The Quest for Purity: Another Look at the New Wittgenstein

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This short note takes another look at the ideas proposed by the 'New Wittgensteinians', focusing on a feature of the discussion these ideas have generated that hitherto seems to have received comparatively little attention, viz., certain assumptions about the conception of philosophy as an intellectual enterprise, including its relation to the sciences, that seem to be adopted by both the New Wittgensteinians and (many of) their critics.

Introduction

The debate about the 'New Wittgenstein' is primarily one about the proper exegesis of Wittgenstein's work, both early and late. A key element in the discussion is the nature of philosophical method. Directly, since the aim and nature of Wittgenstein's method is one of the central topics that is being discussed. But also indirectly, since the debate reflects an old, yet still relevant dispute about the nature of philosophy, a topic that itself is intimately related to question of method. It is this last aspect of the discussion that has received comparatively little attention so far and that I will focus on in what follows.

First I will give a very brief sketch of some of the main claims that the 'New Wittgenstein' interpretation makes, and indicate how these differ from more standard readings of Wittgenstein's early work. Then I will try to pinpoint some of its background assumptions regarding the nature of philosophy. In the final section I will propose an alternative view that seems more in line with the character of Wittgenstein's engagement with philosophy.

1 *Anamnesis*

The term 'New Wittgenstein' denotes a radical re-interpretation of Wittgenstein's work, both early and late, that holds that his sole aim

throughout his entire life was to bring about a radical dismantling of all of philosophy. Wittgenstein's goal, it is claimed, is to provide a therapy that, when properly applied, will rid us once and for all of any inclination to ask philosophical questions, to formulate substantial philosophical views, or to otherwise engage in meaningful philosophical argumentation. Proper philosophy has no content, it only serves to expose attempts to formulate meaningful philosophical propositions as so many pieces of (often cleverly disguised) nonsense.

The roots of this radical re-interpretation go back to Cora Diamond's work of the eighties and nineties of the last century,[1] in which she proposes a reading of the concept of 'nonsense' in the *Tractatus* (henceforth: 'TLP') that starts from the assumption that Wittgenstein's goal in writing TLP is solely therapeutic. Taking her lead from the preface and TLP 6.54, passages in which Wittgenstein indicates how the work is to be read, Diamond argues that Wittgenstein quite literally wants his readers to dismiss (virtually) all of what is stated in TLP as nonsense in the most literal sense of the word: as a collection of meaningless symbols, nothing but mere gibberish. Thus she opposes the standard, or 'orthodox', reading of the work according to which the propositions of TLP are indeed meaningless according to its own standards, but nevertheless do have an informative function, by 'showing' (rather than 'saying') what Wittgenstein intends his readers to see about language, logic, meaning, ethics.

Rather than allowing for such 'substantive nonsense', for the 'showing of the ineffable', Diamond, and in her wake a number of other authors, such as Conant, Ricketts, and others,[2] take a firm stand and declare that Tractarian nonsense is 'austere nonsense', nonsense that is not only without content, but also without any secondary informative function. Thus the 'New Wittgensteinians'[3] wholeheartedly endorse Ramsey's dictum: 'What we can't say, we can't say, and we can't whistle it either.'[4]

A similar interpretation is proposed for Wittgenstein's later writings as well. Thus a strong continuity is constructed in Wittgenstein's work: throughout his life he fought the same battle, although with different means.[5] The idea of continuity, the claims of the newWitts not withstanding, has been around for quite some time. Already in the early book on Wittgenstein by Anthony Kenny[6] it is argued that there

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[1] Cf., in particular Diamond (1988) and Diamond (1991).

[2] Cf., among others, Ricketts (1996); Conant (2001); Read & Deans (2003). In what follows I will refer to the proponents of this view collectively as 'New Wittgensteinians', without implying that every detail can be attributed to each of these authors.

[3] Henceforth indicated as 'the newWitts'.

[4] Cf., Ramsey (1931, 238).

[5] Cf., e.g., Cerbone (2001); Diamond (2004); cf. Conant (2007) for a careful discussion of the various issues involved

[6] Kenny (1973)

are many ways in which Wittgenstein's early and late work form, not a consistent whole, but a continuous development of the same questions and ideas. Nevertheless, the 'therapy only' focus of the newWitts does give continuity a new meaning. Although my initial focus will be on TLP, I will come back to the question of continuity later.

By way of illustration, let us take a quick look at one of the central arguments brought forward by Diamond and Conant. It derives from TLP 6.54, a passage right at the end of the book in which Wittgenstein explicitly addresses his reader and gives him an indication as to how he is supposed to take it:[7]

> My sentences elucidate in this way that he who understands me in the end sees that they are nonsensical, when through them — on them — he has climbed up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed upward on it.)
> He must surmount these sentences, then he will see the world aright.

For the newWitts 6.54 is what they call a 'frame proposition', i.e., a statement in which Wittgenstein indicates how the reader is supposed to read TLP.[8] So what does 6.54 as a frame proposition tell us? According to Diamond, the fact that Wittgenstein refers not to TLP's propositions, but to himself ('...he who understands *me* ...', and not: ...he who understands my propositions ...') is indicative of the status of the former. Wittgenstein does not talk about understanding these propositions, because there is nothing to understand about them in the first place. That is his point, and that is why he talks about 'understanding me'.

