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O pensamento de Wittgenstein

Deciding for Therapy: Deciding for Peace of Mind

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to address the question of "philosophy as therapy" or of "therapeutic philosophy" from the point of view of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* against the picture of the "resolute" interpretation. The main points of interest are here the following ones: first, the *reasons* for undergoing therapy which, as I try to argue, have to be thought not only from a logical point of view, but also from an ethical one; and second, the decision involved in both the climbing up the *Tractatus* ladder and the want for cure and peace of mind – that is, the *decision* for therapy itself.

Keywords: Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus; Therapy; Ethics; Stoicism

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WHY THERAPY?

When someone decides to undergo therapy, this is mainly because she is manifesting certain symptoms which may then have a certain effect over her general (mental) condition: her actual state may even interfere with her professional, social or personal life, and she really may want to be cured from the disease she is suffering in order to lead a more steady life. But more than simply feel free from the symptoms she is experiencing, what she may want to get through therapy is a much more profound fulfillment: call it happiness or peace of mind.

With this brief picture in mind I want to call your attention here to two important features involved in therapy broadly conceived: first, the decision which is taken *pro* therapy: even if the person in need of therapy has sometimes to be encouraged to actually ask for help, she is the only one who can so decide; and, second, the aim which gives sense to the whole therapeutic process. Otherwise, why to undergo therapy?

This last question can certainly be applied to the idea of "philosophy as therapy" or of "therapeutic philosophy" vis-à-vis Wittgenstein's readings: why therapy? What is it that we are aiming for with therapeutic philosophy (whatever that means)? What kind of cure is there involved? A philosophical cure? A moral one? In the same tone: what are the problems we would be solving through therapy? The problems manifested through certain symptoms, or the mere symptoms themselves? If therapy aims to solve ill-motivated philosophical problems, why exactly are they "ill-motivated"? Just because they can lead to philosophical confusions or because these confusions can play a deeper role in hindering peace of mind? In other words: are philosophical illusions bad just because they are illusions, or because they can make us unhappy?

Let me now state my position clearly before starting to argue for it and before trying to answer some of these last questions: I take it that Wittgenstein's philosophy has important therapeutic traits, and not only regarding the

Philosophical Investigations – where the term really appears as such at the §133 – but even regarding the *Tractatus*, where some sort of therapy seems to be really involved in getting the correct view of the world at the end of the book; moreover, I think that this therapeutic activity could be conceived as the proper philosophical activity which is left after the complete dissolution of all sorts of illusions.[1] However, if my position seems so far to agree with several other interpretations of Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy (as the one of resolute reading, for instance) – this is not anymore the case regarding some other aspects of these interpretations: indeed, something seems to be missing in most of these therapeutic readings of Wittgenstein's work and this appears to me to be linked to the lack of a clear stated therapeutic *aim* – such as a fully developed conception of happiness and a fully developed conception of what "being cured" means. In this sense, there is still something else which seems to be missing: a reading allowing to clarify why one would want to undergo therapy – and taking the feature of the *decision* into account, the answer to this question cannot appeal to the use of force, nor to the use of mere irony, nor to the use of a strange and deliberate purpose of misleading the poor patient. If Wittgenstein's philosophy has therapeutic traits as I think it has, both the aim of the therapy and the part of the decision in being treated must be if not plainly stated at least fully presupposed for and by "the patient". What I would like to argue for in the next two sections is that the therapy we are considering here cannot be put in place *in spite of* "the patient" and that she must then be willingly in search of a positive, conscious and effective cure.

[1] And in this sense we would and should talk about a therapeutic task both for the work of Wittgenstein himself and, especially in the case of the *Tractatus*, for that which seems to be establish as a task post-*Tractatus*. As we know, the correct method of philosophy (6.53) such as proposed by the book, is not the method of the *Tractatus* itself: philosophy as activity comes after the final throwing of the ladder.

THERAPY BECAUSE...

