

PIERGIORGIO DONATELLI and LUIGI PERISSINOTTO  
on  
Aldo Giorgio Gargani's *Wittgenstein*<sup>1</sup>

*Forms of Life, Forms of Freedom*  
Piergiorgio Donatelli

1. *Wittgenstein. Musica, parola, gesto* is the book that Aldo Giorgio Gargani left us before he died. It contains some of his most characteristic themes, among them the reading of Wittgenstein from which he drew a way of considering intellectual activities as expression of practices and forms of life, together with the implications that he derived from this, which concern our cognitive activities as well as the spheres of the ethical and the aesthetic. Space is also given to his various interests and his intellectual and human sympathy for both intelligence and sentiment, viewed as creative and inventive spheres in which we discover new aspects of human beings (in the sciences and in the work of the artistic imagination, as in humanistic studies: Gargani is free from any facile juxtaposition between the science of the mind and that of nature).

In various earlier texts Gargani had already elaborated these ideas, but he gave them a rich and original formulation above all in a little book that is a philosophical masterpiece, *Il sapere senza fondamenti*, published in 1975. Here he develops the view according to which the theoretical models through which we organize our experience are themselves an expression of the practical lives of human beings; thus reworking what was a crucial theme of the great cultural change taking place between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the shift of emphasis from attention to the subject and the subject's sphere of activity (the post-Cartesian modern philosophical tradition) towards attention to the broader natural and socio-historic background in which individuals move.<sup>2</sup> His central idea is that the live sources of our conceptual schemes have been concealed; and he asks “what was the matrix of mental and intellectual habits [...] that brought about the concealment – under the surfaces of objects, things, and substances – of the decisions, the behaviours and the customs of an entire form of human life?”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. G. Gargani, *Wittgenstein. Musica, parola, gesto*, Milan: Cortina, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The central importance of this change in perspective is elaborated in many of Charles Taylor's works. See, for example, *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> A. G. Gargani, *Il sapere senza fondamenti. La condotta intellettuale come strutturazione dell'esperienza comune*, introduction by A. I. Davidson, Milan: Mimesis, 2009, p. 67 (orig. ed. Turin: Einaudi, 1975).

In that book, Gargani puts forward at least two major points. On the one hand he wants to show that the quest to provide a foundation for human intellectual activity is illusory and that foundational moves are mere ceremonials with which to preserve the irrevocability of certain ways of proceeding, of certain schemes through which we organize experience. Seen in this light, the operation by which these moves are brought back to where they belong becomes one of unmasking, because it empties out the impression of grounding that these moves make on us. The unmasking empties what are in effect already empty moves, in that it dissolves the claims of what were merely ceremonials, dressing up something that in fact rests on a very different footing, that is, the fact that we are *attached* to that sort of organization of experience. It is in this sense that Wittgenstein writes in the *Philosophical Investigations* that philosophy leaves everything as it is, knocks down castles of cards, is not a constructive activity, does not put forward theses, and so forth. But there is also the other side of the question. For these ceremonials undertake a task, on which Gargani's book shines a fascinating and suggestive light, a task that not only involves revealing the lines along which our experience runs for us in any one moment, but also involves affirming that these are the *only* lines, raising them above all others. In this sense, therefore, the unmasking does not leave things as they were, but frees us; it liberates us from a sense of the necessity of what is, and gives us back the field in which our intellectual activities unfold as our own field, as our own making. For this reason, Gargani writes, in the new preface, that the book thematizes a philosophy of freedom; and Arnold Davidson, in his introduction, says that as such Gargani's work is political epistemology, because this work of unmasking reclaims spaces of freedom.<sup>4</sup> This was already a central concern in Wittgenstein's work, as this has been drawn out, for example, by Cora Diamond: that of philosophy practiced in the form of the dissolution of the mythologies that we create around our intellectual activity, as a form of liberation, and therefore as an activity that has both ethical and political significance.<sup>5</sup>

In resituating intellectual activities in the field of experience in which they have their place, it seems to me that Gargani wishes to hold together two aspects in particular. He wants to reclaim the forms of life, the field of human activities, the social form of human lives, and therefore also to restore – to a certain “we” (which is also an “I”) – intellectual responsibility for our criteria of correctness in the various areas – science, non-scientific knowledge, ethics, and so forth – to restore to this domain what has been crystallized in the mythology of a reality or a logic that seems to carry on without us. Thus he writes: “what has happened is that a relational domain of activity, of behavioral techniques, of customs, of a social form of human life, has been frozen, or congealed, as it were, in the form of a mythical object.”<sup>6</sup> As he wrote in a later text, “we are deceived by the mythologies that we construct, without even suspecting that they are mythologies, because we believe them to be the discovery of reality by means of words rather than the projection of our own ideals upon those words.”<sup>7</sup> Yet this view does not imply

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., respectively pp. 22 and 26.

