree upon. However, it does not follow that Wittgenstein did not sometimes or often identify with, or endorse views, suggested in the text of the *Investigations*. To say that his philosophy is aporetic is not to say that Wittgenstein did not have views of his own on matters he discussed. It is to say, much as can be said of Socrates, that he did not think philosophy had the authority to prejudge what others or he himself ought to say about the things he investigated. Philosophy for Socrates and Wittgenstein is not a shelter from life's responsibilities, it is a form of engagement with them.

(iv) Am I not suggesting that Socrates and Wittgenstein are some kind of relativists or (worse still) absolute ironists who trusted reason less and used it less rigorously as compared with other philosophers who claim to arrive at true theories through systematic argument? This is an important question and various aspects will be discussed here and in subsequent sections. The short answer must be: yes, but only as long as you claim to know before any further reasoning what the highest trust in reason and the most rigorous form of reasoning that is possible

is like. Before providing my longer response I will interject a note on method.

> An illusion can never be destroyed directly, and only by indirect means can it be radically removed. If it is an illusion that all are Christians – and if there is anything to be done about it, it must be done indirectly... That is, one must approach from behind the person who is under an illusion.[34]

It has been popular lately to think of Socrates and Wittgenstein as sharing the view that philosophy ought to proceed ironically in the sense explicated in this quote from Kierkegaard. We then see them as philosophers who are trying to trick others in directions they shun. That might have been Kierkegaard's view about how to proceed in philosophy, but I think it does not at all fit with what Socrates and Wittgenstein were up to. Irony is also not the method of the present essay. To avoid the impression that we are proceeding ironically I will therefore, again, first say something about the direction in which the discussion will go.

The general drift – the position? – that we will be pursuing is that Socrates and Wittgenstein share this: it is not easy to place them with respect to the discussion about objectivism and relativism. If we ask whether their philosophy implies relativism the natural response from their perspective is more of the form: 'Let us look and see', than of the form, 'No, what gives you that impression?' or 'in such and such a sense, perhaps yes'. We may also say: if we have said everything that can be said in favour of classifying them as relativists and also everything that can be said against that view we have said all there is to be said about the matter. Now, some philosophers may still wish to ask: 'So, what is the conclusion?' or: 'What, then, is the fact of the matter?' But then we will ask: 'So, you think there is a fact of the matter? And how will that – the notion of a fact – help us here? What more can we hope to add to our investigation – what may we achieve – if we add to the discussion a conclusion that affirms or denies the classification of Socrates or Wittgenstein as relativists (with or without any amount of qualification, subcategories or such else)?'

So, we are making Socrates and Wittgenstein into champions for a kind of philosopher who can never be pinned down, never be nailed, not even to relativism, because whenever someone grabs them to ask about their views they will always only duck, or slide away sideways?

Perhaps. To the extent that this is so, is it a bad thing? – And if it is bad, does it have truth on its side? Even to the extent that what is true about Socrates and Wittgenstein is true of any philosophy that aspires to be maximally rational? And how could anything that compromises its commitment to reason be worth the name 'philosophy'?

(v) Nietzsche once wrote: 'There is a point in every philosophy where the philosopher's "conviction" appears on the stage'.[35] Nietzsche's picture is conventional. It presents *argument* as the force of reason and *will* as something external to reason that, perhaps, ought to prevail over the will but at the end of the day often fails to do so. Nietzsche's reversal of loyalties – his siding with the will against reason – does not, it seems to me, break with the conventional understanding of the conceptual landscape.

Socrates and Wittgenstein look different. In their philosophy will and argument are not externally related distinct entities. What an argument is, what we can recognize as an argument, and how we want to see things, are all matters that are internal to what it is for something to be an argument and for a will to be our will. Wittgenstein once wrote: 'work in 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.)'[36]

How can that be? Arguments in philosophy, Socrates and Wittgenstein agreed, are arguments about what words mean. The meanings of words guide us in life. The examination of concepts and of lives are inseparable because what we do, what we believe we are doing, and how we understand our concepts are not separate entities – they are all intrinsic to who we are as creatures who (in some sense, to some extent) understand ourselves and shape our lives on the basis of this understanding.

