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Of which we cannot speak …

Philosophy and the humanities

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Philosophy and the humanities have not found much common ground for conversation in theory. In a recent essay, *An Elegy for Theory*, I examined the debate between philosophy and theory from the point of view of competing epistemological stakes. From the analytic and cognitivist point of view, Theory stands accused of »epistemological atheism« and is wrested from the Continent to be returned semantically to the shores of science and the terrain of British and American analytical philosophy. Then there is another strain of philosophy, influenced by the later Wittgenstein, that distinguishes philosophy from science by renouncing theory or leaving it to science.[1]

I want to suggest that the late Wittgenstein takes this argument in a similar but different direction, however, one that also questions »theory« but as a way of restoring a dialogue between philosophy and the humanities. I read Wittgenstein as less concerned with the epistemological perfectability of philosophical language than with reclaiming philosophy's ancient task of *theoria*. To recover a sense of the specificity of philosophy, both with respect to Theory and to the reasoning protocols of the natural sciences, Wittgenstein proposed a philosophical anthropology located in the *sui generis* character of human understanding. In the recent history of philosophy, important figures, though few in number, have called implicitly or explicitly for such a dialogue between philosophy and the humanities, the most forceful examples being Georg Henrik von Wright, P. M. S. Hacker, Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty, and Stanley Cavell. Each of these thinkers takes inspiration from the ways the later Wittgenstein aimed his *Philosophical Investigations* not at the quest for certainty, so characteristic of the history of analytic philosophy, but rather, as ways for returning philosophy to questions of human understanding and interpretation through ethical questioning.

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1 See D. N. Rodowick: An Elegy for Theory, in: October 122, Fall 2007, pp. 91 – 109. My principle conflict in this work is with the positions presented on philosophy and film theory in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll's introductions to Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies, Madison 1996, Richard Allen and Murray Smith's introduction to Film Theory and Philosophy, Oxford 1997, and Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey's introduction to Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts, New York 2001. My book, An Elegy for Theory, will be published by Harvard University Press in 2012.

In my book, *An Elegy for Theory*, I suggest that the humanities and philosophy may find new common ground in reframing, reasserting, or revaluing philosophy's primordial concern with ethics, or rather, with *theoria* as a practice of philosophy driven by ethical dissatisfaction and existential crisis. In its most ancient and fundamental forms philosophical expression is not only discursive, but also finds itself crafted as a life in a process that is open-ended and unfinished. *Philosophein* asks of the novitiate a conversion of being driven by the desire to be and to live in a new way in tune with a changed conception of the world. Therefore, philosophy is lived or presents itself in a life before it is spoken or written. Or rather, it cannot be spoken or written in the absence of a desire for change and the on-going execution of an existential choice. Call this the perfectionist strain of philosophy, so important to Stanley Cavell's later writings, which – as discourse and existential choice, both in a state of change fueled by dissatisfaction with one's self and the world – reaches for a state of knowledge that can never be fully attained.

A similar experience of ethical dissatisfaction permeates virtually all of Wittgenstein's writings after the *Tractatus*. Usually this ethical dissatisfaction is expressed in the acknowledgement that we are all subject to »grammatical« confusion, and that the only way to free ourselves for other steps toward thinking is through an instinctive revolt against the conceptual restraints that bind us, which in turn leads to something like a wholesale rearrangement of our language – that is, of the conceptual and expressive repertoires available for our interpretations and our self-descriptions and self-assessments.[2] Richard Rorty calls this process recontextualization or learning a new language; Charles Taylor characterizes it as transformation under a new concept.[3] In either case the path towards knowledge requires a reflexive turn through assessments of the terms for self-knowledge in which critical evaluations of ways of knowing are linked to the preservation or transformation of a mode of existence or form of life. If the politics and epistemol-

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[2] In The Big Typescript, Wittgenstein writes: »Human beings are deeply embedded in philosophical, i.e. grammatical confusions. Freeing them from these presupposes tearing them away from the enormous number of connecting links that hold them fast. A sort of rearrangement of the whole of their language is needed. (›Man muss sozusagen ihre ganze Sprache umgruppieren.‹) – But of course that language has developed the way it has because some human beings felt – and still feel – inclined to think that way. So the tearing away will succeed only with those in whose life there already is an instinctive revolt against the language in question and not with those whose instinct is for the very herd which created that language as its proper expression.« Cited in Georg Henrik von Wright's translation in: The Tree of Knowledge and Other Essays, Leiden 1993, p. 97.

