The Pendular Nature of Human Experience: Philosophy, Art, and Liberalism

RAFAEL LOPES AZIZE
Federal University of Bahia

Abstract: If we are to escape reification—a sort of cognitive neutrality of basic, gnosic apprehension of the world plus a fundamental disrespect of the other as free agent—we should recognize our mode of existence as always already one of existential engagement with and within experience, aiming at articulating and expressing this engagement. One way of fully inhabiting this, let's call it the proper human stance, is through recognizing a pendular space between the basic attitudes of acknowledging lived, shared interests and values and avoiding being bound to and dependent on the values of others. Both philosophy as radical critical reflection, and art, or artistic processes of production and reception, can be seen as invitations to inhabit this pendular space of human experience, by way of continually opening up our habits of sensibility to new engagements in thought and life, and successfully articulating and expressing these engagements in public forms. I take Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein's mature philosophy as an attuning to an apt attitude towards this invitation. Is this attitude one possible, non-procedural meaning of "liberalism"?

OVERTURE

What is the good measure by which to assess a great philosophical œuvre?[1] Is it by its answers to puzzles, theories, or problems? Is it by the range of its interests, or influences? Is it by the shifts it inspired in thinking habits or in procedures for how to go about investigating subject matters? The practice of philosophy varies so immensely that even colleagues working, say, in the same department, sometimes have a hard time recognizing precisely what each other do—let alone judging the value of each others' work. As there is no standing consensus on what philosophy proper consists in, I can't think of an answer to those questions capable of eliciting satisfaction in large numbers. It is however not unreasonable to say that Wittgenstein's body of work has had, and continues to have, a huge impact in a considerable part of contemporary philosophical practice in the cultural West, either by its treatment of a number of problems in the philosophy of knowledge, language and mind, or by the manner (method?) in which this treatment is carried out.

Robert Vinten's book *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences—Action, Ideology, and Justice* is another symptom of Wittgenstein's ongoing impact on philosophical practice. It joins a literature dedicated to expanding that impact into areas to which Wittgenstein himself paid less attention (say, the philosophy of art, of the social sciences, of education,

etc.), or into traditions in which that impact was less felt (say, phenomenology, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, etc.). It will surely prove to be a useful and valuable addition to this literature.

I want to note a very circumscribed aspect of the book, and think *from* it about one of its topics—the question whether there is an interesting, unusual, defensible sense of "liberalism" that can be derived from Wittgenstein's thought. I say thinking about this *from* the book, because my aim will not be to contend in favor of a degree of truth or falsehood in Vinten's interpretation of textual claims by the authors he chooses to examine in regard to a putative Wittgensteinian "liberalism". I do want to take a cue from the book and approach this question through a different angle.

What I want to do then is to propose a framework for a philosophical work in the form of a Wittgensteinian invitation to address the conceptualized experience of persons in the life-world, an address which is shown, not spelled out, by the textual composition of *Philosophical Investigations*. One of the best ways to articulate the spirit of this invitation is to read Wittgenstein by way of Cavell's notion of *the truth of skepticism*, and also by way of the role of artistic processes, or our engagement with art and aesthetic experience, in accepting that invitation. I hope that an image of (at least one useful meaning of) "liberalism" will in the end emerge from the circumstances of that invitation and especially from the characterization of its field of application.

RADICAL PHILOSOPHY?

Vinten opens and closes his book with claims about Wittgenstein being a radical philosopher, or as useful for radical thought:

> I will argue in this book that Wittgenstein's radical philosophy could also be useful in developing the radical politics and social theory that we need around the world now. (…) We face enormous threats from climate change, rising authoritarianism, bigotry, and war. Wittgenstein's philosophy is useful in challenging the dominant liberalism of today, which does not seem to be up to the task of rising to those challenges, and in developing a clearer, more radical alternative to it (p. 22).

> So, despite the fact that Wittgenstein's work cannot be easily pigeonholed in terms of ideology, and despite the fact that it does not support a particular political programme, it can be used to help untangle conceptual knots in the work of social scientists and can be used to help us to understand other cultures, the ways in which people are oppressed, and the nature of prejudice, as well as many other things (p. 202).

I agree with him, and I join him in the hope for Wittgensteinian philosophy's more widespread "use in work in social epistemology, moral philosophy, and political philosophy, political theory, and psychology" (Ibid.). Again, I think his book is a valuable contribution in that direction, from a philosophical viewpoint. Where I do not follow him all the way, perhaps, is in his understanding of what makes Wittgenstein's a radical philosophy. (This is important because it has a direct impact on the use of "liberalism" he makes, which would benefit, I believe, from the subtle tweak of meaning to be found in Richard Eldridge's texts with which Vinten contends). It is not exactly a disagreement as it is a difference in emphasis and scope of that philosophy as we conceive it. In this section I point to the relevance of this difference, which I then try to develop in further detail in the subsequent sections.

Perhaps one way of briefly stating this difference in emphasis and scope of Wittgenstein's mature philosophy is to relate it to two aspects stressed by Vinten as crucial to the purpose of the philosophical practice: (1) the method of grammatical description, i.e, the "careful examination of the grammar of our language" (p. 104), and (2) its role in countering dogmatism in philosophy:

When Wittgenstein talks about dogmatism in philosophy he does not have in mind the kind of objectionable blinkered or inflexible stances taken in politics that might be contrasted with more open-minded or perhaps liberal stances; rather, he is talking about a kind of philosophy in which an archetype or a model is held onto in such a way that it amounts to a 'preconception to which reality must correspond' (Ibid.).