An example could be that my decision not to escape prison or a death sentence under such-and-such circumstance and my understanding of what justice means are intrinsically linked, because my understanding of the meaning of justice and my description of the circumstances under which I take my decision are inseparable. The philosophical examination of what words mean can deepen our understanding of our lives and our concepts. In this kind of journey semantic and moral issues are one.[37] If we stick to the same example we can say: in taking measure of my capacity to provide a good account of justice, I take measure of my capacity to judge well in matters where justice is a factor. Such judgement is inseparable from my understanding of my action and that understanding is in turn inseparable from the life I

live and how I understand it, and, so, from who I am. This also means that a discovery of confusion in our understanding of concepts will be inseparable from a discovery of confusion in our lives. On this view, when I learn that I have a confused idea of what justice or courage or logical necessity means, I learn something about myself. Here, learning about concepts and about who I am are inseparable.

The idea that will and argument are inseparable is likely to raise concern and resistance. It may appear that I present Socrates and Wittgenstein as holding a subjectivist and decisionist account of meaning. According to such an account, the meaning of a word is always at the mercy of the individual. No one but she herself can decide for her what the words she uses mean to her. What she makes of the words, how she places them in her life, is a question ultimately of how she wants to live. And that is something only she can decide.[38] Am I proposing such subjectivism?

The best way to begin to see how will and argument, the examination of the meaning of words and of self, 'of how one sees things' and how one wants to see them are connected in the work of Socrates and Wittgenstein is to study their respective methods. There are major differences between them. Socrates' means of communication was oral communication with a small group of people, preferably friends. In Wittgenstein's philosophy writing in isolation from others to unknown readers was the preferred means of communication. Socrates insisted on sincerity. He wanted the dialogues only to consider views that some speaker present committed himself to. Wittgenstein often used wild thought experiments. These are all deep differences. Nevertheless, the fact that Socrates and Wittgenstein both used heteroglossic dialogue as their medium of philosophical examination is no minor thing for the present topic.

In the *Investigations* the text of the first numbered paragraph introduces to us a number of personae taking different positions with respect to the text. First we have a quote from Augustine's *Confessions*, the second voice is Wittgenstein's, or one incarnation of him ('These words, it seems to *me*'), followed quickly by a 'we', perhaps the we assumed by way of convention in academic prose ('These words, it seems to me, give *us*'). Then the stance of a neutral or objective observer is introduced ('These words, it seems to me give us a particular picture…*It is this*'). In the third paragraph a fifth perspective is introduced, this time it is a 'you'. The 'you' is closely tied in a dialogue with an 'I': 'If *you* describe…you are, *I* believe, thinking….' When we turn to the fourth paragraph even more persons and perspectives on

them are introduced. Wittgenstein invites the anonymous observer: 'Now think of the following...', and then presents a new individual first person and a new individual third person: 'I send someone shopping. I give him a slip...'.[39] The structure of this opening remark is such that we quickly lose hold of the identity of the speakers. Who is Augustine here? As David Stern has pointed out, following suggestions by Warren Goldfarb, the words are Augustine's but the function given to the words is not his.[40] Is the first person singular of the third paragraph the same as that of the first paragraph? And so on. The first remark of the *Investigations* sets the stage for what follows. This is not a text in which the author tells us where authority resides. At every turn responsibility is invested with the reader. His role in assigning meaning is not relieved by the author. But that is not because the author hides behind a mask. The text involves us in a process of thinking.

Look at the 'it seems to me' of the second paragraph of the *Investigations* that I have just quoted. One function of the words is to alert the reader to her responsibility for her own response. If *that* is it how it seems to the writer, what does it seem to be like to the reader? What do I, the reader, think goes on in the quote from Augustine? To what extent can I agree with the writer? And if I see that I agree with him here, the words 'it seems to me' have at least alerted me that I am myself responsible if I go along with the writer. That implies alertness also to the further developments and consequences of what I have agreed to. So the 'it seems to me' gives the reader freedom and places a moral burden on her. That something seems to me to be in a certain way implies openness to reconsideration. The words signal that I have the freedom and responsibility to come back to what I now said at a later stage, should I be disappointed in what follows when I accept this way of looking at what Augustine says.[41]

