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BETWEEN ETHICS AND AESTHETICS AGAINST THE MYTH OF REDUCTIVE THERAPEUTISM

ABSTRACT. My paper is about Andronico's work on the connection between Ethics and Aesthetics in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. In particular, I will focus on the role that her ideas play against the therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy. I will argue that, contrary to such a reading, the ethical tone of Wittgenstein's philosophy should be understood as a consequence of aesthetical education, that is, the sharpening of the eye in order to see differently. I will show that (1) philosophy is a specific kind of theory and that (2) Cavell's notion of the rediscovery of the ordinary does not properly grasp the ethical force of Wittgenstein's remarks.

KEYWORDS. Wittgenstein, Morphology, Aesthetics, Quietism, Therapeutic Reading.

I. Introduction.

In her *Ethics and Aesthetics are One: how to escape the Myth of the Ordinary*, Andronico explicitly argues against a particular ethical reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy which is mainly endorsed by interpreters close to the New Wittgenstein trend, *i.e.*, the resolute interpreters¹. Her «uneasiness stems from what [she] would like to call the *uncontrolled use* that [...] [they] make of certain words in order to

¹ M. ANDRONICO, *Ethics and Aesthetics are One: how to escape the Myth of the Ordinary*, in *The Darkness of This Time: Ethics, Politics and Religion in Wittgenstein*, ed. by L. Perissinotto, Milano, Mimesis, 2013, pp. 25-37.

buttress their preferred picture of Wittgenstein's philosophical work»². But what is an "uncontrolled use"? If we stick to Wittgenstein's terminology, "uncontrolled use" is the same as "metaphysical use" and a metaphysical use is produced when the distinction between grammatical and factual investigations gets obliterated (Z § 458)³.

Given this, at least two things should be expounded: (1) the main features of the New Wittgenstein scholarship and (2) the words whose use is uncontrolled, or metaphysical. I will deal with this broad issue by focusing on the ethical reading provided by some of the New Wittgensteinians and the key words that are employed in this context. Nowadays, indeed, there is a tendency to emphasise the ethical tone of Wittgenstein's philosophical work. In his *On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy* Conant says that for Wittgenstein «all philosophical thinking and writing has [...] its ethical aspect» and that learning to think better is an important means to becoming a better human being⁴. Surely, it might be tempting to give an ethical reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy due to some ideological or biographical reasons: Wittgenstein seemed to have always lived in a state of moral tension, a sort of stoic attitude towards life that actually had an impact upon his conception of philosophical work⁵. Moreover, Wittgenstein himself wrote to L. von Ficker that his first work, *The Tractatus logico-philosophicus*⁶, had an ethical point, that is, refraining from talking about what is usually called "ethics", for ethics «can only be delimited from within, by being silent about it»⁷. However, these are not the ways in which the ethical tone is understood by the authors under scrutiny. Followers of the resolute reading rather look at Cavell's interpretation, where the ethical tone of Wittgenstein's

² ANDRONICO, *Ethics and Aesthetics are One: how to escape the Myth of the Ordinary*, cit., p. 27.

³ I use abbreviations to refer to Wittgenstein's works. When I refer to a paragraph, I use the symbol "§" before the number of the specific paragraph. When there is no "§", I refer to page numbers. All abbreviations are found at the end of the paper under the section VI *Wittgenstein's works and abbreviations*.

⁴ J. CONANT, *On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy*, in *The Possibilities of Sense*, ed. by J. Whittaker, New York, Palgrave, 2002, pp. 85-129.

⁵ R. MONK, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. The Duty of Genius*, London, Penguin Books, 1990.

⁶ From now on, "Tractatus".

⁷ ANDRONICO, *Ethics and Aesthetics are One: how to escape the Myth of the Ordinary*, cit., p. 25.

writings is extended to the whole of his production⁸. According to Cavell, even though Wittgenstein does not actually deal with ethics as a philosophical branch, «there is a moral or *religious* demand» in the *Philosophical Investigations*⁹. In particular, Cavell associates the ethical tone of Wittgenstein's philosophy to the rediscovery of what he calls "the ordinary", that is, our criteria and their grammatical relations¹⁰. However, what is "the ordinary" and whose "ordinary" are we supposed to rediscover? What does "think better" and "better human being" mean?

The resolute readers take Cavell's notion of the rediscovery of the ordinary to mean a kind of cure, or therapy for the philosophical sickness: the ethical dimension would consist in curing the philosophical sickness by rediscovering ordinary facts about language use and human nature. The ethical tone of philosophy is then associated to the alleged therapeutic character of Wittgenstein's philosophy. For this reason, I will refer to such an interpretative trend as the "therapeutic reading" of Wittgenstein's later philosophy or, simply "Therapeutism".

In this paper I will argue that the ethical tone of Wittgenstein's philosophy should be rather understood as a consequence of aesthetical education, that is, the sharpening of the eye in order to see differently. In order to reach my goal, I will engage with two of Andronico's insights: Wittgenstein's morphological-comparative *philosophical* method, and the closeness between ethics, aesthetics and philosophical investigation in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Firstly, I will present two main aspects of Therapeutism: (1) the reductive therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy, and (2) the characterisation of the ethical tone as a rediscovery of our human nature in order to become better human beings. Secondly, I will reject both points using Andronico's insights. In particular, I will show that, against (1), Wittgenstein's morphological method could be seen as a philosophical method, hence a proper *pars construens* of

⁸ S. CAVELL, *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford, Oxford Univ. Pr., 1979.

