WHISTLIN' PAST THE GRAVEYARD: QUIETISM AND PHILOSOPHICAL ENGAGEMENT[1]

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Resumo: nos últimos anos, John McDowell tem proposto uma concepção de filosofia em que o objetivo da disciplina não é oferecer teses substanciais, mas antes revelar modos de pensar e premissas ocultas que estão na base da filosofia construtiva. Esta visão terapêutica tem sido chamada 'quietismo' e deve muito a algumas idéias favoritas de Wittgenstein ao longo de toda a sua vida. No entanto, a obra de Wittgenstein (e, talvez, também a de McDowell) parece oscilar entre duas compreensões de quietismo: pode-se ser quietista por não macular aquilo que é mais importante com discussões explícitas ou pode-se ser quietista por não ter nada a dizer. Argumentaremos que o segundo tipo do quietismo não implica recusar em se ocupar com a filosofia do passado, nem tampouco adotar uma atitude contemplativa. A concentração sobre o particular, em ética tanto quanto em qualquer outra área da filosofia, é suficiente para minar as ambições universalistas da filosofia tradicional e descortinar um aumento na ação filosófica.

Palavras-chave: quietismo, Wittgenstein, John McDowell, particularismo, linguagem.

1 BEING QUIET AS BEING SILENT

Philosophy's traditional aspirations have never been modest. Philosophers have seen themselves as offering a foundation for all knowledge, as aiming towards the most general kind of knowledge or even as providing the framework where all that

can be known should fit. Whether this is done by unearthing the ultimate constituents of reality or the a priori conditions of possibility of access to that reality, other forms of knowledge were often thought of as either inferior or mere branches of a tree with philosophy as the trunk. Even the successes of modern science have been integrated within this ambitious scheme: the discoveries of the natural sciences, important as they were, could only illuminate certain areas of reality and, even there, under the guidance of philosophy. The huge mismatch between what philosophy aspired to offer and what it actually delivered became more and more a central philosophical topic: despite the assumed privileged status of philosophy, hardly any agreement was achieved, in contrast with almost any other area of human life, most notably the sciences. A good deal of the philosophy from Kant onwards wonders why this is so and how philosophy should rethink its own role so as to escape such a predicament.

Wittgenstein's conception of this role could not be more pessimistic. He proclaims in his *Tractatus* (WITTGENSTEIN, 1921, Preface) that, in order to avoid its many notorious dead-ends, philosophy must distinguish clearly what can be said from what can be only be shown and from what cannot even be shown. As we will see, Wittgenstein concludes that the scope of the sayable is very narrow indeed: it ultimately reduces to the factual statements of the natural sciences, a collection which gives little consolation to philosophy's grand aspirations. Regarding everything else, one should remain quiet, which means that there is nothing left for philosophy to do outside certifying its own death. Some *things*, the most important ones for human beings, for thinkers, should be left alone: "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1921, 7). There is a something (*wovon*: that about which)[2] one cannot speak about and must pass over in silence (in some cases can be shown in others not even that). Ramsey, showing great wit, accused him of wanting to have it both ways: "(...) What can't be said we can't say, and we can't whistle it

either" (RAMSEY, 1928, p. 146). Wittgenstein, on Ramsey's reading, does not want to enter the graveyard of great philosophical discussions, but still tries to gesture at a different way of engaging with the very same topics. In fact, Ramsey's accusation is one of lack of quietism[3]. Given Wittgenstein's explicit recognition of a sphere of things that cannot be talked about, it is a fair accusation. Furthermore, taking into account the central role played by Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy, what Ramsey is saying is not just that Wittgenstein is half-hearted in his commitment to quietism, but that he is inconsistent. The *Tractatus* seems to claim that all that there is can be said and thought clearly. And yet, if "being something" were equated with "being sayable and thinkable", there should remain nothing that is ineffable but still showable or whistlable.