To be able to persuade the will to a different aspect of an image (*Bild*) seen as necessary, i.e, to *see* the same image *as* just possible or at least its necessity as *not itself necessary*—however important it is to *us*, to a certain practice, ritual, value, which be dear to *us* –, to achieve this is certainly important and something that is involved in the therapeutic dimension of Wittgenstein's "new method" (see Moreno 2011 for a more detailed account of this). But is this aspect of the "new method" a rich enough account of the radical nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy?

Here are two possible avenues of negative answers to this question. One is to track the development of the concept of use (*Gebrauch*), which in the early 1930s is almost synonym to application (*Anwendung*), but gradually widens its scope in order to explore an expansion of the reach of phenomenological problems towards the lived experience of persons in culture. Another is to describe the cooperation of the concepts of aspect and spirit. Tackling the philosophical yield of this idea of the "spirit" of the "new method" in Wittgenstein, Arley Ramos Moreno starts from Wittgenstein's observations on the nature of rituals:

> (...) the feeling of deepness [that we may feel in in connection with a ritual] would stem from the correlation we in some way perceive, without being able to admit it, between the rituals and our own feelings and thoughts; or better, the similarities and intermediate connections that we recognize between the different situations, but are not prepared to perceive as similar (Moreno 2009, p. 161).

Knowledge of historical facts about the ritual, "as, for example, the knowledge that remote, original renderings of a particular rite were symbolic substitutions for some tragic event, like famine, pestilence, or a bloody war" (Azize 2019, p. 288) brings us no closer to grasp the resonances of the ritual, its meaning in life. In a word: its spirit would evade us, even in the case of rituals native to our own culture. The comparative case of cultures less familiar to us might help us to understand what is at stake:

> The spirit, then, would be a set of known cultural habits whose features we can recognize, at least partially, in unknown cultures as being similar—to the point of being able, when it is a matter of habits of our own culture, of thinking, inventing or imagining situations in conformity with rules we do not know, as they are similar to those we do know. A common spirit or, at least, recognizable as being familiar, is what seems to be at the basis of the capacity to see an object as another—and of the long descriptions Wittgenstein does of the concept of seeing as (Moreno 2009, p. 162).

Should the comparative case of rituals of different cultures (ours and distant ones) bring us to recognize an aspectual nature in the spirit of our own rituals? It seems so. Why? Partly because, in order to recognize the meaningfulness of our rituals in life, we need to see the internal connections between those rituals and what we typically do, so to speak, "around" them, in order to make them expressive:

> The applicability of the notion of aspect stems in part from the idea (…) that the proper description of experience of meaning, though not completely excluding sensory reports [about purely extensional objects], cannot be reduced to these. Let us remember our undesirable contradiction: the notion that two sensory experiences could be different with no change on the object or the conditions of perception, even ideally as a philosophical fiction. I claim that the solution, or the dissolution of this paradox must include a dimension of reaction—not only a sensorial one—that be both

(1) subjective and (2) "right". There is a risk here: to replace one paradox for another. If we speak of the right reaction, we speak of rules. On the other hand, such rules for reacting or responding (especially aesthetically) do not operate in isolation of a lived, existential, even emotive dimension (Azize 2019, pp. 288-9).

The philosophical endgame of grammatical clarification is no endgame at all. Sure, it might seem so, if we put too much emphasis on a certain reach of the idea of autonomy of Grammar. But at the end of any chain of (language-justified) reasons there is the gesture of pointing to an instance of what is truly basic: the form of life (*Lebensform*), where, if I may say so, the logical space of the *Tractatus* gradually expands towards "phenomenological problems" (see *Remarks on Colors*) and ultimately (in the 1940s) towards the lived experience itself. The gesture of pointing to the lived experience in the hopes of clarifying problem of orientation (or confusions) in the geography of our conceptualized behavior will ultimately, perhaps non-intuitively, rely on a shared participation in a form of life. In the process, some degree of inference and grammatical description will be called for, but only up to a point (Azize 2010b). I can surely spell out aspects of rules that my interlocutor might have overlooked, or even misconstrued, etc. I can also point to the dogmatism of taking the necessary force of an Image as itself necessary (I'll get back to this later). But that will not be enough, if we are to attain a more fulfilling agreement or mutual understanding. Why? First of all, because any usage rely on a myriad of intermediary connections with other concepts, propositions, beliefs, attitudes, rituals etc., which neither interlocutor will be able to keep clearly in mind, even in the most simple instances. When I express a positive judgement relative to a point in a gradation, or succession, etc., I somehow state all negative judgements implied by the former ('This is white' implies 'This is not blue' etc.). When I say "this is what counts as a move in chess" I'm also saying "we do not necessarily accompany a move in chess with a dancing step", etc. The letter of a practice, of a ritual, is not enough: we need to survey its spirit.
There is a passage in Wittgenstein's *Lessons on Aesthetics* which reads:

The word we ought to talk about is 'appreciated'. What does appreciation consist in? If a man goes through an endless number of patterns in a tailor's, [and] says: "No. This is slightly too dark. This is slightly too loud", etc., he is what we call an appreciator of material. That he is an appreciator is not shown by the interjections he uses, but by the way he chooses, selects, etc. Similarly in music: "Does this harmonize? No. The bass is not quite loud enough. Here I just want something different…." This is what we call an appreciation.