[3] See, for example, Richard Rorty: Inquiry as recontextualization: An anti-dualist account of interpretation, in: id.: Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume I, Cambridge 1993, pp. 93 – 110 and Charles Taylor: Self-Interpreting Animals, in: id.; Human Agency and Language, Philosophical Papers I, Cambridge 1985, pp. 45 – 76.

ogy of Theory have been subject to much soul searching and epistemological critique, it is important nonetheless to find and retain in theory the distant echo of its connection to philosophy, or to *theoria*, as restoring an ethical dimension to epistemological self-examination. As Wittgenstein tried to teach us, what we need after theory is not science, but a renewed dialogue between philosophy and the humanities wherein both refashion themselves in original ways.

Georg Henrik von Wright was among the first philosophers to recognize this link between philosophy and the humanities through a renewed concept of ethics. Von Wright is a fascinating thinker, not only as one of Wittgenstein's most devoted students, but also as a key figure in the history of logic and twentieth century analytic philosophy who, like Wittgenstein, in the course of his long career suffered an ethical crisis that led him to reassess and transform his conception of philosophy. In his late collection of texts, *The Tree of Knowledge and Other Essays*, von Wright writes movingly of his disappointment with the overreaching ambitions of behaviorism, positivism, and logical positivism that ultimately failed, on one hand, to make of philosophy an epistemological handmaiden to science, and on the other, to provide a secure or even satisfactory philosophical foundation for the humanities. No one, I think, would consider von Wright an epistemological atheist. Yet, he insists that two general problems frame the failures of twentieth century philosophy, especially with respect to the humanities. One has to do with what von Wright calls the conceptual poverty of scientism, or the inappropriate extension of the methods and attitudes of the natural sciences to domains where they do not apply; the other problem arises from the value vacuum produced by this attitude. The conceptual poverty produced by an excessive concern with epistemology is fueled by an unwavering commitment to the legacies of positivism that inform all the varieties of scientism in theory, whether in formalism, structuralism, cognitivism, or logic, but also with their common inclination to make of language or expression an instrument of thought and analysis. This attitude, so characteristic of logical positivism, expresses the desire of logic progressively to refine language in hopes of making it the grounds for certainty and a perfect instrument of thought.

Throughout the essays collected in *The Tree of Knowledge*, whose original dates of publication range from 1957 to 1991, von Wright links the history of twentieth century analytic philosophy to an ever-widening and deepening instrumentalization of language and thought fueled by the steadily increasing prestige of science and technology in the twentieth century. »The form of rational thought which I used to regard as the highest in our culture,« von Wright explains, »was becoming increasingly problematic because of the repercussions it had on life as a whole.«[4]

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4   von Wright: Tree of Knowledge (ibid. 2), p. 3.

Throughout his book von Wright is calling for a complete reassessment of the terms or grammar of a certain concept of »rationality,« which has led not only to the domination of culture by technology and scientism, but also a miscomprehension and devaluation of culture in its human dimensions of invention and expressivity.