<sup>5</sup> See C. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, especially Introduction I and II.

<sup>6</sup> Gargani, *Il sapere senza fondamenti*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>7</sup> A. G. Gargani, *Sguardo e destino*, Rome–Bari: Laterza, 1988, p. 30.

losing what it is that constrains us in logic; nor does it mean losing the sense that our intellectual activities respond to criteria of correctness, that knowledge of the world responds to reality; it has rather to do with leading these normative activities back to where they operate and have their place. As he writes: “‘Objects,’ ‘things’ and ‘facts,’ are grammatical models and therefore their statute must assume the character of revocability and fluidity that pertains to a use of language that is not bound by arbitrary rigidities brought about by fixed entities that are situated, so to speak, outside of the medium of linguistic articulation.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, it means leading correctness, the appeal to reality, to the facts, to logical necessity (and so forth), back to their concrete and specific uses, not making a myth of them (a “philosophical and epistemological mythology”), that limits and oppresses our possibilities of movement.

2. Gargani reworks this theme in his last book, giving it a new formulation. In this work he argues that tracing intellectual activities back to their base, which is developed here through the idea of a “flux” of practices (“a cohesive, shared and unitary flux of social practices, verbal praxis, behaviors and relations with nature and the environment”<sup>9</sup>) implies rethinking necessity as a certain way in which our linguistic moves hold together. He calls this idea “the dissolution of analyticity,” by which he means the overcoming of the idea that there is an “intrinsic ‘fitting’ or coming together’ (*passen zu*) of concepts and words. And there is no intrinsic or necessitating ‘fitting’ or ‘adaptation’ between the notion of proposition and that of truth. Analogously, there is no essential connection between a mathematical formula and its development [...]. The same theme is stressed when Wittgenstein asserts that no foundation – or force – exists that runs through the connections of thoughts and propositions, establishing their coherence and consistency.”<sup>10</sup>

He goes on: “In this regard, Wittgenstein introduces an illuminating comparison, observing that, just as the strength of a thread lies not in the fact that one fiber runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of the fibers on each other – such that, if we were to remove the fibers we would eliminate the force and in the end the thread itself – by analogy, the content of a concept does not lie in a univocal and rigid identity that runs through its whole extension.”<sup>11</sup>

Gargani does not want to lose the sense for which linguistic activities are governed, and therefore run through in different ways, by necessity. As Cavell says: “you cannot make words mean what you wish (*by wishing*)”<sup>12</sup>; this power is not at our disposal, it depends rather on a sense of logical constraint that language exercises on us.<sup>13</sup> Gargani

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>9</sup> Gargani, *Wittgenstein*, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XVII.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XVIII. The picture is from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, § 67.

<sup>12</sup> S. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, in *Id.*, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (1969), Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 1–43, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Cavell also shows how the power that words exercise on us, without which there would be no language, is a power that we have conferred on them. In this regard, see my “La vie des mots. Cavell et un nouveau départ pour l’éthique analytique,” *Revue internationale de Philosophie*, (forthcoming).

wants to reconstruct this sense of necessity as something that we can understand only if we attend to the whole complex of practices in which we recognize such sense of necessity, for which – as the picture of the thread suggests – we cannot identify either a precise spot in which to collocate the necessity, or the places in which it operates. This disentanglement, the severance of a normative mechanism (necessity, the constraint of moral duty, the relation between signs and meanings, and so forth) from the place where the mechanism operates is the object of Gargani's criticism. There is no special place in which to collocate the necessity that holds together our linguistic practices. "The particular characteristic of the analytic work conducted by Wittgenstein consists in eliminating, from the notion of this continuous flux of elements, the property of a meaning that is identifiable, common, dominant and all-inclusive, that would ensure recognition of the concordance of each step with the rule to which it will conform. I mean that this aspect of continuity [...] is not seen to be condensed and determined or defined in a specific term, in an identifiable formulation or representation."<sup>14</sup>