For present purposes some lessons can already be drawn. If we take the first remark of the *Investigations* as defining the character of the text, and in particular, as defining how it is intended to work on the reader, it is almost impossible to see it as a text that teaches a doctrine. But it is a text that is intensely preoccupied with the task of activating the reader, invoking his responses. Wittgenstein has warned us. In the Preface Wittgenstein writes: 'I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.' But the unique thing is not the Preface alone. If we read it separately from the rest of the text it is not very remarkable. The unique thing about the *Philosophical Investigations* is its method, how the text engages the reader. The heteroglossia of the opening

remark leaves the reader with the open task of finding her own way of relating to the personae of the text. The reader can decide to read the *Investigations* as a cipher that invites us to search for that voice in the text that speaks for correctness. She can look for the voice that the writer, Wittgenstein, thinks the good reader, the one who engages her reason correctly, will realize is the one speaking the truth. But there is nothing in the text that says that this is what we are expected to do. If we turn from the reader to the writer we can note that the shifts between perspectives in the first remark suggest neither the identification with any one voice in the text, nor a non-committing attitude. It seems better to say that the writer is committed to taking all the voices of the text seriously as speaking for him, than to say that some are there only to be corrected. This idea is supported by the unusual way in which the Preface places the writer, how it invites us to see his, Wittgenstein's, role in the text. Wittgenstein begins by saying that he presents 'thoughts'. They are characterized as 'the precipitate of philosophical investigations which have occupied me for the last sixteen years' and as 'remarks'. The remarks do not come 'together in a book' but constitute an 'album' characterized also as 'a number of sketches of a landscape' made 'in the course of long journeys' allowing someone ('you') who 'looked down at them', to 'get a picture of the landscape'.

So, the author and the reader of the work are placed in much the same position. The position is that of one who searches, who 'travels over a wide field'. The position that is not suggested is that of one who comes home from the travel with a treasure, something to show and share with others who have not travelled for themselves. We might say: after each sentence in the *Investigations* stands the injunction to the writer and reader alike: 'Now, what do you want to say?', 'What do you want to do with your words now?'

Socrates is more explicit about method than Wittgenstein. Socrates employed a peculiar philosophical method, usually called elenchus. He carried out elenchus in oral dialogue in which the interlocutor (Socrates) in a question-and-answer session brings into question a moral proposition a party to the debate supports, by showing that the proposition is incompatible with one or more other propositions also subscribed to by that person.[42] Socrates places a number of requirements on the proceedings of philosophical dialogue. They should be open to all; no one should accept the validity of any proposition that has not been subjected to and stood the test in public debate; only claims subscribed to by a participant in the discussion may be considered; any such claim is allowed. So, elenchus is to be undertaken as a

cooperative endeavour. Everyone has the same right to contribute her viewpoints and is reciprocally expected to consider any claim made by any other participant. Finally, as Vlastos rightly emphasized, it is a *sine qua non* of elenchus that everyone speaks sincerely: that participants say what they themselves believe to be true.

With this brief description of Socrates' method we can already see (as already suggested above) how it is that will and argument get linked in it. The material for the elenchus are beliefs people sincerely commit themselves to. If the examination of such beliefs brings out a contradiction, the inconsistency that is discovered is an inconsistency in the set of beliefs people aspire to hold, or believe they hold. To the extent that our beliefs inform our actions and our lives, the revealing of such an inconsistency of belief will be an insight into a confusion in our lives. An elenchus that brings out that I am confused about what my words mean brings out a confusion in my will. It shows to me and others that my life is confused.

I stop here. With this I have tried to indicate in what sense the methods used by Wittgenstein and Socrates serve a kind of thinking in which there is a unity of argument and will, of our understanding of the logic of concepts and our understanding of who we are, of our souls. To examine words philosophically is to examine the lives we live. This is independent of subject matter. The function of Socrates' examination of courage or justice and of Wittgenstein's examination of logical necessity or of the concept of sensations is to allow us to see more clearly than before what we can do and want to do with these concepts in our lives.