This is why von Wright seeks a new valuation of the humanities, and a new emphasis on philosophy's diagnostic and critical role for contemporary culture. Taking inspiration from the late Wittgenstein, a philosophy of the humanities would be concerned with the analysis of conceptual structures in everyday discourse and thinking that relate to human actions, norms, and valuations. In its many variants, the ideology of positivism was driven by a utopian vision of liberal democratic consensus wherein perfect understanding and communication could be progressively achieved through logical refinements of language. But Wittgenstein presents a very different vision of the embeddedness of human life in language and culture, one which enables possibilities for community and creation, but which also divides and separates us into discordant webs of beliefs and destructive attitudes leading to doubt, confusion, and uncertainty. The conceptual poverty of instrumental rationality relates not only to the scarcity of concepts, as malformed or inapplicable to our current needs, but also to their ethical poverty, or their incapacity or disinterest in presenting useful frameworks for defining, interpreting, understanding, evaluating, and passing through or beyond the dilemmas that block us from a better life. Like Nietzsche, and sometimes Wittgenstein, von Wright appeals to philosophy as a diagnosis of values, which is another way of understanding Richard Rorty's comparable appeal in *Inquiry as recontextualization* for rebalancing the ontological–methodical mode of philosophy with an ethico–political one. The instrumental rationality of scientism and logic considers itself exempt from moral reasoning and evaluation. To question instrumental rationality does not mean ignoring or rejecting the enormous achievements of modern science, but rather to counterbalance them with a critical rationality that acknowledges and investigates the value of the human »striving for knowledge as a form or way of life, i.e., as a striving to know and understand for the sake of knowing and understanding in themselves and for no other purpose«.[5] This is a different vision for the evaluation of progress in philosophy, which is less concerned with adding to our stock of knowledge, as if layering bricks to complete an evermore complex and unassailable structure, than with continually turning the earth and surveying the terrain that nourishes thinking and makes it possible. Or as Wittgenstein put it in 1930: »I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as having a perspicuous view of the foundation of possible buildings. So I am not

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5   Ibid. p. 151.

aiming at the same target as the scientists and my way of thinking is different from theirs.«[6]

What can be said, then, about the province of a philosophy of or for the humanities? At the conclusion to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein famously asserted that: »What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.« Often bypassed is the preceding statement: »My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless [*unsinnig*], when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.«[7] Often taken as an admonition to remain silent in the face of what propositional logic cannot express or contain, Wittgenstein's later philosophical investigations give evidence of the importance to philosophy of those domains of experience that are *unsinnlich* – non-sensical, or perhaps, contrary to ordinary or common sense – where no final consensus can be achieved nor one single standard of rationality apply; they are »super-natural« (though not irrational) in the sense that instrumental rationality can neither account for their conditions of sense, their form or reasoning, nor their value to us. Most prominently, these are domains of aesthetic or ethical experience where understanding is grasped, intuited, or brought close to intelligibility through insight before it can be clearly expressed, much less linguistically encapsulated.

Philosophy's inheritance from logical positivism in the twentieth century was twofold. One was the desire to exclude from philosophy »unanswerable« questions of ethics and aesthetics, or at least to reframe them in potentially more limited ways. The other was the desire to make philosophy disappear into science. These two tendencies are related in that what excludes questions of art or ethics, and what makes philosophy disappear into science, is the commitment to models of explanation that are primarily causal, empirically verifiable, and subsumable to universally applicable general or covering laws. The last line of the *Tractatus* meant to indicate that these unanswerable questions may well be the most central concerns of philosophical investigation, and the remainder of Wittgenstein's philosophical life was devoted to finding and giving reasons for why this may be so.

In the *Lecture on Ethics*, prepared for delivery in Cambridge sometime between September 1929 and December 1930 though unpublished in his lifetime, Wittgen-

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[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein: Culture and Value, ed. G. H. von Wright/Heikki Nyman, Chicago 1980, p. 6.

