WITTGENSTEIN'S METHOD AND SOCRATES' CRAFT: THE MORAL LIFE AS A TECHNE

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" ... *quia plus loquitur inquisitio quam inventio* ... "[1]
—Wittgenstein, quoting Augustine

" A nything—and nothing—is right. And this is the position you are in if you look for definitions corresponding to our concepts in aesthetics or ethics" writes Wittgenstein at §77 of the *Philosophical Investigations* (*PI*). After briefly making this point (meant to illuminate certain conclusions regarding the notion of "family resemblances") and suggesting that the word "good" may function differently in various language-games, Wittgenstein drops once and for all his only explicit mention of ethics in the work. Given the absence of any further discussion of such concerns in the *Investigations*—much less any sort of unified moral theory—it is hardly surprising that most scholars have passed over in silence the question of ethics in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. And although they have begun to take seriously the ethical content of the *Tractatus*, commentators traditionally have been more reticent when it comes to similar questions about his subsequent thought. It may be that their silence is intended to be an appropriate response to Wittgenstein's work, one which they imagine would earn his approval. Or, on the other hand, it may simply belie a lack of interest in treading ground that the later Wittgenstein himself seemed to avoid.

Recently, however, there have been some signs of mounting interest in the ethical dimensions of the later work. The last decade has seen several notable attempts to flesh out the implications of the later Wittgenstein for moral theory.[2] Thus far, however, commentators have generally been content to work from a narrow range of interpretive possibilities. The tendency, I think, is to take the later work either to be: (1) devoid of any particular ethical impetus, though it may provide us with a methodology which may be applied to moral dilemmas in order to get more clear about the concepts and language in ques-

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[1] " ... because the search says more than the discovery ... " From *Zettel*, p. 82e.

[2] See, for example, James Edwards' *Ethics Without Philosophy: Wittgenstein and the Moral Life* (1982); Paul Johnston's *Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy* (1989); B.R. Tilghman's *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics: The View from Eternity* (1991); and Cyril Barrett's *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief* (1991).

[3] Johnston says, " ... [F]or Wittgenstein, the work of the philosopher in ethics does not involve presenting particular moral insights (or would-be insights), but rather consists in clarifying the area of ethics in general ... if Wittgenstein's philosophy has profundity of a kind, this lies in its struggle to eliminate superficiality and reveal

tion;[3] or, (2) inspired by a broader ethical vision which aims to establish a life of "sound human understanding" untroubled by the vagaries of philosophy.[4]

I do not wish to claim that either one of these readings of Wittgenstein is simply wrong, at least not in any obvious sense. But I think that the moral quality of Wittgenstein's thought runs more deeply than these sorts of accounts might be taken to imply. I would like in particular to suggest that much can be gained by seeing the connections between Wittgenstein's method and his ethical world-view in light of similar connections in the character of the historical[5] Socrates.[6]

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the genuine problems which philosophy's pseudo-questions prevent us from appreciating" (Johnston 24-25).

[4]"We can now see that fundamental to Wittgenstein's later philosophical criticism is not a philosophical thesis of his own but his abhorrence of the form of life characterized by metaphysical philosophy itself. Thus the later work is grounded in a moral vision—a conviction about where and how the sense of life is to be found ... The sense of life is to be found, not in philosophy, but in that form of life which the later remarks exemplify: the sound human understanding" (Edwards 161-2). See also Tilghman pp. 91-116 and Nieli pp. 184-7.

[5]Whether or not the historical Socrates can be distinguished from the "Socrates" that serves as Plato's mouthpiece may appear to be more of a live question than it really is. Gregory Vlastos has marshalled convincing arguments that show how the Socrates of the earlier dialogues is markedly distinct from the one that emerges later in the Platonic literature and can reasonably be understood to be the historical one. See Vlastos 1991, pp.45-80.