⁹ S. CAVELL, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1988, p. 40.

¹⁰ S. CAVELL, "The Argument of the Ordinary. Scenes of Instruction in Wittgenstein and in Kripke", in ID., *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, Chicago and London, The Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1990, pp. 64-100: p. 68.

Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical reflection and that, against (2), what is to be human is a "general fact" that should be taken into account in the philosophical investigation aiming at clarity, rather than the end of the investigation itself. I will conclude that, if there is an ethical import of Wittgenstein's philosophy – and I think there is – it should not be understood as a slightly Aristotelian pursuing of a better life; rather, it can be a non-philosophical development of a conceptual clarification which is reached through the education of sensitivity.

II. *The therapeutic reading: two aspects.*

In her introduction to *The New Wittgenstein*, Alice Crary defines such an interpretative trend a bunch of papers which share certain unorthodox views about Wittgenstein's conception of the aim of philosophy¹¹.

Wittgenstein's primary aim in philosophy is [...] a therapeutic one. These papers have in common an understanding of Wittgenstein as aspiring, not to advance metaphysical theories, but rather to help us work ourselves out of confusions we become entangled in when philosophizing.¹²

According to Wittgenstein, a metaphysical theory is advanced when we obliterate the distinction between grammatical and factual, or empirical investigations. In this sense, Wittgenstein's philosophical attitude is indeed anti-metaphysical. Contrary to Quine and contemporary scientific naturalism, Wittgenstein strongly rejects the continuity thesis between philosophy and science: they have different methods, objects and goals¹³. Already in the *Tractatus*, philosophy is located in a different drawer than natural sciences and proper doctrines: while natural sciences tell us something about the world

¹¹ A. Crary, R. Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein*, London, Routledge, 2000.

¹² Crary, Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein*, cit., p. 1.

¹³ According to the continuity thesis, philosophy should be continuous with science with respect to method, object and goal of the enquiry. Quine's naturalized epistemology is an example. Epistemology collapses into science, it «simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science», W.W.O. QUINE, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, Harvard, Harvard Univ. Pr., 1969, pp. 82-83.

through a factual or empirical investigation of it, «philosophy is not a body of doctrines but an activity» (TLP 4.112) which «aims at the logical clarification of thoughts» (TLP 4.111). Philosophy is not a doctrine but an activity aiming at clarity. In the *Philosophical Investigations*¹⁴ Wittgenstein specifies that such a clarity is conceptual and it is valuable in itself, as the goal of any philosophical, or grammatical investigation. It is in this context that a particular quietist interpretation of Wittgenstein seems appropriate. Brian Leiter defines Quietism a position according to which «philosophy can solve no problems; philosophy becomes a kind of *therapy*, dissolving philosophical problems, rather than solving them»¹⁵. Indeed, if philosophy is not a doctrine, it is essentially a-theoretical. Wittgenstein expresses in a clear and plain way what I have said so far in the following remark:

It was correct that our considerations must not be scientific ones. [...] And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light – that is to say, its purpose – from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; but they are solved through an insight into the workings of our language, and that in such a way that these workings are recognized *despite* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with. Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language. (PI § 109)

Two different types of investigations are sketched here: (1) the scientific one, associated to the concepts of theory, hypothesis, explanation, empirical problem and discovery; (2) the philosophical one, associated to the concepts of description, philosophical problem, misunderstanding, and insight into language functioning. Now, in order to better expound this metaphilosophical point, we need to clarify all these concepts, together with the ones of “solution”, “dissolution” and “therapy”. However, for the moment it is important to bear in mind such a general distinction between philosophy and science, where the a-theoretical character of philosophy is read in terms of an activity of clarification of the workings of our language in order

¹⁴ From now on “Investigations”.

¹⁵ B. Leiter (ed.), *The Future for Philosophy*, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 2004, p. 2.

to free ourselves from the misunderstandings that are embedded in language itself.

So far so good. The a-theoretical and anti-metaphysical character of Wittgenstein's philosophy is hardly rejected by the scholars. However, followers of Therapeutic go further and suggest a strict quietist reading ultimately influenced by Cavell's and McDowell's works. In particular, they put special emphasis on the word "illusion" and they conclude that, according to Wittgenstein, philosophical problems are not just something different from the empirical ones, but they are illusory; they are not problems at all. In the introduction of *Mind and World*, McDowell states that the spirit of his book is diagnostic, but the diagnostic nature of the enquiry is further defined as being able to unmask the appearance of philosophical obligations as illusion¹⁶. Given this, I will deal with two aspects of the therapeutic reading¹⁷: (1) reductive Therapeutic¹⁸; (2) ethical tone of Wittgenstein's philosophy as a work on oneself.

(1) The first aspect stands on two (by no means innocent) philosophical moves: firstly, from the non-empirical nature of philosophical problems it is concluded that philosophical problems are mere illusions. Secondly, from the rejection of the continuity thesis it is concluded that there is no philosophical method. Consequently, we can summarise the position with three theses: (1a) Philosophical problems are illusions, that is, there are no genuine philosophical problems; (1b) philosophy can only dissolve problems, but not resolve them; (1c) Wittgenstein is a non-interventionist philosopher. Philosophical problems are just illusions and philosophy is useful insofar as it enables to recognize those problems as illusory, thereby dissolving them. Philosophical problems, then, are dissolved rather than solved because they are not proper problems at all and they cannot

¹⁶ J. McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard Univ. Pr., 1996.