One measure of progress in the search is our ability to provide accounts of our concepts. Ability here means, for instance, an ability to make explicit a confusion of ourselves and others. If such a confusion is encountered the next step will depend on our ability to consider and deliberate upon the moral and other challenges we and others may face because of our confusion. The examination is geared towards the illumination of particular cases. It can help us judge more acutely – with more insight about the underpinnings and implications of what we say – with respect to matters such as these: is it a great thing to advance science? Is it a great thing to pursue Hilbert's programme? Is it just, for me, now, here, to leave Athens?

(vi) It may appear that what has been said so far only confirms the impression that Socrates and Wittgenstein come out here as subjectivists. Have we not just said that philosophy leaves everything to the judgement of the individual?

This will seem to be the case only as long as we accept an atomistic notion of community and language. As if meaning were carried by individuals who are free to choose whether or not to take part in a community in which meaning is shared. But this image is not simply rejected. Socrates and Wittgenstein do not treat it as something to combat. They do not propose an anti-atomistic, metaphysical position. They are acutely aware of the difficulty, the precarious status, of the idea that words have meaning, whether shared or not. Human judgement and community are both vulnerable. In what may be the most famous lines of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein writes:

> 241. 'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?'- It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

> 242. If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.

Many would today agree that we get only part of the story, its first chapter perhaps, right, if we see these passages as a condensed transcendental argument that we can spell out along these lines: 'We have language. A condition for the possibility of language is agreement in definitions and judgement and these presuppose agreement in form of life'. But Wittgenstein does not say, like a thesis, that 'we have language' nor that there is agreement in definitions, judgement and form of life. He considers aspects of what we mean by language. Wittgenstein is explicit about this. He writes: '*If* language is so and so. That invites the question: Do we have language?' And we can respond: 'To the extent that we have language and to the extent that language is a means of communication ...'

The conceptual landscape this suggestion opens up appears to me vital for getting a fruitful perspective on the dialectic between subjectivism, conventionalism, objectivism and scepticism in Wittgenstein's treatment of meaning. Often the question is not about whether we agree with others or ourselves about the meaning of our words and the right way of placing them in our lives.[43] Often, too, the question is not of this kind: Do we agree (about x) or not? Is this a confused way of understanding x ('necessity', 'justice')? Do we understand this or not? The task is often to find out about difference and distances between us, and within us, with respect to these issues. – (Perhaps Hilbert's

programme is 'not a something but not a nothing either'?[44]) – Not only is the falsity of subjectivism, conventionalism, objectivism and scepticism the issue, but also their truth, i.e.: what is it that makes these terms alive.

It does not follow that there is no such thing as utter confusion or complete clarity. It also does not follow that there is not agreement and disagreement. But concepts, to the extent that they lead us, people, humans, in our lives – lives we share but are also individually responsible for – are not of a kind that come with a guarantee that when all things have been said and done, when the best of philosophy has come to an end, then we will know what the words mean, and we will have been liberated from confusion and from disagreement. It may not even be clear whether the other is wrong, or stupid or evil or just different when she does not agree with us – after all this!

> Here is Socrates:
> Now be careful, Crito, that in making these single admissions you do not end admitting something contrary to your real beliefs. I know that there are and always will be few people who think like this, and consequently between those who think so and those who don't there can be no common counsel.[45]

> And here is Wittgenstein:
> 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 and of life, not a medicine invented by an individual. – Suppose the use of the motor-car produces or encourages certain illnesses, and mankind is plagued by such illness until, from some cause or other, as the result of some development or other, it abandons the habit of driving.[46]

The quotes seem to me to give sense to two key issues that have been discussed above.

One: the idea of aporia. Socrates and Wittgenstein think philosophy is aporetic in the sense that the best possible argument we can have about the meaning of concepts does not imply agreement between rational, well-intended, sincere discussants about the best way of understanding them. If we live differently our words will be different too. One way of discovering that we live differently – that we do not share a form of life – is to discover differences between what we say in a philosophical examination about our words. One way of overcoming the discovery

is to find a way in philosophy that will bring us close again. That can happen. But not because it is what must happen when rational, well-intended, sincere people successfully philosophize and not because something has gone wrong when it does not happen. (Obviously: quite often the answer to the question whether we share form of life can come in degrees.) But, as we see in the quote from Socrates, it happens too that the correct thing to say is: we do not understand each other at all, we do not agree at all, between us there cannot (at least not now, here) be any common counsel.