I will here take the *Tractatus* as my main point of reference because this will allow me in the first place to make use of what I take to be a positive account of Wittgenstein's ethics – supposing then, of course, that the therapeutic aim (or, more clearly, the general aim of the book) is an ethical one, something which seems to be more or less indisputable today; and then, in the second place, because several interpretations on the subject of therapeutic philosophy are equally centered on this book – specially those interpretations which are in one way or another close to the resolute reading.[2]

Leaving aside all the specific aims of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* – the claims against Russell and Frege among several other things – we know from his own voice that the purpose of the book is an ethical one.[3] Taking this point very seriously, we could imagine that the correct view of the world which is attained (or should be attained) through the reading of the work is not merely a *logical* correct view, but at the same time a *moral* correct view of the world (6.54).[4]

It is a logical correct view because if we fully understand the logical structure of language and its conditions of sense such as established by the *Tractatus,* we are then from now on able to avoid "*nonsense*".[5] Surely, for this to be the case, we

[2] And this certainly transcends the English speaking world. To cite but one example: Chauviré, 2009. The paradigmatic works of the resolute reading are of course, among others, Conant, 1989; Diamond, 1991; McGinn, 1999 (for what she calls her "therapeutic reading"); Crary & Read, 2000; Conant, 2000; Conant & Diamond, 2004. – I will be dialoguing here with the resolute reading mainly through Cora Diamond's interpretation. However, given shortness of space, several elements of her position are merely presupposed here.

[3] See specially the letter sent by Wittgenstein to Ficker in October 1919: Wittgenstein, 2001, letter 53.

[4] All the references to the *Tractatus* will be given through the number of the paragraphs; concerning the *Notebooks 1914-1916*, the numbers will refer to the entries of the diary.

[5] Just as a way of summarizing logical and technical rules of sense we could briefly say that a legitimate proposition of language is one which is related to reality in a figurative way: propositions represent states of affairs in the world and are therefore the main sources of empirical and scientific representations; they need a "one-by-one" correspondence with reality (and we can well see what this will mean to philosophy). The main characteristic of this legitimacy is bipolarity: a legitimate proposition of language needs to be one which can be equally true or false being comparison with reality what comes to decide its truth or falsity. Wittgenstein says: "A proposition is a description of a state of affairs (...) The proposition constructs a world with the help of a logical scaffolding, and therefore one can actually see in the

cannot actually understand "*nonsense*" (*unsinnig*) as Cora Diamond does: as plain nonsense, meaning nothing more (and nothing less) than something like "piggly wiggle tiggle."[6] The *Tractatus* establishes itself the basis for a legitimate language through the distinction between saying and showing – something that Diamond refuses to acknowledge;[7] and "plain nonsense" does not actually bear the qualities of illusion and appearance of sense which are the very reasons both for that distinction and for the existence of the *Tractatus*.

I elsewhere proceed to a complete research of each one of the occurrences of the term "*nonsense*" as they appear in the *Tractatus* and the conclusion I would like to sketch here, contrary to the resolute reading, is the following one: nonsense is every attempt to *say* what cannot be said but necessarily *shows* itself; this means in a sense that *nonsense* is something that is logically impossible (due exactly to the logical conditions of sense) and morally superfluous (in a sense which will be clearer below); moreover, *nonsense* is misleading not because it is plainly and straightforwardly absurd, but exactly because it bears an appearance of sense (that's why they are *Scheinsätze* – "pseudo-propositions"), which properly explains the illusion involved in metaphysical-philosophical sentences. As a matter of example: we do not need to *say* what the logical properties of language are because these properties *show* themselves in the very use of legitimate propositions. This

proposition all the logical features possessed by reality *if* it is true. One can *draw conclusions* from a false proposition" (4.023). But to talk about what constitutes reality or of what constitutes language (the logical scaffolding just mentioned) and the way the last one is able to represent the first one, is already a mistake because these things are shown in the legitimate language itself; we don't actually need to speak about this relation of representation precisely because we already see it in the use we make of language – we would otherwise not be able to understand what we are saying. Wittgenstein names this relation the "logical form" or the "form of representation" common to both reality and language: "the picture, however, cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it forth" (2.172).

[6] Diamond, 2000, p.150.

[7] This is however for Wittgenstein a cardinal distinction and no interpretation could fail to take it seriously. See for instance the letter sent by Wittgenstein to Russell, where the first says: "Now I'm affraid you haven't really got hold of my main contention, to which the whole business of logical propositions is only a corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed (*gesagt*) by propositions – i.e. by language – (and, which comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown (*gezeigt*); which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy." (McGuinness, 2008, p.98).

interpretation of "*nonsense*" allows us at the same time to understand why the propositions of the *Tractatus* are themselves nonsense: they also are attempts to say what cannot be said and they undoubtedly have a certain appearance of sense. We would otherwise not be able to *read* the book.[8]

I will come back later to the question that could be raised at this moment – "if this is what nonsense is, how should we understand the ladder metaphor?" I will first try to show why the correct view of the world is concomitantly a *moral* correct view.

