Morphology and Metaphilosophy: Goethe, Wittgenstein and Waismann

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People nowadays think, scientists are there to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc. to entertain them. That the latter have something to teach them; that never occurs to them.

—Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 42 (MS 162b, p. 59v)

Abstract

The paper explores how Wittgenstein and Waismann interpreted Goethe's ideas from *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. These ideas laid the foundation for Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance", which Waismann also embraced in *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*. However, the paper argues that Wittgenstein's and Waismann's metaphilosophical implications evolved differently in their later works. Notably, it is Waismann, rather than Wittgenstein, who took these ideas to their extreme, concluding in *How I See Philosophy* that all forms of philosophical theorizing should be rejected. By contrast, Wittgenstein rejected only the kind of theorizing in philosophy which aims at offering monistic and reductionist explanations of key philosophical concepts.

0. Introduction

This paper addresses the reception of some views put forward by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (MP) by Friedrich Waismann and Ludwig Wittgenstein.[1] Interestingly, these ideas were received and used quite early on by both philosophers in their careers, and then were developed in rather different ways. Eventually, they led to two different conceptions of philosophy.

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[1] Andronico (1998) is a key text on Wittgenstein and the morphological method. Also relevant to the present paper is Baker and Hacker (2005, ch.15). Other important explorations of the connections between Wittgenstein and Goethe are Monk (1990, 303–4, 509–12, 561–3), McGuinness (2002), Schulte (1982) and the essays contained in Breithaupt et al. (2003).

In the following, I will be focusing particularly on two works by Waismann. One is *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy* (PLP), which was published posthumously in 1965. This work was composed in collaboration with Wittgenstein between 1929 and 1932 with a coda up to 1936. Afterwards, however, the two philosophers parted ways, and Waismann continued working on it by himself. The book reached proof stage in 1939 but, with the outbreak of World War II, it was not published, and it underwent thorough revisions between 1940 and 1953. It was published only well after Waismann's death, which occurred in 1959. A few years before he published "How I see philosophy" (HISP, 1956) in which he further developed his views about philosophy. In that paper he radicalized views that he had first put forward in the *Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*, which, in contrast, had very much in common with Wittgenstein's. Concerning the latter, I will be focusing on the *Philosophical Investigations* (PI), *On Certainty* (OC) and the *Remarks on Colour* (RC). The conception of philosophy which is quite explicitly put forward in the *Philosophical Investigations* and that transpires from the other two works remained fairly stable. Indeed, if at all, it became less resolutely therapeutic – if it ever really was.

1. Goethe's Metamorphosis of Plants

In PLP (p. 80), Waismann writes, "Our thought here marches with certain views of Goethe's, which he expressed in the *Metamorphosis of Plants*".[2] There is a *pars destruens* to Goethe's ideas in MP against a certain "habit" or "way of thinking" (ibid.). That is, the one that recognizes "only a single scheme for such similarities, namely the arrangement as a series in time. (And that is presumably bound up with the uniqueness of the causal schema)" (ibid.). That is, whenever

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[2] Waismann sometimes uses "we" and "our(s)" as a *pluralis majestatis*; some other times as a plural subject term, referring to him and Wittgenstein, particularly in phrases such as "our thoughts", "our philosophy", "our method". It is not always easy to disambiguate these uses. In this connection, it is useful to see if Wittgenstein, in his own writings, goes over the same territory in a similar way. Now, it is interesting that in PI Wittgenstein doesn't mention Goethe. Yet, all the passages around the topic of family resemblance and the ones immediately afterwards, namely the ones on the conception of philosophy, are very similar to the passages that we find in PLP, and in some cases even identical. Thus, I think it is fair to say that although there was no reference to Goethe in PI, the influence of his ideas was palpable. Furthermore, in RC Goethe is constantly mentioned. While, as we will see, Wittgenstein was somewhat critical of Goethe's ideas on colors, which in turn were connected to Goethe's ideas in MP, he was also clearly interested in using them for his own purposes (cf. § 2).

we perceive similarities, we seek some common origin for them, and we are under "the urge to follow such phenomena back to their origin in the past" (ibid.). This is a kind of *Weltanschauung*, as Wittgenstein calls it (PI § 122), which sees subsequent phenomena as caused and sometimes developed out of previous ones, in a linear way. Yet, "Goethe's view shows that this is not the only possible form or conception" (PLP, 81).

Why not? Because in MP Goethe does not make any hypothesis regarding the fact that plants originate and develop from an ancestor, through random mutations that could give rise to new organs. Moreover, Goethe stood opposed to Newtonian projects of explanation of natural phenomena by appeal to deeper causes, as well as to their mathematization. As he famously wrote in *Gedichte* (1827): "Natur hat weder Kern noch Schale//Alles ist sie mit einem Male" – that is, "Nature has neither kernel nor shell//she is everything all at once" – whence Goethe's motto "*darstellen und nicht erklären*" ("describe, not explain"). Accordingly, everything is already open to the view, it does not require digging deeper in search of a hidden cause.