It is not only difficult to describe what appreciation consists in, but impossible. *To describe what it consists in we would have to describe the whole environment.* (*Lessons on Aesthetics*, I, § 18-20, my emphasis).

Azize (2019) comments on this passage:

In other words, we would have to describe all intermediary links (*Zwischengliedern*) of the associations of practices (*Association der Gebräuche*) in connection to the situation in which that notion is used.[2] Naturally, such description is not feasible. But something interesting is implied by Wittgenstein's remark, beyond the rejection of the clarifying nature of aesthetic adjectives: the fact that the aesthete could describe the environment in which his appreciation can be experienced and appropriately expressed, and at the same time he could not. He could, in the sense that a chess player could state the rules for the game of chess even having read no chess rulebook in her life. He could not, in the sense that, prompted to clarify what to play a game consists in, at some point he would have to resort to an instance of the form of a family resemblance definition: this, and that, and things like these, and so on—inviting a form of understanding on the part of the interlocu-

tor that is dependent on a dense description of practices, affections and imaginative scenarios, not only rules. To clarify is here to be able to experience, to know how to go on further in a series without guarantee and open to historical modification at the modal level, i.e., a rather radical modifications of the object (for instance, the object "artwork") (Azize 2019, p. 299).

In what follows, I try to develop in more detail the conception of philosophy hinted at so far, and its connections and similitudes with artistic processes. Let me start with some words on modernity as a background for this story.

MODERNITY AS BACKGROUND

Modernity is one of those umbrella terms whose limits can be fuzzy. But it is perhaps safe to say that what most of us call modernity involves a critical stance whereby traditional seats of authority are subjected to rational and empirical public inquiry. This is a claim to a critical stance in the ordinary experience of persons in the life-world, and it has many different aspects. Let me point out some of these aspects: an increasingly republican governance, mediated by collegiate bodies of deliberation; the establishment of outlets for social experiment and democratic dissent controlled by a negative freedom (Isaiah Berlin), i.e., denying the proposition of ending all other experiments and dissents; the social construction of science based on evidence; the protection of subjective development-in-the-world and access to speech in the public sphere; and so on.

Both philosophy (at least Wittgensteinian/Cavellian-inspired philosophy) and art (or aesthetic processes of production and reception) might be seen in the same light, as aspects of this modern critical stance. Let me focus on art for a while, as it will reflect or afford considerations regarding philosophy by similitude later on. One way of outlining, or articulating images of art and aesthetic experience as aspects of this modern critical stance is, strangely enough, through the continuing impact of Plato's seminal gesture in aesthetics, even if indirectly. I don't mean expelling poets from the city. Whatever else we can say about his conclusions, Plato recognized the full power that art has of articulating meaning and value in ways that affect people more vividly than other pedagogic or overall communicative or value-expressive tools he saw operating around him, and perhaps with a wider range of affordances. Art does this typically by trying to create forms by which to enact and express experiences of distinctly artistic meaningfulness, thereby imaginatively expanding the possibilities of human experience in general. Echoes of Plato's insight can be heard in contemporary philosophies that reopen the question of the uses of art. As Western life in general finds itself at a crossroads between a past of structured oppression and visions of expansions of democratic liberties, we are called once again to protect and promote places in public life for spiritual, artistic, narrative, fictional works that freely experiment on both subjective and social life, not aiming at disruption as an intrinsic value, but to secure a space for human beings to engage with the pendular, existential experience of both acknowledging our and other's interests and wishes and avoiding the forceful common (Cavell).

I take both Wittgenstein's and Cavell's philosophy to be such callings, some of the most powerful and far-reaching in the recent decades, in terms of the ability to avoid philosophical reductionism in all areas to which the two philosophers lend their impressive arrays of attention, and in terms of its capacity to court us back to addressing our human lives philosophically with some of the best tools of the trade, the essay form (in the case of Cavell) and the philosophical fragment (in Wittgenstein's case)—not always trying to emulate the scientific paper.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE AND ARTISTIC PROCESSES

What forms does responsiveness to the calling to envision and experiment in modern free and meaningful life take? Among other things, that calling take form of the work of reading and hearing, finding voice and reaching out to touch others, which Cavell—following Wittgenstein as he understood him—took as more

congenial to philosophy than the systematic carving out of fully developed arguments, heavily bent on anticipating attacks in the game of philosophical dispute. So let me go over this framework in just a couple of wide strokes, and then try to develop some of its different elements a bit further.