Two: relativism. Socrates and Wittgenstein are not relativists if relativism means that their philosophy implies that different views can be equally right or equally well supported by argument or that there is no truth of the matter and that all we can do is to take our chances. We do not take chances: philosophical work does (sometimes) clarify, we do learn. But the truth of the matter may be that we do not find agreement. The truth may be that words can be taken differently and with right. But in such cases the right is not the same right. Human difference is not a license for relativism, but it is also not in the power of philosophy to eliminate difference.

(vii) If the philosophy of Socrates and Wittgenstein is aporetic in the sense suggested above what is its worth? There are two ways of taking the question. One is to take it as a question about the kind of value or importance philosophy has. The other is to take it as a question about the weight of the answer, about the importance of that kind of importance.

We have seen Socrates and Wittgenstein giving similar answers to the first question. To them, the philosophical examination of concepts is a morally transformative examination of self and others, of how one wants to live and what one can share and hopes to share with others.

On the second issue Socrates and Wittgenstein may strike us as wildly different. Socrates' claim is that a life not spent philosophizing in the way he did is not worth living. He insisted that this is true about everyone. This is why he claimed to be a great gift from the gods to Athens.[47]

Wittgenstein surely thought philosophy was important. He said philosophy was his life and added, as his last words, that it had been a wonderful life.[48] But it is doubtful whether he could have agreed with the idea that a life without philosophy cannot be worth living. The distance between Socrates and Wittgenstein about this aspect may primarily be a distance of culture. In a culture that has been shaped by the Christian tradition it is much more difficult than it was for Socrates

to think that it is up to us to judge about life and its worth. But there is another aspect of Wittgenstein's views on the worth of philosophy that seems to make them dramatically different from those of Socrates and that has nothing to do with cultural differences. I think of the well-known fact that he discouraged many of the students he liked most from philosophy. From Socrates' perspective this is sacrilegious – how could he take away the best thing in life from people he loved?

The distance may, however, be smaller than it first appears. What Wittgenstein discouraged was the pursuit of a career in academic philosophy. He surely did not equate philosophy with academic philosophy. But I do think a difference to Socrates remains. Wittgenstein was less convinced than Socrates that the kind of education and care for the self and others that is philosophy is something that can find a benign place in all personalities and lives. On this issue I think there is real difference between the two. On another point still the difference is, however, much smaller than it appears at first.

It is true that Socrates claimed that the life not spent philosophizing is not worth living. But the claim comes, as we have seen, with an important qualification. He says that this is so, 'as I maintain'. Socrates invested his life in this claim. But perhaps Wittgenstein would have understood better than most to what extent Socrates thought others would find common counsel with him about this.

### Notes

1. See also my T. Wallgren (2006) *Transformative Philosophy; Socrates, Wittgenstein, and the Democratic Spirit of Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington), chs 3, 5 and 7.
2. For the role of Schleiermacher in the modern reception of Socrates see H. W. Ausland (2009) 'Socrates' Definitional Inquiries and the History of Philosophy' in S. Ahbel-Rappe and R. Kamtekar (eds) *A Companion to Socrates* (New York: Wiley), p. 495. For Aristotle see *Metaphysics* 1.6 987a29–b9 and 13.4 1086a30–b12. In 1948 Wittgenstein told his friend Drury that he had thought of using Shakespeare's line from *King Lear* 'I'll teach you differences' as a motto for his book. (R. Rhees (ed.) 1981 *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections,* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford), p. 171.) Wittgenstein's notes from the *Nachlass* from 27.2. and 3.3.1947 which von Wright places after each other in L. Wittgenstein (1998) *Culture and Value*, Revised Edition (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 64 show a different quality of Wittgenstein's interest in Socrates than most other places where Socrates is a reference. Wittgenstein's suggests there that wisdom may be 'cold' and 'foolish' and 'conceal life'.
3. G. Moore (1993) 'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–33', in *Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951,* edited by J. C. Klagge and