The *pars construens* of Goethe's work, instead, consists in showing how the various plants (or their organs) are simply a modification of an original element. As he writes: "Nature does not create a new organ [...]; it merely gathers and modifies the organs we are already familiar with, and thereby comes a step closer to its goals" (MP, 30; see also 100). More specifically, in the *Italian Journey* (1786–1788, published in 1886) Goethe explains how he arrived at the idea of a primal element, from which all plants and their organs originate:

> While walking in the Public Gardens of Palermo, it came to me in a flash that in the organ of the plant which we are accustomed to call the *leaf* lies the true Proteus who can hide or reveal himself in all vegetal forms. From first to last, the plant is nothing but leaf, which is so inseparable from the future germ that one cannot think of one without the other" (July 31, 1787). (Goethe 1962, 366)

Why did this escape notice, though? Because "Nature masks the resemblance to the leaf [...]. But this similarity will not escape our attention if we know how to follow it carefully through all its transitions" (MP, 70). Thus, it is crucial that we train our eyes to follow these "sensuous transformations" – as Waismann calls them (PLP, 81). That is, "it is crucial that we thoroughly observe and compare the different stages nature goes through in the formation of genera, species, and varieties, as well as in the growth of each individual plant" (MP, 92). Here is an eample:
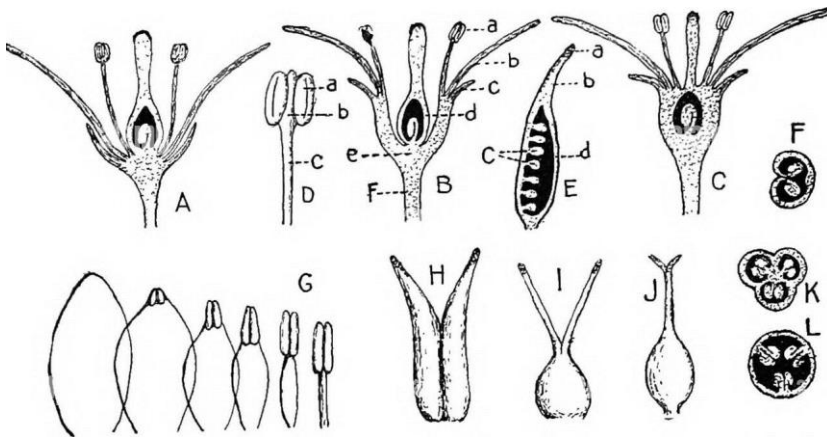
If we focus on the formation of the stamen (G), we clearly see that at first the organ is a leaf, which, through intermediate stages, becomes the stamen. If we looked only at the initial and final stages, we would not see these connections and we could not imagine that the stamen results from the modification of the leaf – whence the importance of attending to the intermediate links. The *Metamorphosis*'s goal is to clarify the laws by means of which these transformations take place so as to be able to predict, or even invent, based on such a schema, all possible plants and organs.[3] Once again, it is necessary to observe carefully and compare: everything lies open to the view, yet we have to train ourselves to see these connections between apparently disparate phenomena; nothing needs to be explained by reference to hidden causes and processes.

Importantly, Goethe claims that these similarities are objective, or in the phenomena themselves. In a letter to Herder he writes:

> The Primal Plant is going be the strangest creature in the world, which Nature herself shall envy me. With this *model* and the key to it, it will be possible to go on for ever *inventing plants* and know that their existence is *logical*; that is to say, if they do not actually exist, they could, for *they are not the shadowy phantoms of a vain imagination*, but possess an *inner necessity and truth*. The same law will be applicable to all other living organisms. (Goethe*, 1962, 310–311; emphasis added)

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[3] It is not by chance that also Klein's geometry, which gave rise to the Erlangen program, was deeply influenced by Goethe's *Metamorphosis*.

2. Family resemblance and surveyable (re)presentations

Now, for anyone who is familiar with Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and with his discussion of family resemblance and the example of the concept "game", it will be apparent that Wittgenstein's ideas were in fact inspired by Goethe. Furthermore, the passage from Waismann, in PLP, in which he mentions Goethe, is placed in between parts of the book that deal with the notions of language game(s), and family resemblance, and those that contain metaphilosophical pronouncements. There is, however, an important difference between Goethe's original views and their reception in Wittgenstein and Waismann. Namely, while the former was interested in understanding natural phenomena, such as plants, the animal kingdom, light, etc., the latter applied them to *concepts* and utilized them to develop a certain conception of philosophy. Indeed Wittgenstein, but not Waismann, explicitly criticized Goethe. In the *Remarks on Colour*, he writes:

> Goethe's theory of the origin of the spectrum *isn't* a [scientific] theory […] at all. *Nothing* can be predicted by means of it. It is, rather, a vague schematic outline, of the sort we find in James's psychology. There is no *experimentum crucis* for Goethe's theory of colour. (RC III, 125)

For Wittgenstein, Goethe's theory of colors is best re-interpreted as a theory of *color concepts*; not of their origins, but of their internal relations and, therefore, a "grammar", in Wittgenstein's sense of the term. The best use we could make of Goethe's *Metamorphosis* is then to "metamorphose" it in a *morphology* of concepts.

As is well-known, in the passages about family resemblance, Wittgenstein, like Waismann in PLP, notices how there is no set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions shared by all activities that are taken to fall under the concept GAME.[4] Rather, there are similarities in various directions. As a result, even if two activities have nothing in common, like playing tennis and playing with dolls, they can still be considered games, since each of them shares some element in common with some intermediate link. For instance, like patience, there is winning and losing at tennis, even though, unlike patience, tennis cannot be played alone. In contrast, although, unlike patience, there is no winning or losing in playing with dolls, the latter can be done by one person alone, like patience. As Waismann puts it, the reason why these activities are

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[4] Small caps are used to mention concepts, as opposed to words.

all collated under the name "game", "may be merely that *every two games are connected by intermediate links*" (PLP, 182). Thus, intermediate links are crucial in holding together the various, and in many cases disparate activities that we call "games". Moreover, the concept GAME is given by the totality of these nodes.