What is that Wittgenstein seems to think that there is, but cannot be said? This is not the place to elaborate a detailed map of the kinds of utterances that lack sense or are plainly senseless (i.e., that try to say what cannot be said, whether it can be shown or not). In any case, Wittgenstein leaves out much of the sphere of theoretical philosophy and its attempt at understanding the relationship between thought, language and reality. The official doctrine of the *Tractatus*, taken very seriously by many philosophers, despite being part of the ladder one must dispose of once climbed, is that thought and language are related to the world because they have an isomorphic structure. That isomorphism cannot be expressed, but only shown. A lot of philosophy from Descartes to Russell fails in trying to make that explicit. The fate of practical philosophy is even darker: values cannot be part of propositions with sense and cannot even be shown by them. But, inasmuch as value is related to the will, it is unrelated to scientific questions about how things are in the world, but it plays a transcendental role regarding the limits of the world, the world's existence. This is what is mystical, the fact that there is such a thing (see note 2 above). Wittgenstein believes to have solved the problems of philosophy by showing they are not real, by dissolving them.

However, the dissolution isn't complete, at least as far as the *Tractatus* is concerned.

The two last verses of the song by Tom Waits, from which I picked the title for this paper, summarize part of the spirit of the quietism Ramsey and I are objecting to: "I never told the truth, so I can never tell a lie". We do not remain quiet because there is no thing to talk about, but because we do not want to risk spoiling it with our words. Wittgenstein's version expresses a parallel fear: when we say everything that can be said we still have not said anything about what we take to be most important (in philosophy: how our words and thoughts hook up to the world; in our lives: what should we value). However, silence is not enough; if we are not convinced that nothing can be said about all that is left outside sensical discourse, we will continue trying to say it. For silence to bring philosophical peace it must be accompanied by a convincing denial of anything mystical. Not every philosophical sensibility can opt for a respectful, contemplative attitude towards what we hold sacred.

As we said, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein reserves a space for the sacred but unsayable and claims that what can be said is reduced to the statements of the natural sciences. However, if we open up the doors for more ways of expressing things, of being involved with things (not only through the sciences, but in the arts and crafts, in our everyday dealings with the world, in all the forms of our enculturation), the mystical attraction of ineffability seems to disappear. In the following section we will explore some important implications for Wittgenstein's quietist programme of this liberating move, such as it is executed in the *Philosophical Investigations*. By insisting on understanding meaning, intentionality, normativity or knowledge in terms of particular instances of agents interacting with the world and with others, we can avoid the temptation of aiming at philosophical universality (a temptation with the price of simplifying the complexity of thought, language and the world beyond recognition) without giving up on philosophy.

2 Being Quiet as Not Interfering

If the point of quietism cannot be to remain silent, it could seem as if it could not make any point at all. After all, a mere rejection of unnecessary philosophical theorizing is unavoidably insular: no philosopher produces more theory than what she needs so as to ease her philosophical anxieties. Any comparison between levels of quietism would be biased: it would have to be made from the standpoint of some theory or another, of some background insight about what problems need to be solved (or dissolved, if you prefer). One could claim that a certain philosopher, say Hume or Kant, gives us more than what *his own* standards allow for (for instance, Kant concession of some role to concepts without empirical content through the practical use of pure reason, Hume's exhortation to the burning of books violating the very criteria that it embraces). But this is far from being sufficient to refuse all philosophical theorizing. However, we can take advantage of a different sense of "being quiet" (more obvious in Romance languages but also present in the English world) and explore what it suggests under the light of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy in the *Investigations*. One can be quiet by not interfering, by being calm, which should not imply a refusal to do philosophy (and, hence, to speak and write philosophy).

In this new, more liberating, sense, the recommendation is to avoid philosophical theories that eliminate, reduce or abstract away the very complexity of the phenomena with which those theories are supposed to deal. Philosophy has, first and foremost, the obligation to avoid eliminative simplifications, such as the ones found in theories that explain the complexity both of reality and of thinkers' engagement with it in terms of something neat and external to that very engagement (be it Platonic Ideas, a clear symbolism that tries to make manifest an underlying structure to the whole of the world or whatever). Part of this obligation is to reject attempts to explain linguis-

tic or intentional phenomena in terms of something which is not itself linguistic or intentional. Wittgenstein's commitment to this negative task for philosophy is especially clear in his discussion of rule following (see WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, §§185-242). Neither the project of explaining correctness in action and language in terms of ready-made facts (ready-made in being understandable independently of any rational interaction with them), nor that of thinking of the world we interact with as a mere projection of the subject's or the community's judgement of what is correct and what is not, are found satisfactory. Wittgenstein refuses to countenance any sphere that could be considered to bestow meaning, or norms of correctness, from the outside. Fixed meanings and any theory that postulates them leads to paralysis in our understanding of something much richer and complex. Being quiet is avoiding to interfere in the characteristic philosophical way: simplifying to the point of eliminating[4].