If we are to escape reification, i.e., a sort of cognitive neutrality of basic, gnosic apprehension of the world plus a fundamental disregard of the other as free agent, we should recognize our mode of existence as always already one of existential engagement—what Wittgenstein came to call Praxis in the 1940s (not entirely unlike Heidegger's notion of Care). One way of reconnecting with this, let's call it the proper human stance, is through a kind of debureaucratization or deautomatization of perception (Benjamin, Shklovsky, slightly disrupting our habits of sensibility so they open themselves up to new engagements.[3] I think that this task can be generalized as one which is more congenial to art in general—not only in more experimentally-led works and genres, but also in more conventional art forms. Why? Because art, either experimental or more stable formally, is always an artificial framing of experience - be it minimalist (think of Raymond Carver or Eric Rohmer) or maximalist (think of Shakespeare or Balzac). A condition of possibility for the engagement with artistic processes in this vein could be articulated with a Cavellian vocabulary in terms of the *truth of skepticism*, whose operation involves a more receptive attitude towards the invitation to debureaucratize perception, thus favoring a more pluralistic view of Praxis in general, and at the same time a clearer view of more localized and stable commitments to meaning (I have the *perspicuous representation* in view here, something Wittgenstein considered we lack when we fail to patiently appreciate the kind of understanding—involving disclosure of meaning and warnings against necessary and sufficient conditions—that they can provide; see *Philosophical Investigation*'s dense §122). There are echoes here of Simone de Beauvoir's (1948) rejection of what she calls *inhuman objectivities* (Beauvoir 1948)—promises of godliness, adherence to microphysical and all-encompassing moral and political causes, necessary and definitive truths about aspects of experience, etc. The compelling character of inhuman objectivities stems from a resistance to accepting our original lack-of-being, or, in a word: our finitude. Anxieties with our finitude are dealt with by our seeking assurances of meaningfulness, in the form of impersonal theories of the meaningful in general, of justice, etc. The danger is that such theories end up restricting or compromising genuine investment in life. On the other hand, there is also the danger of embracing a choice for the sake of affirming subjective decision-making. To envision a middle way between these two excesses involves a particular type of modesty and patience. And it is facilitated precisely by the work of perspicuous representation of interrelated cases of finitely meaningful life. Anxieties with the lack of assurances of meaningfulness can then likely be curbed, as responsibilities and responses within our commitments rise up. There is hope, then, for the ongoing task of inhabiting the pendular human space of acknowledgements of value and avoidances of disagreeable aspects of culture (Cavell) without fantasies of total adherence (to inhuman objectivities—I'll get back to this later). But how does this help us gain a better grasp of the space of philosophy and of art?

SPIRIT, WILL, ORIENTATION IN LIFE

When Arthur Danto, a key theorist in contemporary aesthetics, chose to close his book in which he outlines his topography of the field of philosophy with a brief chapter entitled "The Realm of the Spirit". In a gesture not unlike that of the last paragraph of the *Tractatus*, where Wittgenstein despairs of glossing precisely those regions of thought and experience he deems most important, connected to the domains of the ethical and the aesthetic, in the last paragraph Danto (1989, p. 274) leaves his reader at the threshold of these very domains,

> of what Hegel fittingly called spirit in contrast to nature: the area of politics, law, morality, religion, art, culture, and politics itself. Having brought the readers to this point I must leave them, for the bulk of philosophical reflection has itself not crossed this boundary, and until it does we are very much on our own. This side of the boundary [i.e., previous chapters of the book] is philosophically

explored territory, the geography of which I have sought to describe. The realm of spirit is dark and difficult *terra incognita* so far as philosophical understanding is concerned, though it is as well, so far as human understanding is concerned, the most familiar territory of all. It is in the realm of spirit that we exist as human beings.

It is difficult to draw a precise line marking out the crossing to practical philosophy, unless we happen to be thinking in purely formal terms, whatever this means - perhaps having expunged from the field of our objects all pragmatic aspects relative to the mundane existence of persons and communities, and relative to the pragmatic context where the use of linguistic signs emerges out of a gesturing toward paradigms for proto-objects in the process of setting up rules, between contingency and normativity. As Brazilian philosopher Arley Ramos Moreno (2013, pp. i-xxxii) used to say when talking about the spirit of Wittgenstein's "new method" (after the *Tractatus*),

> What can create secular misunderstandings is precisely to think that it is a question of instilling wishes, interests, personal tastes, all those things that we can sum up with the word 'will', to instill these elements in the concept. On the contrary, it is a question of doing the inverse procedure, i.e., to instill concepts in the elements of the will, to render it critical.