An interesting aspect of the idea of family resemblance is that in some cases the same word is actually used in rather different ways. To take an important example from Wittgenstein, consider the use of "I know":
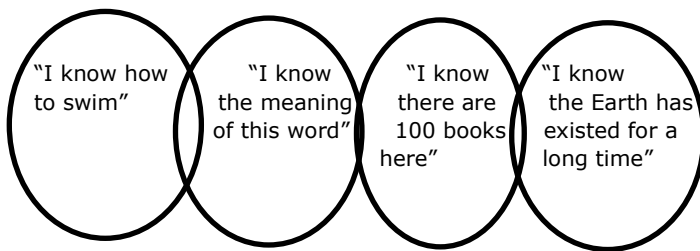
In some cases, it refers to a practical, hardly verbalizable ability, like in "I know how to swim"; in some other cases it refers to an ability still, like the ability of using words appropriately, yet is often accompanied by the ability to explain their meaning – that is, their use, according to Wittgenstein. In other cases, it refers to an epistemic relationship which obtains between a subject and a proposition or a fact, like when we say "I know that there are 100 books on these shelves". In that case, having evidence in favor of the proposition which is said to be known is crucial and one should be prepared to exhibit it, if requested. Furthermore, at least when the proposition that is said to be known is empirical, one's evidence is always defeasible, according to Wittgenstein. That is, further information could show that the proposition in question was in fact not known (OC § 12). Finally, there are cases which, despite looking like the previous ones, in terms of expressing the obtaining of an epistemic relationship between a subject and proposition, which, in its turn, looks like an empirical one, one's evidence in favor of it is either no stronger than that very proposition or else circularly dependent on taking that proposition for granted. This is in fact the case with "the Earth has existed for a very long time". For all geological, paleontological, or historical evidence we may appeal to in order to support such a proposition in effect owes its justificatory status to taking for granted that the Earth has existed for a very long time. If the Earth had popped into existence only a short while ago, with all the fossils, historical documents, etc. we have, we could not appeal to them to justify the proposition that the Earth has existed for a very long time. In these cases, according to Wittgenstein, we could safely replace the expression

"I know" with "it is certain" (OC §§ 194, 203, 270), "it is my unshakable conviction" (OC § 103), or "it stands fast for me (and many others)" (OC § 116). And in these cases, we think that the possibility of a mistake is "logically excluded" (OC § 194) and that we "could not accept any experience as proof to the contrary" (OC § 360).

Once we arrange all these cases alongside one another, we obtain a "surveyable (re)presentation" (*übersichtliche Darstellung*)[5] (PI § 122) of our concepts, such as our concept of knowledge, in this case. For Wittgenstein, the notion of "surveyable representation" is of "fundamental significance" (ibid.), since "[i]t characterizes the way we represent things, how we look at matters" (ibid.); and is in fact a "Weltanschauung" (ibid.). Similarly, Waismann, in PLP (p. 80), after presenting Goethe's ideas, writes: "What then *is* the problem solved by this idea? It is the problem of *synoptic presentation*" (emphasis added). He continues: "Goethe's aphorism 'All organs of plants are leaves transformed' offers us a plan in which we may grasp the organs of plants according to their similarities as if around the same natural centre" (PLP, 81) – namely, the leaf, as we saw. Furthermore, "we see the original form of the leaf changing into similar and cognate forms. We follow these *sensuous* transformations of the type by linking up the leaf through intermediate forms with the other organs of the plant" (emphasis added). And, he concludes, "This is precisely what we are doing here. We are collating one form of language with its environment so as to gain a *view* of the whole space in which [it] has its being" (ibid., emphasis added). To understand our concepts, then, we do not have to find out a hidden essence that all things called "knowledge", say, have in common – *contra* the Socratic/Platonic tradition that has become mainstream in Western philosophy, since the *Theaetetus*; or provide more or less arbitrary – though precise – definitions, which are of relevance at most only in particular contexts, like science or legal discourse (cf. PLP, 183 and PI § 68), in the vein of the Carnapian tradition. Rather, we need to attain a synoptic presentation of the

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[5] The expression *übersichtliche Darstellung* has been variously translated, ranging from "perspicuous representation" to "synoptic presentation", via the currently official translation of the *Philosophical Investigations*, which translates it with "surveyable representation". Both terms in the German expression are problematic. *Darstellung* is often contrasted with *Vorstellung* and used to attenuate the realistic implications of the latter, by creating an opposition between presentation and re-presentation. Moreover, *übersichtlich* appears to have several connotations, ranging from the ones connected to perspicuity and clarity, to the ones connected to the possibility of embracing in one glance the various uses of a given word, via the ones connected with the idea that one could embrace them as if from a bird's-eye point of view (PLP, 60).

various ways in which the word "knowledge" is used, by *looking* at the multiplicity of uses of that word in our language and by arranging them in an order that allows us to *see* how, by sharing one or the other similarity between them, they can all be grouped together. Notice that this is very close to the original meanings of the word *theōria* in Greek – namely, a procession of people, or of elements, in this case, arranged in a particular order, tasked with a mission, as well as a viewing, like a spectator at a theatre or at games.[6] Thus, by arranging cases in a specific order we should gain a synoptic view of the width of the concept under examination and of its relationship with neighboring ones, like belief, certainty and trust, in the case of knowledge.[7] Learning to *look* at phenomena, such as our linguistic usage, in all their multiplicity, and learning to *see* them *as* connected through intermediate links is therefore key to the application of the morphological method and to this new way of doing philosophy, inspired by Goethe. Such an arrangement would not give us any explanation – it would not allow us to answer questions such as "Why is this knowledge?", or "What is common to all these uses such that they all count as cases of knowledge?". In this sense, it would not be at the service of building a theory of knowledge, traditionally understood. Yet, it would produce *understanding* of the width of the concept and of the various rules that govern various uses of "I know". In short, we would see unity in difference, and difference despite the urge to find a unitary explanation.[8]

Yet, there is more to the morphological method than the idea of arranging together these different uses of a given word to appreciate their similarities and differences. For both Waismann and Wittgenstein think that it can have a diagnostic function vis-à-vis the nature of philosophical questions. Philosophical questions for them are not genuine questions, which admit of yes/no answers. Rather, they often depend on taking certain linguistic forms at face value, and/or on conflating the characteristic features – the rules – of

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[6] Cf. Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English-Lexicon*, esp. I, II, III.