Conversely, at the moment in which we place it somewhere specific, as a certain foundation (the topic of *Il sapere senza fondamenti*), we are making a mythology of the sense of necessity; we are helping ourselves, with this sense of necessity, to do *something else*, for example, to separate practices from practices, to confer a special importance to some, or to exclude others. But if we do not mythologize it, the sense of necessity, of logical constraint, is a way of looking at our linguistic practices and seeing them as held together; a way of considering this connection as what emerges (like a physiognomy) from the way in which the different moves we make are interlocked. "Stripped of all idealization, language becomes a *physiognomy*."<sup>15</sup> Necessity is a way of looking at what we do in which we are struck by how what we do fits together properly. Gargani writes: "Language is the institutionalized context of the practices of a certain form of life, of a constructively woven web of signs, tracks and events that hold together, that coexist together rather than implying each other [...]: signs, tracks and events that in their being in a relation of coexistence take on a physiognomy connected with the use of words."<sup>16</sup>

As we know, the idea of envisaging an appropriateness among things is a picture that has been developed by intellectualist conceptions in philosophy, that have looked for an order linking the aspects of circumstances. But here the pictures of looking, perspicuous vision, grasping an aspect, recognizing physiognomies, they all make reference to activities that involve our full human response, they invite us to note how human activities recall each other. The connection that emerges is reached from within our understanding of what it means for human beings to do things together, ordered in particular ways. (Again, it seems to me that there is a clear association with the way Cavell elaborates Wittgenstein's teaching, for example in his comments on the first sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>17</sup>) Gargani thus finds that we can-

<sup>14</sup> Gargani, *Wittgenstein*, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

<sup>17</sup> S. Cavell, *Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein's Investigations*, in *Id.*, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, pp. 125–186; on this see also P. Donatelli, "Concetti, sentimenti e immaginazione. Un'introduzione al pensiero morale

not develop this idea of necessity unless we at the same time take on Wittgenstein's anthropological move, make our own his bringing practices and constraints back to the description of human beings.<sup>18</sup> In this regard, he lays stress on the internal developments in Wittgenstein's philosophy, and the increasingly marked anthropological turn: "In late Wittgenstein [...] the conception of following a rule is grounded on the natural and instinctive practices of our agency."<sup>19</sup>

In this emphasis of Gargani's there is perhaps a shift with regard to his previous views. In *Il sapere senza fondamenti*, the appeal to forms of life had an aspect that I will call materialistic, an appeal to concrete practices of use, and he develops a suggestive and fertile comparison with Marx, as, for example, when he writes: "There is a formal analogy between the distortion historically produced in the relationship use-meaning and that likewise produced in the connection work-commodities." Just as the materials of production, in becoming commodities, acquire a value that they did not have, which Marx calls "sensibly supersensible," so the materials of language, that are vibrations in the air or ink-marks on paper, "through the rules of formation and transformation deployed by use" become a language: "they are no longer the mere vibrations of a physical means, nor are they mere signs of ink on paper, but they become objects supplied with meaning, they rise to that statute of logical sublimation in which a material object is infused with the vital breath of meaning."<sup>20</sup> And Gargani concludes: "In other words, the matrix of use, the decisions and the stipulation of contracts in a community, the behavior of human beings within a form of life – which are the constructive conditions that have transformed physical means into symbols, into a language – have been distorted in the form of the object model, they have been assumed as internal properties, intrinsic to the symbolism."<sup>21</sup>

I would like to suggest that in his last book there is a shift in the analysis of this sublimation. *Il sapere senza fondamenti* asked us to imagine the constructive conditions as the operating of certain materials on other materials. In this sense I have put forward the image of materialism, whereas his insistence on the anthropological turn in the last book suggests another type of liberation from sublimation. The non-sublimated materials now have the shape of human practices, ways of life, gestures and human expressions.

3. This leads me to another issue that is clearly central in the last book. The picture of fittingness, this mode of presenting the nature of necessity, is tied to another theme that is perhaps, in its recurrence, the guiding thread in this volume, and gives it its title: "Music, word, gesture," that is to say, the theme of expressiveness. As we have seen, language is something that is lived, and Gargani also writes, something "instinctive, animal, like life in front of us,"<sup>22</sup> and adds that "one of the most relevant

di Cora Diamond," in C. Diamond, *L'immaginazione e la vita morale*, ed. by P. Donatelli, Rome: Carocci, 2006, pp. 9-52, pp. 15-19.