[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein: Tractatus Logico-philosophicus, London 1974, §6.54. The German text reads, »Meine Sätze erläutern dadurch, dass sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als unsinnig erkennt, wenn er durch sie – auf ihnen – über sie hinausgestiegen ist. (Er muss sozusagen die Leiter wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist.) Er muss diese Sätze überwinden, dann sieht er die Welt richtig.«

stein suggests that final and conclusive agreements on such questions cannot be hoped for. But this does not mean that ethical or aesthetic experiences are incommunicable or incomprehensible; hence Wittgenstein's long fascination with intermediate and impure cases as occasions for investigating these experiences philosophically, though often indirectly. Ethical and aesthetic judgments present cases where humanity expresses its urge to run up against the limits of language. The failure to find an adequate concept or expression may indeed lead us to silence, but it is just as likely to produce in series a variety of different statements or forms of expression, all of which fail to convey these experiences adequately to ourselves or to others, but which nonetheless bring forth the blurred outlines of the experience in our repeated attempts to convey it, like lines in a sketch that create the impression of a picture or idea as compelling as it is incomplete. (»A thinker is very much like a draughtsman whose aim it is to represent all the interrelations between things«, writes Wittgenstein in 1930.)[8] There are thus no pure or final cases, but only intermediate ones. But through the assembly of related intermediate cases and perspicuous grammatical investigation, a latent image develops that nowhere lies in the expressions themselves, but rather emerges in patterns of similarity perceived among or between the expressions so produced.

Consider these images or features expressions, then. But what we want to communicate, convey, apprehend, or understand lies nowhere in the image, but rather is only graspable in a pattern of relationships that is itself neither pictured nor expressed, yet becomes »visible«, as it were, if only in an intuited way. Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics* offers by example procedures for developing or drawing out these pictures through language in a process of comparing a number of more or less synonymous expressions that struggle to assess the defining characteristics of ethics. Though each expression differs slightly from the others, it is nonetheless possible to assemble patterns of difference and commonality in ways similar to the construction of a composite photograph. The effect thus produced is not a consensual definition of ethics nor a complete understanding of the concept. Rather, as Wittgenstein might put it later on, definitions and concepts of ethics are deployed in a variety of language games in order to produce a pattern of family resemblances where different but overlapping conceptual senses can be »seen«: »so if you look through the row of synonyms which I will put before you, you will, I hope, be able to see the characteristic features they all have in common and these are the characteristic features of Ethics«.[9] This is what Wittgenstein might have meant earlier in asserting that the world is seen correctly, not through propositions, but

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8   Wittgenstein: Culture and Value (ibid. 6), p. 12e.
9   Ludwig Wittgenstein: Lecture on Ethics, in: The Philosophical Review 74.1, January 1965, p. 5.

only when propositional thought has been transcended, overcome, quelled, or outgrown (*überwinden*). Moreover, the two fundamental domains where expression and thought enter into such difficult but potentially expansive relationships are also the two areas of primary concern to a philosophy of the humanities – aesthetics and ethics.

In sorting through our expressive and conceptual difficulties in these domains, Wittgenstein also advises that we distinguish the trivial or relative from the absolute senses of concepts. If as G. E. Moore put it, »Ethics is the general inquiry into what is good«, »good« might be characterized in a relative sense as progressively approaching a certain predetermined standard. Judgments of relative value stand close in form to scientific propositions in that they can be posed as statements of fact adjudicated according to fairly quantitative measures. Potentially, they possess a certain logical necessity and are open to procedures for reaching agreement through the falsification and elimination of competing accounts. One could forge a science of relative good perhaps, but it would say nothing about what concerns us in judgments of absolute value, for »No state of affairs«, Wittgenstein offers, »has, in itself, what I would like to call the coercive power of an absolute judge«.[10] In such situations, Wittgenstein continues, »I can only describe my feeling by the metaphor, that, if a man could write a book on Ethics which really was a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world. Our words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, natural meaning and sense. Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts …«[11]

Make no mistake, Wittgenstein's distinction between factual discourse and »supernatural« concepts is neither a lapse into mysticism nor metaphysics. Or rather, perhaps it is a recasting of metaphysics in a way that brings it down to earth, that is, to the level of our quotidian experiences and statements. In any case, such concepts can provoke no compelling agreement through logical necessity, meaning they cannot be factually explained, but only conveyed and understood in special ways wherein language may be both transcended and transformed, if it does not instead lead us astray. Wittgenstein states that he can only offer a metaphor, or perhaps an analogy, simile, or even allegory – all of which are forms wherein the experience can only be indirectly related or which require the invention of new forms of expression.