[7] Rowe (1991, 295) reports a verse from Goethe, quoted by Wittgenstein in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (I, 889) – "Don't look for anything behind the phenomena; they themselves are the theory [*Lehre*]" – in which the German term "Lehre" is translated into English with "theory" and sets a contrast with the nowadays more frequent understanding of "theory" as equivalent to "explanation".

[8] The recurrent temptation to raise the question "What is common to all and only these different uses of 'to know', such that they all count as knowledge?" would then betray a deep misunderstanding of the very idea of family resemblance, where – to repeat – the idea is that to count as members of the same family, these uses need only be connected, albeit possibly in different ways, to intermediate links, while not having anything in common to them all.

one use of a given word, with those of a different use of it. Examples of the first kind are nominalizations, which induce the idea that we are talking about a thing (even when we are thinking about time, numbers, geometrical figures, pain and other mental states, etc.), or that there must be a common essence to all things named that way (for instance when we think about knowledge, meaning, truth, etc.). Examples of the latter are the Cartesian conception of our knowledge of our own mental states, and G. E. Moore's idea that his truisms are known with certainty. For consider the third and the fourth node above. The propositional use of "I know" in connection with empirical propositions is 1) based on evidence; and 2) defeasible – that is, it must be possible, at least in principle, for new information to come in such that we would have to conclude that we do not know what we thought we did know. The grammatical use of "I know", in contrast, is 3) not based on evidence; and 4) is indefeasible, because, given the role the proposition which is said to be known plays in our language games and epistemic practices, it seems precluded that new information could come in such that we would have to conclude that we didn't know it after all. Now, the Cartesian use of "I know" with respect to our current mental states conflates these two uses because it should still be 1) based on evidence; yet be 4) indefeasible, and then the problem arises of explaining how one can have evidence for one's mental states – whence the invention of the idea that we can see or perceive our own mental states – and of how such seeing could ever be such that no new information could defeat it. Similarly, if we followed Moore, we would have to say that there are empirical propositions for which we must have (or must have had) some evidence, clearly of an empirical nature, with respect to which we are also infallible, in the sense that it cannot be defeated by any increment in information. A perspicuous representation of the different uses of "I know" should help philosophers see that their questions, such as "How can I know that I have a toothache right now?" or "Can we know (with certainty) propositions about physical objects and people?", and the extravagant or at least problematic responses that their "theories" are supposed to return to them are in fact based on taking the third node of "I know" as a paradigm when in fact in both cases our actual use of "I know" is like in the fourth node. Hence, it does not express the obtaining of an epistemic relationship between a subject and a proposition or a fact, but it expresses the fact that our language games and epistemic practices assign a privileged role to psychological avowals and to Moore's truisms (and further "hinge propositions" that Wittgenstein

considers at length in OC) – a role which, at least in the latter case, can change through time.

This difficulty in avoiding conflation is entirely understandable, because, even if everything is open to the view, for Wittgenstein, it is precisely because we are continuously immersed in our language that we don't quite pay attention to these subtle differences and are prone to conflating the rules operating at different nodes, when doing philosophy. Writes Wittgenstein in PI (§ 129):

> The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something a because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of their inquiry do not strike people at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck them. And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.

Moreover, the same proposition may sometimes occur as a grammatical one or as an empirical one and that makes the difficulty of seeing these subtle differences even more acute. Writes Wittgenstein (RC I, 32; cf. III, 19; emphasis added):

> Sentences are often used on the borderline between logic and the empirical, so that their meaning changes back and forth and they count *now* as expressions of norms, *now* as expressions of experience […] For it is certainly […] the use, which distinguishes the logical proposition from the empirical one.

And, in OC (§§ 96, 98) Wittgenstein writes:

> It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.

> But if someone were to say "So logic too is an empirical science" he would be wrong. Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing.

Finally, the morphological method is not only of historical or exegetical interest for it offers a positive alternative to more traditional ways of doing philosophy. In fact, it suggests and recommends a pluralistic, anti-reductionist approach which takes each of these nodes as on a par with all others and which does not try to reduce any of them to any other one but aims to clarify the

characteristic features of each.[9] Thus, in the case of knowledge, for instance, it would warn against giving pride of place to one of the nodes, say node (3), and would against trying to reduce the other ones, like (1) and (4), to it.[10]

Philosophy would then be at the service of providing perspicuous presentations of key concepts such as knowledge, truth, belief, etc., and their various ramifications, while showing why certain philosophical ways of theorizing about each of these concepts derive from either ignoring their multiplicity – that is, the variety of nodes and links that constitute each of these concepts – or else, from trying to reduce it by assimilating some of them to only one of them which is considered more central. Arguably, following through this method would provide new directions for philosophy which are still quite unexplored to these days.