The conditions for the experience of meaning can ultimately be traced back to a volitive soil—if we are interested in doing genealogy. But this fact neither invalidates the applicability of the notion of objectivity, nor is it a menace to philosophical rigor (see Oliveira and Azize 2021, pp. 180-202). To instill concepts in the elements of the will should not be just a working program for the contemporary philosopher anxious to have professional impact in the monastic game of *disputatio*. For this is perhaps one of our deepest urgencies in the public sphere, in days of expansion of a kind of irrationalism whose implications for (the impossibility of) minimal agreements we seem far from grasping, and is crippling the conditions for deliberation. We live in a time of strong recession of critical thinking and imagination in public conversation, at least as it is broadcasted to wider audiences in what is still called "the news". An aesthetics of repetition colonizes subjectivity by controlling and empoverishing recognition, narratives about experience, by unifying too forcefully meaning-giving stories which are then received as depictions of the world as it is, not possible versions of the world, inner or outer. This loop is in the process of rekindling all number of dusty inhuman objectivities, flags of gnosic, political and aesthetic absolute allegiances. One wonders, by the way, whether this makes the late XXth. Century talk of grand narratives being *passé* a bit ironic in the XXIst. Century. One way of understanding this phenomenon is to track it back to the way instrumental reason dominates matters of practice, and policy debates are conducted merely in terms of efficiency for the satisfaction of wants, often artificially created for financial reasons. In personal life, this kind of practical thinking translates as an impoverishment of lived experience in the form of adaptation, and deliberation and phronesis are no longer taken seriously as matters of attention and scrutiny. At the same time, our attention is dulled and dispersed by synthetic noise, entertained by a sterile, functional language and by a unilateral diet of clichéd images looping in the sceneries of ordinary life. We become less dexterous in *autonomous exercises of the spirit*—efforts of caring of the self and malaises of resistance to reality. An ever-increasing immersion in digital environments has not made things any easier. Our hyper-connectedness co-occurs with the appearance, once again, of scenes of public bigotry at the entrance of museums and art venues—and even academic spaces. In this context, it bears on the *practices of the spirit*[4] to imagine new sensibilities beyond the experience of ever-fleeting adaptation and its subtext of fake meritocracy, and, through them, new contexts of deliberation (I am thinking of the dense capacity of *fictions* to experiment with these). There is hope that, in these new contexts of deliberation, fresh visions of communal ties might emerge in multiple plans of existence—from love and desire to the experience of time and territory, and work—and greater epistemic justice might be achieved, in and through the artificial framings of possible experience suggested by artworks, and, hopefully, also by philosophy.

So yes, most days I remain prudently hopeful for what Richard Eldridge (2008) calls art's powers of orientation in life for us. These powers involve a number of aspects which are fairly open-ended. One of these aspects is the balance of conscious gesturing in this or that direction (Cavell's acknowledgments and avoidances) with an overall story that binds these gestures together, or give them meaning in life. Another aspect is balancing the presence of a story (Simone de Beauvoir's 'project') with the ability to withstand a level of indetermination and surprise. The experience of persons in the life-world is not a perfect projection of standing images or narratives anticipated in the theater of the mind. A sense of improvisation is called for, like steps in a dance. The immediately previous step somewhat determines the next as a suggestion within the overall formal composition of previous steps further back, and also given our bodies and their natural environment. But still the next step *will* retain *some* character of novelty and unpredictability. This also means that sometimes the whole composition is subjected to a resetting of itself, where possible resolutions fade out and new stories, or series of steps suggest themselves that were perhaps more removed from foreseeable horizons of meaning. (Can a law of form control this for us? Should it?). So to talk here of attention and commitment, which are two important notions for Cavell in regard to both philosophy and artistic processes of production and reception, must not be construed as invitations to fixed visions of meaning or value, to dogmatism, self-righteousness or stubbornness.

The dance metaphor gives me a cue to go back to the notion of artistic processes as a debureaucratization or deautomatization of perception.

ART, IMAGES, PRACTICE

The Russian formalist critic Victor Shklovsky (1988 [1917]) defends the proposition that art consists in thinking in images. To understand the function of imagery in literature, for example, one must distinguish "imagery as a practical means of thinking, as a means of placing objects within categories; and imagery as poetic, as a means of reinforcing an impression" (p. 23). Imagery as a practical means of thinking is one of the devices of the language of prose. Image as a means of reinforcing an impression is one of the devices of the language of poetry. Imagine that a child is eating bread and butter and gets butter in her fingers; now imagine that a child "is playing with my glasses and drops them". If I say "Hey, butterfingers!", you can see how the image works differently in these two contexts. Imagery in this second sense is an important device because of the tendency of our habits of perception to become (unconsciously) automatic. "Habituation devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war (…) And art exists [so] that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known" (p. 24). There are several ways in which art disrupts recognition so that we can see the object again as if for the first time, thus engaging with an aspect of it outside of its knowledge alone. About this engagement we can now say interesting things, we can now inhabit a plain of existence in which that object makes sense to us, or defies sense, intrigues us as to other, similar objects and *their* significance, etc. Schklovsky gives an example of an odd description of flogging by Tolstoy, whose estrangement has the effect of "pricking the conscience" (Ibid.). He then goes on to generalize the technique of estrangement: "I personally feel that defamiliarization is found almost everywhere form is found" (Ibid.). Poetic speech, for example, is comprised of special arrangements of its material - phonetic and lexical structure but also "through structures compounded from the words" (p. 25)— aiming specifically at slowing, or accelerating, the act of reading. Schklovsky says that this is what generates satisfaction in 'poetic language'. He means, I think, more than agreeableness of feeling: estrangement denotes the undoing of perceptual habit as aesthetics.