In Wittgenstein's account, then, the apprehension of absolute value, whether ethical or aesthetic, is less a matter of objective statements of fact than subject-referring descriptions of experiences and beliefs, which are necessarily open and

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10   Ibid. p. 7.
11   Ibid.

contingent, and which themselves gesture towards ineffable or inexpressible experiences. Wittgenstein says that his own best way of describing the experience of absolute value »is to say that when I have it *I wonder at the existence of the world.* And I am then inclined to use such phrases as ›how extraordinary that anything should exist‹ or ›how extraordinary that the world should exist‹«.[12] The apprehension of absolute value, then, has a peculiar grammar, which is both discursive (»how extraordinary that the world should exist«), yet also unspeakable or which strains the capacities of sense. Expressions of absolute value are paradoxical, not only because they are descriptions of super-natural experience, but also because they are non-sensical. But if Wittgenstein here calls them »nonsense«, it is also important to account for how the character and meaning of the word are transformed. These semantic transformations tend in several directions. From one point of view it is nonsense to wonder at the existence of the world because we cannot imagine the world as *not* existing; there is a certain ineluctable self-evidence to existence. But this is not to say that we have lapsed into tautology or have thus disarmed and dispelled the experience, for to question these experiences skeptically is no more or less sensible than questioning why we have the human capacity to wonder or imagine. We will inevitably undergo these experiences and entertain these questions – they are characteristics or potentials of human experience that are best investigated by other means.

Another point of view notes that such experiences never take the form of factual or propositional statements, but rather are most often expressed in the form of similes or allegories. The paradox has now been compounded. Its domain of reference is both self-evident (I cannot imagine the world as not existing) and supernatural (I wonder at the existence of the world), and additionally it eludes ostensive definition – all descriptions of the experience must approach it indirectly or at a tangent. From a logical point of view such experiences are disturbing because as experiences they should have factual dimensions, and to leave them unaccounted for in scientific explanation only means that they have yet to be defined as scientific problems, or that the correct means of logical analysis of what we mean by ethical or aesthetic expressions has not yet been found. But this is not what Wittgenstein means by »nonsense«. And here we circle back to the final statements of the *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein implicitly distinguishes the power of language to describe from its powers of showing or demonstration. For when confronted with the argument that what should be searched for are correct logical analyses of absolute value, Wittgenstein responds:

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12   Ibid. p. 8.

»I at once see clearly, as it were in a flash of light, not only that no description that I can think of would do to describe what I mean by absolute value, but that I would reject every significant description that anybody could possibly suggest, *ab initio*, on the ground of its significance. That is to say: I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. 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. 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. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.«[13]

In a conversation held in the same time period of the preparation of the *Lecture on Ethics*, Friedrich Waismann reports similar thoughts, where Wittgenstein describes this human drive to run up or against the confining borders of language as characteristically ethical: »This thrust against the limits of language is ethics … In ethics, one constantly tries to say something that does not concern and can never concern the essence of the matter. It is a priori certain that, whatever definition one may give of the Good, it is always a misunderstanding to suppose that the formulation corresponds to what one really means. (Moore). But the tendency, the thrust, points to something.«[14]

Humanity feels compelled to run along or against the frontiers of language. In other words, we struggle constantly against the confinement of thought in or by language. And if this struggle is ethical, it is less about achieving a consistent or universal definition of the Good or the beautiful, than expressing a desire to transform the terms of our existence. Moreover, if this drive »points to something«, the experience is assumed to be real or significant, and not something illusory or irrational. Ethics is a matter of deep concern for philosophy, then, even if it cannot be expressed in the form of a question and there is no answer to it. At the same time, for Wittgenstein philosophy has no resources for investigating these experiences apart from those which can be applied to and through language and logical propositions. What Cavell, Taylor, or Rorty add to Wittgenstein, then, are strong arguments for reconsidering this drive. Rather than understanding it as examining our confinements in language and attempting to describe and correct lapses in

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[13]   Ibid. pp. 11−12.
[14]   Friedrich Waismann: Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein, in: The Philosophical Review 74.1, January 1965, pp. 12−13.

sense, philosophical investigation becomes equally or more concerned with the expansion and conceptual renovation of our expressive resources as avenues toward possible transformations of our terms of existence.