3. Objectivity

As we saw, for Goethe natural phenomena themselves were governed by the laws of metamorphosis. Wittgenstein and Waismann transposed Goethe's ideas onto concepts and were very worried about the idea of reifying them once again, by considering these grammatical observations as in fact elements of a (rudimentary) theory of know-how, or of propositional knowledge, or of certainty, say. Grammatical observations, in their view, remained observations about the way we speak or take part in the complex activities in which certain propositions and expressions have their home. More precisely, they remained rules for the correct formation of sentences, and therefore of thought, and of evidential significance – that is, of what needs to stay put in order for us to acquire evidence for or against genuinely empirical propositions.

Yet, while for Wittgenstein – somewhat in Goethe's vein – these similarities and differences were objective at least in the sense of being already deposited in our language and practices, Waismann thought of them as much more arbitrary. As Wittgenstein wrote in the *Remarks on Frazer*'s The Golden Bough (1993a, 133, emphasis added):

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[9] Pluralistic accounts of truth, logical consequence, knowledge, self-knowledge, etc. that are variously represented in contemporary philosophy can all be seen as connected to at least this aspect of the morphological method.

[10] This approach would clearly stand opposed to Stanley and Williamson's (2001) recent attempt to reduce (or explain) knowing-how to knowing that, and it did stand opposed to Moore's understanding of "I know" with respect to his truism as expressing propositional knowledge.

> A hypothetical connecting link should in this case do nothing but direct the attention to the similarity, the relatedness, of the *facts*. As one might illustrate an internal relation of a circle to an ellipse by gradually converting an ellipse into a circle. Not to assert that a certain ellipse actually, historically, had originated from a circle (evolutionary hypothesis), but only to sharpen our eye for a formal connection.

Thus, according to Wittgenstein, we are not here following a subjective way of seeing similarities that are not there in the "facts" – albeit in the *linguistic* or conceptual "facts". That is to say, of course these similarities, for Wittgenstein, aren't grounded in a mind-independent metaphysical reality, yet they are deposited in our language. As he writes in PI (§ 90):

> We feel as if we had to see right into phenomena: yet our investigation is directed not towards phenomena, but rather, as one might say, towards the 'possibilities' of phenomena. What that means is that we call to mind the kinds of statement that we make about phenomena. So too, Augustine calls to mind the different statements that are made about the duration of events, about their being past, present or future. (These are, of course, not philosophical statements about time, the past, the present and the future.)

Thus, by attending to intermediate links, we can see how uses of one and the same expression, e.g. "I know", can metamorphose from expressing the obtaining of a practical ability to expressing the absence of doubt or the impossibility of a mistake given the role the various propositions thereby "known" play in our language games and epistemic practices, and thereby attain an understanding of the very concept of knowledge.

Notice that this is not inconsistent with Wittgenstein's further idea that intermediate links sometimes are not already there and could be invented or imagined, to train our – i.e. philosophers' – mind to the possibility of looking at things differently, so that we no longer fixate on one single use or function of our words and do not incur the temptation of generalizing from it.[11]

Furthermore, Wittgenstein was clearly aware that linguistic usage and epistemic practices can evolve and that the relevant "facts" are not given once and for all. Yet, at any moment in time he thought it had to be possible to

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[11] This is particularly evident in the initial sections of PI where Wittgenstein wants to dismantle the idea that the only function of words is to name objects and that the only function of sentences is to describe facts, and he does so by considering various imagined cases where language is exhausted by simple language games which do not serve any of these functions.

survey them and appreciate their current status, and, in particular, distinguish grammatical and rule-like propositions from empirical ones.[12]

Waismann's position was different at the time of PLP already. In the context of the discussion of the concept GAME, Waismann already notices that "[W]hat we call a 'resemblance' is not fixed. We purposely draw no sharp lines but leave it to each for himself, starting from the paradigms to assign a greater or less extent to the concept" (PLP, 180–1). Surely for Wittgenstein too concepts are open-ended and can and often do give rise to vagueness and to potentially new applications. What is not to be found in Wittgenstein is the idea that each of us is at liberty "to assign a greater or less extent to the concept". This would have been in contrast with his idea that language is an inherently communal activity, but also, at the metaphilosophical level, with his idea that, through the morphological method in which some of the intermediate links may indeed be invented, we are bringing out the rules that govern our current use (or uses) of certain words.

This difference ramifies in various directions and has – I think – momentous consequences regarding the extent to which each of these philosophers can be said to have embraced a *quietist* view about philosophy itself.

4. Varieties of quietism and of therapy

Surely neither Waismann nor Wittgenstein were interested in building theories, in philosophy, in a traditional – that is, in an explanatory – way. Yet, as we saw, they were interested in gaining an understanding of our concepts and thought of the morphological method as a key tool to that end. In this sense, I have suggested, they can still both be seen as engaging in theorizing, if we go back to the original meaning of that word, according to which, by arranging phenomena together in a given order, one gains a clear view of the whole. Writes Wittgenstein in PI (§ 92, emphasis added):

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[12] As is well-known, in OC (§§ 94–99) Wittgenstein claims that there is a distinction between genuinely empirical propositions and those hinge propositions that, while (often) looking like empirical ones, play a rule-like role. He concedes that there is no "sharp division" (OC § 97) between them, and that, over time, hinges can become empirical propositions and vice versa (OC §§ 96–97). Yet, he resolutely states that "if someone were to say 'So logic too is an empirical science' he would be wrong" (OC § 98). Thus, contrary to Waismann, he did not reject the analytic/synthetic distinction, even though he reinterpreted it in terms of grammar and hinges as opposed to empirical propositions.

We ask: "What is language?", "What is a proposition?" And the answer to these questions is to be given once for all, and independently of any future experience. For although we, in our investigations, are trying to understand the nature of language – its function, its structure – yet this is not what that question has in view. For it sees the essence of things not as *something that already lies open to view, and that becomes surveyable through a process of ordering*, but as *something that lies beneath the surface*. Something that lies within, which we perceive when we see right into the thing, and which an analysis is supposed to unearth.