<sup>18</sup> See Gargani, *Wittgenstein*, p. 107.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>20</sup> Gargani, *Il sapere senza fondamenti*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>22</sup> Gargani, *Wittgenstein*, p. 31.

analytic results of his work [lies in Wittgenstein's emphasis on] the value of *familiarity* and of *unhesitating adherence* to a form of life and to a language game."<sup>23</sup> Here we see clearly how the strategy of unmasking that he had elaborated, through a wealth of contents, in *Il sapere senza fondamenti*, now delivers a human life that is made of gestures of direct communication, read in the faces, in the expressions, in the attunement of actions, in the familiarity of a common world. Commenting on a passage from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (§ 204: "Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* which lies at the bottom of the language-game."), Gargani writes: "The certainty that Wittgenstein speaks of lies in action, in our form of life, and not in an epistemological enterprise. What was previously assumed to be an epistemological certainty in relation to the truth of propositions turns out to be converted into relations of familiarity with the content of an expression."<sup>24</sup>

The idea that language has an expressive character, that communication has the appearance of gesture, is tied to the idea of musicality. In developing these themes, the aesthetic interests that Gargani has pursued in many of his writings come to the fore. But we may also tie his work in this field to a line of development from Wittgenstein's teachings that we find, for example, in Cavell, to his elaboration of the idea of the naturalness of language, of its familiarity, which can all the same turn into its opposite: the potentiality that language has, precisely because it characterizes us so intimately, to become alien to us, and to express through its foreignness a peculiar kind of solitude and isolation with respect to the common world, or else to express our unique individuality, for which we have not found words.

The theme of the emptying of language is one that Gargani has treated many times in his studies of Austrian culture, among which there are several truly excellent essays in the collection *Il coraggio di essere*,<sup>25</sup> and it was also discussed in the book published just before this, also on Wittgenstein: *Wittgenstein. Dalla verità al senso della verità*.<sup>26</sup> In this work he showed how the theme of language in Wittgenstein – the sense in which, as Cavell has written, his enquiry, for example in the *Philosophical Investigations*, is everywhere pervaded by an ethical demand, even though (or precisely because it does not) contain any reference to a separate field of study that he calls Ethics<sup>27</sup> – gave voice to a motif that ran right through Viennese culture, one that is represented in the words of Hofmannsthal's *Lord Chandos Letter* when he writes: "the abstract terms of which the tongue must avail itself as a matter of course in order to voice a judgment—these terms crumbled in my mouth like mouldy fungi [...] A pitcher, a harrow abandoned in a field, a dog in the sun, a neglected cemetery, a cripple, a peasant's hut – all these can become the vessel of my revelation. Each of these objects and a thousand others similar, over which the eye usually glides with a natural indifference, can suddenly,

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>25</sup> A. G. Gargani, *Il coraggio di essere. Saggio sulla cultura mitteleuropea*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> A. G. Gargani, *Wittgenstein. Dalla verità al senso della verità*, Pisa: Edizioni Plus, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> S. Cavell, *Declining Decline*, in Id., *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989, p. 40. See also my *Wittgenstein e l'etica*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998, ch. III.

at any moment (which I am utterly powerless to evoke), assume for me a character so exalted and moving that words seem too poor to describe it.”<sup>28</sup>

In this book and in *Il coraggio di essere*, Gargani had identified the problem of ethics in Wittgenstein precisely in the relationship that language may establish with the self. The language that belongs to us naturally, as Hofmannsthal writes, may turn out to be incapable of communicating our personal understanding of things, it may turn out to be corrupted, superficial, to move in an exclusively impersonal dimension. This is also a theme of an author who is very important to Gargani, Robert Musil. “This beauty,” one thought, “is all well and good, but is it mine? And is the truth I am learning my truth? The goals, the voices, the reality, all this seductiveness that lures and leads us on, that we pursue and plunge into – is this reality itself or is it no more than a breath of the real, resting intangibly on the surface of the reality the world offers us? What sharpens our suspicions are all those prefabricated compartments and forms of life, semblances of reality, the molds set by earlier generations, the ready-made language not only of the tongue but also of sensations and feelings.”<sup>29</sup>

The ethical dimension appears precisely in this awareness, in the diagnosis of a linguistic loss which is also spiritual and cultural,<sup>30</sup> and in the possibility that an ethical spirit may take the form of a necessary incommunicability, in a failure of words which is intrinsic to our ethical intention. This is the topic that Gargani finds in the various Austrian authors, like Hofmannsthal and Musil; a kind of work that we may now fruitfully read together with the elaboration of the issue of ethics and language to be found in a writer such as Diamond.<sup>31</sup>

In his last book, Gargani explores another direction of which we may say that here common language is not enough, in the sense that we make use of common and natural language in such a way that the things we say are charged with personal meaning, and thus manage to communicate our interiority. The way in which Gargani presents language, as a flux of practices that involve an attunement of gestures and natural responses, may also show us how gestures can become charged with meanings and be colored by interiority. Learning a language means learning to project (in Cavell's lexicon) the meanings of words into new contexts, where they will be tried and tested by new applications; and if there *is* something like language then this is seen in the fact that making such projections comes natural to us; but sometimes the moves we make are fragile and require an agreement that is more intimate than those of common practice, and therefore more uncertain. These are, for example, the cases that, in Part II of

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Gargani, *Wittgenstein. Dalla verità*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>29</sup> R. Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Reinbek b.H.: Rowohlt, 1978 [*The Man Without Qualities*, trans. S. Wilkins and B. Pike, New York: Vintage International, 1996, ch. 34, p. 135].