[6]It is worth noting that in strictly anecdotal terms, both Wittgenstein and Socrates cut similar figures. The impact of Socrates on his students and acquaintances is well-documented; Wittgenstein's close associates have likewise attested to a "prophetic" side of Wittgenstein, not unlike that "of a religious prophet or seer" (Carnap 34). Compare, for example, O.K. Bouwsma's description of Wittgenstein with Alcibiades' reminiscence of Socrates: " ... I feared Wittgenstein, felt responsible to him. I always knew how precious a walk and talk with him was, and yet I was in dread of his coming and of being with him. I was in fear too that I should have to give him an account of my John Locke lectures ... I breathed easier when he went to Norway, and later when he went to Cambridge. He was my judge in respect to anything I might say, and I felt responsible to him. I could not shrug him off or say: What do I care? When he went away, I felt free ... [T]he main point is that he robbed me of my lazy mediocrity. There is no one to whom I owed so much, no one to whom I listened as I listened to him, no one whom I have feared, no one who was so clearly my rightful judge, my superior" (Bouwsma xv f.).

Says Alcibiades of Socrates: "the moment I hear him I am smitten with a kind of sacred rage, worse than any Corybant, and my heart jumps into my mouth and tears start into my eyes—oh,and not only me, but lots of other men. Yes, I've heard Pericles and all the other great orators, and very eloquent I thought they were, but they never affected me like that: they never turned my whole soul upside-down and left me feeling as if I were the lowest of the low ... And there's one thing I've never felt with anybody else—not the kind of thing you'd expect to find in me, either—and that is a sense of shame. Socrates is the only man in the world that can make me feel ashamed. Because there's no getting away from it, I know I ought to do the things he

It might be appropriate to begin by confessing that Wittgenstein himself seemed to explicitly disavow any real connection between himself and Socrates. In a conversation with M. O'C. Drury, Wittgenstein once highlighted the distinctness of their approaches to philosophy:

> It has puzzled me why Socrates is regarded as a great philosopher. Because when Socrates asks for the meaning of a word and people give him examples of how that word is used, he isn't satisfied but wants a unique definition. Now if someone shows me how a word is used and its different meanings, that is just the sort of answer I want. (Rhees 131)

Drury's reply, however, is notable:

> It may be significant that those dialogues in which Socrates is looking for precise definitions end, all of them, without any conclusion. The definition he's looking for isn't reached, but only suggested definitions refuted. This might have been Socrates's ironical way of showing that there was something wrong in looking for one exact meaning of such general terms. (Rhees 131)

The interpretive challenge, as Drury notices, is that to make sense of Socrates' project we must find a way of circumscribing his search for definitions into a broader rhetorical strategy, one which takes account of non-propositional tropes such as irony. This sort of approach requires that we take notice of both straight forward textual evidence—such as Socrates' persistent disavowal of knowledge—and the contextual and rhetorical evidence that engage with it to produce the depth of Socrates' moral vision. On my reading, it is only by understanding how Socrates' life and philosophical project converge that we can make sense of either one; furthermore, it seems to me that Wittgenstein's own work and his moral vision are likewise organically related. By understanding how Socrates' refusal to "say no more than he knows" is of a piece with his ethical vision, we can also see how Wittgenstein's later work might be read as an exercise in Socratic moral philosophy.

For both Wittgenstein and Socrates, their projects are characterized—on at least one level—by a disavowal of positive knowledge claims, at least insofar as to make such a claim would imply an ability to articulate some particular theory or doctrine. The Socratic dialogues, for example, commonly begin as Socrates claims that he has no knowledge of the moral quality in question and conclude as he again affirms his ignorance. This passage from the *Meno* is typical: "You must think I am singularly fortunate, to know whether virtue can be

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tells me to, and yet the moment I'm out of his sight I don't care what I do to keep in with the mob. So I dash off like a runaway slave,and keep out of his way as long as I can and then next time I meet him I remember all that I had to admit the time before, and naturally I feel ashamed. There are other times when I'd honestly be glad to hear that he was dead, and yet I know that if he did die I'd be more upset than ever" (*Symposium*. 215e1-16c2). This comparison was suggested to me by Daniel Graham and will appear (in a different context) in an article forthcoming in *Phronesis*.