One way to pursue this line can be found in a number of brilliant papers by John McDowell. Rather than feeling forced to chose between two equally unappealing options that offer themselves as exhaustive (either communitarian scepticism or platonism, in the case of rule-following; either mental internalism or causal externalism with meaning naturalistically separated from thought, in philosophy of mind; either a purely descriptive understanding of proper names or a separation between their cognitive value and their referential role, in philosophy of language, etc.), McDOWELL explores the existence of common premises to both poles and shows that they are not compelling (see, for instance, 1984, 1986 or 1994). I find this approach to philosophy to be commendable and, in a certain sense, a form of quietist[5]. However, far from removing any need to do philosophy, it often places us in a situation where there is much more to be done than we thought. I will come back to this in section 3, where I will discuss McDowell ideas on externalism and in section 5, where the prospects of an engaged, but quietist, philosophy will be explored.

Wittgenstein's style in the *Investigations* is characteristic of this refusal to simplify the phenomena under consideration by forcing them into theoretical restrictions. A situation is considered where two people use some words in successful communication, or someone wonders what makes a simple mathematical calculation correct, and, rather than offering a straight answer to this, the text tries to show that no general account can be given, even of the simplest cases investigated. Each example highlights the complexity of the case by demonstrating the failure to subsume it under theories that focus on some aspect or another. By doing that, Wittgenstein manages to suggest a variety of interesting and often novel perspectives on the topic, be it language, communication, thought, correctness, or sensations. Many philosophers take these perspectives to constitute new theories: meaning is defined as use, norms are defined as the practices of a community, pains are dispositions to behave in a certain ways, etc. However, Wittgenstein never commits himself to any of these and sometimes one feels that the intention of his work is betrayed by many interpreters' insistence to find philosophical theories in the traditional sense within his work (much the same can be said about the reception of his earlier work).

This style, that can fairly be characterized as trying to diagnose the source of theoretical options that present themselves as compulsory and to liberate thinking from having to chose between poles that fail to do justice to the richness of reality, clearly situates philosophy in a difficult position. If we think that philosophy is a discipline essentially concerned with theoretical approaches aspiring to universality, and dedicated to eliminating what is contingent, once this aspiration is shown to be unsustainable, there would be no philosophical agenda left to be pursued. Wittgenstein seems to think this is the case and McDowell certainly does. However, the conclusion does not necessarily follow: it is still conceivable that there are *philosophically* interesting things to say once philosophy realizes

the irreducibility of the details. One can accept that there is no area of reality that can only be studied philosophically, that there is no common element to all there is that only philosophy can present, and still see the multiple insights of the tradition as relevant to our never ending task of getting things right. In summary, the kind of quietism that I am recommending does not involve silence, but rather outspoken denunciation of styles of philosophical theorizing that try to silence the thin, particular and rich subject matter of reality[6]. In section 5 we will consider whether the unease produced by this realization – by the realization that there are no consoling, self-standing meanings, essences or truths – is compatible with the kind of quietism described in the previous paragraphs. But first, I want to consider an example, drawn from the work of McDowell, of Wittgensteinian quietism at work: the debate between externalism and internalism in philosophy of mind.

3 Two Kinds of Externalism

An alleged compulsory option between two positions regarding the nature of mental content presents itself at the beginning of the seventies and has dominated the discussion of intentionality ever since: we need to choose between a Cartesian image according to which the contents of our mental states are internal to the mind and, hence, accessible in a privileged, even incorrigible way, and another (presumably non-Cartesian) picture where those contents are determined by the way the world is and influence our mental life by means of causal connections describable in the vocabulary of the natural sciences (where the influence needs not be accessible to the mind). The first option receives the name of internalism and the second is called externalism. The compulsory character of the dichotomy is made explicit by this labelling: either contents are purely internal or (at least partly) outside the mind. We have to embrace a conception of the mind where it is ei-

ther fully independent from the nature of reality, or analyzable into an internal factor (causally connected to the world, if all goes well) and an external one (narrow and broad content, to use the terms made popular by Putnam)[7].