¹⁷ I do not intend to reduce the therapeutic, or resolute reading to these two points, nor I intend to give a complete account of this scholarship. I am just focusing on what is needed in order to sustain my point.

¹⁸ The expression is found in D. MOYAL-SHARROCK, *The Myth of the Quietist Wittgenstein*, in *Wittgenstein and scientism*, ed. by J. Beale, I.J. Kidd, New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 152-174. I am using the expression "reductive" to refer to the extremely deconstructive interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy, which is reductive for it stands on a simplification of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks. I am not referring to the contemporary debate about reductionism and eliminativism.

be envisaged as solvable through argument or reasoning as proper problems are. In his *Wittgenstein's Metaphilosophy*, Paul Horwich claims that, according to Wittgenstein, the philosopher should just remove the confusion responsible for philosophical misunderstandings; however, once this job is done, no positive new theory is left. There is nothing truly constructive. The aim of philosophy seems to be the repudiation of itself: philosophy reaches its goal when there is no philosophy left. «The net result will be simply that we have cured ourselves of a particular tendency to get mixed up»¹⁹. In a similar vein, Cora Diamond claims that, from a Wittgensteinian point of view, «our own linguistic constructions, cut free from the constraints of their ordinary functioning, take us in: the characteristic form of the illusion is precisely of philosophy as an area of inquiry. [...] the conviction that philosophy involves illusion of a particular kind»²⁰.

Clearly, followers of the therapeutic reading look, among others, at paragraph 133 of the *Investigations* as a cornerstone passage of Wittgenstein's Quietism:

The clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.

The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. – Instead, a method is now demonstrated by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off. – Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. (PI § 133)

(2) Indeed, from (1) it follows that philosophical work is not a work about philosophy. If philosophy has no proper object then philosophical work is not about ideas, arguments and theses, but it is rather a work on oneself. This is a point ultimately inspired by Cavell.

What kind of work is it? What is the ultimate result of this work on oneself? I briefly answer to these questions by focusing on two key expressions: “ordinary” and “transformation of life”. First of all,

¹⁹ P. HORWICH, *Wittgenstein's Metaphilosophy*, Oxford, Clarendon Pr., 2012, p. 6.

²⁰ C. DIAMOND, *The Realistic Spirit. Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Pr., 1995, pp. 70, 184. See also J. CONANT, *Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use*, «Philosophical Investigations», 21, 3, 1998, pp. 221-250.

Cavell is interested in the *Investigations* especially to the extent that it represents an original response to skepticism, «one that undertakes not to deny skepticism's power (on the contrary) but to diagnose the source (or say the possibility) of that power, to ask [...] what it is about human language that allows us, even invites us, to repudiate its everyday functioning, to find it wanting»²¹. This is precisely what he calls, in another place, “the argument of the ordinary”: the human drive both to affirm and to deny our criteria, our language, our grammar²². In this regard, Wittgenstein's originality would be to take the drift toward skepticism as the *discovery* of the everyday, which is something that skepticism would deny. The ordinary, thus, is not the given but the task of the philosopher²³. Followers of Therapeutic locate the ethical dimension of philosophical reflection in the rediscovery and acceptance of the ordinary: both rediscovery and acceptance entail that the philosopher becomes responsible for one's own words, thereby curing his own metaphysical sickness.

Secondly, the rediscovery of the ordinary is considered a «morally valuable task»²⁴ because it brings about the element of the transformation of life. «When my reasons come to an end [...] I am thrown back upon myself, upon my nature as it has so far shown itself»²⁵. The acceptance of the ordinary has a moral value in so far as it enables the philosopher to take responsibility over the use of words he recognizes as ordinary, thereby becoming a *better* person. It is in this sense that we should understand Conant's claim that «learning to think better [...] is an important means to becoming a better – *i.e.* to becoming (what Wittgenstein calls) “a real” – “human being”»²⁶. This is the ethical import of Wittgenstein's philosophical therapy,

²¹ S. CAVELL, *The Uncanniness of the Ordinary*, in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values VIII 1988*, ed. by S. M. McMurrin, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Pr., 2011, pp. 81-118: p. 107.

²² CAVELL, *The Argument of the Ordinary. Scenes of Instruction in Wittgenstein and in Kripke*, cit., p. 92.

²³ «In Wittgenstein's philosophizing he seeks the source in language of this torture and repudiation – what it is in language that makes this seem necessary, and what about language makes it possible. He speaks of our being bewitched by language; hence his therapeutic procedures are to disenchant us», CAVELL, *The Uncanniness of the Ordinary*, cit., p. 97.

²⁴ ANDRONICO, *Ethics and Aesthetics are one: how to escape the Myth of the Ordinary*, cit., p. 33.

²⁵ CAVELL, *The Claim of Reason*, cit., p. 124.

²⁶ CONANT, *On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy*, cit., p. 90.

according to the followers of Therapeutism. Such an import inherently connects philosophy and personal life, for the basic thought is that you philosophize when you work on your own misconceptions and you rediscover something essential about yourself, about your human nature; this process has an ethical import because it enables the subject to become a better human being²⁷.

In what follows I will present my point through a rejection of the above two aspects: First, I will argue against point (1) by presenting what I think to be the *pars construens* of Wittgenstein's philosophy, that is, the morphological-comparative method. In this section I will also throw some light upon the already mentioned concepts of solution/dissolution, explanation/description, empirical problems/philosophical problems, doctrine/therapy. Secondly, I will reject point (2) by showing that the ethical aspect is rather a non-philosophical consequence of the philosophical enquiry, *i.e.* concept clarification and perspicuous representation. I will not deny that there can be a connection between philosophical work and personal life; however, I will try to show that such a connection should not be understood – at least from a Wittgensteinian perspective – as the pursuing of a better life, and that the recognition of some general facts about our human nature is not the end of the philosophical enquiry but it is something that should be kept in mind while philosophizing.