<sup>30</sup> In this regard see my “L'etica come critica culturale in Wittgenstein,” *Paradigmi*, 26 (2008), pp. 171–181.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, C. Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's Tractatus,” in A. Crary and R. Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 149–173; Ead., *Introduction to “Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is;”* in J. Gibson and W. Huemer (eds.), *The Literary Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 127–132. Gargani acknowledges his encounter with this reading of Wittgenstein (he mentions, among others, Diamond, Cavell and James Conant), in his *Wittgenstein*, p. XIII.

*Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein treats as secondary or figurative uses, and that he associates with the idea of seeing aspects, of seeing something as something else. They are uses in which we cannot rely on ordinary language; we presuppose it, but we ask for a more intimate communication. As Cavell writes, if we do not meet in communication here we may remain part of the same world, but not of the same flesh. We have eluded a more intimate contact.<sup>32</sup> Gargani shows well how these more intimate and fragile agreements call into play the same capacities of recognition, of glance, of getting the point, of gesture, that are the interweaving of ordinary language.

Gargani touches here on a crucial aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy that has to do with the creativity of our practices, with the indefinite potentiality that words have to transform the scenario of our thought, a possibility of transformation that we are inclined to hide from ourselves. This is also the theme of *Il sapere senza fondamenti*, that of the procedures by which we hide our own freedom from ourselves, the power we have conferred on words to go on their own to mean things. But in this last book, Gargani elaborates this theme of the power of words through the images of gestures and their agreements. He writes: "What unifies the cultural and social horizon is not an apparatus of universal rules, but the unique, individual, unrehearsed expression that gives origin to a new linguistic gesture. And what is responsible for these connections is the pathos, the lived atmosphere of meaning, the rhythm, the gestuality of words."<sup>33</sup> What is crystallized in ordinary language, in the public edifice of language, is the agreement of individual gestures. It is an agreement in which we let the words speak for us, but in which we can also find ourselves, find again the profundity of our self, and imprint a new direction on the words. "The most original aspect of Wittgenstein's work [...] consists [...] in the conception of new, unique, individual meanings for which no preordained rule exists."<sup>34</sup> In this sense Diamond has written: "[...] we think of learning to use a term as learning to follow the rules for that use; we think of language in terms of rules fixing what can and cannot be done. But the most essential thing about language is that it is *not* fixed in that way. Learning to use a term is coming into life with that term, whose possibilities are to a great extent to be made."<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to return once more to the ethical meaning of this philosophical conception. In *Il sapere senza fondamenti* Gargani had written: "Hitherto use has done everything, and therefore it may change everything," and Davidson cites this as the epigraph of his introduction to the new edition.<sup>36</sup> In his last book Gargani takes up again this idea and links it to a passage from Ernst Mach: "history has done everything, history can change everything."<sup>37</sup> He writes that "the task of philosophy for Wittgenstein consisted fundamentally in restoring to human beings their concepts" which had been torn from them by "idealizations, mythologies and sublimations." In teaching each person to take back the responsibility for moving forward in language, in giving back to each person the possibility of extending the meanings of words, "at

<sup>32</sup> S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 189-190.

<sup>33</sup> Gargani, *Wittgenstein*, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> C. Diamond, "Losing Your Concepts," *Ethics*, 98 (1988), pp. 255-277, p. 268.

<sup>36</sup> Gargani, *Il sapere senza fondamenti*, p. 69.

<sup>37</sup> Gargani, *Wittgenstein. Musica, parola, gesto*, p. 53.



the same time one extends human freedom [...].”<sup>38</sup> To succeed in regaining a perspicuous vision of our practices allows us to regain the common world in which we move, as our own field of activity, as a scene of action and of struggle. In an interview given shortly after this book came out,<sup>39</sup> Gargani commented that these are times of falling back, of the absence of thinking that can indicate a new direction, that puts forward a new criticism of society. His books, his work, are rich materials if we wish to go back to such work of criticism, to the elaboration of a new thought.