Parallels can be found in the philosophy of language. One of them is the traditional option between a Russellian conception of meaning, where our only way of referring to particulars (other than dubious internal sense-data, simple particulars only accessible to the thinker), is descriptive, i.e., in terms of general properties that help to pick up uniquely the object referred to. Many traditional readings of Frege's distinction between sense and reference push it in this direction: we can only refer to objects indirectly, senses being the mediating entities between thought or language and reality. As long as the choice we are presented with is one between the idea that we can never refer to objects, but rather describe them in general terms, or the idea that reference is always mediated, it is no surprise that an alternative, "direct", account of reference would seem needed. Such an account, intimately related to the externalism in philosophy of mind described above, was offered by Kripke and proved to be extremely popular: we do not need to appeal to any sort of senses or modes of presentation between words and their objects; referring expressions are connected to their objects by means of causal-historic links quite independent of anything known by the actual user of the expression. Reference becomes independent of the cognitive value of the expressions.

However, both the internalist and the causal externalist conceptions of content, and the descriptivist and causal/direct accounts of reference, share the premise that there is something in thought and language that can be isolated from their being about the world. In fact, vast areas of the philosophies of language and of thought are dominated by the assumption that there is a separation between the content of a concept, the meaning of a word, on the one hand, and the contextual

contribution of the world to what is said with words or what is thought through concepts. Given such a separation between the contribution of thought and language to meaning and the world's contribution, the research carried under this assumption must explain how both elements melt together into a single phenomenon. Some of the proposals do a better job than others on this task. However, it is not the purpose of this section to adjudicate between competing proposals, but rather to question the appearance of compulsion that the dichotomy seems to suggest.

In her paper, "*Feminism and philosophy of language: communicative speech acts*", Jennifer HORNSBY (2000) argues against the tendency to separate the object of study of semantic theories from accounts of communicative acts. (She relates this tendency to compartmentalising, individualistic and intellectualist modes of thinking in "malestream" philosophy, but I don't find her arguments for this connection as convincing.) According to Hornsby, any theory of meaning worth the name must start with the phenomenon of "saying something to another", rather than constructing that concept out of an isolatable, mental, individual factor and another external, merely pragmatic factor. She labels this criticism to Griceans, amongst others. Even though she does not phrase it this way (Hornsby's point is more explicitly expressed in her complaint against seeing linguistic communication as the conjunction of something purely speaker-related and something purely hearer-related; see p. 93), I believe that work in pragmatics, generally and against what one might think when exposed to it for the first time, not only does not have a pragmatist character, but rather aims at separating semantic considerations from questions regarding language use, making the former understandable independently of the latter. The ultimate objective of such a principled separation between questions of meaning and questions of communication is to isolate a space of entities (let's call them linguistic meanings) whose character is independent of

any actual use in linguistic practices and which can be grasped even by someone lacking the proper practical abilities needed for communication.

This move, normally implicit in the literature, may well betray something akin to the platonism criticized by Wittgenstein in his rule following considerations. Granting a distinction between meaning proper on the one hand, and context (linguistic or otherwise) on the other, implies the possibility of separating the practices within which it is adequate to make judgements of correctness or error, from that in terms of which such judgements are made, i.e., it allows for norms to be intelligible independently of practices (whether those norms reside in the mind of the speakers, in the pronouncements of royal academics of language, in some form of platonic realm, or wherever, that is not crucial for our discussion). A similar, if more detailed, diagnosis of two-factor accounts of language and thought can be found in a series of papers by McDOWELL (see 1984, 1995). McDowell, besides criticizing what is ultimately a Cartesian starting point in both sides of the dilemmas, has also offered an account of Fregean senses and an account of experience to explain the possibility of a direct grasp of particulars in thought and language[8]. In the following section I will review some arguments of a particularist nature and wonder whether we need anything besides them to make justice to a conception of thought as fully embedded in the world.

