WITTGENSTEIN’S METHOD: WORKING ON ONESELF, OPENING THE WAY FOR OTHERNESS

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ABSTRACT

I am going to start with a quote from Wittgenstein’s *Culture and Value*: ‘Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them).’

This is the most important formulation of Wittgenstein’s method. It is *a* method and not *the* method; it is compared to a therapy because it makes it possible not to end philosophy, but to stop doing philosophy when one wants to. It is the worry that a philosophical problem brings to the thinker that Wittgenstein is trying to get rid of. Wittgenstein’s philosophy is a critique of language – of the use we make of language and the way language creates grammatical confusions. The philosopher does not aim to tell us which use of language is the correct one, but rather to show us the gap between what was meant to be said and what was actually said. In order to understand what I actually said, I have to look at the practice of language and discern how I used it differently. In other words, I should reach a clear synoptic view of my use of language.

Wittgenstein’s method also has a political and an anthropological dimension: its aim is to put into question our relation to otherness. This relation is characterized mostly by fear of what is different and new – a fear that does not lead only to disagreement but goes beyond that to exclusion. Wittgenstein therefore seeks to repeatedly present us with a new world very different from ours – with new conceptions and new realities.

Primary Reader: Paola Marrati

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‘There are, it has to be said, many excellent introductory books on Wittgenstein’s work that would explain what his main philosophical themes are, and how he deals with them. What they do not explain is what his work has to do with him – what the connections are between the spiritual and ethical preoccupations that dominate his life, and the seemingly rather remote philosophical questions that dominate his work.’

Ray Monk, Introduction to *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*

Ray Monk ends the introduction to *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* by defining the aim of his book, which is intended to bridge the gap between Wittgenstein’s spiritual and ethical preoccupations and his work, by showing ‘the unity of his philosophical concerns with his emotional and spiritual life’¹. The first philosophical problem that Wittgenstein thought of – he was at the age of nine at the time – was the following: Why should one tell the truth if it’s to one’s advantage to tell a lie? After consideration, he found no satisfactory answer and therefore concluded that ‘there was, after all, nothing wrong with lying under such circumstances.’² Wittgenstein later said that this event was an experience that is, if not decisive of his future way

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of life, it was at least characteristic of his nature at the time. But what makes this questioning and the way it was answered important is the way it is characteristic of Wittgenstein’s whole life and his relation to philosophy.

Monk wrote: ‘Philosophy, one might say, came to him, not he to philosophy. Its dilemmas were experienced by him as unwelcome intrusions, enigmas, which forced themselves upon him and held him captive, unable to get on with everyday life until he could dispel them with a satisfactory solution.’³ This quote from Monk is very important to understand Wittgenstein’s relation to philosophy: there was not enough distance between him and the questions he was engaged in resolving, because these questions imposed themselves on his life. In other words, worrying about philosophical problems was not something he did during certain delimited times of the day, they determined his whole way of life. He was concerned with these philosophical enigmas in a way that would stop him from doing other things in his everyday life until he could find a solution.

What makes this problem of telling the truth and lying uncharacteristic of Wittgenstein is that truth had an important place for him as a philosopher. He wrote to his sister: ‘Call me a truth-seeker and I will be satisfied’.⁴ Philosophical problems marked Wittgenstein as moments of crisis in which he would think that the source of the problem or the confusion is himself. Therefore, he always attempted to go against his nature to solve the confusion. Monk wrote: ‘The ultimate achievement, in this sense, would be the complete overcoming of himself – a transformation that would make philosophy itself unnecessary.’⁵

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
In October 1911, Wittgenstein decided to leave his vocation in engineering and submit to his obsession with philosophical problems. It is ‘in a constant, indescribable, almost pathological state of agitation’⁶ that he drew up a plan for a proposed book of philosophy. In this book, Wittgenstein showed that his interest is not directed to the problem of ‘What is mathematics?’ that occupied both Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, but rather to the more fundamental question, ‘What is logic?’ – a question that was left unanswered by Russell’s *Principles of Mathematics*.

Wittgenstein was arguing for a morality based on integrity, on being true to oneself, one’s impulses, and as Monk writes: ‘a morality that came from inside one’s self rather than one imposed from outside rules, principles and duties.’⁷ When Wittgenstein felt free to tell Russell what he liked or disliked about his work, he told him that he had a problem with the last chapter of the book *The Problems of Philosophy*, entitled ‘The Value of Philosophy’. Wittgenstein disliked the idea that people would say philosophy had a value, because for him it is a matter of impulse whether you are attracted to philosophy or not. Actually, for years before becoming Russell’s pupil, Wittgenstein had struggled with the conflict of duty and impulse, as philosophy was his strongest impulse. Monk writes, ‘He indeed believed that one should be – as his father had been, and as his brother Hans had been, and as all geniuses are – a creature of himself. But he had an almost overbearing sense of duty, and was prone to periodically crippling self-doubts.’⁸ It was Russell’s encouragements that allowed him to overcome these doubts and be content with engaging in philosophy.

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Talking about Beethoven’s strangest habits (like not eating for 16 hours and ‘cursing, howling and singing’ over his new fugue), Wittgenstein said that this is the sort of man to be. While Beethoven was his impulse to write music, this impulse led to his impulsive behavior. That is why this behavior is not only acceptable but is a duty. This is the duty of genius: to follow one’s impulse. Russell described Wittgenstein as the most perfect example he has ever known of genius as traditionally conceived, namely passionate and profound, intense and dominating.

In 1912, Wittgenstein saw the play Die Kreuzelscheiber by the Austrian dramatist and novelist Ludwig Anzengruber. It was mediocre, but one character in it declared that no matter what happened in the world, nothing bad could happen to him. This stoic thought struck Wittgenstein, and he told Norman Malcolm that for the first time he saw the possibility of religion. For the rest of his life, he regarded the feeling of being absolutely safe as paradigmatic of the religious experience. After reading William James’ Varieties of Religious Experience, he told Russell: ‘This book does me a lot of good. I don’t mean to say that I will be a saint soon, but I am not sure that it does not improve me a little in a way in which I would like to improve very much: namely I think that it helps me to get rid of the Sorge [worry, anxiety] (in the sense in which Goethe used the word in the second part of Faust).’

Wittgenstein thought that all what matters is the internal self by opposition to external matters. Monk wrote: ‘If one’s soul was pure (and disloyalty to a friend was one thing that would make it impure) – even if one’s wife ran away with another man – nothing could happen to one’s self. Thus, it is not external matters that should be of the greatest concern, but one’s self.’ Here we

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see why Wittgenstein thinks that philosophy should be concerned with the self and the work on oneself. It is really an ethical stand in life that motivates his method in philosophy.

Wittgenstein shared with Paul Engelmann an understanding of religion: they both thought that to be religious is to recognize one’s own unworthiness and to take responsibility for correcting it. Monk writes: ‘I am my world, so if I am unhappy about the world, the only way in which I can do anything decisive about it is to change myself.’ Unhappiness is due to a discrepancy between Wittgenstein and the world.

It would be misleading to separate completely between the life of Wittgenstein and his philosophical work, because for him, ‘his absorption in logical problems was complete. They were not a part of his life, but the whole of it.’ Both logic and ethics constitute a duty to oneself, as Otto Weininger wrote in Sex and Character.

In order to understand Wittgenstein’s decision to join the army during the First World War, his sister Hermine thought it had to do with ‘an intense desire to take something difficult upon himself and to do something different than pure intellectual work.’ Monk adds: ‘It was linked to the desire he felt so intensely since January, to “turn into a different person”.’ Wittgenstein thought that the experience of facing death would improve him on an ethical level. It was for his own sake than for his country that he fought in the war. Wittgenstein wrote: ‘Now I have the chance to be a decent human being for I am standing eye to eye with death.’

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In Wittgenstein’s four years at war, he faced death, experienced a religious awakening, taken responsibility for the lives of others, and endured long periods of close confinement with people he would not have previously met. Monk writes: ‘He was faced with the task of re-creating himself – of finding a new role for the person who had been forged by the experiences of the last five years.’15 The experience of the war gave his life a new meaning and it was not something he wanted to escape. He decided to become a teacher in elementary schools in poor areas, while Russell had stated that the next step in philosophy should come from him due to his philosophical genius. Wittgenstein was seeking to continue to struggle with adversity instead of being in the comfort of intellectual life.

It was difficult for Wittgenstein to get the *Tractatus* published, probably due to the difficulty of the text. He wrote to Ludwig von Ficker, who was a potential publisher: ‘The work is strictly philosophical and at the same time literary, but there is no babbling in it.’

When Rush Rhees asked Wittgenstein about his “theory” of deterioration Wittgenstein reacted with horror: ‘Do you think I have a theory? Do you think I am saying what deterioration is? What I do is describe different things called deterioration.’16

For the first two years of the Second World War, Wittgenstein was frustrated at not being able to find work outside academic life. Monk writes: ‘He found it intolerable to be teaching philosophy while a war was being fought […]’17

In the second volume of *Portraits of Wittgenstein*, M. O’C. Drury wrote an article entitled ‘Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein’, in which I found an interesting insight. Drury writes:

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‘I believe that the difficulty that should be found in understanding Wittgenstein’s writing is not merely an intellectual difficulty but an ethical demand. The simple demand that we should at all times and in all places say no more than we really know.’\(^{18}\) This interpretation coincides with what Wittgenstein wrote in his article ‘Philosophy’, namely that the difficulty of philosophy is not intellectual, but is a difficulty of the will.

In the same volume, in an article entitled ‘Conversations with Wittgenstein’, also by Drury, Wittgenstein tells the author: ‘You must always be puzzled by mental illness. The thing I would dread most, if I became mentally ill, would be your adopting a common-sense attitude; that you could take it for granted that I was deluded. […]’\(^{19}\)

In a symposium entitled, ‘Ludwig Wittgenstein: Assessments of the Man and the Philosopher’, Erich Heller addresses the nature of Wittgenstein’s concern with language. He wrote that a Chinese sage of the distant past was asked by his disciples what he would do first if he were given power to set right the affairs of the country and he answered that he will certainly see to it that language is used correctly. The disciples were surprised by this answer and asked the sage why language first? He answered: ‘If language is not used correctly, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what ought to be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and art will be corrupted; if morals and art are corrupted, justice will go astray; if justice goes astray, the people will stand about in helpless confusion.’\(^{20}\) Heller finds in Wittgenstein’s concern with language a moral dimension that makes him closer to this sage than to the technicians of linguistic analysis. Heller writes that Wittgenstein was ‘convinced of the most 


intimate connection between the quality of our speech and the quality of our living. He knew that the forms of language were deeply rooted in our nature, and spoke of “deep disquietudes” caused by their misuse.  

Wittgenstein worked as a hospital porter for two or three years. He was also an architect: he built a house for his sister. What made Wittgenstein interested in engaging in different practices and to be part of life outside academia? I think this is consistent with his ethical principle about what can be said and what cannot be said. Only speak about what you really know. In other words, and from a different perspective, he is saying that we cannot express something more than an opinion about religion when we have never had a religious experience. It is necessary to engage in a form of life from its inside and not from an external point of view in order to express something about it that has a greater value than the value of an opinion. But Wittgenstein does not mean to draw an opposition between possible practices and intellectual life, which is theoretical, for his own philosophy is not theoretical. But the intellectual life is by its own a specific form of life we can be part of in different ways.

Ludwig Wittgenstein engaged in philosophy so that his readers would change the way they live – not to establish a school of philosophy named after him. For him, philosophy was something very personal and not scientific research. Why did he want his students to do other things than philosophy, to explore other professions? Because he thought that all we have, the given, are forms of life. In other words, we have different possibilities and ways to engage in life.

Even if for him the happy life was the life of knowledge, he firmly believed that reality is that which you can never say that you have fully exhausted conceptually. In consequence, there are

21 Ibid.
always other ways to engage with life to be discovered, and this opening of reality is essential to his philosophy. In order to engage in a new form of life, the subject must undergo a self-transformation. It is the process of this revolution of the self that I would like to describe in this dissertation.

If Wittgenstein was not interested in constructing philosophical theories it is because he thought that his teaching was rather about the praxis of philosophy, he thereby leaves us with a new method of doing philosophy. In order to show us the way out of the bottle that keeps us entangled with philosophical confusions, Wittgenstein aimed at making us change our perception of the philosophical problem at stake and its context. It is not something theoretical that we have misunderstood that is blocking us; it is rather a grammatical confusion due to the way we got used to order our concepts and thus perceive them and the connections between them.

It is argued mainly by James Conant that Wittgenstein did not have only one method but many methods, namely three. Thus, instead of talking about an early and a later Wittgenstein, Conant thought that we ought to read three phases in his work instead of two or one. I will argue in the coming chapters that there are three aspects to learn from Wittgenstein’s method and it is true that they unfold in different phases of his work.

The first aspect is focused on the practice of writing philosophy as self-transformative to the extent that a philosopher might have to be brave enough to acknowledge a change in their own views, and thus make an avowal of this false route they took, and show us the new right one. Only someone who has the faith that Wittgenstein had in his work would be able to make such a turn or conversion.
The second aspect involves the role of time in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Wittgenstein wrote that a philosophical problem is like a disease, but it needs a slow cure. Since the praxis of philosophy for Wittgenstein involved a self-transformation, we need to have a sense of the time before and after the transformation, as it is also itself an event that takes time. If we think of philosophy as a ‘spiritual exercise’, as Pierre Hadot interpreted Wittgenstein’s work, then we also see the importance of time since the exercise must be repeated over time in order to obtain a change.

The third aspect of Wittgenstein’s method is probably the most important one, as it aims to show that the self-transformation Wittgenstein is interested in is really a way for the self to recognize that it is not identical to itself, and thus that otherness – before being external – is internal to the self. The question then remains: what are the implications of this to our relation with the other? Is acknowledgement of the other all what we can do or is there more to be done? How does the other mark us?
'Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)'

Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*

**CHAPTER 1: WORKING ON ONESELF: FROM SUBJECTIVITY TO ETHICS**

My aim in this chapter is to move from the most subjective, namely the avowal, to ethics which opens up the way for intersubjectivity and community. This move is possible through working on oneself, because there has to be a change or a transformation in one’s relationship to oneself in order to make a change in the realm of the ethical and the intersubjective. The avowal for Wittgenstein serves to indicate the revelation of a gap between what the subject thought is saying and what she really said. It is maybe also the revelation of an otherness that is internal to the self. Most importantly, it is only by accepting this alterity within the self that alterity in the community or with other communities can also be dealt with differently. But I will get to discuss this relationship to otherness in chapter 3. This chapter is an attempt to answer the question: What does Wittgenstein mean by saying that philosophy is a work on oneself?
Part 1- From Confessions to Avowals: How Does this Shift Shape Wittgenstein’s Conception of ‘Working on Oneself’?

It is known that the Philosophical Investigations starts with a reference to Augustine’s Confessions. It is usually read as a critique of a certain vision of language that Augustine described in that quoted passage. But what if there is more to the reference than that? My aim in this chapter is to show that starting the Philosophical Investigations with this quote from the Confessions can also be meant to show what Wittgenstein is departing from, not only when it comes to a conception of meaning or language, but also when it comes to a method of practicing philosophy.

It is the French philosopher Pierre Hadot who traced a connection between several philosophers – St. Augustine and Wittgenstein are among them – that belong to the tradition of the practice of philosophy as a spiritual exercise. Hadot’s work will help us to understand what it means to practice philosophy for these specific philosophers. But unlike Hadot’s concept of ‘spiritual exercises’, which seeks to draw a continuity between religious and non-religious spiritual exercises, I would like to argue that this continuity has to be put into question, especially in the case of Wittgenstein’s method.