If the term "quietism" in connection with one's way of philosophizing meant "against theorizing", then it should be specified what kind of "theorizing" one is talking about. Depending on which one of these two senses one had in mind – call it "the vertical" and "the horizontal",[13] respectively –, then both Wittgenstein and Waismann would qualify as quietists in the "vertical" sense, and non-quietists in the "horizontal" one. For they would both be in favor of showing or pointing to "*something that already lies open to view, and that becomes surveyable through a process of ordering*", while being against unearthing "*something that lies beneath the surface*".

The ambiguity just noted, moreover, invites a more nuanced reading of the oft-quoted passage, from PI, which is typically referred to by resolute readers of Wittgenstein as prohibiting to engage in theorizing *tout court*. Namely, PI § 109 (emphases added):

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

Given the ambiguity noted between two senses of "theory", it is clear that, although the passage starts out with the ban of *any kind of theory*, it is in fact any kind of theory – in metaphysics, as well as in epistemology or other areas of philosophy – which makes hypotheses and seeks explanations, that Wittgenstein is opposing. This is also the style of theorizing that finds its home

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[13] Wittgenstein (1993b, 92) himself uses this adjective to characterize his way of theorizing in philosophy.

in science and that is why, for Wittgenstein, philosophical questions aren't scientific ones, nor can they be solved by scientific discoveries (PI § 109).

Conversely, the kind of theory – the "horizontal" kind of theory – that arranges linguistic usages before us in a given order, as suggested in PI § 92 (quoted above), is the proper method of philosophy for him. The horizontal kind of theory, moreover, allows us to avoid those misunderstandings we fall into when we do philosophy, because we are oblivious to important differences and tend to conflate the rules that govern the use of words in one "node" with those that govern the use of those very words in another,

Yet, there are other senses in which one may be said to hold quietist views in philosophy. One of them concerns the possibility of rational disagreement in philosophy. It is here, I believe, that already in PLP Waismann put forward more radical views than Wittgenstein's. For he insists that no thesis is advanced, no explanation proposed, which is something Wittgenstein did too, in the specific sense we have just reviewed. Yet, Waismann also claims that since he is only countering some images with different ones, then there is no real possibility of agreeing or disagreeing. At most, one could be *persuaded* by these different images, or not. Yet, even if one did, it would be a matter of personal decision, as we saw, for no image is, as such, more correct than any other. This would quite easily lead to the conclusion that at least at the level of our most basic philosophical tendencies no argument can be advanced in their favor. Being someone who is attracted to the image either of depth, or of width, on which the vertical and horizontal sense of "theory" and "theorizing" respectively hinge, is like being either more of an individualistic or of a communitarian persuasion, with any attendant political preference those different attitudes may lead to. One could of course change one's views over one's lifetime, but that would be more like a *conversion* than the result of a reasoned procedure and would be affected by assigning different weight and importance to certain aspects that one knew even beforehand, but to which one did not give priority in one's system of *preferences*.

Wittgenstein's own attitude is less open-minded. Even though no *explanation* and therefore theory in the vertical sense is proposed, there is something like *seeing things rightly or wrongly*. For instance, it is not a matter of personal choice to consider "An object cannot be of two different colors all over its surface at once" or "Yellow is lighter than blue" as rules of grammar rather than descriptions of facts; or, similarly, to consider "The Earth has

existed for a very long time" as a "rule-like" proposition – a "hinge" – rather than an empirical one. Seeing things this way is not meant as a suggestion that one might or might not take up, depending on one's preferences. Furthermore, if it were, what would be the point of switching to such a conception? What kind of benefit would one gain if, in principle, it would not be more correct than the alternative original image?

For Wittgenstein, the answer is obvious, but it doesn't depend on taking these as mere suggestions but on taking them as (more) correct ways of looking at certain propositions that have traditionally troubled philosophers. That is, since these are (more) correct ways of looking at the relevant propositions, by doing so we would attain a clearer understanding of the role of said propositions and would be able to see how certain ways of theorizing about them in philosophy are predicated on confusedly and wrongly insisting on their descriptive, rather than normative role. Such "complete clarity" (PI § 133) is the only one that makes "philosophical problems […] completely disappear" (ibid.).

For Waismann, in contrast, the answer is less obvious, as it depends on taking these alternate images merely as suggestions. Still, for him, even if the alternative suggestion is not going to help one get to the bottom of a philosophical problem, it can nonetheless produce an effect *on the subject* who was initially bothered by it. What kind of effect, though? Here is Waismann, speaking in the first-person: "I *silence* the questionings which seem to resemble a problem by setting a number of cases side by side" (PLP, 80, emphasis added). Therefore, the aim of the morphological method, according to Waismann, is to get subjects to stop worrying about what they initially perceived as a problem.