Questions of interpretation, aesthetic judgment, and ethical evaluation are of central concern to the humanities, and what I have hoped to show are the layered and multifaceted connections between these concerns and Wittgenstein's more prominent philosophical attention to problems of language and psychology. For example, in comments reported in *The Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* Wittgenstein observes that the field of aesthetics is both very large but also full of grammatical confusion. The scale or pervasiveness of aesthetic questions is such that they touch upon many different domains of philosophical investigation and at the same time refuse to be reduced to a single or unified theory or method. In addition, the reach and significance of the aesthetic in human experience and culture is far greater than that of artistic expression; in other words, our forms of life are deeply engaged at multiple and daily levels with aesthetic sensations and interests, indeed much more so than our routine encounters with intended works of art.

That much grammatical confusion occurs in our interpretations and evaluations of aesthetic experience arises from two common tendencies. The first tendency, common in the language games of scientism, blind us to the fact that aesthetic judgments involve or evoke types of concepts that are ill-served by empirical investigation, and similarly, that the kinds of conceptual satisfaction we seek in aesthetic or ethical questions will not be found through empirical evidence or experimentation. In particular, Wittgenstein's hostility to the empirical psychological commitments of *Kunstwissenschaft* are undisguised. »The sort of explanation one is looking for when one is puzzled by an aesthetic impression«, Wittgenstein writes, »is not a causal explanation, not one corroborated by experience or by statistics as to how people react … This is not what one means or what one is driving at by an investigation into aesthetics.«[15] Under the influence of explanatory models misappropriated from science, it is all too easy to discount or disparage the many and varied kinds of things that happen when we undergo aesthetic experience and make aesthetic judgments.

As Kant already recognized, philosophy passes through or attends to ordinary expression because it is concerned with our common capacities for presentation, self-presentation, reasoning, interpreting, evaluating, and understanding, even if these activities must gesture toward metaphysical or »super-natural« experiences and non-sensical statements. The interests of philosophy are thus what is of inter-

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[15]   Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, ed. Cyril Barrett, Berkeley 1966, p. 21.

est to us all in virtue of being social and expressive beings. If this is so, then why is it that philosophical expression since the time of Socrates has been characterized as disagreeable – disorienting and difficult, provoking alarm, confusion, exasperation, and dismay? Here again Wittgenstein's deep commitment to the ordinary is illustrative, especially since his own language poses fascinating obstacles to interpretation. Wittgenstein philosophizes, and we in turn produce theories of what he might have meant, until such time as we begin philosophizing ourselves, and we all have the capacity to do so.

This is what I think Stanley Cavell means in an early essay, *The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy*, when he offers that Wittgenstein's appeal to ordinary language as the subject of philosophical investigation suggests new categories of criticism. Here our task is finally to understand what these kinds of critical activities might entail as practices toward a philosophy of the humanities. In investigating the friction between philosophy and the expression of ordinary beliefs Wittgenstein does not feel that philosophy is a superior way or knowing, which must reform or »correct« language conceptually, nor is he defending ordinary beliefs against philosophical abstraction. Rather, in its excessive concern with epistemology, and in its quest to achieve certainty or to shore itself up against skeptical doubt, philosophy has aimed at the wrong targets. The question of belief is only raised in fact by the problem of non-belief; that is, when dilemmas of skepticism or certainty are raised in philosophy and put under scrutiny and critical pressure. In this way, philosophy has built *Luftgebäude*, as Wittgenstein puts it, or castles in the air that raise questions for philosophy that interest only philosophy. How to reengage philosophy, then, with our ordinary dilemmas of doubt, wonder, curiosity, discord and agreement, conflict and contradiction, understanding and misunderstanding, justice and injustice, or adjudication of promises kept and broken, of sense made or unmade? (And here »to make sense« may mean not just being sensible and rational but also *creating* meaning and new contexts for meaning.)