The claim I am trying to make is that Wittgenstein’s method cannot belong to a similar tradition as the one religious confessions belong to. Obviously the point is not simply to comment on Hadot’s work or to underestimate its value; but rather to show that there is a shift from confessions to avowals – two concepts that need to be differentiated. This shift will allow us to understand the

importance of Wittgenstein’s method; and what he means by ‘work on oneself’ as a philosophical activity.

A. Conceptual Differences between ‘Confession’ and ‘Avowal’

The first thing to be noted is that a confession is a description or narration of a past happening or happenings. It thus does mainly involve the memory. Also, a very important component is the presence of another person to whom the confession is addressed. This other person can allow for redemption after hearing what was confessed. A confession can also be written as part of a memoir or an autobiography, as in the case of Rousseau’s and St. Augustine’s Confessions. Here one can say that the other to whom it is addressed is not necessarily another person, but the Other – or God. Even if a confession is happening in the present moment of the writing, it is really referring to the past. It is a remembering of that which is no longer present.

An avowal is neither a description nor a narration – it is an assertion. It also necessarily involves an interlocutor, who in this case has to be present. An avowal is a speech act that does not necessarily involve remembering the past; but rather reacting to another person’s suggestions in a way that allows for a transformation through the speech act. In other words, when I make an avowal, I am admitting something that I was not capable of saying beforehand, or more precisely, before an intervention from another person. This is a crucial conceptual difference between an avowal and a confession, as the latter does not necessarily involve the interaction between the subject and their interlocutor.

While both confessions and avowals can be self-transformative, and share conversion as a common aim, we will see that Wittgenstein’s method aims to show that the subject can only be the subject of their own self-transformation when they are capable of an avowal. This is also what allows
Wittgenstein at several instances to compare his philosophy to psychoanalysis. In psychoanalysis also, the mere description of the past is not sufficient; but the patient recognizing their own confusion as they are still active can lead them to liberate themselves from their neurosis.

In order to investigate the concept of avowal further and more deeply, our primary source will be Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. Of particular importance is the second part of the book which discusses ‘Seeing an Aspect’, in which Wittgenstein claims that a subject can suffer from a blindness to an aspect, in other words she can only see a picture from one perspective (as a duck and not a rabbit, for example). The assertion, ‘Now I see this is a rabbit’, amounts to the avowal that she is now seeing that aspect she was blind to.

In the following section, I will discuss the concept of ‘confession’ and its role within ‘spiritual exercises’, according to the French philosopher Pierre Hadot.

**B. Spiritual Exercises According to Pierre Hadot**

Pierre Hadot became interested in spiritual exercises while studying and trying to understand the texts of ancient philosophers. He first realized that their aim was formative, rather than informative. These philosophers are writing both to practice a spiritual exercise themselves and to allow for their readers to practice it. In other words, the spiritual exercise is formative for the soul, and not an attempt at informing us about a theory or adding something to the discourse of philosophy. Philosophy is no longer reduced to its doctrine. Philosophy is essentially an exercise of conversion. The practice of philosophy is not limited to expression and discourse. According to Hadot, this is what explains that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* shows us the limits of language since the book’s aim cannot only be attained by reading its propositions; but rather by understanding the author of the book as undergoing a self-transformation.
In the first pages of his book *Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy*\(^23\), Hadot explains that the term ‘spiritual’ in ‘spiritual exercise’ is not meant to have a religious connotation, but to encompass all aspects of these exercises, namely that they don’t only involve the intellect or thinking, but also sensibility and the imagination. He also adds that the true dimensions of these exercises are revealed by the word spiritual, because they ought to involve an elevation to the objective Spirit – a metamorphosis of the individual that leads them to overcome themselves by placing themselves in the perspective of the Whole. George Friedmann expresses it as either ‘*to make oneself eternal by overcoming oneself*’\(^24\) or ‘*stepping out of duration*’\(^25\).

The notion and term *exercitium spirituale* is found in ancient Latin Christianity, and it corresponds to the Greek Christian term *askesis*. This *askesis* already exists in the philosophical tradition of antiquity – not in the sense of asceticism, but of spiritual exercises. That is why it is this tradition of ancient philosophy that will allow us to understand the origin of spiritual exercises. The Stoic for instance says it quite explicitly: for them, philosophy is an “exercise” or an art of living in the right attitude, with a determined form of life that engages the whole of one’s existence. Hadot uses the expression ‘philosophical act’ to refer to these exercises and writes: ‘The philosophical act is not situated only in the order of knowledge, but in the order of the “self” and of “being”: it is a progress that makes us more in our being, that makes us better. It is a conversion that changes one’s whole life, it changes the being of the one performing it.’\(^26\) The word conversion is important

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\(^{24}\) Translation of ‘s’éterniser en se dépasant’.  
since it refers to a transition, according to Hadot, from an inauthentic life to an authentic one in which one achieves self-consciousness, the right view on the world, interior peace and freedom.27

While it is easier to see the Stoics as engaging in constant exercises to make their soul overcome the limits of individuality and recognize itself as part of a cosmos governed by reason, Epicure also thought of philosophy as a therapeutic of the soul. The cure for Epicure consists in departing from the worries of life and finding the joy of existing. Research, profound examination, self-control, indifference to indifferent things, readings, meditations, the therapies of the passions, accomplishing duties: these are all practices that form what is called spiritual exercises.28 Even if the practices differ from one philosophical school to another, their aim is always one, namely the cure of the soul.

The most paradigmatic example Hadot gives of spiritual exercises is the Socratic dialogue and its fundamental invitation to ‘know thyself’, which should be recognized as the foundation of every spiritual exercise. Through his conversations with others, Socrates was inviting his interlocutors to care more about themselves through the practice of meditation. This is a crucial point according to Hadot: he writes that there is an ‘intimate connection between dialogue with others and dialogue with oneself; and that has a deep signification’.29 He then explains that only when the subject is capable of a true encounter with the other that she is capable of a true encounter with herself. This will be an important thesis for my third chapter, in which the relation between these two encounters will be discussed.

27 See Ibid.
To support Hadot’s claim that Wittgenstein also belongs to the tradition of *Spiritual Exercises*, let’s examine citations from Wittgenstein’s book *Culture and Value*:

--‘My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them.’\(^{30}\) It is important to note here that this is an ideal for Wittgenstein, precisely because it was so difficult for him to achieve it. As he was constantly preoccupied with philosophical problems, it was difficult to make a separation between his personal life and his philosophical one. Therefore, he constantly found himself unable to reach that ideal of coolness he mentions here.

--‘It is not by any means clear to me, that I wish for a continuation of my work by others, more than a change in the way we live, making all these questions superfluous. (For this reason I could never found a school.)’\(^{31}\) Explaining or making sense of this citation is central to my dissertation as a whole. Wittgenstein did not want to found a school, because he thought that once you create a systematic account of your philosophical views, it is impossible for someone to disagree with you. When it comes to changing the way we live, I take it to be manifested by the fact that all his work has an ethical aim.

--‘The revolutionary will be the one who can revolutionize himself.’\(^{32}\) Wittgenstein’s method is very much grounded in this claim -- if you want to make a change in the way others or we perceive things, you ought to start by making this change in the way you perceive things first.

--‘With thinking too, there is a time for ploughing and a time for harvesting. It gives me satisfaction to write *a lot* every day. This is childish, but that’s how it is.’\(^{33}\) The therapeutic activity that


\(^{31}\) Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*. P.70e.

\(^{32}\) Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*. P. 51e.

\(^{33}\) Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*. P. 33e.
Wittgenstein takes philosophy to amount to cannot be done in a sporadic way according to Wittgenstein. In his book *The Flux and the Instant*[^34], Denis Perrin notes that the reason Wittgenstein did not publish any book after the *Tractatus* is precisely to not interrupt this therapeutic activity.

--‘One cannot speak the truth, if one has not yet conquered oneself. One cannot speak it – but not because one is still not clever. The truth can be spoken only by someone who is already at home in it; not by someone who still lives in untruthfulness, and does no more than reach out towards it from within untruthfulness.’[^35] In this section Wittgenstein draws our attention to the link between the way someone lives and their knowledge of the truth. In other words, the truth cannot be just a matter of the intellect, it implies a certain way of life. To be at home in the truth is to be able to live according to it, and not consider knowledge as separate from the way we live.

--‘Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)’[^36] I think the comparison between the work of the philosopher and that of the architect is interesting, because it draws our attention to the fact that in both fields we deal with constructions that need to be constantly examined. In philosophy, it can be the construction of a philosophical argument or thesis that needs to be dismantled in order to be seen differently.

--‘I must be nothing more than the mirror in which my reader sees his own thinking with all its deformities and with this assistance can set it in order.’[^37] According to Wittgenstein, philosophical confusions are the result of mistaken associations between different facts of language. Once we

[^35]: Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*. P. 41e.
see the correct ordering between these facts of language, we are liberated from the bewitchment of language and start thinking correctly.

**C. Michel Foucault’s “Techniques of the Self”**

Michel Foucault discussed the concept of avowal in his lectures at Darmouth College in Berkley entitled “Subjectivity and Truth” and “Avowal and Christianism”, both published in *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self*. I will investigate them in the following part.

The most general theme that interests Foucault is the genealogy of the modern subject. He writes: ‘In the years that preceded the second war, and even more so after the second war, philosophy in France and, I think, all continental Europe was dominated by the philosophy of the subject. I mean that philosophy set as its task par excellence the foundation of all knowledge and the principle of all signification as stemming from the meaningful subject.’

Foucault seeks to study the constitution of the subject across history, which has led us to the modern concept of the self. By analyzing the experience of sexuality, Foucault realized that there are techniques ‘which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, or to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on.’ Foucault calls these exercises: the techniques or technology of the self.

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Foucault then explains that ‘among these techniques of the self in this field of self-technology, I think that the techniques oriented toward the discovery and the formulation of the truth concerning oneself are extremely important; and if for the government of people in our societies everyone had not only to obey, but also to produce and publish truth about oneself, then examination of conscience and confession are among the most important of these procedures.’\footnote{Michel Foucault. ‘Subjectivity and Truth.’ \textit{About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self}. P.26.} I would like to note that the translation of “confession” from the French is misleading – “avowal” is more accurate in this case.

In ancient philosophical schools, speech acts were important for the spiritual guide to give instructions and rules for how to live. It is not necessary to make a complete avowal about oneself, because what is at stake in these schools is the relation between master and disciple, which ultimately allows the latter to have a better life and become autonomous.

However, it is at the birth of Christianism that telling all the truth about oneself became important. The subject becomes towards herself at once the judge and the accused, playing thus a judiciary scene where she has both roles at once. Whereas the self that has to reveal its own truth is not hidden in ancient philosophical schools, it is rather to be developed through a discourse that is directed towards a clear aim, namely the wise way of living. The Christian ‘techniques of the self’ aim at a hidden truth that has to be deciphered.

On 24 November 1980, Foucault gives another lecture at Darmouth College, this time entitled ‘Christianity and Avowal’. At the outset, he states that it is important to see the differences between avowals and techniques of self-examination in Hellenistic and Latin cultures, on the one hand, and in Christianity, on the other. The modern hermeneutic of the self has its roots in the Christian
techniques, according to Foucault. First, he writes, ‘Christianity is a confession’: which means that it is an obligation of truth, or rather an obligation to consider a certain dogma or certain books and decisions of certain authorities as true. But there is also another type of truth that the Christian is obliged to tell to others, which is the truth about their own sins, temptations, who they are, and what is happening in their ‘inner self’. Foucault explains that these two types of obligations – the ones about dogma and the ones about the soul – are connected to each other. The one is only possible through the light of the other.

When we speak of avowal in Christianity, clearly what is meant are the techniques of confession: to confess one’s sins. Foucault proved in his first lecture, entitled ‘Subjectivity and Truth’, that the hermeneutic of the subject is an invention of Christianity, because it did not exist before its emergence. Ancient philosophical schools were focusing on the transformation of the individual through means that allowed her to achieve self-control, tranquility of the soul, and purity of the body and the spirit, whereas the obligation to tell the truth about oneself did not have such a primary importance. The discourse of the master or the guide was given more importance than the speech of the disciple. Furthermore, the relationship between the guide and their disciple was conceived as only temporary, to allow the individual to achieve their own autonomy. Therefore, there was no necessity for the subject to indulge in either self-exploration or revelation/avowal of a secret truth about themselves. Foucault focused on Seneca’s third book De ira to show that Seneca does not use a judiciary vocabulary to bring out the disciple as an accused subject by a judge, rather what matters is for the disciple to understand their mistakes so as not to repeat them. That will be possible through the subject’s rememoration of their acts and the reactivation of rational conduct, of behavior. Neither punishment nor the avowal of a mistake is necessary in Seneca’s teachings.
Foucault also analyzes *De tranquillitate animi* by Seneca, in which “telling the truth” does not amount to revealing some hidden thoughts or shameful desires. Seneca’s discourse aims at transforming theoretical principles into a force that will allow to give place to truth as a force. There is a victorious dimension in this force that is truth and not something to be ashamed of. Foucault explains that this truth is there for the individual, and it attracts them like a magnetic force would – it does not require any search in the depths of consciousness. Furthermore, access to this truth is possible through demonstrations/arguments/explanations made by the master, but not through an analytic exploration of the self. Also, most importantly, to be reached this truth does not contain or require the revelation of anything personal about the disciple, it is rather a truth that will allow for the transformation of the subject into a knot that binds together knowledge and will. The subject of the will is no longer separate from the subject of knowledge.

In Christianity, the possibility of access to divine truth is dependent on access to the truth about oneself. In order for the individual to show the truth about herself to another, she must undergo a series of procedures: penitence takes the shape of a long series of restrictions and regulations, and the subject ought to manifest the truth about herself, as a sinner, in a ritualized form. This manifestation of the truth about herself does not take the form of a speech act, but rather of a dramatization of her own status. She has to wear miserable clothes, cover her head and body with ash, while asking for redemption and crying, in addition to fasting regularly. In other words, this access to the truth about herself amounts to a constant sacrifice of herself. A sinner is an individual who prefers spiritual death to eternal life. To be accepted again among the community of Christians, the sinner has to renounce her body and her whole worldly existence that led her to the sin in the first place. The sinner should renounce to her life as a sinner, that is, her worldly life. Instead of binding the subject of knowledge to the subject of the will, as in ancient Greece,
Christianity requires the subject to dramatically represent a sacrifice of herself, which is supposed to create a radical rupture in the subject.

This is the most profound contradiction in Christianity, namely that the hermeneutic of the self implies a form of sacrifice of the self. According to Foucault, this is one of the main problems of western cultures: to find a hermeneutic of the self that does not involve a sacrifice of the self, namely through a rather positive emergence of the self that is both theoretical and practical.
Part 2 - Which Form of Avowal Do We Find in Wittgenstein’s ‘Work on Oneself’?

How can we position Wittgenstein’s method between Hadot’s *Spiritual Exercises* and Foucault’s analysis of the techniques of the self? I would like to argue that while it is fair to say that we find many references to spiritual exercises in Wittgenstein’s *Culture and Value*; when it comes to Wittgenstein’s method and the way he applies it on philosophical problems, Foucault’s analysis is more useful. Foucault shows us a transition from the concept of avowal as a confession to a concept of avowal that is non-Christian. Despite Wittgenstein’s interest in religion, I think he is rather interested in the latter, namely avowals that don’t involve a sacrifice of the self, but make necessary a certain verbalization by the subject that will allow them to emerge positively. We find this concept of ‘Gestandnis’ (Avowals) in part II of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

A. Aspect Perception and Avowals

In *The Blue and Brown Books*, Wittgenstein formulates a critique of the cogito. He explains that it is impossible for the subject to refer to herself at once as internal and external. The use of the word ‘I’ or ‘myself’ does not allow for making a reference to an external object, as Descartes would have wanted it. Of course, this critique of the exteriority and objectivity of the subject does not exclude the constant critique Wittgenstein makes of the subject seen as an internal object that is private to the subject herself. Both interpretations are misleading, because they both treat the subject as an object in the world (either an internal or an external one). While Arthur Schopenhauer thought of the body as the object in the world to which the ‘I’ refers, Wittgenstein claims that this way of treating the subject is ontological, and not grammatical. Whereas ontology asks the
question about the being of the subject, grammar asks about what it makes sense to say about the subject.