taught or how it is acquired. The fact is that far from knowing whether it can be taught, I have no idea what virtue itself is" (71a2-5). Indeed, one of the most salient features of the early dialogues is precisely Socrates' unwillingness to claim any sort of moral knowledge. As he tells Critias, " ... you come to me as though I professed to know about the questions which I ask ... [w]hereas the fact is that I am inquiring with you into the truth of that which is advanced from time to time, just because I do not know ... " (*Charm.* 165b4-8).[7]

Wittgenstein might be said to push a similar disavowal of theory to the extreme. As Socrates refuses to characterize himself as one who sees things from "the clouds,"[8] the later Wittgenstein denies that he sees things *sub specie aeternitatis*—his philosophical method does not seem to affirm any metaphysical starting point; its origins are apparently more humble. Stripped of pretense, Wittgensteinian philosophy asks us to ground ourselves in the world of ordinary experience; rather than construct theories to explain phenomena, he seems content to ask us to but "look and see" how things are (Cf. *PI* §66). In fact, Wittgenstein's attitude towards philosophy—specifically *theoretical* philosophy—often borders on something resembling hostility. He has referred to the compulsion to philosophize as an "illness" (*PI* §255) and a sign of linguistic confusion. Indeed, in an obvious sense, much of Wittgenstein's later work can be understood in light of this claim: " ... we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place" (*PI* §109; emphasis in original).

The problem of the renunciation of theory becomes particularly acute for Socrates in an obvious way and is worth taking up in some detail. If we are to understand his disavowal of knowledge to be absolute in a literal sense, it becomes difficult to see what to do with those passages in which he *does* seem to imply that he has knowledge of some sort.[9] Terence Irwin has argued, however, that Socrates' disavowal of knowledge is intended to be understood in a literal sense, although he does evince persuasive beliefs which cannot be justified in the same way that knowledge might be: "Socrates does not explicitly distinguish knowledge from true belief; but his test for knowledge would make it reasonable for him to recognize true belief without knowledge, and his own claims are easily understood if they are claims to true belief alone" (Irwin 40). For Irwin, Socrates' frequent disavowals of knowledge vitiate the claim that his philosophical tactics are grounded in any sort of "fully justified beliefs about virtue."

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[7]It might quite plausibly be objected that Socrates' refusal to elaborate a moral theory is *not* tantamount to a repudiation of the possibility of such a theory, or even that he does not, in fact, have one. In fact, a cogent moral theory seems to be precisely what he is attempting to establish. However, a failure to recognize the ironic dimensions of his search—as I shall later argue—would render Socrates' project altogether unintelligible.

[8]Cf. *Apology* 19b4-c6.

[9]See, for example, *Apology* 29b7-8; *Gorgias* 474a5-6; 505e4-5;etc.

However, the problem with opening up a space between "true belief" and "knowledge"—as Gregory Vlastos points out—is that it is difficult to see how we could continue to take seriously Socrates' unabashed insistence on the interrelatedness of *knowledge* (as distinct from belief, be it true or false) and virtue.[10] To suppose Socrates possesses solely "true belief" would be to either reduce his philosophical quest for knowledge to a "charade" or to hopelessly falsify his claim that "virtue is knowledge" in light of the fact that he seems quite clearly to possess both (see Vlastos 1985, 6).[11]

But if Irwin's narrow interpretation of Socrates' profession of ignorance is unsatisfactory, the other obvious alternative is not much better. To claim that Socrates really does not mean what he says when he claims to know nothing of virtue would likewise create formidable problems: it is difficult to understand how a Socrates that consistently makes false claims would be able in good conscience to insist that his interlocutor always be sincere in representing his own beliefs (see, e.g.,*Gorgias* 495a5-c3).

The problem, then, is that to make sense of Socrates' philosophical project, we must find a way of preserving both the literal features of his disavowal of knowledge while at the same time not devaluing his well-known claim that virtue is knowledge and his own obvious possession (in some sense) of both. And the answer, Vlastos argues, is that we need to learn to make a distinction between the different senses of the word "know" that Socrates makes use of. When he claims that he knows nothing at all, he is denying that he can claim absolute epistemic certainty in the sense that would render subsequent examination superfluous; however, he *is* able to demonstrate the consistency of his own moral beliefs through the practice of his peculiar method of cross-examination—the elenchus (Vlastos 1985, 12).

