Wittgenstein vs. Socrates: Wittgenstein and Plato

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Abstract   Wittgenstein opposes Socrates' insistence that words should have an essentialist definition. Wittgenstein also stands with Euthyphro in his discussion with Socrates over whether God's commands make an action good. While Socrates values the examined life, Wittgenstein wonders how we can stop the demand for more explanation. For this Wittgenstein may find more sympathy from Plato. Plato pays attention to the characters in his dialogues – the particulars of their circumstances, and he offers myths that supplement his arguments. In the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, we can see Wittgenstein wishing to side against Socrates but with Plato – who found ways of making philosophy poetic.

Keywords   Wittgenstein. Socrates. Plato. Definition. Forms. Explanation. Dialogue.

Wittgenstein was infamous for being rather poorly read in the history of philosophy, and really in philosophy generally. For example, he confessed to his students[1] that he had never read any Aristotle! But another friend and student, von Wright (1984, 19), reported that "he did read and enjoy Plato". And von Wright conjectures: "He must have recognized congenial features, both in Plato's literary and philosophical method and in the temperament behind the thoughts". Wittgenstein's manuscripts and conversations contain dozens of mentions of, or allusions to, Plato's dialogues, especially the *Theaetetus*, but including many others.[2] At his death a multi-volume German translation of Plato's dialogues was found among his possessions (Hallett 1977, 771).

Socrates, in Plato's early dialogues,[3] regularly asks 'What is x?' where x may, for example, be piety (in the *Euthyphro*), virtue (*Meno*), or courage (*Laches*). We construe this as a request for a definition, yet his interlocutors initially respond only with examples or instances of the term. A pious action, says Euthyphro, is "what I am doing now" (5d). Meno mentions a man's virtue, a woman's virtue, the virtue of a child, an elderly man, and a slave (71e-72a). Socrates always responds by pushing the interlocutor for what we would call an essence – a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept – what it is that *underlies* the instances, *in virtue of which* they are instances of the concept in question (*Euthyphro* 6d): "Bear in mind then that I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious…". And *Meno* (72c): "Tell me, what is this very thing […] in which they are all the same and do not differ from one another. […] Even if they are many and various, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this". (While we see the term 'form' here, I don't think it yet has the metaphysical weight it will come to have later).

The interlocutors generally come to see what he is looking for, and offer some essence, but one that then turns out to be either too broad, or too narrow, or both. Discussion proceeds until, usually, the interlocutor tires or pleads other obligations (Euthyphro 15e). The dialogue generally ends before a satisfactory definition is found.

Socrates, in these early dialogues, does not imagine that these concepts might fail to have, or not need, such an essence. Socrates seems not to even consider the possibility that the concept might lack such an essence. But, if you think about it, not all concepts *can* have essences of this sort – short of circularity or infinite regress – so one should always keep in mind that a concept may lack an essence.

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[1] Drury 1984, 158; Britton 2016, 495.

[2] See Kienzler 2013 for a full accounting.

[3] For Plato's works, unless otherwise specified, I follow Cooper 1997's edition..

This brings us to Wittgenstein's well-known critique of essentialism regarding the unity of a concept. He tries to reduce our expectations for what is a satisfying resolution of Socrates' question – What is x? In the *Blue Book*, dictated in 1933-34, Wittgenstein warns that (1958, 17) "what makes it difficult for us to take this line of investigation is our craving for generality" and our "contemptuous attitude toward the particular case" (18). Talking with his friend, Con Drury, in the early 1930s, Wittgenstein confessed (Drury 1984, 115):

> 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.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein addresses this issue in connection with games. Wittgenstein sees Socrates' demand for an essence for a concept as a compulsion that holds us captive: "There *must* be something common" (Wittgenstein 2009, §66). To escape from this prejudice, he recommends: "don't think, but look!" *Thinking* leaves us beholden to the temptations of our times; *looking* brings us back to earth. There we will see only "a complicated network of similarities". As he said in a course lecture (Wittgenstein 1993, 367; June 1, 1936):

> We might solve certain puzzles by pointing out that we mustn't look for one common property to be found in all cases: a kinship may be there, but with no common property to which you can point.