5 PARTICULARISM

I would like to start with an especially striking proposal regarding the possibility of a theory of meaning, that can be found in some papers by Davidson from the eighties. It is not clear whether Davidson has remained faithful to that proposal and whether such a proposal is consistent with some previous ideas of his, in particular the idea that we can obtain a theory

of meaning for a given language if we know the truth-conditions of any sentence of that language. In his paper "*A nice derangement of epitaphs*" DAVIDSON (1986) starts by considering what kind of linguistic knowledge would be necessary in order to interpret the meaning of unusual utterances (utterances with novel metaphors, word playing, malapropisms or plain mistakes by the speaker regarding the meaning of the words she is using). Given the ability of any competent language user to understand, often quite easily and without much inference, such linguistic irregularities, it seems dubious that a theory of meaning which puts the emphasis on standard meanings of words or sentences across contexts could be either sufficient or necessary to account for such ability. It would not be necessary because monolingual speakers of distant languages are often capable of understanding each other utterances on the basis merely of their common knowledge of the world. It would not be sufficient because even a complete theory of that kind would lack the resources to interpret the frequent displacements from the very norms they are supposed to codify.

The theory we need to interpret linguistic behaviour (and to produce it's expected success) is a passing theory that will be replaced by a new one by exposure to linguistic exchanges. No general theory can account for linguistic diversity, the theory we use to make sense of an utterances must be geared to the occasion. This is accepted to the point of having the actual utterance under interpretation providing information to the interpreter in a way that constitutes part of her theory. Davidson's conclusion is provocative: if a language is some knowledge which can be sufficiently characterized in terms of a set of fixed general rules shared by the speakers, then there is no such a thing as a language. This should follow directly from Davidson highly dynamic conception of language, thought and objectivity: there cannot be a clear divide between knowing a language and knowing our way around the world (i.e., we cannot isolate something specifically linguistic that consti-

tutes a theory necessary or sufficient for successful linguistic communication).

Against the idea that there is something fix (say, linguistic meaning or general concepts) which can be understood independently of any particular use or application, Davidson invites us to think that our understanding of language and thought needs to centre on the event of someone saying something to someone else in a given situation. The meaning of an utterance cannot be a combination of the standard meaning of the words plus something else (the speaker's intentions, the hearer's expectations, the salient features of the environment, etc.). Similarly for the content of thoughts. What transpires from Davidson's "no-language" argument (and, under a certain reading, from his idea that meaning emerges in the context of radical interpretation of particular utterances) is that there is no need to appeal to universal rules to make sense of communication and that putting too much emphasis on them as possibilitating linguistic exchanges will make a great deal of linguistic commerce utterly mysterious.

What does an interpreter needs to posses to understand what is said to her? No general answer can be given to this question. That will depend on many factors, but clearly it will include knowledge about herself (what would the words mean if uttered by the interpreter), knowledge about the speaker (from standard expectations about her behaviour, linguistic or otherwise, to highly detailed knowledge of the person and her idiosyncrasies) and knowledge of the common environment where communication takes places[9]. Putting things in terms of our previous discussion of quietism, there is nothing specifically philosophical to say to solve this question. One just needs to look and the world and see, and this is can be done in many different ways[10].

This refusal to embark on a search for general rules to explain language or thought has well known parallels in ethics. One of the most interesting features of Irish Murdoch's philosophy is precisely her insistence on the impossibility of explai-

ning all moral action in terms of general rules or principles. She often uses Simone Weil's idea that morality should be understood in terms of attention (see, for instance, MURDOCH, 1961 and 1962). Attention is needed because reality is such that it cannot be easily codified in general rules that would allow the agent to act with fairness in any situation: "(t)he reality of the world we live in is composed of variety. Unequal objects unequally solicit our attention" (WEIL, 1943, p. 202)[11].

The lessons of particularism in ethics can be extended to cover many other areas of philosophy: virtue epistemology, singularist conceptions of causality, approaches within the philosophy of science that emphasize models over universal laws, new trends in the philosophy of psychology and cognitive science that give centrality to the embodiment and situatedness of the agent, etc. I would like to highlight two interesting cases outside the field of philosophy proper where the striking differences between the Anglo-American and the continental traditions may shed some light on the nature of particularist approaches. The first of them refers to the standards of correctness in linguistic practice, the second is the difference between judicial systems where the law somehow precedes judges' decisions and systems where these decisions *are* the law.