There is perhaps a direct line between this feature of artistic processes brought to their full fruition and the spirit of Wittgenstein's method. Arguably, the two main pillars supporting the system of *Philosophical Investigations* are the operative concepts of Grammar and Therapy. Assume that the philosophical work of clarification of images (*Bilde*) (see Moreno 1995, 2011), or of usages of concepts, seeks to mark out differences (and subtle but somewhat commanding intermediary connections, *Zwischengliedern*) between those

usages. Assume also an intrinsic lack of perspicuity of Grammar; we orient ourselves in speech as if walking with a flashlight in the woods at night, not as triumphant trekkers at the top of Mount Meaning with clear views all around. Assume that the business of such a philosophy is not to correct that lack of perspicuity once and for all (Wittgenstein got over that dream in the 1930s); assume that philosophy so conceived starts when an interlocutor complains she no longer knows her way around concepts, propositions and presentations of beliefs; and that the business of philosophy is to set up a dialogue through which, hopefully, a way back to ordinary experience of meaning is found (even if temptations to depart from these again seem inevitable). Finally, assume that the whole endeavor serves no further philosophical project—for instance, the project of positing modal relations as foundational, necessary relations that would themselves be necessary. A crucial technique Wittgenstein employs in order, as he says, to bring words from their metaphysical to their everyday uses consists in inventing strange scenarios so as to try and bring our vision to reach the limits and possibilities of what is sayable given the language we use *and* the creatures we are. He asks, for example, for the precise time when a given thought starts and stops in the mind (of its owner?). Or he introduces off-Earth creatures that would have doubts that would never occur to us about seemingly trivial uses, thus forcing us to see (without thinking) the ocean of assumptions we navigate without being told that they are there, let alone have their rules of operation spelled-out, as in a user's manual, perhaps even a General Anthropology of sorts. There is also, of course, the technique of calling attention to aspectuality (seeing or hearing something as something), by which clarifications of one's perception are no longer to be carried out by descriptions of perception (figurative representations of lines and volumes, graphical notations of sound waves, etc.), and we recognize that there is a seeing which denotes an experience involving subjective reaction and engagement which is not clarified by way of purely extensional descriptions of objects of perception.

The bottom-line of this philosophical practice can appear to be nothing more than settling those moments of disorientation down, so our interlocutor can move on, back to whatever practice had been placed in a sort of temporary suspension in order for philosophy to take place (say, people taking a break in a biology laboratory to discuss a sudden referential opacity of the concept of life). But as I understand Moreno (1995) to have suggested (unavailable in English) there is a deeper outcome to be expected, in terms of a personal change of attitude, a renewed appreciation for the plurality of possibilities of the experience of meaning, and at the same time for our commitments (acknowledgements, avoidances) to those possibilities that are closer to us. That is why Moreno drives attention to the *spirit* of Wittgenstein's new method, not its argumentative conundrums, interesting though those certainly are. To see (without thinking) our Images (*Bilde*, or usages, if you will) as Images would fulfill no iconoclastic task, as perhaps in Nietzsche. Sure, there is something to be said of accepting how moot an endeavor it is to seek for a base necessity *behind*, or *under* necessary relations between concepts and practices. To see the Images as Images does not disengage us from them—for, after all, they constitute experience, they make up our world. On the contrary: we recognize our responsibility for them. But it goes deeper than that, once you recognize Wittgenstein's "writerliness" (Eldridge 1997), the character of his composition, what Moreno used to call the Philosophical Album (of memories): this is an ongoing journey, a spiritual practice, in which self and culture become recognizable through the work of expression.

I wonder if this is a kind of Wittgensteinian-Cavellian humanism. Some compelling recent, and not so recent, voices (M. H. Abrams, Tzvetan Todorov, Martha Nussbaum) think it convenient to once again speak of humanism after the 1960s and 70s' talk of the death of the subject and phonologocentrism, to suggest a renewed attention to artistic processes through which expansions of the imagination and of subjective autonomy are coupled with stabilizations of meaning. Many diagnostics of the growing culture of philofascist ideas in Europe in the last century pointed to a dimmed power of language to bear gestures of rich, clear and stable enough expression (think of Karl Kraus, Stefan Zweig, Victor Klemperer, Adorno, more recently Eric Santner).[5] In the face of a new, recent tide of impoverishment of language, attention to artistic processes of production and reception can fulfill a negative, critical role, as well as a positive imaginative role of inviting and training to open dialogue, and of attempting to curbing anxieties with difference, fini-

tude, ambiguity and commitment to meaning. More recently, Gibson (2003) has made a compelling case for reclaiming a sense of humanism in this vein.

Besides humanism, I had mentioned practical philosophy as if this is a safe thing to do, just pointing out the field where a specific branch of philosophy gathers its objects. Now, the terms "humanism" and "practical philosophy" can both invite misunderstandings, especially in relation to art and philosophy. There might be undesirable echoes of a conception of philosophy (and/or art) as a technology of happiness, or doctrine of normalcy, both serving as instruments by which subjectivity can be molded into new ideological webs with an allure of necessity as yet another version of "human nature" posing as a self-standing essence. This ideological move would then recall parochial aspects of modernity, linked to its justification of colonialism. So, also a dangerous source of misunderstanding. Moreover, undesirable suggestions of an instrumentalist notion of practice could emerge.