All of which is to say that philosophy's new critical categories are now reoriented »grammatically« towards the concrete practices where these activities actually take place: in our human capacities for expression and creation, knowledge and self-knowledge, interpretation and evaluation, which we exercise on a daily basis. In the rational and epistemological tradition that descends down through the Enlightenment from Bacon, Descartes, and Locke, philosophy's original sin, Cavell argues, is its lack of concern for ethical evaluation, that is, »with the knowledge of persons and in particular with self-knowledge; viz., its neglect of history as a form of human knowledge«.[16] Here we return to the value vacuum produced by modern

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[16]   Stanley Cavell: The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy, in: Must We Mean What We Say?, Cambridge 2002, p. 68, fn. 11.

philosophy's excessive concern with epistemology and knowledge of objects rather than persons. Our intellectual problems, Cavell suggests, are set by the very success of instrumental knowledge, that is, »by the plain fact that the measures which soak up knowledge of the world leave us dryly ignorant of ourselves« (68).[17]

Along these lines, Cavell approaches Wittgenstein in a deeply original way that demonstrates how Wittgenstein's new categories of criticism are generated through the grammatical style of the *Investigations* itself, which endeavors not to teach or to convince by saying or writing, but to *show* or picture practices of grammatical investigation and critique. This is a lesson that often passes in silence through seeing, above, below, or beyond words. In a move that brings us back full circle to an account of ancient philosophy as driven by an ethical disquiet that demands a changed conception of both self and world where knowledge and self-knowledge advance through one another, Cavell concludes his essay with a convincing account of how the style of the *Investigations* displays all the hallmarks of a grammar of confession. The question here is not understanding what Wittgenstein writes, but rather to immerse oneself critically and imaginatively in the *how* of his practice, gradually approaching its method or methods through its own suggested techniques of perspicuous description, connective analysis, and the pursuit of intermediate cases. In a deeply original move, Wittgenstein recasts confession as dialogue, especially an ethical dialogue with one's self. Thus the grammatical form of the *Investigations* exhibit,

»what serious confessions must: the full acknowledgment of temptation (›I want to say …‹; ›I feel like saying …‹; ›Here the urge is strong …‹) and a willingness to correct them and give them up (›In the everyday use …‹; ›I impose a requirement which does not meet my real need‹). (The voice of temptation and the voice of correctness are the antagonists in Wittgenstein's dialogues.) In confessing you do not explain or justify, but describe how it is with you. And confession, unlike dogma, is not to be believed but tested, and accepted or rejected. Nor is it the occasion for accusation, except of yourself, and by implication those who find themselves in you. There is exhortation (›Do not say: ›There *must* be something common … but *look* and *see* …« (§ 66)) not to belief, but to self-scrutiny. And that is why there is virtually nothing in the *Investigations* which we should ordinarily call reasoning; Wittgenstein asserts nothing which could be proved, for what he asserts is either obvious (§ 126) – whether true or false – or else concerned with what conviction, whether by proof or evidence or authority, would consist in. … Belief is not enough. Either the suggestion penetrates past assessment and becomes part of the sensibility from which assessment proceeds, or it is philosophically useless.«[18]

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17   Ibid. p. 68.
18   Ibid. p. 71.

Cavell finds that Wittgenstein's writing is both deeply practical and critical in ways similar to Freud. Taking seriously Wittgenstein's assertion in the *Investigations* that »There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies« (§133), Cavell shows that both philosophy and psychoanalysis compel forms of understanding that must be accompanied by self-transformation, and part of this self-transformation involves describing and restoring the broken links that divide us from the sense of ourselves and our relation to others.