A. Nordman (Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis and Cambridge), p. 113.

4.  E.g. G. H. von Wright (1982a) 'A Biographical Sketch' in G.H, von Wright, *Wittgenstein* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford), p. 27.
5.  For a study of some aspects of the continuity in Western philosophy to which Socrates and Wittgenstein both belong see my 'Philosophy without End: Wittgenstein and Pyrrhonian Scepticism', in *Wittgenstein und die Antike / Wittgenstein and Ancient Thought*. Hg. von Ilse Somavilla und James Thompson (Berlin: Parerga), 2012.
6.  G. Vlastos (1991) *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), G. Vlastos (1994) *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), T. Brickhouse, N. Smith (1994) *Plato's Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) and H. Benson (2000) *Socratic Wisdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) may be a representative sample of scholarship that has opened new vistas for the study of Socrates' distinct conception of philosophy. In none of these is there a mention of Wittgenstein. S. Ahbel-Rappe, R. Kamtekar (eds) *A Companion to Socrates*, is one more recent, wide-ranging collection with thirty contributions. Wittgenstein is mentioned in only two of the essays. In only one of these, the essay by N. White 'Socrates in Hegel and Others', is there a brief discussion of substance.
7.  Typically, in S. Ahbel-Rappe, R. Kamtekar's *A Companion to Socrates*, the essays that have as their topic Socrates' relation to modern and contemporary philosophers have Kierkegaard, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Freud and Lacan as the main referents.
8.  So e.g. L.-A. Dorion in his 'Xenophon's Socrates' in S. Ahbel-Rappe, R. Kamtekar *A Companion to Socrates*, p. 93.
9.  Gregory Vlastos's contribution, summarized in his two late books G. Vlastos *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* and G. Vlastos *Socratic Studies*, is the most influential recent contribution defending this idea.
10. For arguments, see T. Wallgren *Transformative Philosophy*, ch. 3.
11. Vlastos's discussion of Socrates' vision of enlightenment culminates in G. Vlastos *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. I think Vlastos's discussion is a magnificent even though I do not agree with it in all respects.
12. Cf. C. Diamond (1991) 'Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*', in C. Diamond (1991) *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press). J. Conant (2002) 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', in E. H. Reck (ed.) *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), A. Crary and R. Read (eds.) (2000) *The New Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge), and G. Baker (2004) *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects* (Oxford: Blackwell).
13. To place my cards on the table in the debate between 'standard' vs. 'therapeutic', or 'resolute' vs. 'irresolute' interpretations of the *Tractatus*, it seems to me that both capture well one tendency in a work that failed and whose failure can largely be accounted for precisely in terms of its lack of clarity about the divergent tendencies it contains. See my 'Overcoming Overcoming: Wittgenstein, Metaphysics, and Progress', in Pihlström (ed.) (2006), *Wittgenstein and the Method of Philosophy.*
14. See e.g. Schulte, Joachim (2001), 'Einleitung', in Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001), pp. 12–47, Schulte, 'What is a Work by Wittgenstein', in Pichler

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and Säätelä (2006), pp. 297–404. Stern, David G. (1996) 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Philosophy.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, edited by Hans Sluga and David G. Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), D. G. Stern (2004) *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), and A. Pichler (2004) *Wittgensteins* 'Philosophische Untersuchungen' (Amsterdam: Rodopi).

15. I ignore the question of the text-immanent versus contextual method in the interpretation of the *Philosophical Investigations*, part 1. It appears to me that the contextual method, in which sources external to the text of the *Philosophical Investigations*, part 1, are used, should only allow results that are compatible with those achieved through the text-immanent approach. [See A. Pichler and S. Säätelä (2006) *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works:* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag)].