But practical philosophy, as we might take Cavell to have (also) practiced it (perhaps departing from Wittgenstein here), *could* reconnect with its ancient focus on the examination and realization of rational powers of the free human subject. It could take seriously, and bring it even closer to Praxis, the Wittgensteinian injunction about how the activity of philosophy should best be carried out: as an examination not of truth (though the concept does not loose applicability), but of the experience of meaning. Philosophy as the analysis of truth alone in a sense bears the mark of the platonic gesture of turning dialogue into a massive reaction against, or anxiety over a perceived lack of foundations for meaning. In contrast, a philosophy more attentive to ordinary language, as the examination of the experience of meaning, dislodges epistemology from its center—a move which involves the "therapy" of that anxiety (see Eldridge 2007, pp. 267-87). I should note that the notion of meaning does not point here to effects of a structural field of relations of signs, but rather to associations of practices (Wittgenstein's *Association der Gebräuche*). These associations of practices are objective insofar as they are expressive of, or even constituted by, a recognizable human engagement. In a word: attitudes (action as gesturing towards or against something).

One important regulatory concept of the philosophical work in aesthetics as Cavell invited us to practice it, is, I think, the notion of spirit, as we saw above. It emerges in ancient philosophy already in connection to practice, to practical knowledge (*phronesis*). The French philosopher Pierre Hadot recovers this practical dimension of spirit (and of philosophy) by rereading the history of hellenistic and roman philosophies in the key of mnemonic exercises in the life-world aiming at a discipline of body and mind, which he called *exercices spirituels*. In spite of the religious overtones, in Hadot's reading these exercises have no theological horizon, or at least not necessarily. Though I would not be interested in the psychological and instrumental aspects of these exercises, Hadot's project as historian of ideas is important to me because it recovers an image of philosophy not subsumed to the search for epistemic truth, to a discourse aiming at epistemic truth (which Hadot calls *théorie*). Spirit as operative concept can be taken as in itself a challenge to instrumentalism, by rejecting the idea that meaning is essentially function of specific practical purposes, with a beginning and an end. If there are tasks involved in human expressive action, they are ongoing tasks, as we apply our inherited words and images (*Bilde*, see Moreno 1995) to ever-new contexts. If there are tasks, they are expressive tasks, as we find ourselves compelled to gestures of acknowledgment and avoidance.

Finally, the layout and procedures of this Cavellian journey in aesthetics is meant not just as a philosophical contribution to the understanding of aesthetic processes, but also as a quest for a philosophical doing that positions itself favorably to lessons learned through engagements with artworks and art forms. As I said earlier, echoing Cavell, if philosophy is once again to escape new forms of platonic control angst, it should allow for the articulation of voice in a gentler, non-impositive fashion, without consuming itself entirely in agonistic theory-building or error-finding. Art taken seriously as part of the public use of reason has the potential to help train philosophers to better avoid two of their most pervasive professional hazards: 1) the notion that the conditions for a particular articulation are fundamentally to be shown through some form of philosophical reduction (i.e., the proposition that an apparent plurality is to make room for a single cause, form, category, ground, etc., more or less as in Plato's theory of forms); and 2) the accompanying notion that the appropriate method to justify reductive moves like these is a specified mode of composition

(the scientific paper?), thus driving a wedge between it and all the other modes of discourse—perhaps literary, essayistic, narrative, aphoristic, fragmentary, etc. Reopening the question of the uses of philosophy and of art would invite us to reposition ourselves in relation to this wedge when we do philosophy. This I take to be another of Cavell's invitations, following Wittgenstein, so philosophy can once again be a vehicle of the human voice and be able to touch, hopefully, wider audiences in these dark times of ours—not just convince.

LIBERALISM?

And what has all this to do with liberalism?

Speaking about the notion of authenticity and estranged absolutes, Simone de Beauvoir writes in the essay where she spelt out her version of existentialism:

> The first implication of such an attitude [i.e, the attitude of "refusing to set up as absolutes the ends toward which my transcendence thrusts itself, and by considering them [rather] in their connection with the freedom which projects them"] is that the authentic man will not agree to recognize any foreign absolute. When a man projects into an ideal heaven that impossible synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself that is called God, it is because he wishes the regard of this existing Being to change his existence into being; but if he agrees not to be in order to authentically exist, he will abandon the dream of an **inhuman objectivity**. He will understand that it is not a matter of being right in the eyes of a God, but of being right in his own eyes. Renouncing the thought of seeking the guarantee for his existence outside of himself, he will also refuse to believe in unconditioned values which would set themselves up athwart his freedom like things. Value is this lacking-being of which freedom makes itself a lack [*la valeur, c'est cet être manqué dont la liberté se* fait *manque*]; and it is because the latter makes itself a lack that value appears. It is desire which creates the desirable, and the project which sets up the end [aim]. It is human existence which makes values spring up in the world on the basis of which it will be able to judge the enterprise in which it will be engaged. But first it locates itself beyond any pessimism, as beyond any optimism, for the fact of its original springing forth is a pure contingency. Before existence there is no more reason to exist than not to exist (Beauvoir 1948, p. 5, my emphasis).

When we pursue what Beauvoir calls inhuman objectivities, we throw ourselves toward the *avenir-chose*, the reified future of absolute assuredness and satisfaction—be it in the City of God or any such scenario of end-games of absolute reconciliation of whole self and perfect community. Recent neo-liberal ideologies toying with the idea of free choice and merit explore such scenarios. With the *avenir-chose* as horizon, any and all sacrifice made in name of the cause is worth its weight in pure gold. The way of the pilgrim is clearly laid-out, and it is the work of repetition which will assure our arrival at the promised land of fulfillment, both individually and collectively. Anxieties about meaning, morality and orientation in life translate immediately into dissent and deviation, or at least there is this danger hovering above communal life.