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### *Wittgenstein's Antidogmatism*

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Like his previous works, Aldo Gargani's new book too is noteworthy for its careful critical reconstruction and original interpretation. Just as in all his other essays and earlier books on Wittgenstein, so in this latest book Gargani's is concerned not only to think *about*, but also to think *along with* Wittgenstein. For this reason it would be unfair to treat this book as just another critical-interpretative work when it is also, and simultaneously, a crucial moment and a further significant step in the long and intense philosophical career of its author. I am totally in tune with most of Gargani's claims and suggestions. Just for this very reason, I will linger on some crucial points and passages and discuss the general interpretative framework that is repeatedly and explicitly evoked by the author.

Actually, the study begins with a claim that is meant to endorse the interpretative line that, for the sake of convenience, is suggested by the title of the successful collection of essays *The New Wittgenstein*<sup>40</sup>. This “new” Wittgenstein – as Gargani maintains – is a Wittgenstein to whom no “philosophical project of theoretical nature” (p. xiii) can or must be attributed. For, in fact, Wittgenstein is principally engaged in furnishing “means of linguistic and conceptual clarification that are meant to return the use of concepts and words to the original contexts and applications to which they belong, to their homeland as it were; these are also bound to give people back the concepts and words they had lost” (pp. xiii-xiv), and here the influence of Cora Diamond is particularly clear.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. XVI.

<sup>39</sup> See: <<http://www.asia.it/adon.pl?act=doc&doc=588>>.

<sup>40</sup> A. Crary and R. Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein is to be taken seriously or, to put it in a different way, quite literally when he points out in the preface to the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* that “it is not a textbook,”<sup>41</sup> or when, elsewhere in the *Tractatus*, he states that “[p]hilosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity” whose goal is “the logical clarification of thoughts” (prop. 4.112). The same holds when Wittgenstein argues in the *Philosophical Investigations* that philosophy “neither explains nor deduces anything,”<sup>42</sup> or that in philosophy “we may not advance any kind of theory” (I, § 109).

I can only agree with this observation and this demand. After all, I have always thought it simplistic to endorse the position of all those who, triumphantly or hopelessly, accept the claim that Wittgenstein’s meta-philosophy would be in patent contrast with his philosophy, that is, with a philosophy where there are certainly plenty of points to accept or criticise as well as the theories to support or reject. The alternatives with which we are left by these critics seem to be very puzzling whichever one we choose: if Wittgenstein’s assumed theories are taken per se, that is apart from his meta-philosophy, they might often simply appear as the intuitions of a genius, who, even in the best case, only developed them in a rough and ready fashion. But if meta-philosophy assumes the upper hand, then the objects of Wittgenstein’s philosophical research (“the concepts of meaning, of understanding, of a proposition, of logic, the foundations of mathematics, states of consciousness, and other things,” as listed in the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 6) risk appearing as merely randomly chosen pretexts. If we hope to acquire even a partial understanding of those issues which, in Wittgenstein’s own words, had occupied him for at least 16 years, then this second approach must be deemed foreign to the spirit of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

One of the clearest merits of Gargani’s book, as is the case in much of his previous work, is precisely to have avoided the false choice I have just indicated. Gargani shows us how much Wittgenstein can teach us. For example, we can learn the important distinction between metaphor and secondary meaning, a distinction which is drawn not *in spite of* Wittgenstein’s meta-philosophy, but *because of* it or, better, because of the philosophical practice promoted by this meta-philosophy itself. Clearly, despite this merit, not all problems have been avoided. When Wittgenstein claims in the *Philosophical Investigations* that in philosophy “[w]e must do away with all *explanation*” (I, § 109), should we infer that every explanation must be banned if we want to be coherent “Wittgenstenians,” or if we want to be – without further qualification – philosophers? Would a philosophy in which we wished to explain or deduce, solely because of that, already cease to be philosophy? Who precisely are the “we” to whom Wittgenstein refers, the “we” who are urged by Wittgenstein to join him in his ban on all explanations?

It must be noted that it is exactly *these* questions that do concern our philosopher. In *The Blue Book*, for instance, Wittgenstein himself asks whether and how what he calls “philosophy” is related to what used to be described in these terms. The answer is formulated in a tentative manner: “One might say that the subject we are dealing is

<sup>41</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1958<sup>2</sup>, I, § 126.

one of the heirs [that is, one, not the only sole legitimate heir] of the subject which is used to be called 'philosophy.'<sup>43</sup> But, as he precisely puts it: "one might say" this, not "one must say" this. Either way the answer depends on which analogies we prefer and which we regard as misleading. However, it should not go unnoticed that "[i]t is, in most cases, impossible to show an exact point where an analogy begins to mislead us" (p. 28). Why should the very analogy with theory always or in principle be regarded as misleading for philosophy? And furthermore, to insist on this point, should we really presume that "theory" has always had a single meaning? After all, as his readers well know, it has been one of Gargani's merits from the beginning that he recognizes the "affinity between Wittgenstein's philosophical analysis and the methodologies advanced by Hertz and Boltzmann's theories in theoretical physics."<sup>44</sup>