So according to this way of reading it, the nature of the TLP-undertaking becomes something like this. What Wittgenstein actually has done, according to the newWitts, is set up a trap. He starts the book with what looks like the development of an ontology, continues with a general theory of meaning, applies that to language, and then goes on to discuss the logical principles that sustain the foregoing. After that he apparently outlines the consequences of these views for the status of logic itself, for fundamental principles of empirical science, mathematics, and finally ethics. But all this is just a show, a gigantic conjuring trick intended to lure the reader into thinking that he is being presented with substantial claims and arguments whereas in fact he is just being confronted with what look like meaningful statements that in reality are completely meaningless. Frame propositions, such as 6.54, are then meant to make the reader realise that all the time he has been had. This shock therapy is supposed to instantly and permanently cure the reader from any metaphysical, or more general any philosophical

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[7] Throughout translations from Wittgenstein's texts are my own.

[8] Other frame propositions occur in the preface, and propositions 4.11–4.116 (in which Wittgenstein distinguishes philosophy from science and characterises the former as being concerned only with 'the logical clarification of thought' and not with the establishment of knowledge) are also considered by some to be part of the frame itself. But the distinction is not very well defined, in fact it is not defined at all.

inclinations.[9] Obviously, according to the newWitts the therapeutic effect extends not just to TLP, but to any kind of philosophy, including, we must assume, the 'unwritten part' that Wittgenstein refers to in his famous letter to Ficker.[10] Not just metaphysical attempts to define the basic structure of language and the world are misguided, the same holds for anything one might want to convey about ethics. And note that we have to interpret this radically as well: just as there is not only no saying but also no showing of logic, so ethics is not simply ineffable, but utter nonsense.[11]

It will be clear that the newWitts' view on TLP and the interpretation defended in *World and Life as One*[12] are at odds at several crucial points. In the WLO-interpretation the logical and ontological sections of TLP do outline an particular view on the world: it is the atomistic, logically structured world that can be described in language and accessed in discursive thought. That view is contrasted with another one, the world as a holistic structure held together, not by logical relations, but by significance, i.e., by meaning in a moral, ethical sense.[13] According to WLO there is a definite message that Wittgenstein tries to get across in, or through, TLP: that the 'problems of life' are *sui generis* in this sense that they can not be tackled by reason, by discursive thought, i.e., by rational (philosophical) argument or empirical investigation.[14] In that sense TLP's aim is indeed 'therapeutic', in that it aims to rid us once and for all of the mistaken idea that 'ethics can be a science'. But, and here the newWitts-interpretation and the WLO-one are radically different, Wittgenstein does so by actually making what can only be considered as substantial philosophical claims. Moreover, according to WLO to describe Wittgenstein's aim in TLP as 'solely therapeutic' would be missing the point. First, the therapeutic role of philosophical analysis that is indicated in 4.112 and 6.53 can exist only within

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[9] So it is some kind of philosophical equivalent of the 'Scared Straight' program, in which 'troubled youths' are confronted with real criminals to make them aware of what kind of future they might be facing. In a report from 2001 the US Surgeon General concluded on the basis of a large number of studies that this approach is ineffective... (cf., http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/chapter5/sec6.html.)

[10] Cf., Luckhardt (1979, 93–94).

[11] Cf., Conant (2005), in which it is acknowledged that there is substance to ethics, yet a resolute reading of TLP-is maintained. That is admirable, but ultimately incomprehensible, and a position that can not be maintain in the light of the philosophical substance of much of W's work. Cf. later.

[12] Stokhof (2002), in what follows referred to as WLO.

[13] Cf., TLP 6.43, on the effect of exercising (ethically) good or bad Will: 'In short, the world then must thereby become an altogether different one. It must, so to speak, decrease or increase as a whole.' In the corresponding passage in the Notebooks 1914–1916 (dated June 5, 1916), Wittgenstein adds: 'As if by addition or loss of meaning'.

[14] As TLP 6.52 states: 'We feel that even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of our life have not even been touched upon.'

the confines of the theory of meaning that TLP formulates, for that very theory is the tool that philosophy must use. And second, and more important, it serves a purpose that, independent from the Tractarian framework, most would definitely consider 'philosophical', viz., the determination of the relation between ethics and science (and philosophy as traditionally conceived).

So obviously there are substantial differences between the new-Witts's take on TLP and the more standard, 'orthodox' one, of which WLO is an example. And one would expect that at least some of the issues should be decidable on the basis of arguments pertaining to the text, the context in which it was written, evidence from biographical sources, and so on.[15] As a matter of fact that discussion is being conducted, with zeal, in the literature. However, the discussion has a remarkable kind of 'staleness', in that every so often it seems an exchange of blows and punches where the opponents actually do not really hit each other. In many cases the criticisms and the rejoinders are concerned with the details of Wittgenstein's work itself, arguing fine points of exegetical detail, apparently without reaching conclusions that are so conclusive that they manage to convince the opponents.

The aim of this note is not to assess the merits of the various arguments. As a matter of fact, many of the arguments adduced by Proops, Hacker, Mounce, Kitching, and others, do seem to me convincing as far as the kind of 'internal' exegetical criticism that they represent goes.[16] But rather than adding another voice to that discussion, I want to try to find out what makes this controversy unsatisfactory in the first place.