III. Wittgenstein and morphology.

III. I. Philosophy and science.

I think that the main problem of a reductively therapeutic reading is that, in the words of Moyal-Sharrock, «it gives all of Wittgenstein's philosophy an exclusively deconstructive or negative burden»²⁸. This interpretation had a huge impact on both the academic and non-academic perception of Wittgenstein and his philosophy: one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century is often considered someone who actually did not say anything substantial and who can be

²⁷ In Conant's words: «The issue here [...] is at once personal and philosophical. [...] The spirit of a person shows itself in the spirit of his philosophy, which in turn shows itself in the way he philosophizes», *ivi*, pp. 88-89.

²⁸ MOYAL-SHARROCK, *The Myth of the Quietist Wittgenstein*, *cit.*, p. 154.

interpreted as we like. Nothing can be really said about him because he did not sustain any real theses that can be accepted or rejected. Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks on the a-theoretical nature of philosophy have been interpreted as a turn down, or abandon of philosophy itself.

Contrary to this interpretative tendency, I think that Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks are far less deconstructive than what it is supposed. In particular, the *pars destruens* is followed by a *pars construens* where Wittgenstein positively characterises philosophy as an activity with a specific object, goal and method. In order to see this, we should better contextualize his metaphilosophical remarks, that is, they must be understood together with his remarks on science and the critique of scientism: the main point is that Wittgenstein is not against theory *tout court*, but he is against the continuity thesis between philosophy and science. This provides the useful framework against which we should consider his idea that philosophy is not a doctrine and it is a-theoretical.

First of all, Wittgenstein employs the notion of theory in a very specific way; theories are scientific theories. In this sense, stating that philosophy is not theoretical means that it is not a scientific theory; it is not a doctrine given the notion of doctrine provided by the realm of natural science. The distinction is, in a certain sense, a categorical one. The concepts of solution and explanation are tied to the concept of empirical problem: sciences are *doctrines* that have a particular worldly phenomenon as a proper object, that is, they deal with factual, or empirical questions. The goal of sciences is to *explain* such phenomenon, where explanation stands for "causal explanation": the scientific method consists in construing *theories* in order to discover the hidden *causes* of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Philosophy is not a doctrine because, contrary to science, it *describes* the ordinary use of linguistic expressions belonging to a particular language and it aims at what Wittgenstein calls the *übersichtlichen Darstellung* (PI § 122), *i.e.*, a perspicuous representation of the logic of language, in order to *dissolve* conceptual misunderstandings. The word "dissolution" is useful in order to distinguish the philosophical enquiry from the scientific one: we cannot properly talk about solutions, given Wittgenstein's notion of solution, because philosophy does not respond to factual problems and, rather than looking at the hidden causes of phenomena, it looks at the *reasons* of particular linguistic practices.

Secondly, it is improper to conclude that there is no philosophical method simply from the fact that no scientific method can be used in philosophy. This “can” is, again, a logical, or categorical one. Wittgenstein is not against science; he wants to show the danger of employing the model of science in any domain of human enquiry and thought. In other words, he rejects scientism²⁹. Rather than suggesting the “anarchic” idea of an enquiry without any method, Wittgenstein seems to suggest that the particular method has to be considered with regard to the specific problem it should resolve: if the problem is conceptual, or grammatical, then a conceptual enquiry is what is needed. If the problem is empirical, then an empirical investigation is needed. If I want to know the chemical structure of a lump of sugar, I need to employ methods coming from chemistry. If I want to calculate the acceleration of a massive body, then I need to refer to some laws of fundamental physics. If I need to find a cure for a new and dangerous virus, I need to research in the medical field. However, if I need some conceptual clarification on the meaning of the word “sugar”, or “body”, then a different kind of tool must be used: a philosophical, or conceptual one. The main problem is, again, the temptation to philosophize using the methods of science, which is precisely what the continuity thesis considers desirable.

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. 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”. (BB 18, my emphasis)

Indeed, Wittgenstein explicitly says only that philosophy is not a matter of explanation and deduction. This point is clearly expressed in the *Investigations* too, where he says that philosophy «neither *explains* nor *deduces* anything» (PI § 126, my emphasis)³⁰. This does not mean that there cannot be proper philosophical arguments; on the contrary, Wittgenstein does make use of arguments, especially the

²⁹ See J. Beale, I.J. Kidd (eds.), *Wittgenstein and scientism*, New York, Routledge, 2017.

³⁰ See also NTB 16: «In philosophy there are no deductions: *it is purely descriptive*».

*reductio ad absurdum*³¹. The remark only states that philosophical arguments are not deductive and they do not aim at explaining phenomena like natural sciences do.

III.II. The method of philosophy.

Given this, I do think that Wittgenstein's *pars destruens* is followed by a *pars construens*, that is, his conception of philosophy as a conceptual enquiry aimed at giving a perspicuous representation of our ordinary concepts. Therefore, the therapy is not against philosophy *tout court*; rather, it tries to cure a certain particular way of philosophizing: philosophy as disguised science. It is true that philosophy is not a theory in the sense of scientific theories that aim to explain the essences of phenomena, but it is nevertheless something in its own right: an activity of conceptual elucidation which has a goal and a proper method.