With these brief remarks I would suggest that the target identified by Gargani's book and by the authors of *New Wittgenstein* – namely the idea that Wittgenstein, more or less consciously, presents certain philosophical theories – on the one hand is far too general and indistinct, and on the other hand implies a notion of theory which is both too rigid and too restricted. In some famous passages of the *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, Wittgenstein suggests that we should deal with language games as if they were models, "as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities" (I, § 130). It is only in this way, Wittgenstein adds, that we can, firstly, avoid treating them dogmatically as "a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond" (I, § 131) and, secondly, avoid mistaking "the possibility of a comparison" for "a state of affairs of the highest generality" (I, § 104).

Gargani's book is perfectly in tune with Wittgenstein's remarks and with the anti-dogmatic animus that inspires them. One must critically (or negatively) resist the temptation, typical of philosophy, to "predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it" (I, § 104). There is no doubt about this. But this critical-negative attitude has also a positive counterpart: when it does not mistake its models for reality, philosophy is capable of "throwing light" or, as Wittgenstein puts it in another paragraph, of clearing up "the ground of language" (I, § 118). In my opinion many Wittgensteinian scholars insist only on the critical-negative side, fearing that they would otherwise violate Wittgenstein's supposed ban on theory. In his book Gargani never forgets that for Wittgenstein philosophy is also called upon to "throw light" on things. In this respect, despite some of his explicit statements, Gargani helps us recognise the "theoretical" side of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

As we have already indicated, in his latest book Gargani explicitly endorses the line of interpretation proposed by the contributors to *The New Wittgenstein*, although he does not always succeed in making this entirely clear. In one passage he even seems to ascribe to them the view, which is actually persistently challenged by Cora Diamond and James Conant, that for the *Tractatus* nonsense would be what "breaks the rules of logical syntax" (p. xiv). Yet in truth, for Diamond and Conant, this would

<sup>43</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, edited by R. Rhees, Oxford: Blackwell, 1969<sup>2</sup>, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> P. 61 of the book under review; Gargani also insists on this affinity in his classic book *Introduzione a Wittgenstein*, Bari: Laterza 1973.

be Rudolf Carnap's view or, with the appropriate qualifications, Gilbert Ryle's view, but certainly not Wittgenstein's, as we can see from the following proposition in the *Tractatus*: "Frege says that any legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense. And I say that any possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and, if it has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a *meaning* to some of its constituents" (prop. 5.4733). In any case, and regardless of the complex interpretative details, Gargani endorses the essential point: if the propositions of the *Tractatus* are nonsense, following the well-known proposition 6.54, this is not because they try to say what is ineffable on principle. Nonsense in the *Tractatus* as such is neither more nor less relevant than any other nonsense. One of Gargani's conclusions is that "the difficult themes of ethics, aesthetics and meaning of existence must not be referred to ineffable structures or entities" (p. xiv). Who is Gargani referring to here, or who does he think Wittgenstein may be referring to in this connection? There is no easy answer to this question. But, from the perspective of *The New Wittgenstein*, it is even less simple to say anything on those "difficult themes." Actually, Gargani describes as "sterile and pedantic" the attempts of those scholars who "in dealing with the *Tractatus* values have striven to substantiate ethical and aesthetic values (even if they are defined as ineffable) by reference to the philosophical and literary works familiar to Wittgenstein, such as Dostoevskij, Tolstoj, Kierkegaard, and so on" (p. xiv). Here one of the flaws of *New Wittgenstein* becomes evident: the temptation to elevate Wittgenstein into an entirely unique and exceptional figure without context or background. This may be a form of splendid isolation, but it is still a form of isolation. Curiously enough, Gargani himself is tempted to take this path. I say "curiously" because Gargani has always, and distinctively, read Wittgenstein in relationship to the philosophical and cultural complexities that constitute the background of his philosophy. Surely, if to "give substance" means to look for some possible "metaphysical definitions of values" (p. xv) in Dostoyevsky, Tolstoj, Kierkegaard or any others, then Gargani is absolutely right. It would be like taking the *Tractatus* as an empty box to be filled up from the outside. Gargani is also right when he denies that in the *Tractatus* one can find a "normative" ethics, that is, an ethics "ossified in pre-established and preformed precepts" (p. xv). But this is not the case in the *Tractatus* where, as Gargani reminds us, in agreement with some of the authors of *New Wittgenstein*, "ethics [...] is grasped as a performative process which allows the ethical component to light up while it is enacted" (Ibid.). This is certainly an evocative passage but what does it exactly tell us about ethics? As I understand it, Gargani ascribes Wittgenstein a number of thoughts such as the following: ethics pervades life, it is not something (like a value, a norm, a command) that values or orients life from the outside; in the first place, ethics means giving up the search for its *raison d'être* in observance and compliance with a value (or norm, or command) from outside; there is no transition from non-ethics to ethics; if ethics is present, it goes along with our life, and is like our life; in ethics what is primarily required is courage, the courage not to tell ourselves stories about ourselves. We can certainly agree that all these claims can be found in Wittgenstein. But the point is how all this is told us, and from where we are told this. I think we are still a long way from a satisfactory answer.