This might sound like a caricature of a distant world, with perhaps medieval overtones. But in fact I have in mind the turn-of-the-century semblance of consensus over a neo-liberal anthropology of pseudo-meritocracy and all-around laissez-faire, and also a more recent backlash whereby anxieties of identity caused ghosts of racial purity and integrative national myth to violently reassert themselves in the streets, torches and chants and all.

Trying to articulate a similar temptation, but having in view the drama played out within the dialogical composition of *Philosophical Investigations*, Richard Eldridge writes:

> Seeking to think, judge, and speak with perfect authority, somehow in touch with absolute norms, "we lose (…) a full realization of what we are saying: we no longer know what *we* mean" (Cavell,

The Claim of Reason, p. 207). That is, rather than speaking within the terms of ordinary practice—conversationally or dialectically, one might say—where challenges are always possible, we instead seek to speak as more than a finite and situated subject. Hence we come to speak inhumanly, as we refuse the role of an ordinary speaker in relation to an ordinary interlocutor" (2003, p. 123).

By speaking inhumanly, "we lose a sense of ourselves as finite subjects in conversational and other practical relations to other finite subjects" (Ibid.). Is there a way out of this, an assured way of resisting this temptation of speaking inhumanly? Cavell's reading of *Philosophical Investigations* recognizes not a set of problems and solutions, but a drama expressing the human condition: the ongoing task of inhabiting a space where we both acknowledge and resist meaning (or language games). This agonistic situation is not one to be dissolved by knowledge, truth or the adherence to absolutes—or even outcomes of political theory (like "liberalism" in another sense, not the one I'm hinting at here). The oscillation between "our dissatisfaction with the ordinary [i.e. our language-games] and our satisfaction in it" (Cavell 1990, p. 83; Eldridge 2003, p. 123) is expressed and exemplified in a myriad of ways within the text of *Philosophical Investigations*, but not as an answer or a reaction to a theoretical quest. One could say, perhaps as Russell did upon receiving news of Wittgenstein's "new way of thinking" in the 1930s, that this is philosophy gone astray, assuming the role of other literary genres, shying away from living up to its task of offering us things like "the form of the good, the essence of the just state, *the* aim of human life" (Eldridge 2003, p. 124). But Cavell's reading invites us to see in the drama of *Philosophical Investigations* precisely a successful case of expressing the human condition, which is best represented in this irreconcilability between "moments of acceptance of the ordinary and moments of criticism of it" (Ibid.). It is in this enactment of the human person, Eldridge aptly suggests, that we can see a kind of "perfectionist liberalism" at play if we accept the spirit of Wittgenstein's "new method" (Gordon Baker): just as from the criss-cross of clarifying and resisting language-games in the dialogical composition of *Philosophical Investigations* different possibilities emerge for the experience of meaning, we can see "different ways of life as reasonably contending ways of embodying the good" (Eldridge 2003, p. 128). And we can see that, not as neutral observants: this very contention is at play within each one of us, which is why "Affirmative tolerance and talking will often be in order, including feeling in oneself measures of both resistance and attraction to what is other. So will waiting: sometimes there will be nothing to say, though nonetheless the hope of reciprocity and social perfection does not lapse. So will a political framework of mutual respect: hence the liberalism" (Ibid.).

To follow the pendular nature of the human experience, a crucial methodological virtue is then patience, so as to really hear and at the same time find one's voice, as two co-ocurring stances of our presence. Philosophy (and art) here addresses and assesses an attitude, not, strictly speaking, a theoretical outcome.

NOTES

1   Many of the ideas of this essay were discussed with Richard Eldridge when I was a visiting scholar in Swarthmore College in 2017, under his supervision, and in later dialogues. My stay in Swarthmore in 2017 was made possible through a grant from the Brazilian scientific agency CAPES, process nr. 88881.120191/201601.

2   On the importance of intermediary links to the "new method", see Azize 2010a (in Portuguese).

3   This can be paralleled to the trivial gesture of applying concepts in ordinary language: as linguists working in pragmatics will attest, instances where there is an ever so slight semantic dislocation are more common than instances of precisely controlled applications (Anwendungen). John Austin developed a fine-tuned ear for this, something which served him well philosophically.

4   Somewhat similar to what Aristotle called realization of the rational powers of the human animal.

5   "Zweig recognized that propaganda had played a crucial role in eroding the conscience of the world. He described how, as the tide of propaganda rose during the First World War, saturating newspapers, magazines, and radio, the sensibilities of readers became deadened. Eventually, even well-meaning journalists and intellectuals became

guilty of what he called "the 'doping' of excitement"—an artificial incitement of emotion that culminated, inevitably, in mass hatred and fear. Describing the healthy uproar that ensued after one artist's eloquent outcry against the war in the autumn of 1914, Zweig observed that, at that point, "the word still had power. It had not yet been done to death by the organization of lies, by 'propaganda.'" But Hitler "elevated lying to a matter of course," Zweig wrote, just as he turned "anti-humanitarianism to law." By 1939, he observed, "Not a single pronouncement by any writer had the slightest effect . . . no book, pamphlet, essay, or poem" could inspire the masses to resist Hitler's push to war." (Prochnik 2017).

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