Let us consider the example of "An object cannot be of two different colors all over its surface and at the same time". If you look at it as a rule of grammar you will no longer be puzzled by the status of that "cannot": according to Waismann (and Wittgenstein),[14] you will no longer try to ground it in physical facts or in our phenomenology. You will no longer question its nature. Yet, if, as Waismann has it, this alternative conception is no more correct than the initial one, your "silence" will be no more justified than the one of those who think that that "cannot" *is* grounded either in metaphysical facts or in our phenomenology. Notice that the problem is not merely that any interpretation

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[14] See, for instance, Wittgenstein (RC I, 1, 3, 6, 9, 74; III, 8–11, 35–36).

of that "cannot" would be on par. Rather, it is that it is not at all clear why that image, rather than any alternative one, should lead to *silencing* the questioning. After all, one may want to notice, the very idea that our grammar is arbitrary – that is, neither grounded in facts nor in our phenomenology – is neither particularly obvious nor unproblematic. If it succeeds in silencing one's questioning, while not being more correct a view than any other, then it is simply because one is so taken in by it that one *does not see* the questions about that very image which are just around the corner. For instance: is it really the case that we cannot make sense of the possibility that things might be otherwise? And if we really cannot make sense of that, why not think that it is the way we experience colors that impedes it? Yet, if this is the case, it follows, by parity of reasoning, that as long as one feels satisfied and content with that image – that is, one feels more strongly attached to it – that image will be fine, as far as it goes. For example, if one is strongly taken in by the idea that phenomenology, say, excludes such possibilities, then one will not see the questions which are just around the corner about that image of the workings of statements such as "An object…". After all, our phenomenology – assuming it is stable across our species – may not be stable across different ones. Yet, we could not verify it, for our experience would impede it. Still, if we encountered a community that said the opposite we could take them at their word, instead of saying that we could not make sense of what they are saying. Thus, thinking of "An object …" as a rule of grammar either is correct, and it silences questionings like any correct answer does (or should do) because, by being the correct account of the status of that proposition, it rationally compels its endorsement; or else it is no more capable of silencing questionings than any of the alternatives, for those who do not see its force and are unpersuaded by it.

Now, while there are passages in PI that seem to resemble such a resolutely therapeutical position, they bear only a superficial similarity to Waismann's views. For better or for worse, that is, Wittgenstein is convinced that considering "An object …" as a grammatical proposition is the *correct* view and the only one that can legitimately silence any questioning regarding the status of that "cannot". To see this, consider that, for Wittgenstein, rules of grammar allow for or prohibit certain combinations of symbols. Furthermore, for Wittgenstein, they are arbitrary, in the sense that they are not grounded in experience: neither in the world – in some physical impossibility or physical fact –; nor in psychology – such as the impossibility of seeing or imagining an

object of two different colors all over its surface at once, or a yellow object darker than a blue one (see RC I, 1, 3, 6, 9, 74; III, 8–11, 35–36). Surely, for Wittgenstein, these grammatical rules are not given independently of human subjects (cf. RC I, 10–14), or once and for all. They are a function of linguistic usage, carried out by people, and use may change. Yet, it would be a *non sequitur* to think that just because they might change in the future, or because they might have been different from what they are, this prevents us from seeing them as meaning-constitutive rules. Furthermore, Wittgenstein is typically reluctant to admit that we may easily imagine *radically* different rules (while he is often exploring the possibility of partially different ones). For what would it be for the same object to be both red and green all over its surface? Or what would it mean for a yellow object to be darker than a blue one? Unless we recur to metaphorical or secondary senses, as long as we assign their ordinary meaning to the relevant words, these possibilities seem to defy our imagination and thus our understanding. As he puts it in the *Remarks on Colour*, when we are dealing with logic, "that is inconceivable" means: "we don't know what description, portrayal, these words *demand* of us" (RC I, 23; my emphasis. See also RC I, 31; III, 87–88).

Thus, despite some of his overt pronouncements (PI § 128), Wittgenstein was indeed putting forward *theses*. Since, however, he thought of them as grounded in linguistic facts, or, if you will, as elicited simply from the careful observation of such facts, he did not think of them as *philosophical* theses – that is, as theses produced by philosophers and in need of proof. In this sense, he was a quietist and held a therapeutical conception of philosophy: seeing language *aright*, by means of the morphological method, should allow one to see how *philosophical* theses in fact originate in a misapprehension of the functioning of language and in a conflation of the rules that govern the different uses of our words. Yet, there is a correct way of looking at things, according to him, and by utilizing the morphological method one can come to see and appreciate it.

Waismann's thoroughgoing quietism, in contrast, did away with the idea of a correct representation of the workings of language altogether and took a much more resolutely therapeutic turn: philosophy works only insofar as it silences individual *philosophers*' questioning, given their specific preferences at least at a given moment in their life time.

Interestingly, all these ideas were in fact radicalized in HISP, where Waismann insists that in philosophy there are no proofs, theorems, or yes/no questions (HISP, 1); that there are arguments, but many things are beyond proof including one's starting points in an argument (HISP, 1). Furthermore, philosophers can only "build up a case" (HISP, 30). For philosophical questions are "*not so much as questions as tokens of a profound uneasiness*" (HISP, 2, emphasis added). As such, philosophical questions cannot be solved, but only dissolved (HISP, 10) and no one can be proved wrong.

Waismann also insists that by following this method "we don't force our interlocutor. We leave him free to choose, accept or reject any way of using words" (HISP, 12). For this is "the true way of doing philosophy undogmatically" (HISP, 12), contrary to the tendency of "bullying in philosophy" (HISP, 18.; cf. 21). Thus, presenting intermediate links is just a method to persuade one to look at things differently (ibid.). As a result, philosophy consists more in a discussion that presents and makes a case for a certain vision, than in a proof (HISP, 18, 31). Similarly, it doesn't consist in putting forward a correct description of linguistic usages and concepts. Rather, in the end it remains a matter of personal decision (HISP, 21) whether one is persuaded by it or not.

Waismann then goes as far as stating: "*As we have no views*, we can afford to look at things as they are" (HISP, 21 emphasis added), and takes this to be the only way of correctly subscribing to Goethe's motto "describe, do not explain". Hence, he thought of himself as propounding no theses, and not just, as Wittgenstein did, as propounding no *philosophical* theses and merely drawing attention to the working of language to get rid of philosophical misapprehensions. Thus, for Waismann, philosophy so construed is "one of the liberatory forces" (HISP, 13) not only from philosophy itself (HISP, 20), the aim of which is to abandon the search, but also from one's personal uneasiness, such that "a certain [psychological] strain disappears" (HISP, 20). If so, philosophy – like psychoanalysis – is a discipline that produces or restores a sense of well-being, if properly carried out.