What I would like to argue here for is that the best way of understanding the ethical aim stated by Wittgenstein for the *Tractatus* is by understanding it as a *stoical* aim. In other words: for we to understand Wittgenstein's ethics we have to understand it *as* a stoical ethics with a typical stoical purpose: happiness – surely understood as "tranquility of the soul" and not some simple temporary state of mind. This is not to say that stoical philosophers were of influence over Wittgenstein's work in the same way we know Schopenhauer certainly was. What this does mean is that Wittgenstein's ethics displays essential stoical characteristics in view of a certain way of living life which is then said to be "a non-problematic way", and that exactly is what gives life a sense. Surely, the main source for these conclusions are certainly the remarks of the *Notebooks 1914-1916* which are much more generous than the remarks on ethics coming from the *Tractatus* – but they have of course to be read in parallel. I would like to think that this interpretation provides the grounds we need to see why the *Tractatus* aim is both logical *and* ethical, and at the same time why we are authorized to talk about a therapeutic task: if we are to get rid of metaphysical-philosophical illusions and philosophical

[8] Diamond's appeal to a "frame" – which would give us hints about how to read the otherwise fully absurd book – does not even account for the simple fact that we seem to be indistinguishably understanding everything we are reading. The "frame" does also disregard important contents concerning logic and mathematics, domains which Wittgenstein would certainly not dismiss as nonsense as such – even if these domains should not be thought through any philosophical-metaphysical means. See, for instance, Diamond, 2000, p.151.

nonsense that is because this is mainly a problematic way of viewing life – and "problematic" in the sense of contributing to an unhappy life.

One of the first things we can say in support of this interpretation is that there is indeed a *moral correction* involved which is opposed to an incorrect way of seeing and living life. This is the sense of the following remark of the *Notebooks*:

> 30.7.16 – I keep on coming back to this: simply the happy life is good, the unhappy bad. And if I *now* ask myself: But why should I live *happily*, then this of itself seems to me to be a tautological question; the happy life seems to be justified, of itself, it seems that it *is* the only right life.

Surely, Wittgenstein is not there saying that this is a *stoical* happiness, nor (yet) saying that this correction implies something like an obligation. We can see something more of the identification between happiness and moral correctness through two other remarks, the first still from the *Notebooks* and the second from the *Tractatus* itself:

> 6.7.16 – And in this sense Dostoevsky is perfectly right in saying that the happy man fulfills the aim of the existence. We could also say that the one who fulfills the aim of the existence is the one who doesn't have any other aim but life itself. That is, the one who is in peace.
>
> 6.422 – The first thought in setting up an ethical law of the form 'thou shalt...' is : And what if I do not do it? But it is clear that ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the ordinary sense. This question as to the *consequences* of an action must therefore be irrelevant. At least these consequences will not be events. For there must be something right in that formulation of the question. There must be some sort of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but this must lie in the action itself. (And this is clear also that the reward must be something pleasant, and the punishment something unpleasant)."[9]

Here reward and punishment are said to be something pleasant and something unpleasant respectively and said to be placed in the act itself. This means that each action carries its own "ethical consequence", or, in other words: the "consequences" are intrinsic to the action, and so whoever acts rightly is rewarded with the pleasant feeling of being in peace with herself for doing so – and vice-versa. In this sense, moral correctness is identified with happiness in the same

[9] I did some minor changes in the translation of both remarks.

way virtue is identified with tranquility of the soul: acting virtuously is the best way of showing, always coherently, the wisdom of being a happy, virtuous person.[10]

Clearly, in stoical terms, being virtuous is something that involves several other elements, most of them also present in Wittgenstein's ethics and constituting what he calls the "non-problematic way of living", or the life of the happy man – the one who is in peace of mind living life for life itself. Or course, I cannot run through all of these elements in detail here, but I will list them below with their respective references so that you can have a global view of Wittgenstein's ethics and the reasons why it should be considered as *stoical*.