The standard line at this point—even opted for by Vlastos in the same breath as he argues against Irwin—is to claim that Socrates' moral knowledge is something akin to inductive knowledge, which is to say that it is falsifiable, at least in theory.[12] Because it can do little more than verify the consistency of his own beliefs it seems incapable of yielding the certainty that Socrates seems to crave. Any "knowledge" gained through such a method cannot, by definition, be known "through itself but [rather] only 'through other things' ... there is always a security gap between the Socratic theses and its supporting reasons ... [Socratic knowledge] is full of gaps,unanswered questions; it is surrounded and invaded by unresolved perplexity" (Vlastos 1985, 18-9).

The question we have been trying to answer is this: given Socrates' refusal to lay claim to theoretical knowledge, what is the status of his elenctic

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[10]Vlastos 1985, 1-31.

[11]As Vlastos puts it, "His avowals of epistemic inadequacy, frequent in the dialogues, are never paralleled by admission of moral failure; the asymmetry is striking" (Vlastos 1985, 6n.). It is indeed difficult to imagine a more poignant and heartfelt defense than the one that Socrates offers for himself in the *Apology* at 30c2-31c3.

[12]See also Vlastos (1991, 113-5); Irwin (although for him it is something closer to "inductively justified true belief;" 41); Brickhouse and Smith (145-7); etc.

knowledge? I think that to recast it simply as a "radically weaker" form of knowledge than the sort that he explicitly disavows is surely to miss the point. While it may indeed be true that any given conclusion that emerges through the elenchus is *always* amenable to fresh investigation—and is hence falsifiable—it seems to me that Socrates also manifests a form of knowledge that he gives *no* reason whatever to think is controvertible, tentative, or unproven. First of all, he insists that he is conscious of his own ignorance in a way that no other Athenian is (*Apology* 21d3-6; 21e3-23b3). Second, he describes his own method of doing philosophy in the following way, without any hint of wavering or apology: "For I *know how* (*epistamai*) to produce one witness to the truth of what I say, the man with whom I am debating" (*Gorgias* 474a4-6; my emphasis).

At this point, Socrates' claims become more meaningful if we recall that in the *Apology* he *does* allow the craftsmen a certain kind of knowledge—a *techne*—that provides them with the sufficient expertise and wisdom to function within their proper field. Without offering an extended defense of the claim, I would like to suggest that elenctic activity is a sort of craft for Socrates, and insofar as he possesses this sort of *practical* knowledge, we may take him to be something of a "craftsman of virtue." By knowing how, through his execution of the elenchus, to remind himself and his interlocutors of the limits of their own knowledge, he is continually able to reclaim the only piece of knowledge that he is willing to explicitly profess: "human" wisdom (*Ap.* 20d7-8), which is precisely the recognition of one's own ignorance (*Ap.* 23a7-b3). Because this knowledge is *technical*, it cannot be exhaustively described by theoretical accounts,[13] it must in some sense be *demonstrated*. We must recognize—as Socrates' interlocutors so often do not—that the very process they are engaged in is the care of the soul, rather than the things of the body.[14] Virtue is indeed knowledge for Socrates, but only if "knowledge" is broadly conceived. And what is at stake, as Callicles recognizes, is nothing less than an overhaul of one's entire way of life: "Tell me Socrates, are we to consider you serious now or jesting? For if you are serious and what you say is true, then surely the life of us mortals must be turned upside down and apparently we are everywhere doing the opposite of what we should" (*Gorgias* 481b8-c3). As John Gould explains, "the επιστημη which Socrates envisaged was a form of knowing *how*, knowing, that is, *how to be moral*" (Gould 7; emphasis in original). Of course, to claim that Socrates' knowledge is essentially practical is *not* to deprecate or devalue his search for definitions; rather, it is to point up the fundamental level at which the search for theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge are mutually engaged through irony and ambiguity.[15]

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[13]Which is not to say that Socrates does not demand them.

[14]"For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls" (*Apology* 30a7-b1).