Andronico's main work, *Antropologia e metodo morfologico. Studio su Wittgenstein*, is precisely a complete and accurate enquiry of this particular philosophical method³². Two key words must be kept in mind: "morphology" and "anthropology". They refer to two distinct elements of the method which should be distinguished for the sake of clarity: 1. The comparative strategy; 2. The employment of imaginary cases.

1. First of all, Andronico managed to see that a key historical source was missing in order to understand what the later Wittgenstein was after: Goethe's morphology of plants, together with Spengler's work *The Decline of the West*³³. In *The Metamorphosis of Plants*,

³¹ We could read in this way Wittgenstein's anti-platonist remarks and his remarks against private language. See D.A. MCDUGALL, *Is Wittgenstein Presenting a Reductio Ad Absurdum Argument in the 'Private Language' Sections of Philosophical Investigations §§ 243–315?*, «The philosophical Quarterly», 67, 268, 2017, pp. 552-570; T. McNALLY, *Wittgenstein's Anti-Platonist Argument*, «Philosophical Investigations», 39, 3, 2016, pp. 281-301.

³² M. ANDRONICO, *Antropologia e metodo morfologico. Studio su Wittgenstein*, Napoli, La città del sole, 1991.

³³ *Antropologia e metodo morfologico* is still a key text for the connection between Wittgenstein's later philosophy and morphology. Other relevant works are B. MCGUINNESS, *In the shadow of Goethe: Wittgenstein's intellectual project*, «European Review», 10, 4, 2002, pp. 447-457; F. Breithaupt, R. Raatzsch, B. Kremberg (eds.), *Goethe and Wittgenstein. Seeing the Worlds Unity in Its Variety (Wittgenstein Studien 5)*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2003; M. BRUSOTTI,

Goethe argues that all different plants develop out of an original plant – what he calls *Urpflanze* in his *Italian Journey*³⁴. Such original plant, or organ, contains all the possible variations actually manifested by the existing flora. The main idea is that nature does not create any new organ; rather, new organs and plants come from the interaction and modification of the organs we are already familiar with. For example, a stamen is seen by Goethe as developing out of several transformations of petals through gradual passages. These passages are intermediate steps which are invisible to an inexperienced eye: they are similar to the previous and subsequent ones, but they might be very different from the ends of the transformation. Indeed, we see a petal, we see a stamen and we might perfectly think that no connection exists between them, due to their lack of similarity. On the contrary, a good and well-trained botanist is able to see all these transformations as legitimate components of the organ under scrutiny. The morphological method, in this sense, enables to see how certain organs are different while related, just like the stamen is very different but internally related to the petal. We come to see this by lying bare the connections between the elements of the chain.

Wittgenstein's philosophical method is a comparative strategy extensively influenced by Goethe's morphological method. The analysis of language is construed through the analysis of limited portions of language – language games – which are compared with each other in order to bring out the rules that govern the use of terms and expressions. From a methodological point of view, language games stand as «*objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language» (PI § 130). Just like focusing on intermediate links enables to see how different plants are related, comparing different language games enables to see differences and similarities between different and still related concepts too. In this way, concepts can be seen as internally developing through family resemblances (PI §§ 66-67). At the end of the comparison we should be able to better recognize forms of

Wittgenstein, Frazer und die "ethnologische Betrachtungsweise", Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014.

³⁴ W. J. GOETHE, *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790), intr. by G.L. Miller, Cambridge, MIT Pr., 2009; W. J. GOETHE, *Italian Journey* (1886), transl. by W.H. Auden, E. Mayer, London, Collins, 1962.

expressions which we already use but whose usage is not clear to us because we regularly employ them.

2. However, it is important to note that such a comparison can be made between actual linguistic usage and invented ones. This is why the figure of the anthropologist comes to play. Wittgenstein often asks us to imagine situations where language and concepts are very different from the ones we are actually adopting in conjunction with differences in human nature and nature in general; he clarifies the use of our concepts through the construction of imaginary cases where invented tribes and people have strange and curious practices. Wittgenstein's later writings are permeated by the use of these imaginary cases. In *The Brown Book*, for example, Wittgenstein asks us to imagine a tribe with two different systems of counting (BB 94), a population where no expression like "water is in the glass" is used (BB 100), or a tribe where the physical state of people is described with expressions such as "he can run fast", or "he can throw the spear far" independently from the fact that people can actually run fast or throw the spear fast, for those expressions are used in the way we use, relatively, "he has bulging legs muscles" and "he has large biceps" (BB 101-102). These examples should help to clarify, respectively, our actual system of counting, the expressions we use to locate physical objects, and our concept of power ("can", "be able to").

The comparative strategy helps respecting Wittgenstein's anti-causal principle of the logical-grammatical analysis. As rightly stated by Andronico, Wittgenstein does not endorse causal externalism, according to which concepts formation would be caused by causal relations with the external world³⁵. The point of the philosophical enquiring is not «to explain a language-game by means of our experiences, but to take account of a language-game» (PI § 655), that is, treating it in the analysis as a «proto-phenomena» and simply saying «*this is the language-game that is being played*» (PI § 654).

The employment of imaginary cases, on the other hand, allows to have what I here call a "non-metaphysical kind of estrangement": it helps to look at our language games in an objective way³⁶ even if we

³⁵ ANDRONICO, *Antropologia e metodo morfologico*, cit., p. 251.