2 *Diagnosis*

The main suggestion I have to offer at this point is that the apparent undecidability of the controversy is, at least partly, due to a too limited focus on the purely exegetical, and to a lack of awareness, on both sides, of the fact that the debate starts from assumptions about what philosophy as such is, can be, and should be, that are not taken into account in the discussion. Of course, this is not to suggest that the various authors are not aware of their conception of philosophy. It seems a fair assumption that they are, and in some cases we can actually see that conception being discussed and defended, but not in this

[15] Which means that the observations adduced by the newWitts must be reinterpreted from the orthodox point of view. One example is their reading of 6.54. From the WLO-perspective that passage can also be explained as a reference to the ethical goal of TLP: if you get that (and that is something that is not *in* TLP but something *about* it; it is as it were a' meta-goal'), i.e., if you understand *why* this had to be done and what is important about, then you can forget about *how* it has been done.

[16] Cf., Proops (2001); Hacker (2001); Mounce (2001); Kitching (2003). Cf., also Stokhof (2002, 274–276) for some critical observations.

context.[17] Rather what seems to be confusing the debate is a lack of explicit discussion of the conceptions of philosophy involved, and a lack of awareness that this is actually a limitation of the debate, in so far as this is something that is actually at stake in what the debate basically is all about.

Apparently, both sides in the debate seems to have a certain conception of philosophy, one that applies to what philosophy in reality is according to the orthodox interpreters, or to what it would be if such a thing were possible in the first place according to the resolute new-Witts. That is to say, the debate is not so much about (widely) different conceptions of philosophy, but rather about the possibility of making one particular conception work. The newWitts claim that this is not possible, the orthodox interpreters think it is. But neither side questions the conception of philosophy itself, nor do they investigate in detail whether it is justified to assign this conception, or something closely similar to it, to Wittgenstein, either in TLP, or in his later work, such as the *Philosophical Investigations* (henceforth: 'PI'), or in both.

Notice that the entire controversy hinges on an independent determination of what is, and what is not, a *philosophical* argument, statement or thesis. Without a prior characterisation of that, one that is given independently of the exegetical discussion, it is in fact difficult to asses how radical, appearances notwithstanding, the claim of the new-Witts exactly is. What is it that they take Wittgenstein to deny when they attribute a rejection of traditional philosophy and a 'therapy only' alternative conception to him? How do we assess the arguments that they give for this attribution if we can not be sure what conception of the philosophical is used? How great is the deviation of the orthodox exegesis in this respect? The same holds for such key terms as 'metaphysical' and 'therapeutic': without a prior, independent explication of what these terms refer to, both the content and the strength of the claims being made are difficult to determine. To give just one example, the claim that according to the text of PI itself no philosophical theses can be formulated or defended[18] and that it is the task of philosophy to reveal the philosophical illusions surrounding such concepts as 'rule', 'meaning', 'sensation', and so on, becomes a radical position only if it is accompanied with arguments that support the additional, two-fold claim that, first of all, that really is all that PI actually contains, and, secondly and more importantly, that, given its conception of what philosophy is, it could not contain anything else. Without these additional claims, many an orthodox Wittgenstein-interpreter would readily concur. This is indeed what PI claims and does, but is it really true to its self-description and, even if it is, does it need to be?

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[17] A good example is Hacker, who, in the book he wrote together with Bennett on philosophy and neuroscience (Bennett & Hacker, 2003), explicitly defines and defends the particular kind of conception of philosophy that is used in their critique of some of the claims of neuroscience.

[18] Cf., PI 124–128.

This is not to say that, in particular with respect to PI and the other writings of Wittgenstein' later period, the newWitts' reading is totally off the mark. Of course not. Wittgenstein's work certainly does not fit a conception of philosophy that holds that philosophy is concerned with providing us with philosophical theories that are defended on the basis of rational argument (transcendental or otherwise). It is different, and intentionally so, and it does indeed present a break with tradition. But it is important to see what tradition that is, and into what direction Wittgenstein is going. My conjecture is that at this point many involved in the debate around the 'new Wittgenstein', be they newWitts or opponents, are misled by their reliance on a conception of philosophy that bears the mark of an underlying scientism. I think that many, knowingly or unknowingly, subscribe to the idea that it is science and science only that is a reliable source of knowledge about the world and about ourselves, that traditional philosophy has failed to live up to its claims, and that therefore there can not be such a thing as a substantial philosophy. The root of this conviction is the assumption of an intrinsic connection between content (in a broad sense) and argument (also in a broad sense). This is an essential ingredient of scientism.[19]

The role of argumentation (which I use in a broad sense, as the formulation of meaningful statements that can be justified according to accepted rational methods) in the newWitts-interpretation, in particular of PI, is interesting and complicated. On the one hand the interpretation itself is sustained by argument, often ingenious and intricate. On the other hand the main contention is that Wittgenstein does not employ argumentative methods, but uses therapeutic devices. But these devices in their turn are meant to show the illusory nature of a philosophy that is essentially conceived of as an argumentative enterprise. Apparently, it never occurs to the newWitts that this is selfdefeating. But apart from that, more important to note is that the newWitts apparently never consider the possibility that these same non-argumentative, rhetorical devices are often also employed by Wittgenstein to make a point, i.e., to sustain an actual, substantial thesis in a non-argumentative way. That such a thing is possible seems lost on them, which shows how thoroughly orthodox and analytical their view of philosophy is in this respect: it simply leaves no room for anything but rational argument as a companion to cognitive content.