16. Bakhtin introduces the words polyphony and heteroglossia (*raznorecie*) as technical terms in his studies of the unique features of the modern novel in general and Dostoevsky's novels in particular. [M. M. Bakhtin (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) (the first edition in Russian was published 1929) and M. M. Bakthin (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press) (Russian original 1934)]. In musical contexts polyphony refers to harmony and 'the simultaneous and harmonious combination of a number of individual melodic lines' (Oxford English Dictionary). In our context another meaning of polyphony is intended, namely that of ventriloquism or of multiplicity of voices. It is because I want to avoid the impression that I suggest that Wittgenstein composed the *Investigations* as a polyphonic work striving at harmony that I will here use the term heteroglossic. Stanley Cavell was one of the first commentators to pay attention to the philosophical relevance of the dialogic style of the *Investigations*. [S. Cavell (1976) *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), esp. Foreword and chs 1 and 2]. Brunner, Raatzsch, Stern and Pichler have pioneered a polyphonic interpretation of Wittgenstein that has parallels with Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky. See Brunner, H. (1985), *Vom Nutzen des Scheiterns* (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang), Raatzsch, R. (1998) *Eigentlich Seltsames. Wittgensteins* Philosophische Untersuchungen, Stern, D. (2004) *Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations and Pichler, A. (2004) *Wittgensteins* Philosophische Untersuchungen.

17. See A. Pichler (2004) *Wittgensteins* Philosophische Untersuchungen and L. Wittgenstein (2005), *The Big Typescript.*

18. I should stress, however, that there is no need to quarrel about words. If you say that nothing that I say below about heteroglossia in Wittgenstein (and Socrates) is at odds with reading them as therapeutic philosophers, then fine.

19. '[Wittgenstein asked Turing a question.] – *Turing*: I see your point. – *Wittgenstein*: I have no point.' This exchange between Wittgenstein and Alan Turing is reported at p. 95 in the volume *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939* (ed. C. Diamond 1976).

20. I am aware of the objection that may come up that I misrepresent therapeutic readings. This is the objection: I suggest that they, i.e. the therapists,

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suggest that Wittgenstein suggests that language divides up in sense and nonsense. I accept that such a suggestion by me would be too crude, too metaphysical perhaps, to be a correct depiction of the idea of therapeutic interpretations of Wittgenstein. But that is not what I suggest. My suggestion of what therapeutic readings suggest is more of this type: They say: 'We do not say that what we find in philosophy is that so and so is nonsense. What we do say is that through philosophical work we may find that something we thought made sense to us does not do so, and then it loses its charm for us.' But my contention is that even this is too rigid, too metaphysical if you like, when considered from the viewpoint of the heteroglossia of the *Investigations*. It is too rigid in the sense that it suggests that Wittgenstein suggests that at the end of a successful philosophical investigation we should be able to find agreement about where sense lies and where not. I come back to this.

21. Sextus Empiricus (2002) *Outlines of Scepticism,* J. Annas, J. Barnes (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1.3–1.4.

22. *Apology* 33c, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1961.

23. I invite the reader to accept the shortcut to our topic that I allow when I infer from Socrates' claim that God's commands can be given to us that he also thought that divine wisdom can be given to us. Qualifications of this inference will not, as I suggest, be relevant for the discussion to follow here, about Socrates' discussion of the concept of a wisdom that serves the perfection of the soul.

24. In Socrates' time the paradigm of divine knowledge, or divine wisdom (it seems to me that there is no systematic distinction between knowledge and wisdom at work in the *Apology*) was knowledge about the future, esp. premonition. Such divine wisdom is not the topic here. In the *Apology* it becomes a topic only in the third (and arguably less authentic) part, as one aspect of Socrates' discussion of what comes after death, a thing he claims no certain knowledge about (*Apology* 40c–41c) and of which he says, in the conclusion, that it is known by God.

25. Excerpted from *Apology* 21b–22c.

26. L. Wittgenstein (1961) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 5.473 (my translation).

27. Hence the importance of the so called 'five-four-seven-threes' of the *Tractatus*, i.e. of the remarks numbered 5.473 to 5.4733.

28. See L. Wittgenstein (1979) *Notebooks 1914–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

29. Diamond has worked out the ideas I touch upon here with great precision in many of the essays in her C. Diamond (1991) *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind (Representation and Mind)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), most forcefully perhaps in the two Introductions to the work. But she does nothing out of the heteroglossia in the *Investigations* and hence sees no problem in treating the idea in the *Investigations* that philosophy can liberate us from illusions as the pinnacle in the discussion of logic (or grammar), not as one perspective on it.