– what he called a 'family resemblance'.

Some have responded to Wittgenstein by trying to offer especially careful definitions of 'game'.[4] But even if this were successful, it would not undermine Wittgenstein's point. (Here, I wish in his lecture he hadn't said that we 'mustn't look for' but rather that we *needn't insist on finding* a common property). Wittgenstein in fact admits that some terms *are* definable in essentialist terms. In the *Blue Book* (Wittgenstein 1958, 25), for example, he offers the "defining" criterion of angina as having "the bacillus so-and-so in his blood". And no one could doubt that the definition of a triangle is: a closed plane figure whose three straight sides form three angles. Let us call such terms with essential definitions 'technical terms'. Wittgenstein does not object to the existence of technical terms. He objects to the Socratic prejudice that *all* terms are technical terms.

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4 See, for example, Suits 2005, 48-9, 55.

Wittgenstein makes similar points about the concepts of 'language' (Wittgenstein 2009, §65), 'goodness' (Wittgenstein 2009, §77; Wittgenstein 1979, 33; Bouwsma 1986, 40-2), 'punishment', 'revolution', 'knowledge', 'cultural decay', and 'music' (Wittgenstein 1984, 190). (And see also William James's 'Wittgensteinian' account of 'religion', in the opening paragraph of Lecture II in James 1982). In each case there is no definition but rather a series of connections from case to case that constitute a kinship.

Wittgenstein sums up his position in the early 1930s this way (Wittgenstein, Waismann 2003, 33):

> I can characterize my standpoint no better than by saying that it is the antithetical standpoint to the one occupied by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. For if I were asked what knowledge is, I would enumerate instances of knowledge and add the words 'and similar things'.

In a contemporary typescript (Wittgenstein 2005, 56), after a similar discussion of Socrates' essentialist expectation, and his own satisfaction with enumeration and kinship, he remarks parenthetically: "(I'm making it easier and easier for myself in philosophy. But the difficulty is to make it easier for oneself and yet to remain precise)." 'Easier' by having reduced expectations for what is required of a legitimate concept. A voice in the *Philosophical Investigations*, that sounds suspiciously like Bertrand Russell, complains (Wittgenstein 2009, §65): "So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself most headache…".[5]

It is an interesting question how one might decide whether a term was susceptible of an essentialist definition, or when you can let yourself off the search. What are we to make of the fact that in the Socratic dialogues discussion generally ends before a satisfactory definition is found? When Wittgenstein was discussing the Socratic dialogues with his friend Drury sometime around 1930, Drury suggested (1984, 116):

> 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 is looking for isn't reached, but only suggested definitions refuted. This might have been Socrates' ironical way of showing that there was something wrong in looking for one exact meaning of such general terms.

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[5] Cf. Russell 1959, 161.

Apparently, Wittgenstein did not pick up on this suggestion at the time. However, much later, in a conversation with his friend Oets Bouwsma (1986, 50; October 19, 1949) Wittgenstein said:

> Now when it comes to those early dialogues, one on courage for instance, one might read and say, 'See, see, we know nothing!' This would, I take it, be wholesome.

The early dialogues generally do end in *aporia* – puzzlement. No definition is found. One might conclude that there *is no* definition to find, or one might conclude that we just have not tried *hard* enough. This latter conclusion seems to be the one that Socrates prefers: the dialogues often end inconclusively because those Socrates is talking with run out of patience. Consider *Euthyphro* 15e ("Some other time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry now and it is time to go"); *Protagoras* 361e ("We will examine these things later, whenever you wish; now it is time to turn our attention elsewhere"); *Republic* 331d (where Cephalus bows out: "I'll hand over the argument to you, as I have to look after the sacrifice" even though he had just come from the sacrifice, see 328c). And the *Symposium* 223d, where Socrates drinks all his companions under the table, and then goes off to spend the rest of the day "just as he always did". In this respect Wittgenstein was *not so unlike* Socrates. As Russell recalled their early discussions (1968, 137):