[19] To be sure, many other arguments against such a radically therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein's later work can be, and have been, formulated, cf. e.g., Hacker (2004b); Mulhall (2004). Another interesting observation is due to Chantal Bax (Bax, 2011) who notes that the 'therapy only' reading ascribes a remarkable arrogance to Wittgenstein, saddling him as it does with the ability to decide in an a priori fashion that all of philosophy must be be 'plain nonsense'. Sure enough, Wittgenstein is often a harsh critic (but also of his own ideas, we should note), and he does have serious objections to many a philosophical theory, but he does present these objections in a substantial manner. Perhaps not always in the way we are used to, but Wittgenstein always addresses and criticises also the content of such views, and never resorts to simple 'bashing' the ideas of others.

Another intriguing point to consider is what conception of philoso-phy it is that we are left with when we accept argument, and argument only, but deny the possibility of a substantial, philosophical point of view. How are we to view an activity that is only concerned with ar-guments, not with positions, or to be more precise, when we deny the existence of philosophical content? Are there any (interesting) argu-ments that do not depend on positions, that do not address substantial issues? To say that there are, seems to rely on a very naive version on what an argument is, which probably reflects an equally naive, positiv-ist version on what science is, how science works, in that it completely ignores the role of context, tradition, history, goals, and so on. Small wonder that for the newWitts there can be nothing more to philosophy than argument with a therapeutic aim.

But even more important is the other side of the equivalence of ar-gument and content, viz., that if there is content then there must be arguments. This holds that there is no other way of dealing with sub-stantial issues than by way of argument (including hypotheses, and explanations, and ...). But why should that be the case? In our ordi-nary everyday lives we are confronted time and again with substan-tial issues—of love, faith, justice, meaning—that lend themselves to an argumentative approach only to a very limited extent, if at all. Yet no ordinary person would conclude with regard to these issues that where arguments end, content is lacking as well. We accept the limitations, and carry on in different ways.

The claim I put forward here is that a conception of intellectual in-vestigation that ties argument and content so closely together does not fit Wittgenstein´s work very well, especially not the later work, for two reasons. He does not use just arguments, and he arguably does make substantial philosophical points. To be sure Wittgenstein does provide arguments as well, both in his early and in his later work. But very often he just uses descriptions and 'simple' observations, and the main function of those is to change the way we look at things. Their target is a particular point of view on a certain matter that we hold and their aim is to change it, or at least provide an alternative point of view as a comparison. Obviously this is one reason why a 'no points of view, only arguments' attitude does not fit Wittgenstein. Apparently, for Wit-tgenstein there are points of view, 'pictures', ideas we have about how things are, that are substantial but that can not be affected (sustained, defeated) by arguments, at least not solely by means of arguments, but that nevertheless need to be and can be changed by other means. An example is provided by PI 144. This is a rare passage, in that it is one of the few places in which Wittgenstein explicitly and concretely reflects on his goal and method. Its subject is an observation that he has presented in an exposition about what may happen if we teach someone to follow a rule. The observation concerns a possibility, viz., that of a pupil's capacity to learn coming to an end. Wittgenstein, in an

exceptional case of explicit methodological reflection, then asks: 'What do I mean when I say "the pupil's capacity to learn *may* come to an end here"?' It is not a factual observation about learning, based on experience, neither is it a factual observation about what we can, and can not, imagine. Rather, what Wittgenstein wants the effect on the reader to be is this:

> I wanted to put that picture before him, and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently; that is, to compare it with *this* rather than *that* set of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*.

Obviously then, Wittgenstein's aim is not therapeutic, he does not want to expose a particular point of view as metaphysical nonsense, rather, he wants to replace one way of looking at things by another, or at least make us see that there is more than one such way. That presupposes that these various points of view are substantial, that they can be compared, evaluated, that one can be preferred over the other, if only in a particular context. And that is exactly what the observationsWittgenstein adduces do: they contrast different perspectives, and persuade us to drop one and accept another.[20]

If we look at the variety of other means that Wittgenstein brings to bear on the way we look at, and think about, rules, emotions, meaning, the will, mathematical necessity, music, religious belief, aesthetic experience, and a host of other topics, we see descriptions of actual use of words and phrases, invitations to think of very particular situations, often counterfactual ones, reminders of the brute facts of our natural history that may determine our ways and means, observations about our emotional and intellectual 'inner life', and so on. What we see is a philosopher who employs much more than just arguments, one who is involved in a kind of practical phenomenology of the everyday, and not an analytical philosopher in the usual sense of the word.

So whereas the newWitts debate centres around 'arguments', in a style that is typical for an analytical conception of what philosophy is, this seems to be way off the mark with regard to Wittgenstein. Especially in the case of the later work, it simply overlooks the substantial phenomenological side of Wittgenstein's modus operandi: the fact that Wittgenstein does not argue (at least not in an obvious sense), but rather works with 'persuasive' means, does not imply that there is no philosophical content. That only follows if one equates philosophical content with explicit theses plus arguments. But as we have seen, there is no reason to accept that equation. Content presents itself to us in many different ways, and for Wittgenstein a lot of philosophical content resides in 'pictures'.

[20] The importance of the role that the notion of a picture plays in Wittgenstein's work can hardly be overstated: in his discussion of mathematics and religious belief, aesthetics and psycho-analysis, knowledge and certainty, the notion plays a crucial role. Cf., e.g., Genova (1995) for extensive discussion.