Once we leave ontology and ask about the grammar of subjectivity, the question should rather be: How do we speak and use the word ‘I’? In which circumstances or language-games? How does it take part in our forms of life? Or: Where do we find the speaking subject? Is the subject to be found in language?

Jocelyn Benoist writes that the subject is where it is not and that is why it manifests itself only in language. Language is for Wittgenstein the only way for ontology to be created, because it is the result of some particular language-games. But ontology cannot exhaust language. We can therefore find how language also allows for the creation of the subject. Expressions involving ‘I’ are neither referential nor descriptive, because we cannot replace the ‘I’ by another pronoun and maintain the same meaning of the same sentence. The use of the word ‘I’ allows for the manifestation of subjectivity in a way that no other word does, even if this other word has the same referent.

In the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein investigates the use of the verb ‘observing’, which interests us here because an observation presupposes a distinction between the observing subject and the observed object. If a person says that she observes her own grief, that means that she is feeling it and it is grammatically confused to make a separation between her and her grief as if they were a subject and an object. Her grief is essentially subjective and therefore cannot be conceived as an object separate from her. This proves that not only the subject, but also all what is subjective, should not be perceived as an object of a special kind. Wittgenstein writes:
“Observing” does not produce what is observed. (This is a conceptual statement.) Again: I do not “observe” what only comes into being through observation. The object of observation is something else.”

Wittgenstein goes through many mental states in the second part of the Philosophical Investigations to make a similar critique, namely that the experience of doing something like observing or remembering cannot be referred to by referring to one’s own experience or by attending to it. This is because each instance of observing or remembering only captures a possible aspect of an experience that could have been different in particular ways. An avowal can serve to say that I saw one aspect without generalizing – by saying that I captured the concept of observing. This is why as along as aspect perception is seen as allowing for a subjective component, without presenting an objective account, the avowal is precisely the manifestation of this subjectivity that is inherent to the perception of an aspect. Unless I say so, nobody else can tell the way I am seeing something as something else, and this is what makes it different from seeing that can be shared with others. The act of speech or of making the avowal is my way of expressing my ‘subjective’ perception.

G.E.M. Anscombe translates Gestandnis as “confession”, although Gestandnis follows from gestehen, which does not necessarily have a religious connotation. I would like to follow Jocelyn Benoist’s suggestion that “avowal” is the appropriate translation of Gestandnis. In fact, Wittgenstein does talk about confessions in Culture and Value, in which he does not use the term Gestandnis, but rather Eine Bechte.42

An avowal allows us to express that we are struck by the dawning of an aspect. In this case, the avowal is not describing our experience but letting the other person know that we saw something new. Wittgenstein writes: ‘The criteria for the truth of the avowal that I thought such-and-such are not the criteria for a true description of a process. And the importance of the true avowal does not reside in its being a correct and certain report of a process. It resides rather in the special conclusion that should be drawn from an avowal whose truth is guaranteed by the special criteria of truthfulness.’

Because the limits of our imagination are the limits of what makes sense for us to say, Wittgenstein developed a method of supposition that takes us to this limit of our imagination to then return to a different place from our original point of departure. How are avowals related to this method of supposition?

B. Wittgenstein’s Method of Supposition and Avowals

‘I want to say: an education quite different from ours might also be the foundation for quite different concepts. For here, life would run on differently. What interests us would not interest them. Here, different concepts would no longer be unimaginable. In fact, this is the only way in which essentially different concepts are imaginable.’

In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein embraced a conception of logic that would allow us to map all logical possibilities and impossibilities, for they should all be known *a priori*. In his latest writings in *Zettel*, Wittgenstein goes back to this issue of the generality of logic that he already had put into question in the *Philosophical Investigations*, explaining: ‘Generality in

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logic cannot be extended any further than our logical foresight reaches. Or better: than our logical vision reaches. “But how can human understanding outstrip reality and itself think the unverifiable?” Why should we not say the unverifiable? For we ourselves made it unverifiable. A false appearance is produced? And how can it so much look like that? For don’t you want to say that this like that is not a description at all? Well, then it isn’t a false appearance either, but rather one that robs us of our orientation. So that we clutch our brows and ask: How can that be? It is only apparently possible “to transcend any possible experience”, even these words only seem to make sense, because they are arranged on the analogy of significant expressions. The “philosophy of ‘as if’” itself rests wholly on this shifting between simile and reality. “But I can’t anticipate reality in my thoughts, using words to sneak in something I am not acquainted with.” (Nihil est in intellectu….) As if I could as it were get round and approach from behind in thought, and so snatch a glimpse of what it is impossible to see from the front. Hence, there is something right about saying that the unimaginability is a criterion for nonsensicality.’

We reach the limit of the thought experiment when the imagination reaches its limits, and Wittgenstein explains here why at that moment we are also reaching nonsensicality. But interestingly what matters the most is not that the tribe or community we are imagining becomes unimaginable, because it doesn’t meet our criterion for what makes sense; it is rather that this failure to continue imagining it tells us something or is supposed to tell us something about our own community and what makes sense in it. This is where the self-transformation ought to take place.46

In *Zettel*, Wittgenstein writes the following: ‘Let us imagine men who express a color intermediate between red and yellow, say by means of a fraction in a kind of binary notation like this: R, LLRL and the like, where we have (say) yellow on the right, and red on the left. These people learn how to describe shades of color in this way in kindergarten, how to use such descriptions in picking colors out, in mixing them, etc. They would be related to us roughly as people with absolute pitch to those who lack it. *They can do* what we cannot. And here one would like to say: “But then, is it imaginable? Of course the behavior is! But is the inner process, the experience of color?” And it is difficult to see what to say in answer to such a question. Could people without absolute pitch have guessed at the existence of people with absolute pitch?’\(^47\)

Here, Wittgenstein tries to show that there is a limit to which extent we can imagine another community to be different from us. Our concepts do have limits in the sense that they do not always allow us to imagine concepts that are radically different. However, Wittgenstein was aware that there was a conceptual confusion around the concept of ‘imagining’ or ‘imaginability’ itself, and he discussed it in later sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Let us look particularly at sections 395-401: He starts by writing that ‘there is a lack of clarity about the role of imaginability (*Vorstellbarkeit*) in our investigations. Namely about the extent to which it ensures that a proposition makes sense.’\(^48\) He clarifies what he means by comparing the imagination to a visual room and adds that even if it seems like a discovery, ‘what its discoverer really found was a new way of speaking, a new comparison; it might even be called a new sensation.’\(^49\) This is a very important section because this is what Wittgenstein’s method is aiming


at: to provide the reader, by way of the imagination, with this new way of speaking – or new sensation – that will allow them to see their world differently. But we are not talking here only about ‘perception’ per say, the reader is invited to have a different sensation that will allow them to speak or act differently – in other words, to engage with the world in a new way.

Wittgenstein is said by his biographers to have always sought new ways of living. We know that he was not only a philosopher, but also an engineer, a school instructor, an architect, a soldier in the trenches, among others. His friends and students, who have written about him in the Portraits of Wittgenstein, testify that he encouraged them to do something other than philosophy after finishing their studies. He expressed admiration, for example, when he saw that one of his pupils was studying psychiatry, a discipline that Wittgenstein himself was interested in pursuing as well. When Wittgenstein wrote in the second part of the Philosophical Investigations that all we have are forms of life (Lebenformen), he did not mean to advance a thesis or a theory around forms of life. However, he meant maybe to say that if this is all that we have, then we should try to engage in these different forms of life, and not be limited in our imagination or in actuality to one form of life.

Wittgenstein defined his grammatical investigations as investigations about the possibilities of phenomena. How are avowals related to grammatical investigations?

C. Grammatical Investigations and Avowals

In Section 14 of the Big Typescript TS 213, Wittgenstein defines “grammar” as follows: ‘What interests Philosophy about the sign, the meaning (die Bedeutung), is what is laid down in the
grammar of the sign’.\textsuperscript{50} He goes on to explain that the interpretation of a sign, because it is meant to explain it, cannot be separate from its grammar. We cannot add an interpretation to the grammar of a sign. If a new interpretation arises, then a new grammatical “neighborhood” must be set as well. Furthermore, it is only \textit{within grammar} that what is to form a proposition can be determined.

The word “synopsis” is inspired by Goethe and his \textit{Metamorphosis of Plants}. Grammar aims at this synoptic view: ‘Look, don’t think!’ Grammar can be understood by examining Wittgenstein’s method of comparison leading to his concept of family resemblances and finally that of aspects. Antonia Soulez\textsuperscript{51} explains that it is only through the practice of language-games that we can make use of the method of comparison to see family resemblances. In other words, these conceptual family resemblances cannot precede practice. The game is the first act, Soulez writes. That is the case because the internal relation between concepts, and between the action and the rules governing it, can only be found in the language-game, and not prior to it. This internal relation between the action and the rule is what is called the grammatical description of the game. According to Wittgenstein, an internal relation is what cannot be otherwise, because the terms of the relation are related in a way that is constitutive to each one of them. A simple example of an internal relation is that the color white is lighter than the color black.

Similarly, it should be noted that rules of language-games are not there prior to the game. There is no such thing as a book with all the rules of language-games written in it. Hence, the practice of the game is prior to the rule governing it in an essential way. Most of our language-games don’t have rules, but when something goes wrong in the game, we try to find the rule that has not been


applied correctly. Hence it is precisely because we are already engaged in a certain practice of the game that it is possible to conclude the rules governing it, and not the other way around. That is why the actions constitutive of the game can only be internally related to the rules.

The moment of avowal is the most important one in Wittgenstein’s grammatical method. He first refers to it in the *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘It is the business of philosophy, not to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to make it possible for us to get a clear view of the state of mathematics that troubles us: the state of affairs before the contradiction is resolved. (And this does not mean that one is sidestepping a difficulty.) The fundamental fact here is that we lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and that then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. That we are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules. This entanglement in our own rules is what we want to understand (i.e. get a clear view of). It throws light on our concept of meaning something (*unsern Begriff des Meinens*). For in those cases things turn out otherwise than we had meant, foreseen (*anders, als wir es gemeint, vorausgesehen, hatten.*) That is just what we say when, for example, a contradiction appears: “I didn’t mean it like that” (*So hab’ich’s nicht gemeint*) […]’

This is the avowal that interests Wittgenstein in a philosophical problem: He is able to lead the reader through a path that allows them to figure out that they did not know what they were saying, or there was a gap between what they meant to say (*Ich habe...gemeint*) and what they actually said. The moment at which the speaker or reader recognizes this gap is the moment at which they can make this avowal of error. In other words, the avowal is also an avowal of a contradiction between what was said and what the speaker meant to say. Wittgenstein writes, ‘the civil status of

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53 See Stanley Cavell. ‘Must we mean what we say?’ *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge UP, 1969.
a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem.\textsuperscript{54} It is important to note here that while talking about something as theoretical as mathematics, he concludes that the philosophical problem lies in “civil life”, which brings it back from theory to the everyday, or the practice of speaking in a certain way.

An important aspect of grammatical investigations is the Wittgensteinian concept of criteria, which tell us of what \textit{kind} an object is. Stanley Cavell discusses this topic in the first chapter of his book \textit{The Claim of Reason}. He argues that what is important to see is that we can disagree over our criteria, and this disagreement cannot be solved by reference to some general consensus. In fact, he is asking what is it that allows us to claim the generalization of criteria. He answers: ‘When Wittgenstein, or at this stage any philosopher appealing to ordinary language, “says what we say”, what he produces is not a generalization (though he may, later, generalize), but a (supposed) \textit{instance} of what we say.’\textsuperscript{55} He continues – and this is the part that interests me the most here – that this instance is awaiting confirmation from the interlocutor to say whether it is a sound generalization or not. Furthermore, if I cannot confirm the claim of my interlocutor, then ‘if the disagreement persists, there is no appeal beyond us, or if beyond the two, then not beyond some eventual us. There is such a thing as intellectual tragedy.’\textsuperscript{56}

Cavell’s argument rests on the idea that, in my disagreement with the other, there is no further instance than each of us to solve the disagreement. He writes: ‘The only source of confirmation here is ourselves. And each of us is fully authoritative in this struggle.’\textsuperscript{57} Cavell explains that this search for our criterion or for what we say is a search for community, for reason. But all I have is

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Stanley Cavell. \textit{The Claim of Reason}. P.19.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
my own avowal of whether this makes sense for me. This avowal can isolate me from others or not. According to Cavell in *The Claim of Reason*, Wittgenstein’s philosophy tells us things about ourselves that we thought were a secret of our own, and this should be a source of amazement for the reader. Wittgenstein’s examples of words that force themselves upon us, or words that we are tempted to say, seem all to be so true for the reader. But in order to find out that we share this experience of language, there must be this first movement of looking towards ourselves (while philosophy asks us to look away from the self, as Cavell puts it). This is why the role of avowals is of primary importance.
Part 3 - Ethics as a Work on Oneself

I would like to show in this third part of my chapter that the best example of self-transformation through the means of an avowal is in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. It is in this work that Wittgenstein makes a radical change of point of view between the beginning and the end of the book; he also invites his reader to undergo the same radical change of perspective. I think that what Wittgenstein perceives differently after throwing away the ladder constituted by all the propositions of the *Tractatus* is precisely the role of logic in our language. In this third part, I will attempt to elucidate the relationship between logic and ethics in the *Tractatus*.

A. “The Ethical is Personal”

‘At the end of my lecture on ethics I spoke in the first person: I think that this is something very essential. Here there is nothing to be stated anymore; all I can do is to step forth as an individual and speak in the first person. For me a theory is without value. A theory gives me nothing.’

Ludwig Wittgenstein, quoted in *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna circle*

‘“There isn’t a solution to the human drama by a change of regime, no system of salvation.” (Levinas. *Is it Righteous to Be?*) Politics must give way to something else, to “ethics without ethical system” or to individual, discrete acts of goodness.’

Michael Morgan. *Discovering Levinas*

Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is a treatise about the logic of language, which only begins to tackle the problems of sense and value at the end of the 6th proposition, namely after
proposition 6.4 that says: ‘All propositions are of equal value.’\textsuperscript{58} We find a similar affirmation in the lecture on ethics: if a person were omniscient and wrote a big book with all the facts of the world, all the propositions in the book would stand on the same level.

Wittgenstein writes in proposition 6.41: ‘The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen.’\textsuperscript{59} It is possible here for Wittgenstein to separate sense from the world, because he is drawing the limits of factuality, and sense has to be outside these limits, thus it has to be outside the world. But, it is important to make a distinction here between a natural sense that any proposition could express and a supernatural sense that corresponds to what a description of an ethical or religious experience would point to. Wittgenstein’s claim is that the description of an ethical or religious experience cannot be a proposition, in the sense that he defined propositions in the \textit{Tractatus}, because considering them as propositions would imply that we look for a natural, scientific description of a fact in them, whereas the fact at stake cannot be seen in that way. If someone grew a lion’s head and began to roar, that can be considered as a miracle by some people, but if we ask for a doctor to examine the transformed individual, then we are no longer seeing it as a miracle. Wittgenstein writes: ‘For imagine whatever fact you may, it is not in itself miraculous in the absolute sense of that term.’\textsuperscript{60}

In other words, a fact by itself cannot be miraculous, we need to be living in a certain way, having certain beliefs that allow us to see the miraculous in this fact.