What criterion do we use to claim that a given utterance is correct or not? One possibility, the one available to languages endowed with the poisoned historical gift of a royal academy, like Spanish or French, is to search for the official rules for the language and check whether the utterance complies or not with the rules. Such an appeal to rules makes the decision much easier and simpler, but ultimately fails because official rules always run behind the organic development of the language, and in fact they are unsustainable if they are not based on actual linguistic practice. However, giving up explicit and supposedly complete lists of principles does not mean that everything goes. On the contrary, it demands the growth in us of a feeling for correctness which we can try to justify rationally one way

or another, not universally and a priori, but rather in response to particular instances. When we question the adequacy of an utterance we do not normally apply a pre-established rule which tells us what is correct and what is not. Our questioning itself is a linguistic practice, and it acquires its normative character from our capacity to justify our standard of correctness, something which ultimately leads back to linguistic use. An additional advantage of the particularist approach to linguistic correctness is that it avoids linguistic elitism, an especially regretful form of disempowering relation where those with a less formal education are even excluded from the realm of proper linguistic interaction by converting them into second class language users. Here, once again, Davidson's ideas about radical interpretation and his rejection of any reified conception of language as a set of rules that are either necessary or sufficient for linguistic understanding are clearly to the point (see DAVIDSON, 1986).

The second case that I would like to briefly mention also involves an increase in difficulty paired with a greater scope for accuracy and can be summarized by the commonplace of considering the spirit of the law more important that the letter. Those traditions, most notably that originated by the British judicial system, where the judge must study the resolutions of her predecessors in order to take decisions and whose decisions are themselves to be pondered by either applying or rejecting them by future judges, are perhaps more prone to errors due to the idiosyncrasies of the judge but, at the same time, have a much smaller chance of depersonalizing the whole process by means of cold application of general laws that cannot take into consideration the peculiarities of each case. Here, as in the previous case, we found ourselves with a situation that demands more care and reflection and, hence, more difficulties for arriving at a conclusion, while the possibilities of keeping the richness and complexity of the practices (linguistic or legal) are much higher.

I want to finish this paper by extracting a moral from these examples: a quietist refusal to embrace philosophical abs-

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tract theorizing by no means involves giving up on the task of thinking, quite the opposite; the paradox is that quietism invites us, not to be quiet in the sense of being silent, but rather to a permanent state of disquietness, the state that defines thought that avoids the fatal shortcuts of universality.

Abstract: In recent years, John McDowell has proposed a conception of philosophy in which the aim of the discipline is not to offer substantive theses, but rather to disclose ways of thinking and hidden premises that are at the basis of constructive philosophy. This therapeutical vision has been called 'quietism' and owes much to some ideas dear to Wittgenstein throughout his life. However, Wittgenstein's work (and, perhaps, also McDowell's) seems to oscillate between two understandings of quietism: one can be quiet by not tainting that which is most important with explicit discussion or one can be quiet because there is nothing to be talk about. It will be argued that the second kind of quietism does not imply refusal to engage with the philosophy of the past nor to adopt a contemplative attitude. Concentration on the particular, in ethics as much as in any other area of philosophy, is sufficient to undermine the universalist ambitions of traditional philosophy and to look forward to an increase in philosophical action.

Key-words: quietism, Wittgenstein, John McDowell, particularism, language

NOTES

1   A previous version of this paper was presented at the *II Colóquio de Externalismo e Internalismo* (Brasilia, Brazil, 24-25 October 2005). I am grateful to Hilan Bensusan, John McDowell, Ernesto Perini, André Porto, Aracelli Velloso, Phil Jones, Edgardo Loguercio and the Bolinhas Group for their comments and suggestions. Work for this paper was partially funded by the MEC research project HUM2004/02330.

2   "Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies *zeigt* sich, es ist das Mystische" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1921, 6.522). There are inexpressible things, those that manifest themselves, what is mystical.