Although Wittgenstein's method in his earlier work is indeed quite different, we can apply this perspective on what philosophy is all about to TLP as well. If we do, we see that its main (but not its sole!) purpose is to present us with a way of looking at things and to say: do something with that, if you are willing to accept this alternative way of looking. And note that 'accept' is the crucial feature here.[21]

3 *Therapy*

What we observed in the above is that the relevance of the discussion surrounding the 'new Wittgenstein' extends beyond 'mere' Wittgenstein-exegesis. Central to the debate is the conception of philosophy that we bring to bear on it, and that means that in an important sense the debate is one about philosophy itself. And as we also saw, it is also a particular view on the relation between philosophy and science that motivates and drives this discussion. This may be reminiscent of the debates between 'the' analytic and continental traditions that dominated the philosophical scene for much of the fifties, sixties and seventies of the last century. Are we returning to that phase? It may look like that, but I think this is misinterpretation of the present situation. At the time the case of scientism case was defended mainly on what one might call 'ideological' grounds, whereas today, with the rise first of computational psychology, computer science and artificial intelligence, and of late that of cognitive neuroscience, the prospects of an actual empirical science of man no longer seem to be a matter of belief, but one of fact. In the face of that, to defend philosophy as a viable enterprise seems hopeless: the ideological arguments succumb, or so it seems, to empirical facts, and one might say that the newWitts' strategy in the face of such a defeat is to simply deny that there was something to defend in the first place. Yes, science is the only source of objective knowledge, but no, that does not mean that science has replaced philosophy, since philosophy never actually held a stake in the knowledge field anyway.

But could there not be a role for philosophy to play today? I think there are at least two ways in which philosophy can claim to have a substance, and to be able to make a contribution to our understanding of the world and of ourselves. One is, if you like, more traditional, and I will only indicate very briefly what it might look like. The other is more directly related to the question of scientism and the relation between science and philosophy, and I will discuss that one slightly more exten-

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[21] To be sure, there is a certain shift as well. As Kitching (Kitching, 2003) argues, one important difference between TLP and Wittgenstein's later work is a shift in Wittgenstein's evaluation of the concept of analysis. Following that line, one could argue that whereas TLP's main interest was in safeguarding ethics from the argumentative while acknowledging a substantial role for argumentation in science (broadly conceived), Wittgenstein later on grew more and more disappointed with the latter as well, and, as a consequence, found room to apply a substantially more varied palette of strategies.

sively. (A full discussion is beyond the scope of this brief note.) That these two ways are not unrelated will be pointed out later on.

The two roads that philosophy might take can be called the 'ethical-aesthetical' and the 'empirical' respectively. The first road we travel when we focus on those aspects of phenomena, objects, and events, that display a particular kind of significance for us, one that resists any attempt at straightforward description and that hence do not lend themselves to being subject to argumentation, hypothesising and explanation, but that nevertheless are integral to the important role these phenomena play in our lives. Examples in Wittgenstein's work come (mostly) from aesthetics and ethics (in a broad sense, since Wittgenstein does not distinguish very clearly between ethics, moral convictions and religious beliefs, quite in keeping with the proclamation in TLP 6.421 that 'ethics and aesthetics are one'). For example, in the 'Lectures on Aesthetics'[22] Wittgenstein focuses on the nature of aesthetic experiences and emphasises that although there are, of course, observations to be made and investigations to be conducted into the empirical 'correlates' of aesthetic experiences, these will not touch upon their specific nature. This, Wittgenstein observes, is evident from the fact that aesthetic experiences are expressed and communicated in specific ways, which are largely non-verbal and certainly do not follow the model of description of empirical phenomena.[23] In the words of Frank Cioffi (Cioffi, 1998, 129):

> In Wittgenstein's description of what we really want in place of empirical speculation, a key term is 'aesthetic'. [...] All he means [by using the phrase 'like aesthetics', MS] is to call attention to its epistemic affinity with the problem of describing the how and why of aesthetic experience in that "agreement is the only criterion".

The 'ethical-aesthetical' alternative is quite prominent in Wittgenstein's writings and has been explored in detail by a number of authors.[24] In what follows I focus on the second direction philosophy might take, that of a building a 'working relationship' with empirical science. This is not something we can find that many traces of in Wittgenstein's writings, but I do think that Wittgenstein was well aware of the conditions under which such an undertaking might prove to be fruitful.

Starting point of the second alternative view is that some of the notions that play a central role in philosophy, such as consciousness, knowledge, and meaning, are indicative of entities that are of a hybrid nature. These entities are at the same time natural and cultural phenomena. This hybrid nature does not refer to a split between ontology and epistemology, as is the case with many other notions. Obviously, in the course of our

[22] In Wittgenstein (1978).

[23] Cf., the discussion of the architect and the tailor in the 'Lectures on Aesthetics'.