³⁶ A similar point was later made by M. BRUSOTTI, "An 'anthropological' way of looking at philosophical problems". Wittgenstein, Frazer and the art of comparison, in C. Kanzian, J. Mitterer, K. Neges (eds.), *Realism – Relativism –*

are inside the system *without* entailing a disembodiment of the observer, that is, without separating the observer from the system he is part of. This is one of the reasons why, according to Andronico, Wittgenstein makes a comparison between the philosopher and the anthropologist (PG 45, CV 45): looking at the varieties of uses helps understanding our actual uses. Wittgenstein presents different imaginary cases in order to shed some light on our actual uses by looking at the contrast between ordinary uses and imaginary ones. This is what Bouveresse calls «imaginative anthropology»³⁷.

IV. “Working on one’s own conception”: a different kind of theory.

As we have seen, the aim of the comparative strategy – hence of the philosophical investigation – is to produce a perspicuous representation of our concepts and their relations. This representation can be considered to be a theory if we employ the more original and etymological sense of the word: *theoria*, a way of looking at things. I will now argue that here lies the connection between philosophical enquiry and aesthetics, where the word “aesthetics” refers to *aesthesis*, *i.e.*, the perceptual hook onto the world. In this final section I will expound two points: 1. The closeness between ethics and aesthetics; 2. A revision of the ethical tone of Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

1. In general terms, Wittgenstein seems to make a connection between ethics and aesthetics, where aesthetics is in turn connected to philosophy and conceptual enquiries: both philosophy and aesthetics produce a certain sharpening of the eye, *i.e.*, the education of the subject’s sensitivity. But let us take a step back, and see where and when Wittgenstein makes such a connection.

The closeness between ethics and aesthetics is already expressed in the *Tractatus*. In this work, Wittgenstein writes that ethics and aesthetics are «one and the same» because they are both transcendental (TLP 6.421). Indeed, just like the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, the work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis* (NTB 7.10.1916). In this context, Wittgenstein employs the

Constructivism. Proceedings of the 38th International Ludwig Wittgenstein-symposium, Kirchberg am Wechsel, 9-15 Aug. 2015, pp. 35-37.

³⁷ J. BOUVERESSE, *Wittgenstein antropologo*, in RFGB, 1975, pp. 59-92, p. 63.

word “aesthetics” to refer to the work of art and what he thinks to be the right attitude to it³⁸. However, things are different if we look at the only later work where Wittgenstein explicitly addresses ethics: the *Lecture on Ethics*. Here Wittgenstein employs Moore’s definition of ethics as «the general enquiry into what is valuable» and he intends to include in this notion of ethics also «what is commonly understood to belong to the subject matter of aesthetics» (LOE 137)³⁹. Now, what is the subject matter of aesthetics is a controversial issue⁴⁰. Wittgenstein’s remarks on this topic are often fragmentary. Here I want to focus – as Andronico does – on the remarks where Wittgenstein envisages a «queer resemblance between a philosophical investigation (perhaps especially in mathematics) and an aesthetic one» (CV 25)⁴¹. According to Andronico, Wittgenstein’s later remarks on aesthetics address two issues: 1. The meaning of aesthetic words and our understanding of aesthetical judgements; 2. The aesthetic experience, that is, the aesthetic disquiet and the satisfaction of it. It is within this second issue that we find aesthetics as perceptual hook and the ethical implications of it.

Aesthetic disquiet consists in being affected by certain sequences of sounds, or pictures, or words while feeling that something is wrong. Aesthetic satisfaction, instead, is often accompanied by words of approval such as “right”, “correct”; it is as if something “clicked” (LC III § 1). Wittgenstein interestingly states that the experience of disquiet cannot be satisfied through a causal explanation, that is, it is of no use to statistically and empirically enquire into the way people react (LC II § 11). On the contrary, what is needed is «certain comparisons – grouping together of certain cases» (LC IV § 2).

³⁸ ANDRONICO, *Ethics and aesthetics are one: How to escape the Myth of the Ordinary*, cit., p. 28.

³⁹ Wittgenstein has in mind Moore’s *Principia Ethica*. He slightly modifies Moore’s definition, for Moore defines ethics as the general enquiry into what is good.

⁴⁰ See M. BUDD, *Wittgenstein on Aesthetics*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, ed. by M. McGinn, O. Kuusela, Oxford, Oxford Univ. Pr., 2011, pp. 775-794; G. HAGBERG, *Wittgenstein’s Aesthetics*, 2007, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein-aesthetics/>; P.B. Lewis (ed.), *Wittgenstein, Aesthetics and Philosophy*, Edinburgh, Ashgate, 2004; S. SCHROEDER, *Wittgenstein and Aesthetics*, in *A Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. by H.-J. Glock, J. Hyman, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, pp. 612-626.

⁴¹ «I may find scientific questions interesting, but they never really grip me. Only conceptual and aesthetic questions do that» (CV 79).