In order to understand the defining characteristics of ethics, Wittgenstein suggested that we look at different expressions that one could use to express an ethical or religious experience. The first

\textsuperscript{58} Ludwig Wittgenstein. \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus}. Translated by C. K. Ogden, Routledge P, 1922, 6.4.
\textsuperscript{59} Ludwig Wittgenstein. \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus}. 6.41.
was the experience of wonder at the existence of the world. This experience can also be described by saying that it is the seeing of the world as a miracle.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein distinguished between “seeing” and “seeing as”: when we see a figure as a rabbit while it is possible also to see it as a duck, we are seeing an aspect, thus our seeing involves an interpretation and not the mere observation of a fact. The essential insight brought by the concept of ‘seeing as’ is that it introduces a perspective into ‘seeing’, an insight that science would certainly struggle to exclude.

It is important that in the lecture on ethics, Wittgenstein constantly insists on demarcating ethics from any scientific enquiry: first, ethics does not deal with facts as science does; second, if we had to write a scientific book on ethics, or if we had to make a science out of ethics, then all the other books in the world would be destroyed. And this is the question that we should be concerned with: why can’t we construct a scientific ethical theory or provide a scientific ground to morality?

We should recall proposition 6.52 of the Tractatus: ‘We feel that even if all possible scientific questions were answered; the problems of life have still not been touched at all.’

In the beginning of the lecture, Wittgenstein distinguishes between relative or trivial sense and absolute or ethical sense: the right road in a relative sense would be the road that leads to a predetermined goal, whereas the right road in an absolute sense is the one that everybody would take with logical necessity, it is a state of affairs that everybody would necessarily bring about. Wittgenstein’s claim is that such a state of affairs does not exist: there is not one determined state of affairs in the world that could be called ‘the absolutely good’. We could conclude that the aim of ethics cannot be to construct a theory defining the absolute “Good”, as there is no such fact or

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thing. Furthermore, the seeing of the world as a miracle does not reveal a truth about the meaning of life. If we are looking for a scientific truth, it does not add anything to our knowledge.

In *Wittgenstein: Rhyme and Reason*, Jacques Bouveresse explains that Wittgenstein wants to show us that it is absurd to imagine that when we fight against a certain ethical system, we do something more, as in something more rational, and more scientific, than fighting against a certain ethical system. Furthermore, it is not true that there exists an *a priori* solution to ethical problems that we should just find and convince others that it is the right solution. 62

But even after having shown that ethics cannot be a science, Wittgenstein still thinks that we do try to express something by certain unique forms of speech, like “I feel absolutely safe” or “I wonder at the existence of the world”. In fact, the essence of what we want to say is “non-sense”, because what we are expressing by these expressions is an urge to go beyond all meaningful language. In his note to Schlick on 30 December 1929, Wittgenstein says that ethics is the thrust against the limits of language. And, at the end of the lecture, he writes: ‘my whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless.’ 63 Wittgenstein explains that this desperate running against the boundaries of language is due to the impossibility of making any scientific claims in ethics: ‘Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science.’ Again, in the note to Schlick, he writes: ‘But the tendency to thrust against the limits of language points to something’. We could say that it points to the importance of the question of sense, whereas science is only concerned with the question of truth.

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In *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein writes: ‘In former times people entered monasteries. Were they perhaps simple-minded, or obtuse people? Well, if people like that took such measures so as to be able to go on living, the problem cannot be an easy one!’

‘I myself find my way of philosophizing new, and it keeps striking me so afresh, and that is why I have to repeat myself so often. It will have become part of the flesh and blood of a new generation and it will find the repetitions boring. For me they are necessary. This method consists essentially in leaving the question of *truth* and asking about *sense* instead.’

In the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein calls this tendency to still look for something, when science leaves our desires unsatisfied, the tendency towards the mystical. It is the mystical that language cannot express. The mystical is not in the world, it is the feeling of the world as a limited whole. And it is only this feeling of the world as a whole that makes it possible to find a ‘sense’ outside it, because if the world is limited, it means that there is something outside it. That which gives meaning to existence and value to values is outside the world. But language cannot say that – it can only show it. The reasons why we should throw away the ladder after climbing it through the propositions of the *Tractatus* is that these propositions are metaphysical. They are attempting to say something that cannot be said – they are thus nonsense. It is by delimiting what can be said that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* shows us that what is important is all what remains outside these first limits.

In *Culture and Value*, he writes: ‘I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy as one writes a poem. That, it seems to me, must reveal how far my thinking belongs to the present, the future or the past. For I was acknowledging

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64 Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*. P.3e.
myself, with these words, to be someone who cannot quite do what he would like to be able to do."  

Wittgenstein seems to be saying that philosophy has more to learn from poetry than from science. In his essay entitled ‘From the mysticism of the Tractatus to the impossibility of silence’, Gerhard Schmezer says that Wittgenstein seeks to show that if there is something beyond the facts, namely the mystical – access to it is not essentially discursive, it may be only indirectly accessible through art, literature and religion.

Should we then conclude that ethics cannot be expressed, that is, ethics is transcendental because it belongs to the domain of the mystical?

We mentioned above that seeing the world as a miracle introduces a perspective into ‘seeing’. There is a place for subjectivity in these experiences. However, was Wittgenstein’s conception of subjectivity in the Tractatus and in the lecture on ethics not allowing for a subject to express itself in language? It does seem that the only way for the subject to express itself in the Tractatus is through the ‘I’ and the fact ‘the world is my world’, but this subject is not yet an individual that takes part in a community where he or she can share ethical and religious views.

In Culture and Value Wittgenstein writes: ‘Don’t for heaven’s sake, be afraid of talking nonsense! Only don’t fail to pay attention to your nonsense.’ It seems then that the fact that talking about ethics necessarily implies going beyond the limits of sense should not stop us from transgressing those limits. However, we should know what we are doing when we use language in that way, and acknowledge that we are talking non-sense. Is this insight about the nonsensicality of ethical expressions only aiming to demarcate it from science, or does it have other important implications?

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65 Ludwig Wittgenstein. Culture and Value. P. 28e.
66 Ludwig Wittgenstein. Culture and Value. P. 64e.
In his conversations with Friedrich Waismann recorded in *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, Wittgenstein said, commenting on his lecture on ethics: ‘At the end of my lecture on ethics I spoke in the first person. I think that this is something very essential. Here, there is nothing to be stated anymore; all I can do is to step forth as an individual and speak in the first person…Running against the limits of language? Language is, after all, not a cage.’ The claim I have been trying to make in this section is that the ethical is personal, as Wittgenstein wrote, and this citation proves this claim further. Wittgenstein is not interested in telling others what to do in the sense that he would have his own ethical doctrine, but rather he wants to speak about his own ethical experiences (that are also mystical in nature). Running against the limits of language would amount to creating a universal ethical system that everyone ought to abide by. But language is not a cage in the sense that the impossibility of a systematic ethics does not mean that we should remain silent completely when it comes to ethical matters.

The last proposition of the *Tractatus* asks the reader to remain silent about that of which they cannot speak. But, we can see that this silence is meant to restrict a particular kind of talk about ethics, the kind trying to derive absolute value judgments. But this should not stop the individual from acting or speaking in a sense that is relevant to ethics. If ethical problems don’t have *a priori* solutions, that doesn’t mean that individuals cannot find solutions for the different problems they face in their lives.

In ‘Some Developments in Wittgenstein’s View of Ethics’, Rush Rhees notes that we express or try to express judgments of value, not just any time, but in circumstances in which it makes sense to do so. Furthermore, in the first example Wittgenstein gave in the lecture on ethics of a judgment

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of absolute value was, ‘Well, you ought to want to behave better’ – it is a natural remark to make in the circumstances, it is not a misuse of language, it is the only a remark you could make. However, we could say that the judgment has a significance that goes beyond all circumstances.

In his conversations with Rhees, Wittgenstein mentioned that he does not think Kierkegaard’s question – ‘Has a man a right to let himself be put to death for the truth?’ – is an ethical problem. He said, ‘I don’t know what it would be like to let oneself be put to death for the truth. I don’t know how such a man would have to feel, what state of mind he would be in, and so forth. This may reach a point at which the whole problem wavers and ceases to be a problem at all.’ It will cease to be a problem because we don’t have the means to find a solution. When Rhees suggested the problem of a man who has come to the conclusion that he must either leave his wife or abandon his work of cancer research, Wittgenstein thanked him and thought that this is a real ethical problem. Whatever choice the man makes, it will affect his attitude in life (‘he may say, “well thank god I left her; it was better all around”’, or maybe, “thank god I stuck to her”, or he may not be able to say “thank god” at all, but just the opposite) – and this is what the solution of an ethical problem looks like. Wittgenstein adds that if we consider the problem from the perspective of Christian ethics, the possible solutions become limited: the problem becomes a different one because leaving his wife is not an option, but the claim Wittgenstein wants to make here is that the question whether Christian ethics is right whether it makes sense. He compares it to wanting to decide which of two standards of accuracy is the right one.

We can conclude that the ethical may not lie in moral philosophy constructing theories about the absolute good, but rather in the problems and situations that individuals face in various circumstances in their lives: ‘If anyone should think he has solved the problem of life and feels like telling himself everything is quite easy now, he need only tell himself, in order to see that he
is wrong, that there was a time when this “solution” had not been discovered; but it must have been possible to live *then* too, and the solution which has now been discovered appears in relation to how things were then like an accident. And it is the same for us in logic too. If there were a “solution to the problems of logic (philosophy)”, we should only have to caution ourselves that there was a time when they had not been solved (and then too it must have been possible to live and think).”

If Wittgenstein has shown that the answer to the question of the meaning of life is that it does not exist, this implies that the question vanishes as well: ‘The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem’,

This dissolution of the riddle tells us something important about Wittgenstein’s method. He writes in *Culture and Value*: ‘Thoughts at peace. That is the goal someone who philosophizes longs for.’

And: ‘Slept a bit better. Vivid dreams. A bit depressed; weather and state of health. The solution of the problem you see in life is a way of living which makes what is problematic disappear. The fact that life is problematic means that your life does not fit life’s shape. So you must change your life, and once it fits the shape, what is problematic will disappear. But don’t we have the feeling that someone who doesn’t see a problem there is blind to something important, indeed to what is most important of all? Wouldn’t I like to say he is living aimlessly – just blindly like a mole as it were; and if he could only see, he would see the problem? Or shouldn’t I say: Someone who lives

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68 Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*. P. 6e.
71 Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*. P. 50e.
rightly does not experience the problem as *sorrow*, hence not after all as a problem, but rather as joy, that is so to speak as a bright halo round his life, not a murky background.\textsuperscript{72}

In the beginning of the lecture on ethics, Wittgenstein wrote that he is using the word ethics in a large sense, which includes the essential part of what is called aesthetics, and in the *Tractatus*, he writes that ethics and aesthetics are one. In both ethics and aesthetics, there is an attempt to make the world meaningful. The kinds of reasons we give in a conversation about ethics or aesthetics are similar, because we use in both cases reasons that could be only justified at the end by saying, ‘But this is how you should see it!’

According to Wittgenstein, we are misguided if we can only think of aesthetics through a philosophical problem like what is beauty? In *Wittgenstein: Rhyme and Reason*, Bouveresse writes that ‘in order to understand what aesthetics is really about, we should look at the language game that is actually played, what is done in certain circumstances around certain objects, to study the logic or grammar of a certain activity.’ While saying that ethics includes an essential part of aesthetics, Wittgenstein possibly meant to hint that we should approach ethics and aesthetics in a similar way, namely we should stop trying to make a theory of the good or of the beautiful, and look instead at the language games in which we use these concepts, in order to understand what we really do with these words and how is our use of these concepts related to our practices. It is only then, by changing the way we see our concepts, that we can transform ourselves.

According to James Conant in his article entitled ‘Wittgenstein’s Methods’\textsuperscript{73}, it is misleading to see a *Kuhre* (turn) only between an early Wittgenstein (in the *Tractatus*) and a later Wittgenstein.

\textsuperscript{72} Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Culture and Value*. P.31e.
(in 1929 in Cambridge). He suggests that we need to carefully read passages 89 to 133 in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and compare them to Wittgenstein’s ‘Philosophy’ in the *Big Typescrit*, to see that in the beginning of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein was criticizing the author of the *Tractatus*, replacing his method by another one that would allow for a transition from logic to a plurality of grammars. However, it is only later that Wittgenstein will make another important transition from this middle Wittgenstein to a later phase, in which he understood that even if we replace one method by another, the problems of philosophy cannot therefore be solved. It is the problem of the gap between theory and practice in the sense that a theory that defends plurality and differences is not less theoretical than a theory that defends monism. That is why it is crucial that Wittgenstein admits that there is not one method of doing philosophy, but that he is suggesting a method. Such a statement allows to deduce that there is no way for philosophy to find one way to solve all possible occurring problems, and most importantly, that philosophy is itself a practice among others that can develop in many directions that are unknown to Wittgenstein himself. It is at this point that Wittgenstein’s own understanding of what philosophy is allows us to see that he bridges the gap between so-called theory and practice. Section 135 from the *Philosophical Investigations* is where Wittgenstein most explicitly lays out his method with the following statements:

‘It is our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of-ways.

‘For 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 makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy 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, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples
can be broken off. Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated: “Shweirigkeiten beseitigt”), not a single problem.

There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.  

In other words, the philosophical problems Wittgenstein discusses in his work are personal in the sense that they portray his own struggles with these problems, and not the only way possible to deal with them. That is why he says that his aim is to be able to stop doing philosophy whenever he wants and to put the problems to rest: it is not because that is what he did but rather what he wished he could do and found it so difficult.

B. The Ethical Point of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophical*

Throwing away the ladder amounts to realizing that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are nonsensical. Wittgenstein wrote in a letter to Ficker that the most important parts of this book are the preface and the conclusion, because this is where the ethical point of the book can be realized. He wrote: ‘It isn’t really foreign to you, because the book’s point is ethical. I once meant to include in the preface a sentence which is not in fact there now, but which I will write out for you here, because it will perhaps be key for you. What I meant to write then was this: my work consists of two parts: the one presented here and all what I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one. For the ethical gets its limits drawn from the inside, as it were, by my book; and I am convinced that this is the ONLY *rigorous* way of drawing that limit. In short, I believe that where many others are gassing, I have managed in my book to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it…For now I would recommend you to read the preface and the conclusion, because they contain the most direct expression of the point.’

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Furthermore, in the preface of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein included this central remark:

‘Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to draw a limit to thought, we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).’

It is only in language that this limit can be drawn and what lies on the other side of the limit is nonsense. According to Cora Diamond in ‘Ethics, Imagination and the Tractatus’, this statement in the preface makes us question the remark that precedes it, which distinguishes between things that can be said and things that can only be shown. In other words, if this limit was possible, Wittgenstein wouldn’t have made such a statement, especially that it is written after the first and not before it. Cora Diamond writes: ‘And this giving of the limits of expression from the inside is what Wittgenstein takes the book to have achieved in its presentation of the general form of a proposition.’

Indeed, I agree with Cora Diamond that what the book aimed to achieve is to find this variable denoting the general form of all propositions such that it would be possible *a priori* to say whether a proposition makes sense or not. In other words what is really at stake here is being able to draw this limit between sense and non-sense in an ideal, clear, exact and *a priori* way.