[15]Vlastos has rightly criticized Gould for overlooking passages in which the sort of knowledge that Socrates claims cannot be understood to be anything but intellectual (Vlastos 1957, 227-232), and has even recognized the possibility of some ambiguity

I have already briefly suggested that Wittgenstein's own philosophical enterprise was largely characterized by a repudiation of the very impulse to theorize. While Socrates' project depends upon irony and ambiguity to draw the interlocutor into the very search that itself becomes constitutive of virtue, Wittgenstein apparently foregoes irony altogether as he makes short work of theoretical philosophy. Rather than offer a Socratic exhortation to live the philosophical life, Wittgenstein suggests that philosophy is precisely what should be avoided. Above all, it is the very urge to philosophize that is the temptation to be resisted if one is to live a genuine life, untroubled by the pseudo-problems that the structure of our language tends to generate. If the mind troubled by philosophical problems is diseased, it must be healed by the therapeutic qualities of ordinary language analysis. As he puts it in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, "The philosopher is the man who must cure himself of many sicknesses of the understanding before he can arrive at the notions of the sound human understanding" (*RFM* 302). Only by breaking free of the mesmerizing grip of theory can such a healing be effected. As James Edwards sees it, two movements thus characterize Wittgensteinian therapy: "First, there is the attempt to free the individual from captivity to particular grammatical pictures ... Second ... there is the attempt to free the individual from his captivity to philosophy itself" (Edwards 153). In order to understand, then, we must "*command a clear view*" (*PI* §122) of our use of language. *Clarity* must replace confusion.

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in Socrates' use of the term, given that his interest is in the moral side of the question, "What is knowledge?" rather than the epistemological one. Vlastos goes so far as to suggest that the obvious behavioral connotations of *episteme* (as in "knowing how" to be just) may have even called Socrates' attention to the no less "obvious" intuition that anyone who knows *how* to be virtuous must also know *what* virtue is (229-30). However, it is not at all clear to me that the pursuit of the intellectual question in any way obviates or supplants the performative one. Although Socrates always explicitly insists that his interlocutor give a rational account of, say, friendship, it is worth noting that, in an important sense, he does not render the performative question subservient to it. As he tells Lysis and Menexenus, " ... we have made ourselves rather ridiculous today, I, an old man, and you children. For our hearers here will carry away the report that though *we conceive ourselves to be friends with each other—you see I class myself with you*—we have not as yet been able to discover what we mean by a friend" (*Lysis* 223b5-9; my emphasis). Socrates and his young interlocutors continue to be friends (and it would be ridiculous to say that it is only in a trivial sense, or one of only secondary importance to Socrates) without any satisfactory theoretical knowledge to determine the nature of that friendship.

It is worth further note that Socrates' use of ambiguity in his investigations is deliberate. He asks exemption from the precise verbal definitions of Prodicus (*Prot.* 358a5) and seems unwilling as well to put a strict technical usage on *episteme* as we would expect him to, were he to adhere to the sort of intellectualism that is often ascribed to him: within the course of a single Stephanus page in the *Euthydemus* he uses *sophia, phronesis,* and *episteme* interchangeably (281d-282d). It is precisely his use of ambiguity, I think, that allows Socrates to preserve the tension between an earnest search for definitions and an appreciation of the value of the search itself. Socrates is thus able to draw his interlocutor into an activity in which not only are the beliefs of both examined, but also their way of life (for more on the relationship between Socrates' examination of the beliefs and life of his interlocutor, see Brickhouse and Smith 135-40).