The non-problematic way of living is said to be a life lived in the eternity, where eternity means not infinity but atemporality (6.7.16), which again means a life lived in the present (8.7.16, 6.4311); : it is clear that a life that is fully lived in the present has no reasons to fear the future or to fear death, nor to expect anything from a future which could eventually not even happen; moreover, given Wittgenstein's conception of the will as the limit of the world, death is not something we *live*, but it's simply the end of the world (of *my* world) (6.311); indeed, Wittgenstein says, fearing death is the "best" way of living a "false life" or a "bad life" (8.7.16). Now, the life lived in the present is an essential component of the stoical ethics and is equally connected to the fear of death and to false hopes (and desires) with respect to the future. Seneca and Marcus Aurelius are the best examples in this case: you cannot but be unhappy if you live in expectation, especially when the last one is linked to fear.

The non-problematic way of living life is further a life lived in accordance with the world (however it is); this is indeed what "being happy means" (8.7.16); being in accordance with the world means to accept what happens as it happens and to

[10] To be more precise, since this "identification" is not *strictly* so: in stoical terms virtue is sufficient for happiness, and happiness is indeed the *summun bonum.* See Sellars for instance: "Thus one might say that virtue is intrinsically valuable for the Stoics precisely because it *constitutes* happiness, the *summun bonum*, rather than being merely a means to happiness in some instrumentalist fashion" (Sellars 2006, p.124). Cf. also Long & Sedley, 2001, p.399.

understand that the will is independent to the world and unable to interfere with the facts (11.6.16, 6.373, 6.374); the only way of "dominating" the world is consciously and willingly renouncing to interfere with it; that is why the only thing one can really change is its own will (or its limits) (5.7.16, 6.43); this means in a sense that the accordance with world is a matter of attitude – of happy attitude (4.11.16).

Of course, another understanding involved (and required) in this accordance with the world as it is has to do with the fact that nothing *in* the world bears any ethical value; that is to say that nothing *in* the world can be said to be good or bad; only the willing subject can be so characterized and the will is indeed the bearer of good and evil; this is the only way in which we can talk about ethical values (2.8.16, 5.632, 6.41, 6.43). In this sense, if the only thing one can really change concerns her own will, this means that it fully depends on the subject to have a good or bad will, to have a good or bad attitude towards life and, then, to be happy or unhappy (4.11.16). It all comes to the fact that all one has to do is *to want* to be happy to accomplish happiness itself. Nothing *in* the world can change (and nothing has in it to change) for one to be happy; on the contrary, as Wittgenstein states, the world of the happy person is itself a happy world.

These last traits are similarly stoical in essence: the sage is the one who has learned to detach himself from the world, understanding and accepting his own impotence vis-à-vis destiny, molding his own will so as to wish only what is in his own power (that cannot be other than his own virtue); and because the will is in this way entirely under his control, he is also fully responsible for his own happiness (or, for what is worth, his own unhappiness). To blame the world would be foolish and to search for happiness outside oneself is in fact an illusion that one can only dissolve by deciding to escape the illusion.[11]

[11] This is of course a too brief account of both Wittgenstein's ethics and stoicism, but it should suffice for the present purpose.

In a nutshell, from the ethical point of view the correct view of the world that is aimed at the end of the *Tractatus* is the view of a non-problematic way of living life – a life lived in the present, without fears nor hopes, in accordance with the world as it is. Moreover, that this is the *correct* way of living is confirmed by its intrinsic value: a non-problematic life is its own reward. Living such a life, according to Wittgenstein, is to fulfill the very aim of human existence, giving life a sense.

Now, returning to the question of the therapeutic task of philosophy I would like to point out that this ethical aspect of Wittgenstein's work should not at all be neglected. This aspect explains why one should undergo therapy. For wouldn't the "ill-motivated" problems of philosophy be related to an "ill-motivated" way of life? Wouldn't "being happy" be the cure we are here looking for? Aren't the illusions of metaphysical-philosophy at the same time the illusions of a problematic point of view? When searching for answers there where no legitimate questions can be raised, aren't we hoping to solve the problems of the sense of life through what does not depend on us? Surely, I am not dismissing the logical aspect of the question and that is why it is so important to understand properly the concept of "*nonsense*"; what I am suggesting here, is that we can only fully comprehend the therapeutic task we want to see in Wittgenstein's work, if the ethical aim is taking into equal consideration; and what I am proposing is then an interpretation allowing us to see why illusions should be solved and why language should be restricted in the way it is: because the only correct life is a happy life and no life can be happy if entangled in a problematic perspective such as the one of metaphysical-philosophy.