This is why the form of dialogue in the *Investigations* is so interesting and compelling, especially in how the competing voices of temptation and correctness cycle through stages of assertion, doubt, speculation, and self-correction. The place, voice, and thought of Wittgenstein seems so quixotic, mobile, mercurial, and unfixable in the grammar of the *Investigations* because Wittgenstein himself is projected less as a unique author or enunciator than as an »intermediate case« – a self-projected philosophical friend or conceptual persona – whose positions shift, sometimes dramatically, from section to section, and whose portrait takes form not in words but in the conceptual pattern of family resemblances that emerges from and between, not the sections or phrases themselves, but in the gaps, ellipses, and blank spaces that both separate and assemble them into the larger grammatical architecture of the work itself. In this, the *Investigations* are both an exercise in self-examination and in self-portraiture, but one which can never be finished because on close examination the subject they project dissolves into a corona of lightly indicated images: »Just as if each figure in a painting were surrounded by delicate shadowy drawings of scenes, as it were in another dimension, and in them we saw the figures in different contexts«.[19]

The »subject« of grammatical investigation thus concerns us all as human subjects in our quotidian dilemmas of interpretation, understanding, evaluation, discrimination, and consensus building. And we only advance through these dilemmas, as Cavell puts it, in confronting and assessing the self-imposed restrictions and pictures or fantasies that block our real needs. In this, philosophy becomes an exemplary practice or repository of methods. What is thus requested through philosophy is a reflexive turn back on the conditions or possibilities of expression, or »a request for the person to say something about himself, describe what he does. So the different methods are methods for acquiring self-knowledge. … Perhaps more shocking, and certainly more important, than any of Freud's or Wittgenstein's particular conclusions is their discovery that knowing oneself is something for which there are methods – something, therefore, that can be taught (though not in obvious ways) and practiced«.[20] In a deep sense, we are asked by Wittgen-

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19   Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Investigations, Oxford 1953, II.vi.
20   Cavell: Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy (ibid. 16), pp. 66–67.

stein or Cavell to recover or relearn philosophy's ancient practice of *theoria* for our own time as something of central concern to the humanities.

Philosophical investigation differs from the logical quest for certainty, and in turn, as von Wright insisted: »The phenomena which the humanities study have features of their own which distinguish them logically from the typical objects of study in the natural sciences. A primary task of a philosophy of the humanities is to try to capture and do justice to those features.«[21] To those who want truth from philosophy, or at least the proper conditions for truth telling, this turn in philosophy is scandalous for at least two reasons. Here the quest to enlarge our powers of reasoning takes place less through adding progressively to our knowledge of the external world than in examining the capacities and limits of human reason itself as expressed in its forms of communication and cultural practices, whose failures are as compelling as their successes. And further, strategies for enlarging our capacity to interpret and to understand necessarily require a reflexive turn as acts of self-interpretation where problems of knowing are inextricably intertwined with questions of import and value.

For better or worse, recourse to super-natural and non-sensical expressions may simply be a central fact of human existence. Moreover, acts of interpretation and evaluation are unavoidable in any mode of inquiry we undertake, whether as scientists or humanists. Interpretation is integral to sense-making and value-assessing in all its varieties, and interpretive acts also frequently produce acts of creation, thus producing new situations and frameworks for understanding. In such cases, there is both a transformation of the conceptual contexts in which inquiry and understanding take place, and also a subjective transformation of the interpreting agents. In this perspective, there is no separation of an object from a subject of knowledge, and thus the ascription or creation of sense will also involve a corresponding self-interpretation and transformation. Such arguments are aimed at preserving a space for the humanities in the face of an ever-expanding instrumental and technological reason. But they also profoundly challenge any strict division separating the humanities and the sciences. The focal point of a philosophy of the humanities, then, is to assert and evaluate the place, function, and importance of the human subject with respect to these activities of interpretation, creation, inquiry, and understanding.

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21 Georg Henrik von Wright: Humanism and the Humanities, in: Tree of Knowledge (ibid. 2), pp. 163 – 164.