[24] Besides Cioffi, already mentioned, one can think of people such as Phillips, Bouveresse, Clack, Budd, Schulte, and many others, who have written extensively on Wittgenstein's ideas on religion, Freud, psychology, and related topics.

investigation of them many natural phenomena are conceptualised, and these conceptualisations are often historically and culturally contingent. In such case the natural and the cultural are on different planes, the ontological and the epistemological respectively. However, with these central philosophical notions things are different, here the natural and the cultural are not on different levels, but really coalesce to form the very nature of these entities. On the one hand consciousness, meaning, knowledge are natural phenomena, i.e., entities that occur in the world, have distinct physical and biological (neurological) substrates. But they are also cultural products in a specific sense. They reflect in their very being our own self-conscious conception of them, i.e., they are, in part at least, performative, and it is our historically, socially and culturally contingent state of reflection about them that determines part of their identity.[25] In other words, to a certain extent these notions are what we think they are.[26] So, these are entities that are both natural phenomena and conceptual constructs at the same time. And it is precisely because that is how they to come into being and develop over time, that self-reflection (or 'self-clarification' as Frank Cioffi calls it[27]), as practised in philosophy but also in other humanistic endeavours such as art, can provide access to part of their content, if, that is, this self-reflection is conducted in a systematic and critical fashion. At the same time, being also natural phenomena, they can be studied in scientific ways. One may probe their biological evolution, their neurophysiological basis, their historical and social origins, and so forth.

One consequence of the hybrid nature of these concepts is that the relationship between philosophy and empirical science becomes, or at least should become, more symmetric. Philosophy no longer can pretend to be a priori with regard to science, and science needs philosophy in order to obtain a complete understanding of its own results. This provides a middle way between scientism coupled with a 'therapy only' role for philosophy, which is what the newWitts defend, and the conception of philosophy as a priori conceptual analysis, as favoured by some of their opponents, such as Peter Hacker.[28] When dealing with hybrid, performative concepts, philosophers have to acknowledge the relevance of empirical investigations for their own subject matter, and,

[25] In a sense this is an extension of the fundamental distinction made by Davidson (Davidson, 1982) between 'having a conviction' and 'having a belief': the latter requires (self-)reflection and the availability of certain concepts, whereas the latter can be described purely behaviouristically.

[26] This reminiscent of Giddens' idea of a 'double hermeneutics' that is at work in the formation of certain sociological concepts (such as 'class'; cf., Giddens (1987)), and the 'looping effects' that Hacking connects with 'human kind concepts' (such as certain psycho-pathological concepts; cf., Hacking (1995)). The difference is that in the cases that are under consideration here the 'performative object' comes from natural sciences.

[27] Cioffi (1998, chapter 5).

[28] Cf., e.g., Bennett & Hacker (2003); Hacker (2004a).

conversely, scientists need to become aware of the limitations of their methods and see that for a proper understanding of their topic, including a proper understanding of their own empirical findings, they need also the perspective that a particular kind of philosophy has to offer.

An interesting example of such a development is provided by neuro-phenomenology, which attempts to incorporate systematically accessed first person experience as an additional source of information that adds to experimental evidence.[29] It provides an example of how science can appropriates insights from philosophy, i.e., use them for its own goals, while by doing so extending its scope in a way that changes what it is about. Cf., the following 'declaration' by Depraz, Varela and Vermeersch (Depraz et al., 2003, 10):

> [...] we are trying to avoid two unilateral extremes that we see as nonsensical or absurd: 1. claiming that experience is standard, raw, pure, or ineffable; 2. claiming that all our experience is always already moulded or even deformed by the language we use. [...] Experience moves and changes, and its exploration is already part of human life, even if the exploration has different objectives than the experience it explores.
>
> It should be clear by now that we want to position ourselves in *a prudent but daring middle ground*. On the one hand, we wish to explore fully the tools available for first-person accounts. On the other hand, we do not claim that such an access is method-free or 'natural' in any privileged sense. This mixed stance is yet another manifestation of the pragmatic spirit of this work.

Note that co-operation here does not lead to assimilation, it still remains the case that philosophy and science have their own goals here, but they strive to reach them by joining forces, transforming themselves while doing so. As for the cognitive science involves, it abandons an exclusively 'third person perspective', and acknowledges the relevance of first person experience, without giving up on the familiar conditions of empirical testability. As for the phenomenology, it no longer is exclusively first person, and transcends the traditional goal of phenomenological description in the sense of relating particular to general, focussing on the articulation of experience.[30]

This provides an important qualification to what was meant above when it was said that hybrid concepts have a 'cultural component'. As was already indicated, 'cultural' here refers not merely to what can be studied empirically as culture (historically, sociologically, etc.). Rather, it indicates the constitutive self-conception, the performative aspects that can be grasped as such only from within (although as objective empirical phenomena they can also be studied from the outside, in an

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[29] The movement is associated mainly, but not exclusively, with the work of Varela, Thompson, Lutz and others. For an exposition of the philosophical background, cf., Depraz et al. (2003), for some tentative empirical results, cf., e.g., various contributions to Petitot et al. (1999) and Lutz (2002)

[30] I.e., on what Varela c.s. call 'disciplined' descriptions (Depraz et al., 2003, chapter 4).

empirical and objective way). The point of emphasising the need for a 'systematic access' is to overcome the threat of pure subjectivity. For the performative aspects are cross-individual in that they constitute a *common* self-perception. So hybrid concepts do not come from two different domains, two different ontologies, but from two different ways of accessing reality, two ways of dealing with it, which are also two ways in which reality affects us.[31]

I hope this provides some reason to think that a 'therapy only' approach to philosophy is not the only alternative, and in fact is arguably wrong. If the claim that many of the concepts that are central to traditional philosophical theorising do indeed have this hybrid nature is correct, then there does exist something for philosophy to be about. Arguably not in the same way as science, and equally arguably not in the ways of old, but nevertheless. 'Therapy only' gives in to the 'imperialistic' claims of science because it lacks a proper perspective on the nature of the phenomena that philosophy deals with. But as was already noted above, another, more substantial conception of philosophy that is defended in the analytical tradition, one that holds that philosophy deals with conceptual analysis and science with empirical investigation,[32] becomes questionable as well. On this view philosophy lacks a domain of investigation and a conceptual apparatus of its own. It is not, in that sense, analogous to science. Rather, it is the task of philosophy to provide clarity with regards to the concepts that science uses in its empirical investigations. But those investigations concern only one aspect, they cover only part of what the concepts as such cover. Hence, this 'conceptual analysis only' view, though definitely more substantial than the 'therapy only' perspective, leaves out what philosophy could properly call its own.