    The outline of Wittgenstein's project that I have described above has
found wide—almost universal—acceptance by the community of Wittgenstein
scholars.[16] And it would indeed be hard to deny that Wittgenstein saw the "sound
human understanding" as somehow connected with an unraveling of the philo-
sophical enterprise.[17] But at this point we would be well-advised to keep in mind
the warnings that Wittgenstein himself tried to place on the interpretation of his
own work; that it was particularly susceptible to misinterpretation was a fear
that constantly plagued him. In the preface to the *Investigations* he says of his
own words: "I make them public with doubtful feelings. It is not impossible
that it should fall to the lot of this work ... to bring light into one brain or an-
other—but, of course, it is not likely" (vi). And again, "I should not like my
writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimu-
late someone to thoughts of his own" (vi). If it is the case that Wittgenstein's
philosophy seeks to restore to us a life of "sound human understanding," it does
not follow that his project amounts to a simple negation of philosophy. As
Henry Staten reminds us, "[t]here is always more than one thing going on in
Wittgenstein's language, more forces than one transecting his words and images,
and it is often possible to detach from this language a homogeneous and trans-
parent layer of philosophical significance" (Staten 65). The failure to recognize
this possibility—to simply collapse all of Wittgenstein's thought into a
"coherent," "unified" whole—could once again seduce us: "A picture held us cap-
tive. And we could not get outside it ... " (*PI* §115).
    To free ourselves from such a picture, even if it is our picture of
Wittgenstein's project, requires that we pay close attention to the way in which

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[16]Paul Johnston describes the consequences that he sees in such a view for the moral
life: " ... [T]he struggle for clarity might ... be said to force us, as *non-philosophers*,
to face up to those real moral problems from which the lazy thinking and comfortable
pictures of philosophy would protect us" (Johnston 25; emphasis in original).

[17]Although overt references to ethics are relatively sparse in the later philosophical
works, the importance that he seemed to attach to it in more "informal" settings is
striking. In November 1944, after a disagreeable exchange with Norman Malcolm,
Wittgenstein sent him a letter chastising him for not seeing that moral concerns were
not to be separated from "philosophical" ones: "You and I were walking along the
river towards the railway bridge & we had a heated discussion in which you made a re-
mark ... which shocked me by its primitiveness. I then thought: what is the use of
studying philosophy if all that it does for you is enable you to talk with some plausi-
bility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your
thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more
conscientious than any ... journalist in the use of *dangerous* phrases such people use
for their own ends. You see, I know that it's difficult to think *well* about 'certainty',
'probability', 'perception', etc. But it is, if possible, still more difficult to think, or
try to think about your life & other peoples [sic] lives. And the trouble is that think-
ing about these things is *not thrilling*, but often downright nasty. And when it's
nasty then it's *most* important. (Malcolm 39; emphasis in original). The biographi-
cal information we have about Wittgenstein is, in fact, replete with such examples. In
another notable anecdote, Drury recalls him specifically equating his philosophical
inquiries with a broader vision: "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing ev-
ery problem from a religious point of view" (Rhees 94).

his method is actually deployed. That it is precisely the methodological element in Wittgenstein's work that is of primary importance—like the technical dimension of Socrates' project—was recognized by Wittgenstein himself. G.E. Moore recalls Wittgenstein's announcement of his discovery of a new philosophical method in the 1930's:

> He went on to say that, though philosophy had now been "reduced to a matter of skill," yet this skill, like other skills, is very difficult to acquire. One difficulty was that it required a "sort of thinking" to which we are not accustomed and to which we have not been trained—a sort of thinking very different from what is required in the sciences. And he said that the required skill could not be acquired merely by hearing the lectures: *discussion was essential.* As regards his own work, he said *it did not matter whether his results were true or not: what mattered was that "a method had been found."* (Moore 26; my emphasis)

Like the Socratic elenchus, the importance of Wittgensteinian philosophy lies as much in the way that results are generated as in any conclusions that come out of it. As Staten explains, " ... there will always be a double sense to each move he [Wittgenstein] makes. On the one hand, he will address a particular question or confusion and attempt to show how it is to be resolved. On the other hand, the attack on the problem will be an *example* of the operation of the skill or method being taught" (Staten 66; emphasis in original).