Consequently, what is needed for the disquiet to be assuaged is a criterion that enables to know that the right thing, and not the wrong one, has happened; a sort of recognition capacity which can be learned and trained. Indeed, Wittgenstein employs the notions of rule and agreement in this context: «Finding that something is the right thing may come from having developed a feeling for the rules» (LC I § 15), that is, agreeing with someone about the right thing being right or correct. We learn rules and we then become gradually more and more sensitive to them: a tailor, for example, learns «how long a coat is to be, how wide the sleeve must be, etc. He learns rules – he is drilled – as in music you are drilled in harmony and counterpoint» (LC I § 15). But then the tailor might develop a feeling for the rules. If someone says “This coat is too short”, the tailor might reply “No, it is right according to the rules”. The tailor makes an aesthetic judgement according to the rules he has learned, and if he hadn’t learnt the rules, he would have not been able to make it (*Ibid.*). Wittgenstein makes another example, where the connection between aesthetics and philosophy gets more explicit:

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

In this case, the satisfaction is reached because the right word has been found, whereas in the tailor case, the satisfaction is reached because there is an agreement with regard to the coat’s right length. In both cases, «correctness and agreement support each other»⁴². Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy resembles aesthetical education for it is meant to educate the interlocutor’s sensitivity so that he comes to see better, or differently. Philosophy is characterised as an «activity persuading people to change their style of thinking» (LC III § 40), the way they see things. Indeed, Wittgenstein makes a comparison between philosophical tools and optical instruments:

⁴² ANDRONICO, *Ethics and Aesthetics are one: How to escape the Myth of the Ordinary*, cit., p. 30.

People who have never carried out an investigation of a philosophical sort [...] are not equipped with the right *optical instruments* for that sort of investigation or scrutiny. Almost as someone who is not used to searching in the forest for berries will not find any because his eye has not been *sharpened* for such things [...] similarly someone unpractised in philosophy passes by all the spots where difficulties lie hidden under the grass. (CV 33-34, my emphasis)

This is what Andronico calls «the aesthetic commitment of conceptual enquiry»⁴³: «work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more a work on oneself. On one's own conception. On how one sees things» (CV 24).

2. Reference to architecture is fundamental in order to understand what kind of work on oneself Wittgenstein has in mind. Indeed, Therapeutism argues that, according to Wittgenstein, philosophy, having no proper object, is a work on oneself. However, as we have seen, they interpret this work on oneself as the rediscovery of some facts about our nature. In the above passage, the work on oneself is a work on one's own conception, that is, the way we see things; this is about our sensitivity, this is precisely what aesthetics in the sense of *aesthesis* is about. I like to think about this point using an example which is not taken from Wittgenstein – and maybe it is not particularly precise – but that might be informative. If it is perceived so, then I hope it might at least help to understand the general point about aesthetical sensitivity I am making, independently from the exegesis of Wittgenstein's writings. Let us imagine a classical scene from American crime tv series: three people stand together in a room. They are all looking at a whiteboard filled with pictures, notes and written arrows that connect them. Everything is there, "horizontally", and all they have to do is to glimpse the right connections between those elements, without looking deeper for other ones beneath the surface. They need to see connections, similarities and differences, until something clicks. Similarly, a Wittgensteinian inspired grammatical analysis adopts a horizontal perspective on language: different portions of language stand there, in need of clarification and we do not need to look beneath the surface, for what we need to look at

⁴³ M. ANDRONICO, *The Aesthetic Commitment of Philosophical Analysis*, in R. Heinrich, et al. (eds.), *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts: Proceedings of the 33rd International Ludwig Wittgenstein-Symposium*, Kirchnerberg am Wechsel, 8-14 Aug. 2010, pp. 17-19.

«lies open to view, and [...] becomes *surveyable* through a process of ordering» (PI § 92). Working on oneself means working on the way we look at philosophical problems, for misunderstandings lie in some implicit deceptive pictures embedded in our language; only if we manage to see differently, we are then in a position to dissolve what looked to be puzzling. Only if we see differently, we then behave, or react differently.

It is in this sense that, I think, we should talk about the ethical tone of Wittgenstein's later philosophy: if you see differently, or better, you then behave differently, or better. Wittgenstein himself is quite explicit about this point in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, in a passage where he deals with the misleading idea of the essence of a picture. We are tempted to talk about essences of pictures especially in cases where we interact with someone who does not see what we think he should see by looking at a particular picture. We then utter expressions such as "don't you see a squirrel?!" (RPP II § 457). What Wittgenstein seems to suggest is that, rather than talking about the essence of a picture, we should rather reflect about the subject's recognition capacities; again, what we may call the subject's aesthetic sensitivity. If someone had not learned to read and write the Roman alphabet, then it would have been very difficult for him to copy something that I wrote down; the mastery of the Roman alphabet enables him to read what I wrote and reproduce it easily despite our different handwriting styles. As in the tailor example, the aesthetic experience stands on the mastery of certain rules. Now, Wittgenstein asks: «should I say: Whoever has learned these things would see my handwriting completely differently from someone who had not?» (RPP II § 458), *i.e.*, should I make a hypothesis? But then he answers:

What do we know about this? It could be that we gave someone that sheet of paper to copy before he learned to read and write; and then again, after he had learned to read and write. And then he might tell us: "Oh yes, now I see these lines completely differently." Possibly he might also explain: "Now all I really see is the writing that I'm reading; all else is floss, which doesn't concern me, and which I hardly notice." Well this means that he sees the picture differently – when, that is, he actually does react to it differently. (RPP II § 458)

The different reaction is the *criterion* for the different way of seeing the picture. This means that seeing and reacting are internally

tied. We find another interesting example in the *Last writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, which are the preliminary studies for part II of the *Investigations*. Here Wittgenstein is working with the famous duck-rabbit picture; an example of optical illusion.