From an exegetical point of view, it seems that the 'middle way' conception of philosophy is closer in spirit to Wittgenstein's view of philosophy than either the 'therapy only' or the ' a priori conceptual analysis only' views. Note: the catch is in the 'only': I do not deny that there is both therapy and conceptual analysis in Wittgenstein's work (and there really lies the whole point about the controversy between new-Witts and orthodox interpretation: the beef is in the claim to the exclusivity of therapy). To be sure, Wittgenstein hardly ever engages explicitly with results from empirical science. Yet, his insistence (e.g., in PI, OC, in his work on psychology and mathematics) on the importance of acknowledging the natural roots of our concepts certainly points in this direction. In the following passage from PI (part II, section xii), he gives a subtle and balanced description of philosophy in view of that:

[31] Note the parallel with WLO, in which TLP is analysed as representing two different ways of interacting with one and the same reality, viz., the discursive and the ethical.

[32] Cf., the already mentioned Bennett & Hacker (2003) for a clear statement and an application of this view. Cf., Keestra & Cowley (2007) for a critical discussion.

> If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar?—Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of our generality.) But our interest does not fall back upon these possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history—since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes.

Note that Wittgenstein explicitly acknowledges the relevance of empirical data ('Our interest certainly includes ...'), so his philosophy is not an a priori conceptual analysis. But philosophy does have a stance of its own, and hence is not only therapeutic either. It is the interplay between facts and concepts that he is interested in:

> I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). But: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realising something that we realise—then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concept different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.

And is making us realise that the facts are different from what we thought they are not what science (sometimes) does? What makes this conception of philosophy challenging, and thereby interesting and worthwhile, is precisely that: since it deals with concepts that are 'Janus-faced', its subject matter is not stable, but may change over time. In particular, the findings of empirical science may, and arguably do, influence the very concepts with which it works.

One final observation. Although the two roads towards a substantial philosophy that I have outlined above travel into different directions, that is not to say that there are no connections, crossroads at which they meet and through which they may influence each other and benefit from each other's results. One example of such a crossroad is provided by Erik Rietveld's analysis how Wittgenstein's 'ethical-aesthetical' analysis of the 'expert knowledge' of the architect and the tailor can be linked with empirical issues in cognitive neuroscience.[33] Another example is constituted by the notion of the subject. Again, let me try to illustrate this by means of a concrete example.

Whereas in classical philosophical analysis subject and world were basically conceived of as homogeneous and 'total' entities, Varela, in his work on consciousness, uses the notion of 'micro-worlds' and 'micro-identities'.[34] Organisms live primarily in an environment that is determined by what they (can) perceive: a micro-world. There is not just one such micro-world, there are many, each related to a specific environment. In their daily interactions with these environments organisms have certain action potentials, i.e., ranges of actions and reactions that

[33] Cf., Rietveld (2008).
[34] Cf., e.g., Varela (1999).

are immediately and transparently connected to each of these micro-worlds: these Varela calls 'micro-identities'. These identities are each physically (neurologically) realised in the body of the organism and in that sense they are connected. The self, on this view, is not one homogeneous whole, but rather a conglomerate of micro-identities, a 'virtual self '.

In the normal course of events, the switch from one micro-world to another, and the associated switch between the corresponding micro-identities is a process that runs its course without requiring (much) attention or awareness. Since the micro-worlds are interrelated physical environments the organism moves through them along a natural trajectory, one that does not need the monitoring by a higher self, over and above the micro-identities the organism adopts in each micro-world.

But unexpected events may cause the immediate and transparent relation between micro-identity and micro-world to break down. This results in a unusual transition of one micro-identity into another, and it is such unexpected, 'hard' transitions that harbour the possibility of the emergence of new, adapted micro-identities and newly perceived micro-worlds. Often such transitions spur an awareness of micro-identities and micro-worlds involved, and as such contribute to the learning process that organisms go through. Learning, on this view, is the adaptation of an organism to new situations on the basis of existing capabilities, often helped by the examples provided by other organisms in similar situations. In early stages of development such unexpected and unusual transition will occur more frequently than later on. But being less frequent, they may also have more impact.

According to Varela this conception of cognition as an embodied, situated ability that is founded in action and that develops via a learning process of adaptation and integration, is also relevant for how we should look at ethics and ethical values. For Varela, like for Wittgenstein, ethics is primarily connected with concrete action, not with judgements and reasoning, with principles and rules. Ethics is founded in a concrete, situated ability for right action, and here, too, a crucial role is played by development, by means of adaptation to and integration of new situations, facilitated by the examples of the ethical behaviour of others.