Traditional accounts of Wittgenstein's project are indeed right to point out that for him, the "sound human understanding" is achieved through a careful untangling of philosophical problems. By resolving the conceptual confusion that the structure of our language invites, we are able to envision a "form of life" which frees up our rigid patterns of thought. However, what most of those same accounts tend to miss—as Staten points out—is the ongoing methodological side of that project. Although the significance of Wittgenstein's *particular* conclusions cannot be denied—including his denunciation of theoretical philosophy—neither can we neglect that element of his method whose task it is to destabilize any attempt to ground oneself in epistemic bedrock, even if that bedrock is purported to be *non*-philosophical.[18]

Wittgenstein's project, like Socrates', is fundamentally an attempt to preserve the tension between a renunciation of philosophical theory (although for Wittgenstein, this renunciation is general rather than personal, as it is for Socrates) and a method that must take theory seriously. The compulsion to philosophize, while denigrated in *general* terms in Wittgenstein's texts, nonetheless is taken quite seriously within the context of *particular* philosophical problems. Simply recognizing that the epistemologist, for example, is embroiled in a conceptual confusion is not sufficient. As Wittgenstein writes in *On Certainty,*

> But is it an adequate answer to the skepticism of the idealist, or the assurances of the realist, to say that "There are physical objects" is

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[18]For an excellent discussion of this point, see Staten, chapter two.

nonsense? For them, after all, it is not nonsense. It would, however, be an answer to say: this assertion, or its opposite is a misfiring attempt to express what can't be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shewn; but that isn't the end of the matter. We need to realize that what presents itself to us as the first expression of a difficulty, or of its solution, may as yet not be correctly expressed at all. Just as one who has a just censure of a picture to make will often at first offer the censure where it does not belong, and an *investigation* is needed in order to find the right point of attack for the critic. (*OC* 7e; emphasis in original)

In such a case, it is not enough to say that the philosopher goes astray; we must dig out the roots of his puzzlement by constructing a continuous series of transitional cases that allow us to work through the difficulties with him and identify the point at which confusion enters (see *PI* §122 and §161). As Wittgenstein puts it in *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, "We must begin with the mistake and transform it into what is true. That is, we must uncover the source of the error; otherwise hearing what is true won't help us. It cannot penetrate when something is taking its place. To convince someone of what is true, it is not enough to state it; we must find the *road* from error to truth" (1e; emphasis in original).

As Wittgenstein suggests in the above passage, when we practice philosophical therapy, we are attempting to not only engage the problem but to engage the person caught in the problem as well: they must be *convinced*. Philosophical confusions, then—whether one believes that justice is nothing but the advantage of the stronger (*Republic* I 338c1-2) or that understanding is a mental process (*PI* §153)—always arise in social contexts, which is to say that they are always *human* in origin and call for resolutions which not only point out the false nature of the belief but indicate a method whereby such beliefs may be eliminated. The philosophical process, as both Wittgenstein and Socrates practice it, is precisely a social one, one in which we are all implicated if for no other reason then the fact that we are often not clear about our use of language. Wittgenstein says:

> Human beings are profoundly enmeshed in philosophical—i.e. grammatical—confusions. They cannot be freed without first being extricated from the extraordinary variety of associations which hold them prisoner. You have as it were to reconstitute their entire language.—But this language grew up as it did because human beings had—and have—the tendency to think in this way. So you can only succeed in extricating people who live in an instinctive rebellion against language; you cannot help those whose entire instinct is to live in the herd which has created this language as its own proper mode of expression. (MS 213, 423; quoted in Kenny 16).

Socrates is no less clear about a similar point: his method of cross-examination is not designed to provide general theories of the sort that would satisfy the many; in fact, he refuses to take them into account while engaged in the

elenchus (see *Gorgias* 471e2-472c3; 474a4-b1; 475e8-476a2; etc.). Rather, the social context that the early dialogues provide for the investigation is invariably a personal one; it is only then that the examination can become truly efficacious: "In fact, then, any agreement between you and me will have attained the consummation of the truth" (*Gorgias* 487e5-7). Lack of dramatic narrative form not withstanding, the literary structure of the *Philosophical Investigations* likewise allows the philosophical project to play itself out. We see the compulsion to theorize exemplified in the text; and phrases such as "I should like to say … ", "I might say that … ", "One does not feel … ", "You say to me … " make it clear that what is at stake is some specific belief held by *someone*, even if that someone is left undefined or tacitly understood to be Wittgenstein or the reader himself. Not surprisingly, then, for both Wittgenstein and Socrates sincerity is at a premium if one is to engage in philosophical discussion: "We can bring someone's mistake home to him only when he acknowledges it as the right expression for what he feels" (MS 213; cited in Kenny 4; cf. *Crito* 49d1-8).