Imagine a sign language in which a duck's head were a certain message, and a rabbit's head another one. Someone using this code accidentally draws a duck's head so that it can also be seen as a rabbit's head. The recipient of the message gives it the wrong interpretation: this will come out in his actions. But if he realizes that it can be seen *this way* and *that* he will not (also) behave differently, according to whichever aspect he happens just then to be seeing. (LW I § 178)

The different reaction is a consequence of a different way of seeing. I think we are now in a position to better judge Conant's Cavell-inspired notion of the rediscovery of the ordinary as a rediscovery of our human nature in order to become better human beings. As we have seen, part of the comparative strategy of Wittgenstein's philosophy consists in employing imaginary cases where a contrast is set between our actual use of words and very different ones. Now, the contrast is construed in the framework on an entire form of life, that is, the philosopher should focus on some very general facts of human nature and the environment, be it physical or cultural. This is the core of Wittgenstein's new anthropological turn in philosophy of language: the idea that language is not merely an activity governed by rules, as a calculus is, but a *human* activity. This means that language is influenced by the features of its users and that it is better characterised as an activity embedded in the world (PI § 23). From a methodological point of view, this means that we cannot really understand concepts use if we do not take into account such a human background. The philosopher's interest includes the «correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality)» (PPF § 365). However, the interest does not fall back upon the possible causes of the formation of concepts; Wittgenstein is not doing «natural science; nor yet natural history – since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes [imaginary cases]» (*Ibid.*). Rather, employing imaginary cases, on the one hand makes the formation of concepts different from the usual ones intelligible to us and, on the other hand, enables «to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept» (PI § 142).

Reference to human nature and general facts of nature is done in order to better enquire the grammar of our concepts, for concepts are embedded in a form of life and cannot be approached in an intellectualistic manner. What is to be human, therefore, is not the goal we should reach through a certain kind of therapy, but rather what we need to take into account if we want to study language without stepping outside of it. It is a regulative fact which plays an important role in the grammatical elucidation of concepts.

V. Conclusion.

In the previous section I tried to show how philosophy as aesthetical education can affect ways of acting. Wittgenstein teaches us that in order to behave differently, or better, we need to see differently; we need to sharpen our eye and change perspective. I think this is one of the non-philosophical consequences of the conceptual, or philosophical enquiry. The philosophical therapy, rather than dissolving philosophy itself, improves the role of philosophy outside the borders of the academic philosophical studies. Wittgenstein's remarks on the comparative method and the connection between nature and concepts can, for example, suggest some interesting ways to deal with the problem of intercultural understanding. If philosophy can help us to see differently, it can be used to see in a different way what has always been seen just in one way, for the change of perspective could be what is needed in order to resolve, or dissolve conceptual problems. Conceptual problems are not just prerogative of specialist philosophers; they can be found everywhere and they often inform what we erroneously think to be only factual problems. Contemporary neurophysiological research often stands on some conceptual problems about the words "mind" and "brain", but scientists do not deal with such problems; philosophers do. Or better, philosophers who are equipped, as Wittgenstein said, with the right optical instruments. As clearly stated by Putnam,

What concerned Wittgenstein was something that we saw as lying deep in our lives with language (and he certainly did not think one could be 'cured' of it once and for all) [...] the need for and the value of escaping the grip of inappropriate conceptual pictures is literally ubiquitous" so that the pursuit of clarity "needs to go on whenever we engage in

serious reflection [...] If this idea is grasped, we will see that far from being a way of bringing an end to philosophy, it represents a way to bring philosophical reflection to areas in which we often fail to see anything philosophical at all.⁴⁴

To conclude, I hope to have shown at least two things with this paper: 1. How Andronico's insights about the morphological method and the closeness between ethics and aesthetics could offer some important tools in order to argue against a reductively therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. 2. How Wittgenstein's remarks about the a-theoretical nature of philosophy do not undermine the possibility to do philosophy but, on the contrary, they give philosophy a proper space in the domain of human life and thought.

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VI. Wittgenstein's works and abbreviations.

BB *The Blue and Brown Books* (1933-1935), ed. by R. Rhees, Oxford, Blackwell, 1969.

CV *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains* (1977), ed. by G.H. von Wright, H. Nyman, revised edition of the text by A. Pichler, trans. by P. Winch, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998.

LC *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, compiled from notes by Y. Smythies, R. Rhees, J. Taylor, ed. by C. Barrett, Berkeley-Los Angeles, Univ. of California Pr., 1972.

LOE *Lecture on Ethics* (1930), ed. by E. Zamuner, E.V. Di Lascio, D. Levy, with notes by I. Somavilla, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2007.

LW *Last writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, ed. by G.H. Von Wright, H. Nyman, trans. by C.G. Luckhardt, M.A.E. Aue, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1998.

⁴⁴ H. PUTNAM, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life*, Bloomington (IN), Indiana Univ. Pr., 2008.

- NTB** *Notebooks 1914-1916*, ed. by G.H. von Wright, G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1979.
- PG** *Philosophical Grammar* (1932-1934), ed. by R. Rhees, trans. by A.J.P. Kenny, Oxford, Blackwell, 1974.
- PI** *Philosophical Investigations* (1938-1945), ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe, R. Rhees, fourth revised ed. by P.M.S. Hacker, J. Schulte, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, J. Schulte, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- PPF** *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* (1946-1949), in PI (2009), pp. 183-243 [Previously known as PI “Part II”].
- RFGB** *Remarks on Frazer’s ‘Golden Bough’* (1967), it. trans. by S. De Waal, Milano, Adelphi, 2013.
- RPP II** *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Vol. 2* (1948), ed. by G.H. von Wright, H. Nyman, trans. by C.G. Luckhardt, M.A.E. Aue, Oxford, Blackwell, 1980.
- TLP** *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), trans. by D.F. Pears, B.F. McGuinness, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Z** *Zettel* (1945-1948), ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford, Blackwell, 1967.