In many religious and spiritual traditions a central, necessary feature of moral development is insight in the true nature of the self.[35] According to Varela the scientific insights from modern research in neurocognition into the nature of the self that have been outlined above, have potential moral surplus value. Learning that the self is a virtual self, creates the possibility for the conscious learning and developing of ethical behaviour and ethical values. The self is virtual because of the transitions that occur between micro-identities and micro-worlds.

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[35] Cf., Mencius' insight through intelligent consciousness ('chih'), the prajñāpāramitā of the Buddhist tradition, or the gnosis of some of the early Christians.

These transitions contain the possibilities for further development of the self. Once we gain insight in this virtuality of the self we realise a precondition for an effective notion of free will, and a conception of free will is a necessary condition for moral and ethical development.

Here we see the two roads that philosophy may travel, intersect. The aesthetic understanding of the moral dimensions of our being and the combined phenomenological and scientific insights into the nature of the self come together and potentially reinforce and strengthen the contributions each has to offer. This does not take the form a theory, i.e., of a set of general and abstract principles, (quasi-)deductively tied to particular conclusions, which are supposed to represent a special kind of knowledge. Rather, these insights are based on everyday experience, on what we find out that works in ordinary (and extra-ordinary) circumstances, combined with regular empirical investigation.

Conclusion

I have argued that an hitherto relatively unnoticed aspect of the debate around the 'new Wittgenstein' is a particular conception of philosophy and philosophical methodology that both the newWitts and many of their critics entertain, one that considers philosophy as a discipline that deals with arguments and counter-arguments. In addition, the newWitts display what I have referred as a 'quest for purity', a desire to remain autonomous as philosophers with regard to science, even if this means giving up on philosophy as a substantial undertaking. This quest for purity, I claimed, is not the only possible reaction to the successes of empirical science, and it is not the one that we can ascribe to Wittgenstein. On the contrary, Wittgenstein was well aware of both the urge to remain aloof of science and the impossibility of doing so. He proposed a view of philosophising that is at the same time more humble and more substantial. If there is such a thing as a quest for purity in Wittgenstein' work, especially the later work, it is for a purity that is always in the balance, one that is not defined in terms of subject matter, or the lack thereof, or in terms of a fixed method, such as conceptual analysis, but one that resides in a constant trying to come to terms with what characterises our human encounter with the world and with ourselves: objectifying, self-constitutive, generalising, focusing on individual details. The purity Wittgenstein was after resides not in principle or in outcome, but in the attitude with which we travel along the road from one to the other.[36]

That such a conception of purity is characteristic of Wittgenstein's later views, not just on philosophy, but on all matters, is eloquently

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[36] And that, in fact, represents a strong continuity in Wittgenstein's thinking, who from the days of TLP onwards has viewed ethics as a matter of the attitude we have towards the world, others and ourselves, and not as something that relies on principles and involves rational argumentation.

worded in Derek Jarman's movie *Wittgenstein*.[37] It ends with a scene in which we see young Wittgenstein hovering between heaven and earth and we hear the voice-over (of one of the main characters in the movie, John Maynard Keynes) saying:

> Let me tell you a little story. There once was a young man who dreamt of reducing the world to pure logic. Because he was a very clever young man, he actually managed to do it. And when he'd finished his work, he stood back and admired it. It was beautiful. A world purged of imperfection and indeterminacy. Countless acres of gleaming ice stretching to the horizon. So the clever young man looked around at the world he had created, and decided to explore it. He took one step forward and fell flat on his back. You see, he had forgotten about friction. The ice was smooth and level and stainless, but you couldn't walk there. So the clever young man sat down and wept bitter tears. But as he grew into a wise old man, he came to understand that roughness and ambiguity aren't imperfections. They're what makes the world turn. He wanted to run and dance. And the words and things scattered upon this ground were all battered and tarnished and ambiguous, and the wise old man saw that that was the way things were. But something in him was still homesick for the ice, where everything was radiant and absolute and relentless. Though he had come to like the idea of the rough ground, he couldn't bring himself to live there. So now he was marooned between earth and ice, at home in neither. And this was the cause of all his grief.[38]

I feel that this image and this text capture the profound ambiguity of both Wittgenstein as a person and his work in a very delicate and sensitive way. That ambiguity, the tension between there being substance and a lack of means to express it, is characteristic of Wittgenstein's entire philosophical career. In TLP, it seems, Wittgenstein was still convinced that he had found one, solid and correct way of dealing with the problem, of resolving the tension once and for all. That conviction, being built as it was on a mistaken conception of language and logic, was not to last. In his later work Wittgenstein accepted that the ambiguity could not be made to go away, that it was in the essence of the substance that he was dealing with that it would never fit into the moulds that (traditional, mainstream) science and traditional philosophical theorising offer, but that it nevertheless would always be there and require some form of expression. That at one timeWittgenstein remarked that he would have like to have written a book of philosophy that consisted entirely of jokes, and at another that 'philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry',[39] are but reflections of this. The 'new Wittgenstein' debate shows too little sensitivity for this crucial aspect, and not to be aware of it is, I think, to miss something essential about Wittgenstein, not only about the man but also about his work.

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[37] The movie was made in 1993 based on a scenario to which Terry Eagleton also contributed (cf., Eagleton & Jarman (1993)). The passage quoted occurs in both Eagleton's and Jarman's version of the script.

[38] Cf., Eagleton & Jarman (1993, 55, 142).

[39] Cf., Wittgenstein (1969).

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