Several scholars (most notably Baker 1999, 2003a, b; and Morris 2007, 2019) have therefore seen a profound analogy between Waismann's conception of philosophy and psychoanalysis and, by projecting back Waismann's view in HISP onto Wittgenstein's PI, have provided psychoanalytic, resolutely therapeutical readings of Wittgenstein's later

philosophy. Yet, for reasons already explored, Waismann's thoroughgoing quietism and resolutely therapeutic ideas have no real currency in Wittgenstein's PI (cf. also Hacker 2007), or in OC and RC – that is, all his major later writings. That is, philosophy, when done properly, does not merely silence individual *philosophers'* questionings, like a psychoanalytic therapy may dissolve a given subject's uneasiness but not another's. In fact, to the extent that it does achieve silencing, it is only because it allows one – that is, *everyone* – to see things *aright*. In this sense it silences (or at least, it *should* silence) all philosophers' questionings by clarifying how philosophical *questions*, which are not merely signs of personal intellectual uneasiness, are actually predicated on misleading analogies and categorial conflations.

Surprisingly, and somewhat paradoxically, however, Waismann introduces ideas in the second half of HISP that were not already present in PLP. First, contrary to PLP, ordinary language is not considered to have the power of determining what is meaningful and what isn't. As he writes, "linguistic usage can change and what seemed like nonsense, it is no longer so" (HISP, 23). Moreover, while it remains that ordinary language is not precise,[15] and that trying to regiment it would be like trying to "carve cameos on a cheese soufflé" (HISP, 22), it is also said to contain clichés and therefore to induce analogies and generalizations that are ungrounded. Writes Waismann: "Just as a good swimmer must be able to swim up-stream, so the philosopher should master the unspeakably difficult art of thinking up-speech, against the current of clichés" (HISP, 19).

Second, and more importantly, Waismann distances himself from the idea that the aim of philosophy is to attain a clear understanding of the workings of our language and hence of the status of our concepts. Quite eloquently, he writes: "It is all very well to talk of clarity, but when it becomes an obsession it is liable to nip the living thought in the bud" (HISP, 16). And, against the *early* Wittgenstein he adds, "no great discoverer has acted in accordance with the motto, 'Everything that can be said can be said clearly'" (HISP, 16). Furthermore, he writes, against the *later* Wittgenstein that the aim of

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[15] Yet, "My point is: language is plastic, yielding to the will to express, even at the price of some obscurity" (HISP, 22). Hence, "ordinary language simply has not got the […] logical hardness to cut axioms in it […]. If you begin to draw inferences it soon begins to go 'soft' and fluffs somewhere. You may just carve cameos on a cheese soufflé" (HISP, 22).

philosophy "is not a matter of clarifying thoughts", or of "hairsplitting" or of clarifying "the correct use of language" (HISP, 38). Nor is it "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (HISP, 32–33). For "there is something clearly exciting about philosophy, a fact not intelligible on such a negative account" (HISP, 33).

Thus, what is its aim? Answers Waismann: "Philosophy['s] most essential feature is: *vision*" (HISP, 38, emphasis added). "A philosophy is an attempt to unfreeze habits of thinking, to replace them by less stiff and restricting ones. Of course, these may in time themselves harden, with the result that they clog progress". In the same vein, he writes: "the genius of the philosopher shows itself nowhere more strikingly than in the *new kind of questions he brings into the world*" (HISP, 16, emphasis added). And he also contemplates – quite contrary to Wittgenstein's own pronouncements in PI – the possibility that questions first raised within philosophy may pass into science (HISP, 14), in which case: "A whole new chapter might be written on the fate of the questions, their curious adventures and transformations – how they change into others and in the process remain, and yet, do not remain, the same" (HISP, 15).[16] In sum: "A philosophy is there to be lived out. What goes into words dies, what goes into the work lives" (HISP, 38).

The morphological method here no longer seems to be the most powerful tool to clarify the status of our concepts or to silence philosophers' questions. Rather, it is a tool that could be used to describe the complex and fruitful relations amongst questions and the underlying visions that great philosophers have proposed and that may in some cases supersede the boundaries of philosophy and inform scientific investigations. Indeed, for Waismann in HISP (p. 38): "To say that metaphysics *is* nonsense is nonsense." Thus, *contra* Wittgenstein and earlier Waismann himself, he claims that we should recognize the power of those systems of thought and live them through to see what of them informs fruitful ways of thinking.

Still, it remains that these systems are not correct or incorrect, for Waismann. They are just complex and worked out *visions*. They are edifying as

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[16] As we saw in passing in fn. 12, Waismann anticipated Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction, and did so after PLP, in a series of papers that appeared in *Analysis* between 1949 and 1953. Wittgenstein never got that far. As we also saw in passing, while the same proposition may be treated as a rule of grammar (and in this sense may be considered analytic) in one context, but treated as an empirical proposition in another (and could thus be considered synthetic), in each context it plays one or the other of these roles.

long as they have the power to generate thoughts and ideas, whereas they die the moment they clog thought by taking it through clichés and already trodden paths. By embracing a radical form of quietism, Waismann then paradoxically ended up salvaging those metaphysical systems against which he and Wittgenstein had fought, albeit by reconceiving of them as just powerful visions, rather than true or false theories about reality.

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