DECIDING TO BE CURED

Due to her conception of nonsense as plain nonsense, Diamond explains the reading of the *Tractatus* as an imaginative engagement that results at the end in the correct view of the world: reading this absolute absurd would enable one to

see philosophy as the illusion it is for the sake of becoming free of it; this would be the right way of climbing the *Tractatus* ladder. I cannot go through the whole of this interpretation in this paper, but the picture of the therapy which seems to me to be involved here (at least in the case of the *Tractatus*) is the following one: someone reading a book full of nonsense of the same kind as "abracadabra" or something the like, would come to the end of it and feel the crash of an illumination: he has attained the correct view of the world. Given the conception of nonsense, there is nothing in this book which would allow us to explain why the reader has attained such a view. But even if we think that the reader was carried out by some sort of illusion of the understanding of the type Diamond is arguing for, then the fulfillment of the therapy *through this specific book* sounds to me more like a coincidence or a miracle which in a sense could have happened with no matter what other work (say, a book of Lewis Carroll). In this kind of interpretation, the correct view of the world is a kind of "secondary effect" unwillingly attained. What the reader would have been looking for would not have been peace of mind, but as ever philosophical-metaphysical solutions.

But, if "piggly wiggle tiggle" can be really put under the same label as "the world is everything which is the case" (1) what should we do with our first taking the *Tractatus* propositions as senseful?[12] Moreover, why would Wittgenstein say, at the beginning of the Preface, that "this book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it – or similar thoughts"? Couldn't we think that for us to climb up the ladder we should be already aware of the ladder itself? Couldn't we think that climbing up a ladder demands a certain attitude from the start – at least the attitude of climbing it up? Does not this action demand a *decision*?

I would like to compare the ladder metaphor with the skeptic purgative as it appears in Sextus Empiricus, for example: on doesn't take the pill unwillingly, but

[12] See Lynette Reid for a similar objection to Diamond: Reid, 1998.

because one wants to get rid of what is causing pain and troubles to the body. And the action of the pill does not itself go unnoticed: after the whole process the body expels the pill together with the reason of the disease.[13] The pill is necessary for the health, but at the same time only transitory. I would like to think that this is the correct way of understanding both the ladder metaphor and the dismissing of the *Tractatus* as nonsense: it is metaphysical as all the philosophies he is trying to dismiss, but it is a necessary step in view of a healthier condition. This is undoubtedly a therapeutic undertaking, but not one that disregards "the patient"; the latter has to want to be treated and has to be himself seeking the cure to his troubles and illusions – because, of course, he is not happy with them.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

According to the conception of the "will" as sketched above, happiness is attained consciously, willingly and responsibly by the subject herself. One changes the attitude towards life learning precisely "how to want." And if the change comes from elsewhere than the will, we wouldn't be talking any more of an attitude, nor of ethics, nor of therapy, but of conversion, miracle or something similar to these. In this sense, the *decision* involved in being happy is already part of the therapy: one has to want to be cured to let herself being treated through therapy. Similarly, the *decision* involved in reading the *Tractatus* is already part of the correct view of

[13] "Arguments, like purgative drugs which evacuate themselves along with the matters present in the body, can actually cancel themselves along with the other arguments which are said to be probative" (Sextus Empiricus, 2000, p.118). This metaphor also occurs in this form at p. 52. – The fact that I am using a skeptic argument to talk about the *Tractatus* ladder metaphor does not contradict the stoical interpretation of Wittgenstein's ethics such as given above: the ladder as the purgative are necessary but temporary means which, in the present case, justify the existence of the book itself; but the quality of what is attained at the end of the *Tractatus* (the peace of mind thought in stoical terms) is superior when compared with the state attained by the skeptic who, we could say, does not willingly give up philosophical research for the sake of health, but does it due to frustration. See in this sense the story of Apelles told by Sextus Empiricus: p.10.

the world which is aimed at: one has to want to see the world aright to be able to view it from this very perspective.

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