30. C. Diamond (ed.) (1976) *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics* (From the Notes of R. G. Bosanquet, Norman Malcolm, Rush

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Rhees, and Yorick Smythies) (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, LTD.), p. 103.

31. In view of the parallel I suggest, between Socrates' views on piety and Wittgenstein's views on logic and mathematics, it is striking that the only remark in the *Investigations,* part 1, that explicitly mentions set theory immediately goes on to mention god. Wittgenstein writes in remark 426: 'Here again we get the same thing as in set theory: the form of the expression we use seems to have been designed for a god, who knows what we cannot know'.

32. See esp. Wittgenstein, L. (1997), *Denkbewegungen.*

33. The immediate continuation of the second passage I just quoted is less memorable then the quoted part. It says: 'Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do".'

34. I derive the quote from J. Conant (1996) 'Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors' in D. Z. Phillips (ed.) *The Grammar of Religious Belief* (NY: St. Martins Press). The original source is S. Kierkegaard (1962) *The Point of View for My Work as An Author*, translated by B. Nelson (New York: Harper & Row), pp. 24–25.

35. F. Nietzsche (1966), *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books), p. 15. Myriads of cases come to mind: Frege's reaction to Russell's postcard, G.H. von Wright on animism in his philosophy of mind, Habermas on the division of labour ('differentiation of value spheres' and respect for the different kinds of validity claims) as the achievement of modernity, Robert Brandom on naturalism in his introduction the volume he edited on Richard Rorty, the opening paragraph of the Preface to the second edition of Kant's first critique and many more.

36. L. Wittgenstein (1998) *Culture and Value*, Revised Edition (Oxford: Blackwell), 25. MSS 112, 46: 14.10.1931.

37. This is not a comment on the controversy about Socrates' moral psychology.

38. Wittgenstein, we may recall, has memorable things to say about the idea of such subjectivist accounts of meaning in the *Investigations*.

39. L. Wittgenstein (1976) *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell), part 1, no. 1. All italics in the quotes provided in this paragraph have been added by me.

40. D. G. Stern *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, 72ff.

41. Theunissen says that 'all truly modern art stages the experiment which the human being who does not know herself makes with herself' (M. Theunissen (1982), p. 10, my translation). If we accept that definition we can say that Wittgenstein is the truest modernist in philosophy. But he is not the first. See the discussion of Socrates to follow. See also Sextus Empiricus's pivotal statement in the opening section of *Outlines of Scepticism* at I.4: '...as regards none of the things that we are about to say do we firmly maintain that matters are absolutely as stated, but in each instance we are simply reporting, like a chronicler, what now appears to us to be the case' (I here use the translation by Mates in the Oxford University Press edition from 1996).

42. This characterization differs from that of some recent commentators in that I do not say that propositions or beliefs suggested by Socrates' interlocutors are refuted, but that they are brought into question.

43. See C. Diamond (1991) *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press), pp. 29–35 for a fascinating discussion of Kant's notion of understanding that is in agreement with itself and its relation to Frege's and Wittgenstein's conceptions of logic. Diamond does not, however, pause to discuss the problems we run into if we say both say that logic and empirical psychology are absolutely 'distinguishable' and that we do not accept 'any idea of metaphysical being the case'. Her lack of attention to this issue reflects, it seems to me, her implicit adherence to the idea that one often meets in secondary literature, that Wittgenstein advocated a clear separation of empirical and grammatical propositions. But for this idea, do we not need to read places such as *Investigations* part 1, 251 non-heteroglossically, as proposing a doctrine affirmed by the author?

44. Cf. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, part 1, no. 304.

45. Plato *Crito,* 49d. I have used the Tredennick translation, but for the concluding phrase which is from G. Vlastos *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, pp. 194–95.

46. Quoted from G. H. von Wright (1982) *Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 182.

47. For some arguments for this reading of the *Apology*, see ch. 3 in T. Wallgren *Transformative Philosophy.*

48. See R. Monk (1990) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (Jonathan Cape, London), p. 579.

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