Diamond explains her view of what the ethical point in the *Tractatus* is by writing: ‘What it is to understand a person who utters nonsense is to go as far as one can with the idea that there is.’ And further: ‘To want to understand the person who talks nonsense is to want to enter

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imaginatively the taking of that nonsense for sense.\footnote{Ibid.} This process, according to Diamond, results in the philosopher gaining a self-understanding of themselves when they do philosophy. The reason why the only correct method in philosophy is to show that we failed to give meaning to our signs is that this conception itself is nonsensical and put into question after we can as far as possible gain an internal understanding of it. Diamond draws an important distinction between understanding from the outside, like empiricists do, and an understanding from the inside, which requires a specific use of the imagination – to imagine being in the philosopher’s place and thinking along their path until we reach the limit.

But the question remains: Why is the Tractatus a book about both ethics and logic? Are these two intertwined in some way?

I would like to defend the thesis that the ethical points to a way of acting in the world. Therefore, if we see philosophy itself as an activity rather than a doctrine, then Wittgenstein’s struggles within philosophy are primarily ethical struggles. If the elucidation meant by the propositions of the Tractatus is to climb up a ladder before throwing it away, then this activity itself tells us something important about the ethical point of the book.

The fact that we realize that it is impossible to accomplish the task of the Tractatus, namely to determine the limits between sense and non-sense in an absolute way; and that is impossible because it requires us to be able to think both sides of the limit between sense and non-sense, whereas we cannot think the nonsensical.

What are the ethical consequences of this impossibility? It implies first that whenever we are engaging in some thought or conceptual activity, we cannot know what lies on the opposite side
of the limit of sense, or in other words, I cannot say much about all the grammars that can be in contradiction with the grammar governing my concepts. This is a way in which work on oneself opens the way for otherness.

Second, the limits of my concepts lose their clarity – they are now vague, allowing for more flexibility in my conceptual apparatus. The ideal exactness that the general form of proposition aimed at cannot be reached, and we find this claim continuously in all Wittgenstein’s work. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein repeatedly goes back to this impossibility to determine logic *a priori* we need to have friction with reality. In *On Being with Others*, Simon Glendinning writes: ‘Against the idea of a lack of definitional sharpness, Wittgenstein proposes the idea that we can become captivated by the ideal of exactness because “the real foundations of inquiry” are “hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity” (PI, 129); they are, that is to say, normally inconspicuous.’ 79 The logic that governs our language, which we cannot see because it is too embedded within our practices, shows that ‘our concepts do not exhibit the clear and closed borders we are inclined to expect: “We expect a smooth regular contour and get to see a ragged one…Rules occur to us, no doubt, but the reality shows nothing but exceptions.”’ 80

If we go one step further than Cora Diamond and say that the ethical point of the book is not only to imagine that the nonsensical makes sense until a certain limit, but rather that this limit itself is what is put into question, we can see how the logical and the ethical are intertwined. If my concepts do not have fixed limits, how can I claim to be the only one to know what is the right way for doing something, or what is the right attitude to have towards the world? If I cannot think about

80 Ibid.
what is beyond the limits of what makes sense to me, then how can I judge what seems nonsensical (namely otherness)?

Finally, I would like to argue, as I pointed to it in the beginning of this third part that the self-transformation Wittgenstein undergoes in the *Tractatus* was made possible through an avowal, namely a distinction made by Wittgenstein between understanding him and understanding his propositions.  

81 ‘My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understand me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. […]’ Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico- Philosophicus*. 6.54.
'This is how philosophers should salute each other: “Take your time!”'

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value

‘Human beings have a physical need to tell themselves when at work: “Let’s have done with it now!”, and it’s having constantly to go on thinking in the face of this need when philosophizing, that makes this work so strenuous.’

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value

CHAPTER 2: WITTEGENSTEIN ON THE ROLE OF TIME IN PHILOSOPHICAL ACTIVITY

Part 1 - Time in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

It was the Cartesian gesture that established the indubitability of the ‘I’ on the ground of the judgment of the cogito. Can we deduce the evidence and truth of ‘I am’ from the assertion that ‘I think’? At least, we can say that the indubitability of the ‘I’ is the product of a scientific desire for truth. The problem that then arises is how to think of the status of the ‘I’ after the truth of science is no longer evident? Wittgenstein is a philosopher who had put into question both the apparent evidence of the existence of a subject who can ground the possibility of knowledge and the claimed evidence of the truth of science. However, this should not lead us to conclude that Wittgenstein was denying subjectivity or the centrality of the ‘spirit’ in philosophy. It is in his later writings,
after the *Tractatus*, that Wittgenstein explicitly discusses the place of subjectivity in language. But the propositions of the *Tractatus* cannot be said to deal with something more profoundly than the human spirit. In her book *The Meanings of Use*, Sandra Laugier writes: ‘The Tractatus is certainly the work that goes the farthest in a logical and linguistic exploration of the human spirit, of the question of the articulation of thought and the world, to the extent of a pure and simple renunciation of such an investigation.’82 But what kind of investigation does Wittgenstein wants us to renounce? In order to answer this question, we will have to understand how Wittgenstein conceived of philosophy – particularly the method he thought can make philosophical activity possible. Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy is based on the idea that not only does philosophy not consist in constructing theses and doctrines, but also when philosophers think they are putting forward such doctrines, they are really the captives of some confusion.

I would like to suggest in this chapter that the work on oneself, or the spiritual exercise that Wittgenstein hopes the reader of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* can accomplish, is a work on the signs that constitute the book’s propositions. More specifically, a work that involves seeing them first as signs83 that make sense, which amounts to having a certain understanding of this sense, in order to reach eventually the moment when we can start seeing them as signs that are nonsensical, thus merely as signifiers that we had to work through before throwing away the ladder. How does the transformation in the way we perceive these signs entail a self-transformation and why is it important?

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83 The concept of a sign means here a signifier that has a use.
A. A Chain of Concepts or the Insistence of Logical Necessity

Let me first introduce the *Tractatus*, a book that Wittgenstein warns us in the preface not to consider as a ‘text-book’ (he writes: ‘*Er ist also kein Lehrbuch*’). The *Tractatus* is composed of seven numbered propositions, and each proposition is commented on by several other propositions that are also numbered, with decimal figures indicating their logical importance and the emphasis placed on them in Wittgenstein’s exposition, as he explains in a footnote to the first proposition. He writes: ‘The propositions n1, n2, n3, etc. are comments on proposition No.n; the propositions n.m1, n.m2, etc., are comments on the proposition No. n.m; and so on.’ (Wittgenstein 1922, p.31)

The opening proposition is: ‘The world is everything that is the case.’ (‘*Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist.*’) And in order to define ‘what is the case’, the second proposition states: ‘What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts.’ (‘*Was der Fall ist, die Tatsache, ist das Bestehen von Sachverhalten.*’)

3- ‘The logical picture of the facts is the thought.’ (‘*Das logische Bild der Tatsachen ist der Gedanke.*’)

4- ‘The thought is the significant proposition.’ (‘*Der Gedanke ist der sinnvolle Satz.*’)

5- ‘Propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions. (An elementary proposition is a truth-function of itself).’ (‘*Der Satz ist eine Wahrheitfunktion der Elementarsätze. (Die Elementarsatz ist eine Wahrheitfunktion seiner selbst.)*’)

6- In the sixth proposition he gives the general form of truth-functions, and adds that this is the general form of propositions.

7- ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.’ (‘*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.*’)

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I cited all seven propositions, not because I think this is the best way to summarize the book, but rather in order to show the form of these propositions, the way they relate to one another. A proposition is almost always an explanation of a concept mentioned in the one preceding it, which can suggest that what we are really being presented with is a chain of concepts that we have no other choice but to follow, once we have accepted the primacy of concepts like ‘the world’, ‘fact’, ‘objects’, ‘substance’, ‘picture’, etc. This chain of concepts is insistent, because it is held together by the power of the logical ‘must’. By virtue of logical necessity, we have to accept the claim that there is a substance of the world that is simple and not compound, and it is this substance (which is nothing else than simple objects) that makes it possible for sense to be grounded. Wittgenstein writes: ‘Objects form the substance of the world. Therefore they cannot be compound. If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true. It would then be impossible to form a picture of the world (true or false).’ (Wittgenstein 1922, 2.021-2.0212)

It is only at the end of the book that this chain of concepts disintegrates, when the possibility to ground meaning is lost, and we are left with what Eli Friedlander, in his book Signs of Sense, calls ‘a space of non-meaning at the heart of language’. It is the enigmatic nature of the world that makes all the attempts to find conceptual determinations of ‘the world’, ‘facts’ or ‘objects’ fail. In Signs of Sense, Friedlander defines an enigmatic text as that ‘whose difficulty implicates that the reader transforms his mode of approach.’84 This transformation is what Wittgenstein wants his reader to experience. But is there a method that the Tractatus is presenting for the reader to understand the aim of the book?

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B. On the Method of Philosophy

In proposition 6.54 Wittgenstein writes: ‘My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)’\(^{85}\)

According to Friedlander, the ladder is a figure that presents an analogy between the way we relate to the text and the way we relate to the world. Just as the propositions have eventually to seem nonsensical to the reader, they have to recognize that his relation to the world also loses its sense. In other words, the chain of concepts that are meant to determine the sense of the first formulated concept, ‘the world’, fails and disintegrates.

But we still need to understand what is non-sense according to Wittgenstein. Proposition 3.3 of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* states that: ‘Only the proposition has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning.’ In order to determine whether a proposition has sense, it will not be sufficient to know whether its constituent parts have meaning. It is rather the combination between the words constituting it that is either possible or not. According to ‘the logical syntax’ as introduced in the *Tractatus*, the complete logical analysis of a proposition – revealing its logical structure by reducing it to a combination of elementary propositions that are themselves composed of simple signs – will allow us to determine whether a proposition is nonsensical or not. This boundary between sense and non-sense can be clearly traced, because all possibilities of sense can be determined *a priori* once we posit the existence of simple objects constituting the substance of the world, and thus the ground for meaning. This is due to the fact

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that objects are defined as containing the possibility of all states of affairs. A proposition depicting an impossible state of affair will thus be discarded from language.

But is this conception of non-sense the same as the one Wittgenstein is using in proposition 6.54, when he says that we should recognize his propositions as nonsensical? The answer has to be negative, because the propositions of the *Tractatus* are only nonsensical when they are used in a certain way, and here we refer to the centrality of the notion of ‘use’ in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Wittgenstein is saying that we can only recognize the nonsensicality of these propositions after we have climbed up the ladder, that is, after we have read and understood them. The problem is then if we continue to consider them as sensical after reading the entire book. This is why temporality that is necessarily correlated with the notion of ‘use’ is important.

In a lecture in 1935, quoted by Cora Diamond in *The Realistic Spirit*, Wittgenstein says: ‘Though it is nonsense to say “I feel his pain”’, this is different from inserting into an English sentence a meaningless word, say “abracadabra”…and from saying a string of nonsense words. Every word in this sentence is English, and we shall be inclined to say that the sentence has a meaning. The sentence with the nonsense word or the string of nonsense words can be discarded from our language, but if we discard from our language, “I feel Smith’s toothache”, that is quite different. The second seems non-sense, we are tempted to say, because of some truth about the nature of things or the nature of the world. We have discovered in some way that pains and personality do not fit together in such a way that I can feel his pain. The task will be to show that there is in fact no difference between these two cases of non-sense, though there is a psychological distinction in

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that we are inclined to say the one, and be puzzled by it, and not the other. We constantly hover between regarding it as sense and non-sense, and hence the trouble arises.’

Diamond argues that in order to understand what Wittgenstein meant by ‘throwing away the ladder’, and the idea that there are no philosophical doctrines, we should consider the propositions of the book as necessary transitional remarks. To illustrate her point, she refers to Frege’s emphasis on the distinction between objects and functions that is manifested in the signs we use to talk about functions and objects in an appropriate notation. There is a difference between the signs we use to refer to a function, and the signs we use to predicate something of a function. Diamond writes: ‘And when we try to say *that* there is a distinction between functions and objects, we see that we are not *there using* language to talk about functions at all, because we are not there using signs of the distinctive sorts through which functions are spoken about and characterized.’

Thus, in saying sentences like: there is a distinction between functions and objects, we are making a transitional remark that once made, we no longer need to repeat or expand upon, because the distinction can be shown through the logical notation. I take Diamond’s argument to mean, when applied to the *Tractatus*, that we do need a clarification of the logic that governs our language (for philosophy is defined by Wittgenstein as ‘Sprachkritik’). However, once we take these logical remarks or propositions to form the body of a doctrine, we are misunderstanding their ‘use’, which has to be transitional and therefore temporary.

It is interesting that the proposition preceding 6.54 mentioned above is the one in which Wittgenstein defines what he calls ‘the only strictly correct method’ of doing philosophy. He writes: ‘The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and

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then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. This method would be unsatisfying to the other – he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy – but it would be the only strictly correct method. In this passage we find a traditional encounter between a student who wants to learn philosophy and their teacher. While the described method is not exemplified by the *Tractatus* itself, the teacher will directly after describing it, announce that their teaching by itself cannot allow the reader to have a meaningful relation to the world. The teacher is thus calling upon the reader to accomplish by themselves this task of ‘giving sense’, or more generally the task of thinking even when he cannot ‘speak’ – because speech presupposes an interlocutor, while thinking according to Wittgenstein is a solitary activity.

C. On Time and Logic or Time After Logic

While writing about time in relation to the *Tractatus* and to spiritual exercises, commentators have mostly focused on the primacy of the present moment. I would like to suggest that we need to think about the relation between logic and time, as well as about the time that is opened to us after throwing away the ladder, in order to have a sense of the self-transformation or the spiritual exercise that the *Tractatus* allows the reader to experience.

First, concerning the relation between logic and time: logical reasoning is thought by Aristotle to be spatial and static, because it is analytic. When giving examples of arithmetic, Husserl and Kant noted the synthetic character of such equations as 5+7=12. The concept 5 is not simply added to the concept 7; there must be a displacement in time that happens through counting, which makes it possible to substitute 5+7 by 12. In the first part of this paper, we saw that the propositions of

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the *Tractatus* involve substitutions of concepts by others defining them, and that these substitutions make possible the evolution of the logical reasoning. It is this displacement that is characteristic of what can be called ‘the moment of formulation’\(^8^9\) that gives sense to these propositions while we are reading them. Here, I will allow myself to make a brief digression from Wittgenstein to refer to a text by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, entitled ‘Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty’\(^9^0\), in which he illustrates through a fictional situation how logical reasoning involves a displacement in time. The situation is the following: three prisoners have to undergo a test that will be decisive for their lives. There are five disks (three white and two black), and one of them will be fastened to each prisoner on his back, that is, outside his visual field. The first to deduce his own color can benefit from a discharging measure. The prison warden adds that the prisoner’s conclusion must be founded upon logical and not simply probabilistic grounds. This having been said, the three prisoners are given white disks, and the two black ones remain without use.

Lacan describes the perfect solution as such: ‘After having contemplated one another for *a certain time*, the three subjects take a few steps together, passing side by side through the doorway. Each of them then separately furnishes a similar response, which can be expressed as follows: “I am a white, and here is how I know it. Since my companions were whites, I thought that, had I been a black, each of them would have been able to infer the following: if I were a black, the other would have necessarily realized straight away that he was a white and would have left immediately; therefore I am not a black. And both would have left together, convinced they were whites. As they did nothing of the kind, I must be a white like them. At that, I made for the door to make my

\(^8^9\) I owe this expression to Professor Bruno Haas who mentioned it while referring to the *Tractatus* during a class on Lacan at Paris I University in the Fall 2008.

conclusion known.” All three thus exited simultaneously, armed with the same reasons for concluding.  

We can see how the prisoners were only able to arrive at a certain knowledge through a displacement in time. The opposite of knowledge based on such a displacement would be the repeated knowledge, which would not be knowledge at all for Lacan, because knowing is also desiring to know.