The specific form that this task will take for the Wittgensteinian philosopher and the Socratic ethicist alike is one of "assembling reminders for a particular purpose" (*PI* §127). While neither philosopher professes to offer his interlocutor any novel theories or doctrines, they can bring home to him something he has "known" all along. The process of philosophical investigation is thus a matter of reacquainting oneself with the familiar which, for all its commonality, strikes us as new: "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.)" (*PI* §129). Ironically, the result of philosophical investigation is that one comes to gain a sense of one's *own* beliefs, which have become obscured through carelessness or muddled theorizing. Brickhouse and Smith explain this point with reference to Socrates' exchange with Polus at *Gorgias* 472bff: "Socrates concludes … that Polus really does believe what Socrates was arguing, and not what Polus had argued. So Polus was not only on the wrong side of the argument; he also did not know what Socrates really believed. Even more striking, however, is the consequence that Polus did not know what *Polus* really believed. So Socrates gives Polus a lesson in knowing Polus" (Brickhouse and Smith 142; emphasis in original). To put it in Wittgenstein's terms once more, philosophical confusions are resolved, "not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known" (*PI* §109).

For Wittgenstein, the upshot of these reminders is—to put it simply— a reinstantiation of the Socratic challenge to "say no more than we know" (*BB* 45); it is an attempt to avoid thinking that one is wise when one is not (*Ap.* 23a4-b7). Thus, when David Pears says that philosophy is not a natural activity of the human soul (Pears 39; quoted in Edwards 153), he is only half right. The irony of Wittgenstein's later work is that there simply is no "beyond" that his method purports to bring us to. To read Wittgenstein as an *anti*-philosopher—to read him as providing a theory, or perhaps an *anti*-theory, that would mark the end of philosophy—would be to simply fall into the same kind of trap that his method is designed to work against. In an important sense, philosophy's work is never done:

> Disquiet in philosophy might be said to arise from looking at philosophy wrongly, seeing it wrong, namely as if it were divided into (infinite) longitudinal strips instead of into (finite) cross strips. This inversion in our conception produces the *greatest* difficulty. So we try as it were to grasp the unlimited strips and complain that it cannot be done piecemeal. To be sure it cannot, if by a piece one means an infinite longitudinal strip. But it may well be done, if one means a cross-strip.— But in that case we never get to the end of our work!—Of course not, for it has no end. (*Zettel* 80e; emphasis in original)

To quote the *Philosophical Investigations* again: "My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense" (*PI* §464).

The point I have been trying to make is that for both Wittgenstein and Socrates, the very process of philosophical inquiry is bound up in an essential way with the moral life. Such a life can only be the product of careful self-scrutiny and an austere disavowal of the trappings of "theory," moral or otherwise. But even as both deny that they themselves are philosophers in a traditional sense, they both must take the philosophical craving for generality—the quest for definitions—as the starting point for their own projects. For Socrates, the search for an answer to the question "What is virtue?" must initiate the elenctic process by which the soul is humbled and brought to virtue. For Wittgenstein, the careful tracing out of the compulsion to philosophize marks the process by which we are able to (continually) break free of the "pictures that hold us captive." By providing us with reminders of how we are related to our own language, Wittgensteinian philosophy helps us avoid the trap of "saying more than we know," thereby facilitating a life characterized by a "sound human understanding." Understood in these terms, Wittgenstein's later work is not simply a handbook that can do no more than help us sort out the language game of morality; neither is it a guide to escape from philosophy into a moral realm that lies beyond. Rather, it is a moral work *in itself* in the same way that Socrates' own philosophical project is by its very nature an ethical gesture. The point is that in neither case does the moral content of their respective philosophies lie "beyond" the philosophical method that animates them. For both Wittgenstein and Socrates, philosophical problems are cured only through philosophy; that is, through a "changed mode of thought and of life" (*RFM* 132).

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