3   As far as I know, the term 'quietism' was introduced by Crispin WRIGHT (1989). Wright finds in the *Investigations* indications of a path towards positive theorizing

regarding meaning and intentionality that contradict Wittgenstein's quietist attitude to philosophy. I will try to show below that no such contradiction exists.

4   A very interesting precedent of Wittgenstein's quietism is pointed out by Peter SLOTERDIJK in his book *Zur Welt kommen – Zur Sprachen kommen* (1988, especially chapter 3). Sloterdijk argues that what trully distingui-shes Socrates of all other philosophers is his insistence on questioning and dialogue not as a path to construc-ting philosophical theories, but rather as an acceptan-ce of the philosopher's ignorance. As soon as a positive answer is attempted, we move away from the Socratic method into the realm of platonism.

5   Another commendable feature of McDowell's philoso-phy, also of Wittgesteinian ascent, is his use of medical metaphors (diagnosis, anxiety, therapy, etc.) rather than the more usual war images (attack a position, defend a view, etc.). Here, as in much more else, I draw on discus-sions with Hilan Bensusan.

6   I quoted above two lines from Tom Waits to summa-rize the Tractarian attitude to philosophical theorizing: it is best to avoid expressing things that are taken to be central in order to avoid the risk of perverting them. In contrast, I find in the *Investigations* a braver attitude to the complexity of thought's relation to reality. An ele-gant expression of that second attitude finds expression on the verses of the German-Brazilian poet Dieter Ross: "an jedem Wort, hängen tausend Lügen, an jeder Lüge, hängen tausend Wahrheiten" ("a thousand lies hang in each word, in each lie a thousand truths"). While the *Tractatus* embraces the idea that, once all sayable truths are stated, nothing (no truths and no lies) will be left to be said, in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein recognizes that things are far from being that simple.

7   See PUTNAM (1975) for the classic statement of the dilemma and the presentation of the two-factor concep-tion.

8   See McDOWELL (1977, 1994). For the most influen-tial statement of the neo-Fregean, non-descriptivist, con-ception of sense, see EVANS (1982). A very interesting exploration of this topic can be found in LUNTLEY

(1999). KRIPKE (1980), DONNELLAN (1966), PUT-NAM (1975), FODOR (1987) and RECANATI (1993) are some excellent examples of the kinds of positions in philosophy of language and mind that rely on a content / context separation. It is doubtful whether McDowell's account of experience can avoid the dangers of constructive philosophical theorizing. For a criticism of his transcendental empiricism, see PINEDO and BENSUSAN (2006).

9   See DAVIDSON (1982, 1991) where he develops the idea of the interdependence of these three kinds of knowledge and introduces the metaphor of triangulation to explain the emergence of thought and objectivity.

10   Wittgenstein suggestion is that any act of interpretation involves a degree of sharing a form of life, where this amounts to much more, or much less, than having knowledge of common linguistic code.

11   Another beautiful expression of the very same idea can be found in the poem "Possibilities" by the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska: "I prefer myself liking people / to myself loving mankind". The idea of understanding moral engagement in terms of attention to the moral demands of particular situations rather than on the capacity to judge how to act in terms of general norms has been explored by McDowell and J. Dancy. See, for instance, McDOWELL (1983, 1985), and DANCY (2004).
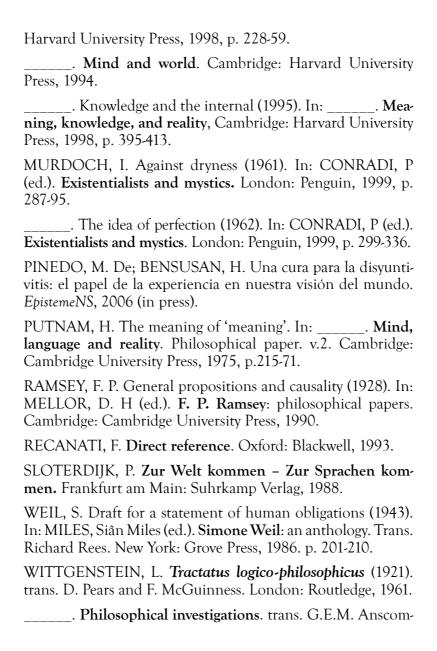
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