Even with regard to those secondary studies that focus on Wittgenstein's work after the *Tractatus*, the ones to which the book is mainly devoted, Gargani's approach is generally characterised by a refusal to find "a theoretical project or a doctrinal body"

(p. xv) in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Even in this case one should ask whether the idea of theory adopted here is not altogether too generic and narrow. The point on which Gargani insists is nonetheless extremely interesting: for instance, Augustine's well-known picture of language, with which the *Philosophical Investigations* begins, should not be treated as a theoretical concept to be rejected, as most of the interpretations suggest. Gargani writes: "Wittgenstein does not consider or argue against the model of language presented by Augustine [actually, in the passage from the *Confessions* that Wittgenstein quotes, Augustine does not recommend a model of language, but he recounts his learning of the language as if it was a real memory], [...] for his analysis aims instead at discovering possible language games which might make such models plausible" (p. xvi). This should not surprise us if we consider, as Wittgenstein invites us to do, language games as models or terms of comparison. The model drawn from Augustine is not false. Rather, the point is that "not everything that we call language" (I, § 3) is described by it: this model can surely be used, "but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe" (I, § 3). Now, if we define "theory" as the claim that our model may describe and enclose everything or reality in its entirety, then Wittgenstein's philosophy is certainly and radically anti-theoretical; but if we include the construction of models as part of theoretical reflection, along with the warning that a model is, precisely, just a model, that is "an object of comparison [...], not [...] a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond" (I, § 131), then the term "theory" is not inappropriate for Wittgenstein's philosophy.

On the whole Gargani thinks that some of the most significant parts of Wittgenstein's work after the *Tractatus* might be linked with this profoundly anti-theoretical orientation. And, above all, this is true if we attend to what he defines as "the process of language extension" (p. xvii), of its meanings and concepts. The key point is that this extension is not founded on a supposed intrinsic relationship between concepts or meanings, which should be just recognized and made explicit. Gargani remarks that, as a matter of fact, among concepts there is only a relation that "is casually established by the language praxis," that is by the "constructive praxis" of language (p. xvii). Thus Wittgenstein succeeds in dispelling a rigid view of concepts and the related idea that to achieve understanding we always require "predetermined and pre-arranged rules, models and paradigms" (p. 16). The so called "dissolution of analyticity" (p. xvii) should be recognized as central to the later Wittgenstein. Again and again Gargani insists on this point: concepts neither join nor engage one another (like "as with a cogwheel" – the image comes from *Philosophical Investigations*, I, §136) in an "intrinsic and compulsory way" (p. xvii).

The many penetrating pages that in several chapters of the book Gargani devotes to these aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy are very instructive and rich in examples which prevent the interpretation of Wittgenstein from being all too self-enclosed. Philosophically, Gargani draws on many arguments used by those scholars who interpreted Wittgenstein in a conventionalist perspective or in a conventionalist sense, while acknowledging that the kind of conventionalism at stake here is not abstractly stipulative, but rooted, so to speak, in practice and context. The path he follows is arduous but I believe unavoidable and advantageous.

The second major theme that Gargani finds in Wittgenstein comes into play and finds its justification in this context: namely the attention which is paid to "the physi-

ognomic, gestural, sonorous, musical, material aspects of language” (p. xviii). As the subtitle of his work makes clear, this is the theme at the heart of the book. Thus Gargani can say that “the issues concerning the meaning of propositions, the distinction between factual and value utterances, the distinction between the physical and mental element, between the psychological and the natural” (p. xix) can be brought back to this perspective and clarified in this context. I consider these to be the most original pages in Gargani’s book, and they deserve to be carefully assessed by anyone interested in understanding Wittgenstein and his contribution to a better, richer, and – to use a term dear to Gargani – less “petrified” understanding of language.

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