Going back to Wittgenstein, the *Tractatus* also involves arriving at a final moment when we can recognize something that should allow us to transform our way of seeing so that we can have a better understanding of ourselves (a self-knowledge that might be as important as the prisoner’s knowing the color of the disk on his back).

Eli Friedlander writes the following about this final moment of recognition: ‘Throwing away the ladder is not an action dictated by the reading, but a distinct moment temporally separated from such reading, hence the time gap between reading and recognition. This idea shifts the burden of meaningfulness onto the reader. (…) It is in this gap that the very existence of a reader, by way of his resoluteness in throwing away the ladder, becomes the issue.’

It is only after throwing away the ladder, by recognizing what Diamond called the transitional character of the propositions, that a new time can open to us – a time in which we are freed from a certain prison that the conception of logic as science can put us in. It is a time in which the reader can start thinking on their own without the constraint of finding answers, but rather to be open to all kinds of work (within or outside philosophy) that the enigmatic nature of existence can incite us to do.

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Part 2 - Memory-Time and Physical-Time: What is the Significance of this Distinction?

A. What is Memory-Time?

Wittgenstein’s interest in time started in 1929 with his discovery of the phenomenological project. In the *Philosophical Remarks*, he explained that a phenomenon is reality, and should not be understood as a symptom of something else.\(^93\) In the *Tractatus*, he wrote in section 48 of part V: ‘If the world of data [i.e. the phenomenological world] is timeless, how can we speak of it at all? The stream of life, or the stream of the world, flows on, and our propositions are so to speak verified only at instants. Our propositions are verified only by the present.’\(^94\)

The few philosophers and commentators who were interested in Wittgenstein’s account of the concept of time (mainly Moore, Alice Ambrose, Jaakko Hintikka, Joachim Schulte) focused on the distinction he made between concepts of memory-time and physical time, or between memory-time and information-time later on. Hintikka was the one who took this distinction the most seriously – rightly or wrongly – in the sense that he considered it to be an instance of the more general distinction between phenomenological (time as experienced and remembered, ordered by the subject-being memory-time) and physical (information-time, referring to actual time references in the world like clocks, dates, calendars). Wittgenstein made this conceptual distinction in order to show later that it is only when we take memory-time for physical time that we are confused.

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Therefore, according to Hintikka, Wittgenstein is here criticizing more generally an ontological understanding of time.

In this second part of my chapter I am interested in understanding the relevance of memory-time to Wittgenstein’s elucidation of his method.

In 1949-1951, after he became ill, Wittgenstein visited Cornell to see Norman Malcom and then Oxford to see Elisabeth Anscombe, accompanied by O.K. Bouwsma, who wrote a book about these two visits as well as his conversations with Wittgenstein, entitled: *Wittgenstein Conversations 1949-1951*. In this book, Bouwsma mentions a remarkable comparison made by Wittgenstein between reading a philosophical statement like Descartes’ cogito and watching cinema on a screen. He says after Bouwsma introduced the sentence: *Cogito, ergo sum*: ‘Of course if – now you told me such a thing, I would say: Rubbish! But the real question is something different. How did Descartes come to do this?’ Bouwsma asked him whether he means what leads up to it in Descartes’ thinking, and the answer was: ‘No. One must do this for oneself. I always think of it as like the cinema. You see before you the picture on the screen, but behind you is the operator, and he has a roll here on this side from which he is winding and another on that side into which he is winding. The present is the picture which is before the light, but the future is still on this roll to pass, and the past is on that roll. It’s gone through already. Now imagine that there is only the present. There is no future roll, and no past roll. And now further imagine what language there could be in such a situation. One would just gape. This!’

The time of reality, of immediate experience, the phenomenological time, is the one on the screen and the time of the facts of physics is the one on the roll – the latter is a mere construction of a

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temporal representation of the time of immediate experience. But if all what we have on the screen is the present, how is it possible that this second temporal system on the film, that has a past and a future, could be constructed as a presentation of the first one? It is this question that will make Wittgenstein think about a concept of time that allows for a continuous perception, in which the present is the final point, and memory is the source. Wittgenstein writes: ‘Among other things, memory-time is distinguished from physical time by being a ray the origin of which is the present.’

It is the concept of memory that makes it possible for phenomenological time not to be reduced to the present instant, but to conceive it in terms of a temporal flux and temporal order. The order of the temporal system that governs the phenomenological world is memory-time: ‘Memory-time. It (like visual space) is not a part of time in the larger sense, but is the specific order of events or situations in memory.’

The order of the temporal system of the physical world is physical time. In Conversations with the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein said that ‘time is the way my memories are ordered.’ Similarly, in Section 105 of the Big Typescript, entitled ‘Memory-Time’, Wittgenstein writes: ‘The traditional questions are of no use for the logical investigation of the phenomena. The latter create their own questions, or rather, supply their own answers. After all, time is not a temporal space, but an ordering.’ Here Wittgenstein could be referring to Augustine, who asks the questions, ‘What is time?’ – as if we could compare it to a space that we need to identify.

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97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
The notion of time for Wittgenstein plays an important role in the transition between the *Tractatus* and his later philosophy. Instead of this confrontation between language and reality, Wittgenstein will be concerned with language-games that obviously involve duration. The notion of use will have a central role, because use suggests durability.

**B. The Facticity of Concepts**

Wittgenstein defines his method in philosophy as that of making us see a different order of the facts of language; at the same time he defines memory-time as the ordering of our memories in time. Concepts for Wittgenstein cannot be separated from the life or framework, in which they do their work; in other words, they are part of this reality that they allow to shed a new light on. What are concepts other than ways to grasp something new about a reality that we became so assimilated with that we cannot see it from a new perspective? Furthermore, concepts are those “things” that get expressed by language.

In his third chapter on *Concepts*100, entitled ‘The Grain of the Real’, Jocelyn Benoist starts from the sort of doubt we have about concepts, namely do they allow us to access reality? And he first quickly answers by saying that it is a strange doubt, because what are concepts made for if not for that?

It is in fact thought that the real does not always meet the expectation that the concept has of it; in other words, it does not meet the application we are trying to make on it. In this case, we commonly say that a concept is ‘empty’. But the question to ask is really whether, in such a case, it still makes sense to call it a concept at all. Instead of talking about the concept being ‘empty’, Benoist suggests that what the concept really implies is a form of distance with regard to its object. It’s a logical

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distance, namely that an application can be either true or false. The possibility of failure, Benoist says, is here essential, because we could think something that turns out to be false. This logical distance opens up the possibility of a gap between concepts and the real. And the question is to understand what that gap really means. Does it suggest a form of incommensurability between the concept and reality? Benoist answers: it is exactly the opposite – this gap is only possible precisely where all the conditions of an anchoring in reality are met. In order to prove this, Benoist refers to Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, and precisely section 429: ‘The agreement, the harmony, of thought and reality, consists in this: if I say falsely that something is red, even the red is what it isn’t. And when I want to explain the word “red” to someone, in the sentence “That is not red”, I do it by pointing to something red.’

Benoist explains that Wittgenstein’s aim in the first part of the section is to show that if I say some things are red, they can turn out to be not red. But the story does not stop here. Whereas what I say is wrong, there is still a strange relation, according to Benoist, between what I say and these things: namely that they are not red in reality. The claim here is that even if an application of a concept is false, it still concerns the object in question in its reality. In both true and false thoughts, there is an essential link to reality, and that is why we have to point to something red, even when we say, ‘That is not red’.

In his fifth and last chapter, entitled ‘The Reality of Thought’, Benoist defines what he calls the “nature” of concepts: First, the nature of a concept is not its essence that would make it absolute; there is no such thing as a concept that we can apply everywhere. The nature of a concept is what anchors it in a certain situation: it is the sum of facts that make the concept always attached to

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reality. The mistake is to think that these facts should be represented in the concept – they are actually part of the *being* of the concept, and not of its representation or thought.

At the end of his chapter, Benoist concludes from this that concepts have their own facticity, and the principle and aim of conceptual analysis is to give their reality to concepts. It is in this reality that we will find their principle of efficiency. This reality includes not only a perspective on the world, but also the density of what we are that affects how we think. The being of a thinker is not a mere contingency that is exterior to the thought itself; on the contrary, it constitutes the body itself of the thought. Benoist writes that it is not necessarily what Karl Marx eats that is essential to understanding his thinking, but rather his whole life constitutes in a sense the *substance* of his thinking.

There is a relation of reciprocity between the life of a thinker and their thought. Changing the way of life of a thinker will lead to a change in their thought; and this explains why Wittgenstein aimed at changing the way his readers live. The way our memories are ordered is constitutive of the way we inhabit time in our lives, and this makes the singularity of the life of an individual. Changing how a thinker inhabits her time by changing the order of her memories will have an essential effect on her way of thinking. In this context, we see how it is impossible to make a strict separation between concepts and the time they inhabit. In other words, concepts cannot be atemporal.

C. Memory-Time and Grammar

Wittgenstein mentioned the notion of ‘ordering’ twice in his work. First, when discussing his method in philosophy in section 132 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where he writes that ‘We need to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end
in view; one out of many possible orders; not the order. To this end, we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language made us overlook.’

In part II of the *Investigations*, it will become clear that what Wittgenstein has in mind is a change of order that will lead to seeing a new aspect of the working of language. It is only by changing the order of the facts of language that we see the picture in a new aspect (the Gestalt switch). The second time Wittgenstein uses the notion of ordering is when defining memory time – he writes that it is an order of events or situations in our memory.

How is memory relevant to the method of Wittgenstein? We need to remember section 127 of the *Investigations* to answer that question. There, he writes: ‘The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose.’ But what are these reminders? And how do they work? In order to understand this, I will use the private language argument Wittgenstein explores in the *Philosophical Investigations*.102 In section 293, Wittgenstein first suggests that a person could believe that he can only tell the meaning of the word ‘pain’ from their own case: What would we say to such a person?

Here is Wittgenstein’s proposition: If we imagine that each one of us had a beetle box and can only tell what a beetle is by looking at their box, then in this situation it is possible that each one of us has something different in their box. However, what if the word ‘beetle’ had a use in these people’s language? Wittgenstein writes: ‘If so it would not be used as a name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might be empty. No, one can “divide through” by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.’

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For a word to have a use in language the speakers of that language must share a common understanding of that use; in other words, it must be known by everyone what is the criteria that allows them to identify whether the beetle is in the box or not. But if these criteria are private, the word cannot be used by all the speakers of that language. Why did Wittgenstein choose to compare sensations to this odd example of a beetle in a box?

In fact, Wittgenstein’s argument is grounded in the idea that the confusion of those who believe that there can be such a thing as a private language is due to a false parallel between the physical realm and the mental realm. To be more explicit, these people imagine that having an interior sensation is similar and follows the same rules as having an object in a box that is only visible to me, in this instance a beetle. If designating a sensation is thought to be similar to designating an object, then the language-game containing that object cannot really refer to it or name it, because we only have one person’s private access to it, and not a shared criterion for its use. Wittgenstein writes: ‘if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of “object and designation” the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.’ 103 In other words, the grammatical confusion here consists in construing a grammar of a concept on the model of a grammar of another concept that might have similarities with it, but also major differences. It is the difference between a physical concept and a mental concept that is at the origin of this grammatical confusion. For some reason, in the order of memories, the physical and mental can be confused with one another in some cases. The apparent similarity between the physical realm and the mental realm – because both seem to be spaces composed of “things” – make us claim that mental entities can be objectified, and therefore our attitude towards them becomes similar to the

attitude we have towards physical things. The reminder here is to clarify the differences between these two and thereby change the order of our memories.

I would like to suggest that the order of our memories is constitutive of who we are, of our perspective on life. This means that we cannot separate between the order of memories and everything else that is essential to the subject, namely our concepts. Therefore, we have to consider this order of memories as also constitutive of the structure of our concepts, or as Jocelyn Benoist defined it, their “nature” and “facticity”. If we accept this, then we can see that there is a parallel between changing the order of our memories and making a conceptual clarification. Therefore, there is a correlation between memory-time and grammar. And this should not come as a surprise, because after all, thought is inscribed in time.
Part 3 - The Role of Memory-Time in Wittgenstein’s Conception of Work on Oneself

‘We see now in which sense this Dichtung of conceptual games is different than ours, may be considered as a way to go back to our own Auffassung by working on it starting by a work on ourselves just like the architect auto-correct himself. It is by this act of distancing the self from itself that a change of usage can be possible.’

This is how we can see that work on oneself has to involve an act of distancing between the self and itself; or better yet, seeing oneself as another allowing for an auto-corrective work compared by Wittgenstein to the work of an architect. As indicated in the passage above, this work is only possible through fictitious experimentation, therefore the subject of the experimentation needs to take the time to see their own language in a new light. It is only after this time has passed that the avowal is possible and the experimentation has to be ended.

In this particular context, time is the condition of possibility of the event of transformation, the transformation of one’s way of seeing. In order to make this claim clearer I would like to contrast it with the conception of time in Henry Bergson’s work.

According to Bergson, the main misconception of time is to think of it in spatial terms as a chronological succession, whereas time should be understood as pure duration. But what is pure duration and why is it difficult to think of duration ‘in its original purity’? The first definition of pure duration presented in Time and Free Will is the following: it is what the consciousness perceives and thus endures. But the problem, as Bergson explains it in the second chapter of Time and Free Will, is that we are not alone to endure external objects: objects also endure. Bergson writes: ‘When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movement of the hand which
corresponds to the oscillations of the pendulum, I do not measure duration, as seems to be thought; I merely count simultaneities, which is very different. Outside of me, in space, there is never more than a single position of the hand and the pendulum, for nothing is left of the past positions. In other words, duration does not have its origin in a change in the external world. But rather within myself, it is ‘a process of organization or interpenetration of conscious states’ which constitutes duration. While space is a homogeneous medium duration consists of these heterogeneous moments which ‘permeate one another’.  

However, it is only after *Time and Free Will* that Bergson’s concept of duration is going to change and take an ontological dimension that it didn’t have before. In the present work, I am interested in the concept of duration as non-ontological, and the way it can relate to the concept of memory-time. Both concepts involve an organization or ordering of subjective images or conscious states. This idea of ordering is crucial to the possibility of transformation, because it will allow for a possibility of changing this order. In *The Creative Evolution*, Bergson says that metaphysics misconceives reality when it opposes “Being” to “Nothingness.” Being cannot emerge from nothingness; rather what we have is different orders of things. Just because some orders are missing, and we are presented with a disorder, it does not mean that we can conceive of the absence of all orders. That would be, according to Bergson, a confusion between abstracting from the part in the whole and abstracting from the whole in itself, which is as impossible as a squared circle, as the French philosopher writes. We can thus conclude that the concept of nothingness is a result of speculation that got entangled with itself. Instead of conceiving of being as emerging from

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nothingness, Wittgenstein departs from this ontological view of things, and admits that we are always already looking at a certain order of facts that we can only thrive to change in order to see more clearly.

Wittgenstein insists that memory-time should be understood as a particular ordering. He uses the analogy of cinema. It consists in distinguishing between the ordering of the events on the filmstrip on the side of the projector and the ordering on the screen that we see. Interpreting this analogy according to Wittgenstein’s conversation with Bouwsma leads us to say that the screen is similar to the physical world, while memory-images are the ones on the strip of the film. He calls this process of ordering the images to show them on the screen the work that each has to do for themselves. In fact, in several instances in his works, Wittgenstein repeats that we should not change language, but change the order in which we see some facts about language. Once the order is changed, we can see a new aspect, a new way of understanding the working of language. So at the root of our philosophical and grammatical confusions lies a problem with the order in which we see some grammatical facts, or maybe we can say that it is the memory-time of our grammar that is confused or misleading. Therefore, it is only by reworking this ordering, or creating a new memory-time, that the confusion will be resolved. Unfortunately, Wittgenstein offers us more examples about his method than an actual explanation of its process, because he thought that this would lead to theorizing – to founding his own school – which was not his aim. He wrote that his aim was for his readers to change the way they live. Therefore, it is difficult not to see a political and ethical dimension to Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and that will be our task in the third chapter.

At this point, I would like to comment on a passage from Culture and Value. Wittgenstein writes the following: ‘If anyone should think he has solved the problem of life and feels like telling himself everything is quite easy now, he need only tell himself, in order to see that he is wrong,
that there was a time when this “solution” had not been discovered; but it must have been possible to live then too and the solution which has now been discovered appears *in relation to how things were then* like an accident. And it is the same for us in logic too. If there were a “solution to the problems of logic (philosophy)”, we should only have to caution ourselves that there was a time when they had not been solved (and then too it must have been possible to live and think).\textsuperscript{107} This passage demonstrates the relation of reciprocity between forms of life and grammar. This reaffirms what I wrote earlier about the relation between concepts and time, namely that concepts cannot be indifferent to time.

Wittgenstein wrote in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – *forms of life.*’ This is a plurality that could be considered in the present, but also for our concern here, it is a plurality, thus a variation happening in time. Each form of life is made complicated by the different patterns through which it is organized. Giving light to this relation of reciprocity between grammar and forms of life is a way to negate the idea that concepts could be absolute and atemporal. Concepts that seem to resolve problems in one form of life can be inefficient in another form of life.

\textsuperscript{107}Ludwig Wittgenstein. Culture and Value. MS 108 207: 29.6.1930, p.6e.
CHAPTER 3: DISAGREEMENT OR EXCLUSION?

‘If we teach a human being such-and-such a technique by means of examples, that he then proceeds like this and not like that in a particular new case, or that in this case he gets stuck, and thus that this and not this is the “natural” continuation for him: this of itself is an extremely important fact of nature.’

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Part 1 - Wittgenstein on the Relation to the Other

A. Introduction

Wittgenstein’s philosophy may seem apolitical, but it is not. Wittgenstein lived the atrocities of the two world wars and wrote his first book, the *Tractatus*, in the trenches of the First World War. But maybe Wittgenstein’s apparent silence about politics is precisely due to the fact that he lived the experience of facing death and this is what is so difficult to speak about.

Nevertheless, isn’t there something political in saying that the use of philosophy would vanish if it does not help us to understand better the questions of everyday life? We can maybe find the

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108 Letter to Norman Malcolm after they were in Britain together and saw a journal saying that the British attempted an assassination of Hitler. Malcolm said: No that is not possible, the British would not do this! And this remark made Wittgenstein so upset that he brought it up later in a letter saying that he doesn’t know what is the use of philosophy if it doesn’t help us understand the questions of everyday life better.
traces of the political in a philosophy that is interested in language as a public activity, opening up the questions of exchanges and of the meaning of the community.

In *The Realistic Spirit*, the part entitled ‘Eating Meat and Eating People’, Cora Diamond speaks about the familiarity that we have with our concepts: for instance, the concept of being a human being and reflects that in the philosophy of Wittgenstein this familiarity is only acquired by losing it, by looking at the use we make of the concept from outside. Diamond distinguishes between an unjust act and an act that doesn’t recognize the other person as a human being, such as calling a girl by a number instead of a name. This movement of making the familiar seem unfamiliar or uncanny, that is only possible through the imagination, is at the heart of Wittgenstein’s philosophy as seeking a self-transformation and thus having a political dimension that is inseparable also from its anthropological dimension.

I would like to argue in this first part of the chapter that if there is politics in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, it does not – as most commentators argue – lie only in his skepticism about the transition from my voice to ‘our’ voice, or the claim to community; but rather goes a step beyond this to be preoccupied with otherness, the uncanny, and the other as the main objects of his investigations.

**B. Wittgenstein and Realism**

The realism that we can find in Wittgenstein’s philosophy opposes the idealist by turning our attention to what he calls our ‘frame of reference’, which is the background of our lives. He writes: ‘The truth of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference (*zu unserm
Bezugssystem)\textsuperscript{109}. The main statement that points to this realism is in the second part of the Investigations: ‘What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life.’\textsuperscript{110}

Here Wittgenstein is not giving us a theory about forms of life, as some commentators interpreted it, but rather a description of the reality that is always there in the background of our lives.

According to Wittgenstein, the problem Moore is facing by repeating ‘I know this is my hand’ – in order to prove the existence of the external world and refute skepticism – is that the expression “I know” expresses a relation between me and a fact, and not between me and the sense of a proposition (like in the case of ‘I believe’). So, Wittgenstein adds, it seems like ‘the fact is taken into my consciousness. (Here is the reason why one wants to say that nothing that goes in the outer world is really known, but only what happens in the domain of what are called sense-data.) This would give us a picture of knowing as the perception of an outer event through visual rays which project it as it is into the eye and the consciousness. Only then the question at once arises whether one can be certain of this projection. And this picture does indeed show how our imagination presents knowledge, but not what lies at the bottom of this presentation.’\textsuperscript{111}

In other words, the way our imagination equates knowledge with the perception of an external object is at the root of a misleading representation of realism as an attempt to prove the existence of something external. But it is not productive to think of reality in terms of an exteriority opposed to an interiority. Wittgenstein shows rather that it is in terms of an ‘inherited background’ that it has to be described: ‘But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its

correctness, nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited
background against which I distinguish between true and false.¹¹²

Furthermore, when one talks about proving the reality of an external event or conditions, it is
important to know and ask what does one consider them external to. And here the answer is that
they are exterior to a certain system or structure that is normative, constitutive of ‘my
convictions’.¹¹³ But, although reality can be sometimes that which disturbs or agitates this
normative structure, this is not what defines it. These convictions that constitute my inherited
background or my frame of reference are ‘anchored in all my questions and answers, so anchored
that I cannot touch it’. This structure is then the reality that I am anchored in. Wittgenstein then
argues that this system or structure is not at the foundations of our beliefs, but is ‘the element in
which arguments have their life’.¹¹⁴

However, even if we do not have a foundation for our beliefs, what we are left with is not an
ungrounded presupposition, but rather ‘an ungrounded way of acting’¹¹⁵ or ungrounded practices.
We don’t start by teaching children how to believe or disbelieve in the existence of chairs, we start
rather by teaching them how to sit on a chair. Furthermore, if a child is taught that there is a
cupboard in the room, ‘it isn’t taught to doubt whether what it sees later on is still a cupboard or a
kind of stage set.’¹¹⁶ All that is to say is that we need to start with a certain stability of things that
is the norm, and then this norm can be subject to alterations. Wittgenstein’s aim is to show that
logic cannot be described, but once we look at the practice of language, we can see it.

¹¹³ See Ludwig Wittgenstein. On Certainty. 102, P. 16.
¹¹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein. On Certainty. 472, P. 62
In *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein writes that a fact is that which is defined as such within a certain grammar. In other words, what is real or not real is defined by grammar. But are we saying then that there is nothing in the facts of nature that is independent of grammar? No, Wittgenstein would clearly disagree with that. In fact, he claims that our grammar is both necessary and arbitrary. There is something about the very general facts of nature that makes our grammar what it is.

Wittgenstein asks whether our colour and number systems reside in ‘our’ nature or the nature of things in section 357 of *Zettel*. He answers that it cannot reside in the nature of colours and numbers. But does that allow us to conclude that there is something arbitrary about our system? He answers: ‘Yes and no. It is akin both to what is arbitrary and to what is non-arbitrary.’ The difference between us not acknowledging a color between red and green and people who have a color called reddish green is not factual but conceptual – we have different grammars of color. We do not usually think of our grammar of color as arbitrary; the concept of arbitrary only becomes relevant or necessary when we encounter a different grammar. However, Wittgenstein thinks that we cannot have two grammatical rules that exclude each other – if the one is true, the other is not a rule anymore.

As quoted above, Wittgenstein does believe that grammar is in a sense independent of the nature of things. And here, instead of saying that this is an anti-realist claim, I would like to point out that even grammar is part of reality. As we have seen in Chapter 2 above, concepts have their own facticity.

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In fact, Wittgenstein blames other philosophers for always defining what reality is, while what they are really perceiving is one aspect of it. According to Wittgenstein, there will always be new aspects of reality to be discovered, and thus it cannot be restricted to one definition or another. I think this is the realism aimed at when Wittgenstein writes: ‘What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life.’\textsuperscript{118} Returning to Zettel, Wittgenstein writes: ‘One is tempted to justify rules of grammar by sentences like “But there really are four primary colours”. And the saying that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is directed against the possibility of this justification, which is constructed on the model of justifying a sentence by pointing to what verifies it.’\textsuperscript{119}

This claim is directed against the idea that there is something grounding grammar that is independent of it and constitutes the reality of things. He adds: ‘It is obvious at a glance that we aren’t willing to acknowledge anything as a colour intermediate between red and green. (Nor does it matter whether this is always obvious, or whether it takes experience and education to make it so.) […] These people are acquainted with reddish green. “But there is no such thing!” What an extraordinary sentence. (How do you know?)’\textsuperscript{120}

Just as there is no ontology prior to grammar, grammar is not productive of an ontology of which we can make a theory. The possibility of a being that we’ve never heard of always remains.

\textsuperscript{119} Ludwig Wittgenstein. \textit{Zettel}. 331.
\textsuperscript{120} Ludwig Wittgenstein. \textit{Zettel}. 359 and 362, P. 65.
C. The Encounter with the Other

I started with an introduction about realism because this will allow me to open up the subject of alterity. The other has her own reality, and yet it contradicts my reality, so we cannot be at the same time, unless we are grammatically confused and call them both ‘reality’. This is a tension that is meant to be sustained through Wittgenstein’s work, and not resolved with some kind of solution to the problem. This is why when Stanley Cavell and others following him claim that Wittgenstein’s aim is not to show the impossibility to know the other, but the urgency to acknowledge the other. I am left unsatisfied because the sense of this tension I mentioned above is lost. For instance, Wittgenstein explains the difficulty he encounters to communicate with someone who tells him ‘I will see you in the afterlife!’. It is true that the religious man has a different perspective on life, but while living in the world I cannot simply understand this difference between our perspectives. It seems like one perspective eliminates another, and cannot coexist with it. He writes in *Zettel*: ‘Concepts with fixed limits would demand a uniformity of behavior. But where I am *certain*, someone else is uncertain. And that is a fact of nature.’

The problem is: this difference that is a fact of nature is itself a difference between concepts. The concepts of others can deviate from ours and thus seem ‘very queer to us’, as Wittgenstein puts it. This deviation might be very rare, and therefore it is hard to see it as a unity or, better yet, ‘as a particular physiognomy’. Here we see how the discussion about aspect perception is related to these remarks about conceptual differences. When one fails to see a different grammar of colours, it is a grammatical aspect that one is blind to. However, the good news is that the story does not end here.

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Wittgenstein invites us to do an exercise in imagination by inhabiting this other perspective that contradicts mine. He makes us imagine how it is to live in a world where all rules can be bended until our imagination meets its limits and can no longer continue to imagine how that world would work. When we reach these limits we are left to go back to our own world with rules that can never be bent. It is at this moment that we can feel like strangers in our own world, looking at it from the perspective of the other, and thus seeing it as uncanny. This otherness that was first only attributed to what is exterior to me turns out to be intrinsic to my world as well. Here we are at a point of intersection between the familiar and the unfamiliar, namely the uncanny. This intersection is precisely the transformative turn for the self that thought to be identical to itself: it now recognizes that it is not.

The French journal *Cités* has devoted their 38th publication in 2009 to the topic of ‘Wittgenstein the political’, although almost all articles in the journal repeat that Wittgenstein should be considered as an apolitical philosopher. Antonia Soulez wrote an article entitled ‘Wittgenstein, the imagination, and the political’ in this journal. She thinks that even if Wittgenstein did not have a theory of action, it is in his work and not in his life that we can find a sense of the political. Soulez refers to Alice Crary’s article in *The New Wittgenstein* entitled ‘Wittgenstein’s philosophy in relation to political thought’. She says that the practical value of our responsibility for what we say and do can reveal itself when we mobilize the imagination. Furthermore, she suggests that with Wittgenstein a certain politics becomes possible at a distance from one form or another of a consensus founded on linguistic conventions. Soulez refers also to John Danford, whose thesis is that with Wittgenstein it is no longer possible to have a theory of political vocabulary. That is due to the profound sense of agreement that we have in language, and not on some ground of meaning. Soulez considers that if we can find a profound sense of the political in Wittgenstein’s writings, it
is in Section XII of the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘If anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize – then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.’\textsuperscript{123}

I think that this is where Wittgenstein makes the most explicit his method of the use of the imagination to transform our perception of ourselves and others. In order to understand this passage, I would compare it with another one in *Culture and Value* that conveys a similar message: ‘If anyone should think he has solved the problem of life and feels like telling himself everything is quite easy now, he need only tell himself, in order to see that he is wrong, that there is a time when this “solution” had not been discovered; but it must have been possible to live then too and the solution which has now been discovered appears in relation to how things were then like an accident.’\textsuperscript{124}

Examples of very general facts of natures are: colors do not change constantly, rulers don’t get bent, we don’t have the color reddish green, etc. Lars Hertzberg wrote an article entitled ‘Very General Facts of Nature’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, in which he claims that there is a dimension of Wittgenstein’s later thought that has been largely bypassed or underplayed. He writes: ‘It concerns the importance, for our way of thinking about language, of recognizing the ways in which the language we speak is contingent on the circumstances of our lives.’\textsuperscript{125} He continues to suggest that the central notion for Wittgenstein is a *correspondence* between concepts

\textsuperscript{124} Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*. P. 6e.
and facts of nature, because Wittgenstein wrote earlier in Section xii quoted above: ‘If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that nature which is the basis of grammar? Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality)’

This correspondence seems to suggest, according to Hertzberg, that the correctness of our concepts is not absolute, but relative to the circumstances in which they are used. But what is more important for Hertzberg is that this implies ‘an internal relation between the concepts and the life in which they have a place. The circumstances do not define the standard against which the meaningfulness of the concepts is to be adjudicated; rather it is only by taking note of the circumstances that we can get a clear picture of those concepts: we see them for what they are in the context of life.’

Hertzberg refers to a passage from On Certainty, Sections 513 and 514: ‘What if something really unheard-of happened? If, I say, saw houses gradually turning into steam without any obvious cause; if the cattle in the fields stood on their heads and laughed and spoke comprehensible words; if trees gradually changed into men and men into trees. Now, was I right when I said before all these things happened “I know that that’s a house” etc., or simply “That’s a house” etc.? This statement appeared to me as fundamental; if it is false, what are “true” or “false” anymore?!’

These possibilities of things, being extraordinarily different from what we think they are, show us that we cannot claim that our perspective on reality or our grammar has an absolute truth intrinsic to it. Wittgenstein is seeking here to ‘draw into question the possibility of separating once and for all, (what, in that text, he calls) logic from the actual use of words in making judgments about


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various states of affairs." Finally, instead of being forced to choose apriorism or aposteriorism, Wittgenstein is suggesting that we should focus on the particularity of what is taking place when people speak to one another.

Part 2 - Possibilities that Don’t Exclude Each Other?

A. Grammatical Investigations

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein writes: ‘The truth of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference.’ If two persons have different frames of reference, then they can disagree on some empirical propositions. Later in the book, Wittgenstein states, ‘What would it be like to doubt now whether I have two hands? Why can’t I imagine it at all? What would I believe if I didn’t believe that? So far I have no system at all within which this doubt might exist.’ So there are beliefs that I cannot doubt unless I put into question my whole system of knowledge. Does that mean that all my beliefs are grounded? Wittgenstein writes: ‘I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions. And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house.’ We can conclude then that instead of a ground for all my beliefs, there are foundation-walls that allow all beliefs to hold together by supporting each other. If you doubt one of those beliefs, you have to doubt the whole house or system.

Near the end of *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein argues that if there are innumerable connections with things that allow me to dispute someone doubting that my name is “L.W.”. It could happen that

someone provides me with such connections as well, but none of them would be connected with reality. In that case, Wittgenstein writes: ‘If I imagine such a person I also imagine a reality, a world that surrounds him; and I imagine him as thinking (and speaking) in contradiction to this world.’

In Zettel, Wittgenstein explains why there is such a possibility of a world to be in contradiction with ours: “It is as if our concepts involved a scaffolding of facts.” That would presumably mean: if you imagine certain facts otherwise, than the way they are, then you can no longer imagine the application of certain concepts; because the rules for their application have no analogue in the new circumstances. So what I am saying comes to this: A law is given for human beings, and a jurisprudent may well be capable of drawing consequences for any case that ordinarily comes his way; thus the law has its use, makes sense. Nevertheless its validity presupposes all sorts of things, and if the being that he is to judge is quite deviant from ordinary human beings, then e.g. the decision whether he has done a deed with evil intent will become not difficult but (simply) impossible.‘

While I was speaking previously of a contradiction – thus an exclusive relationship between two worlds – there is a sense in which Wittgenstein allows for a difference or disagreement between two worlds without exclusion. For instance, ‘These people are acquainted with reddish green – “But there is no such a thing!” – What an extraordinary sentence. (How do you know?)’

Therefore, I would like to point out a tension here in Wittgenstein’s thought between the possibility of exclusion and the possibility of disagreement, namely he doesn’t want to defend exclusion

131 Ludwig Wittgenstein. On Certainty. 595, P. 78e.
against disagreement, nor the other way around. Exclusion and disagreement seem to coexist, but each in a different case.

Another example of a disagreement is when Wittgenstein asks us to imagine a tribe that has two concepts of pain: ‘One is applied, where there is visible damage and is linked with tending, pity, etc. The other is used for stomach-ache for example, and is tied up with mockery of anyone who complains. “But then do they really not notice the similarity?” Do we have a single concept everywhere where there is a similarity? The question is: Is the similarity important to them? And need it be so? And why should their concept ‘pain’ not split ours up?’

The difference between us and this tribe is that we are not interested in the same aspects of the concept of ‘pain’.

Wittgenstein uses the concept of ‘difference’ to describe the relationship between us and the tribe: ‘But in that case isn’t this man overlooking something that is there? He takes no notice of it, and why should he? But in that case his concept just is fundamentally different from ours. Fundamentally different? Different. […]’

Wittgenstein’s philosophical investigations are grammatical investigations. He is interested in grammatical possibilities and differences. He argues in Zettel that the essential thing about metaphysics is that it takes grammatical investigations to be factual investigations. Facts are important for Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigations, but only in so far as the fact creates a deviation in the grammar of a concept.

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B. The Will as Non-Ontological

To be free to engage in the world in a certain way rather than another is an act of the will. The will, understood as non-ontological, does not concern wanting something to be in one way rather than another; it concerns the capacity to imagine a possibility to engage with the world that is different, and to be able to work on oneself in order to achieve this new engagement with this new possibility. This would be an act of the will that involves both practice and an act of self-transformation or conversion. The capacity to want to live in a certain way, a new way, cannot therefore be separated from an understanding of the sense of this new possibility of living or of this new form of life. Departing from ontology consists precisely in this context in entering the realm of possibilities, and the sense of these new possibilities. This work on oneself is not theoretical as philosophy usually is; it is a practice that should be understood as both ethical and esthetic. The use of the imagination counts for the esthetic part: we need to be able to imagine possibilities of living that are not there yet.

Sandra Laugier writes: ‘That our ordinary language is founded on nothing but itself is not only a source of anxiety as to the validity of what we do and say: it is the revelation of a truth about ourselves that we not want to recognize – that “I” am the sole possible source of their validity.’ Laugier draws from this that this brings us back to the finitude of the everyday, but in Wittgenstein’s work, it also shows fundamentally to which extent the ‘I’ or myself has the most important role to validate what ‘we’ say, and therefore can also be the most fundamental subject to make a critique of whatever ‘we’ has adopted as a correct way to say or do things. This is where Wittgenstein’s philosophy, I would like to suggest, can be seen as belonging to the tradition of

philosophy understood as critique. Isn’t it precisely the task of critique to make sure that when there is a claim to community, or in other words when ‘I’ claim to speak in the name of ‘we’, there is a possibility to put that claim into question by another ‘I’?

In her essay entitled ‘The free game of the will’, Soulez writes: ‘Through the elaboration of grammatical paradigms the constructions of which mobilizes a certain imaginative potential, the will moves, in front of us as readers taken by the game, by this aesthetic activity of supposition requiring an actual art of composition: the reason for which Wittgenstein does not hesitate to say that the will imagines or that the imagination presupposes an act of the will. It is this meaning that we should give to the constructive activity of the will when Wittgenstein declares that the will is “what I do”.’

C. Anthropological Disagreements

The problem with Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, according to Wittgenstein, is that he considers religious and magical views of mankind as false, while actually there is only error when these views are set forth as theories. Wittgenstein writes: ‘The very idea of wanting to explain a practice – for example, the killing of the priest-king – seems wrong to me. All that Frazer does is to make them plausible to people who think as he does. It is very remarkable that in the final analysis all these practices are presented as, so to speak, pieces of stupidity.’

Frazer tried to find a rationality that justifies ancient or primitive practices of mankind, and when this rationality fails to meet the criteria of our rationality, he would disqualify it. But the mistake is not only that of comparing the two types of rationality, but that of thinking that the practice is


grounded in this way in a worldview. Wittgenstein rather thinks that we should look at the view and the practice as ‘both just there’. Or better: ‘Here one can only describe and say: this is what human life is like.’\textsuperscript{139} This way of comparing all primitive practices to Frazer’s own worldview, and deciding therefore that they are erroneous, shows according to Wittgenstein that he had a very ‘narrow spiritual life’. Furthermore, it shows how difficult it was for him to imagine a form of life different from his own, or from that of the England of his time: ‘Frazer cannot imagine a priest who is not basically a present-day English person with the same stupidity and dullness.’\textsuperscript{140}

D. Is Madness Just a Different Perspective?

First, I will be commenting on the book ‘The Paradoxes of Delusion’ written by Louis A. Sass, who compares Wittgenstein’s philosophy with Schreber’s case and the Schizophrenic Mind. Sass starts his preface by this quote from Wittgenstein in Recollections of Wittgenstein: ‘You must always be puzzled by mental illness. The thing I would dread most, if I become mentally ill, would be your adopting a common sense attitude; that you could take it for granted that I was deluded.’\textsuperscript{141}

Another important quote from Culture and Value in the introduction to Sass’s book: ‘If in life we are surrounded by death, so too in the health of our intellect we are surrounded by madness.’

The main part of Wittgenstein’s philosophy that interests Sass is his conception of ‘seeing-as’ or seeing an aspect. He argues that this concept is also helpful to understand delusions. But my interest here is not in delusions per say, but in how this use of the concept of ‘seeing as’ sheds a new light on it.

A first important remark Sass makes about seeing an aspect is that it is subject to the will. In the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Wittgenstein writes: ‘One wants to ask of seeing an aspect. “Is it seeing? Is it thinking?” The aspect is subject to the will, this by itself relates it to thinking.’ According to Sass, the role of the will is to be understood such as the attempt to see an aspect ought not be considered incoherent or illogical, but one that can sometimes be successful. Sass suggests then that Schreber’s experience of being represented as a woman has some of these qualities of seeing an aspect. Schreber has some control over his feminization. In fact, Schreber himself calls “‘the notion of ‘representing’” as “giving to a thing or a person a semblance different from its real nature (expressed in human terms ‘of falsifying’)’” However, representing is not mere falsifying for Schreber, because he takes ‘what is represented in the mind’s eye – for instance, his own feminization – very seriously and even considers it at times to be the manifestation of a deeper and somehow more significant reality.’

The point of these remarks is to show that ‘seeing as’ is not a standard case of ‘seeing’, just like considering a hallucination as a perception without an object makes that same error. Seeing an aspect is an essential part of the work on oneself as described by Wittgenstein, and it requires an act of the will.

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CONCLUSION

I am going to start with a quote from Wittgenstein’s *Culture and Value*: ‘Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them).’

This is the most important formulation of Wittgenstein’s method. It is *a* method and not *the* method; it is compared to a therapy because it makes it possible not to end philosophy, but to stop doing philosophy when one wants to. It is the worry that a philosophical problem brings to the thinker that Wittgenstein is trying to get rid of. Wittgenstein’s philosophy is a critique of language – of the use we make of language and the way language creates grammatical confusions. The philosopher does not aim to tell us which use of language is the correct one, but rather to show us the gap between what was meant to be said and what was actually said. In order to understand what I actually said, I have to look at the practice of language and discern how I used it differently. In other words, I should reach a clear synoptic view of my use of language.

Wittgenstein’s method also has a political and an anthropological dimension: its aim is to put into question our relation to otherness. This relation is characterized mostly by fear of what is different and new – a fear that does not lead only to disagreement but goes beyond that to exclusion. Wittgenstein therefore seeks to repeatedly present us with a new world very different from ours – with new conceptions and new realities. If we can find a realism in Wittgenstein, it is to be equated with openness: reality cannot be mastered conceptually, there is always an exterior that is also real. The exposure to these new and strange conceptions and worlds is meant also to provoke a thought-experiment that mobilizes the imagination. This thought-experiment can be called the experience of supposition: it invites us to imagine a form of life that is different from ours, from a given
system of conventions, to see to what extent we can continue to imagine conceptions that are so different from that first system. The aim is to reach the limit of our capacity to imagine this form of life, and thus go back to our familiar form of life. However, something crucial has changed about our relation to this familiarity: our form of life no longer seems like the only possible one. In other words, we no longer see it as necessary, but rather as a contingent organization of life. The experience of supposition is meant to create a distance between me and my frame of reference, to demystify the idea of a frame of reference and thus open the way for otherness.

In my Chapter 1, I argue that a move is necessary from the most subjective, namely the avowal, to ethics, which opens the way for intersubjectivity and the community. The claim here is that it is only when an otherness is revealed within the self that otherness within the community or with other communities can be accepted. The avowal is meant to reveal this gap that creates a distance between the self and itself. It is the gap between what I meant to say and what I really said. The aim of Wittgenstein’s method is to dissolve grammatical confusions, and once the reader sees the deformities in their thought-process, they realize that the use they made of a certain concept is misleading. And thus, what they wanted to say does not correspond to what their concept expresses in a particular grammatical context.

I used Foucault’s two lectures, ‘Subjectivity and Truth’ and ‘Avowal and Christianism’, to show the distinction he makes between religious and non-religious avowals. While religious avowals involve a sacrifice of the self that aims to decipher a hidden truth about oneself, non-religious avowals do not consider that the truth about oneself is hidden, but is to be discovered through exercises. These non-religious avowals allow for a positive emergence of the subject. I argue that Wittgenstein’s avowals do not fit with Pierre Hadot’s conceptualization of spiritual exercises; however, they do fit with Foucault’s argument. In fact, Hadot does not speak about avowals, but
rather about confessions. My intent here is to show how the concepts of avowals and confessions must be contrasted with one another. Thereby making the claim that Wittgenstein was departing from the method of confessions that we find in Augustine’s first quote in the *Philosophical Investigations* to make the shift to avowals characterizing the work on oneself that interested him.

Wittgenstein’s method ought to be characterized as primarily having an ethical aim. Wittgenstein’s philosophical problems were imposed on him due to his ethical and spiritual preoccupations, and he always thought that he must turn inward towards himself to resolve these problems – that is the only way for a change to happen, namely from within the self.

The *Tractatus* had an ethical point, which is to distinguish between understanding the author and understanding the propositions of the book, thereby achieving a conversion and throwing away the ladder. The conversion consists in leaving behind the project of the *Tractatus* as a logical sum of propositions, aiming at finding a general notation for all the propositions of empirical sciences, and realizing that this project is impossible.

In Chapter2, I begin by investigating the role of time in the *Tractatus*. I conclude that the propositions of the *Tractatus* have to be understood as temporary and transitional remarks, and it is only after taking the time to read the whole book that we can see the propositions as non-sensical. My claim here is that logic involves a displacement in time. There is a shift between seeing first the signs as having a meaning and then seeing these same signs as mere signifiers.

Wittgenstein introduces the concepts of memory-time and physical time: memory-time corresponds to the phenomenological time as experienced by the subject, and physical time refers to external temporal references like clocks and calendars. He defines memory-time as a ray that
has the present as an origin and memory as a source. Furthermore, memory-time is the way that events or situations are ordered in our memory. Time is not a temporal space, but an ordering.

I use the private language argument to show the relationship between the ordering of memory-time and the ordering of the facts of language. It is a confusion between the concept of the physical and that of the mental, which leads us to think of sensations as internal objects like beetles in a box. Both the mental realm and the physical realm are populated with “things”, thereby the confusion. It is the order of our memories that must be rearranged, and in this case, Wittgenstein is leading a grammatical investigation that changes the order of the facts of language. Concepts are the things expressed by language and their being has its own facticity. We can conclude that there is a correlation between changing the order of our concepts and changing the order of our memories. The claim I want to reach here is that thought is inscribed in time. Furthermore, that just like our concepts and thoughts are constitutive of who we are essentially, the order of our memories is also constitutive of who we are.

Wittgenstein insists on a relation of reciprocity between grammar and forms of life. He also wrote in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – *forms of life.*’ The plurality of forms of life indicates a variation happening through time. My claim is that concepts cannot be indifferent to time. A concept can be efficient in one form of life, but not in another.

I argue that if there is politics in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, it does not lie only, as most commentators have argued, in his skepticism about the transition from my voice to ‘our’ voice, or the claim to community; but rather he goes a step beyond this to be preoccupied with otherness, the uncanny, and the other as the main objects of his investigations.
The way our imagination equates knowledge with the perception of an external object is at the root of a misleading representation of realism as an attempt to prove the existence of something external. But, it is not productive to think of reality in terms of an exteriority opposed to an interiority. Wittgenstein shows rather that it is in terms of an ‘inherited background’ that it has to be described. In *On Certainty*, he writes: ‘But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness, nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.’

According to Wittgenstein, the system of our beliefs is ungrounded, and even when we do not have a foundation for our beliefs, what we are left with is not an ungrounded presupposition, but rather ‘an ungrounded way of acting’ or ungrounded practices. Wittgenstein’s philosophy does not only show the primacy of praxis in contrast with theory (which is considered useless), but it also manifests itself as a kind of practice or a form of life that nobody is constrained to imitate.

The other has her own reality, and yet it contradicts my reality. So we cannot be at the same time, unless we are grammatically confused and call them both ‘reality’. This is a tension that is meant to be sustained through Wittgenstein’s work, and not resolved with some kind of solution to the problem. This is why when Cavell, and others following him, claims that Wittgenstein’s aim is not to show the impossibility to know the other, but the urgency to acknowledge the other. I am left unsatisfied, because the sense of this tension I mentioned above is lost.

To be free to engage in the world in a certain way rather than another is an act of the will. The will, understood as non-ontological, does not concern wanting something to *be* in one way rather than another; it concerns the capacity to imagine a possibility to engage with the world that is

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different, and to be able to work on oneself in order to achieve this engagement with this new possibility. This would be an act of the will that involves both practice and an act of self-transformation or conversion.

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