> He used to come to see me every evening at midnight, and pace up and down my room like a wild beast for three hours in agitated silence. […] I did not like to suggest to him that it was time for bed…

The former conclusion seems to be the conclusion that Drury reached: that *there is no* definition to be found. But after all, there is no way to *show* that a particular term is *in*definable. That would require proving a negative existential claim. At most there could be inductive evidence for such a conclusion. Recall G.E. Moore's discussion of Good (Moore 1903). While he insists that it cannot be defined, his evidence for this is really inductive – none of the proposed definitions succeed. They all fail the 'open question' test. But Moore offers no reason to suppose all possible definitions *must* fail the test. It was only later non-descriptivists, like R.M. Hare (1952), who offered principled arguments against the possibility of a naturalistic definition.

The *Republic* is an interesting dialogue in part precisely because it *does* reach a definition – a definition of 'justice' – that the interlocutors seem to accept. (Not that we are necessarily impressed, or should be!) But it takes a good four 'books' – much longer than the so-called early, Socratic dialogues – to get there. So that may be evidence that a satisfactory definition is just hard to find. And it leaves

open the possibility that Moore just did not try hard enough to define 'good', and Wittgenstein did not try hard enough to define 'game'.

Bernard Suits, for example, takes a whole book to defend his definition of "playing a game" as (Suits 2005, 55) "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles", or more fully (48-9) "to play a game is to engage in an activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only permitted means by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity". What would Wittgenstein say about that?

But I think Wittgenstein would not want to formulate his difference with Socrates as being over whether there really IS a satisfactory essentialist definition of 'game'. Rather, he would (or should) put their difference as being over whether there *needs* to be a satisfactory essentialist definition of 'game'. It is not that Wittgenstein tires of the search (as the interlocutors in the early dialogues did). But rather that he is willing to *rest content* without achieving the outcome that Socrates seeks.

It seems that Wittgenstein's own revelation on this point came in a conversation with his friend Piero Sraffa concerning the nature of language. Here is part of the story, as told by one of Wittgenstein's friends (Malcolm 1984, 57-8):

> Wittgenstein and Sraffa, a lecturer in economics at Cambridge, argued together a great deal over the ideas of the *Tractatus*. One day (they were riding, I think, on a train) when Wittgenstein was insisting that a proposition and that which it describes must have the same 'logical form', [...] Sraffa made a gesture, familiar to Neapolitans as meaning something like disgust or contempt, of brushing the underneath of his chin with an outward sweep of the fingertips of one hand. And he asked: 'What is the logical form of that?' Sraffa's example produced in Wittgenstein the feeling that there was an absurdity in the insistence that a proposition and what it describes must have the same 'form'. This broke the hold on him of the conception that a proposition must literally be a 'picture' of the reality it describes.

The gesture Sraffa used was akin to giving someone the finger. Sraffa's point was that a gesture could convey meaning in the way language does, and yet it does not do so by representing a state of affairs. It does not get meaning by sharing a logical form. Language does not *have* to be representational. Wittgenstein himself testified to Sraffa's 'stimulus' and its impact on his thinking in the Preface to the *Investigations*.

Clearly this gesture (could we call it a 'poetic gesture'?) had a lasting impact that imprinted itself on Wittgenstein. And the anecdote

has had a similar effect on students of Wittgenstein. It opened Wittgenstein up to a new way of thinking. It was more than just an exception or counter-example to a definition of language. It changed his way of thinking, his movement of thought. He let go of the *need* to find the essence of language – and I think, ultimately, the need to find the essence of many a concept.

How might we respond to Socrates' 'movement of thought' here? I think Plato asked himself something like this question. And I propose his own response to Socrates' search for definitions was his 'theory of the forms'. I believe the forms constitute a metaphysical embodiment of the essence that Socrates sought, but in a way that was never fully articulable. Knowledge of the forms required a sort of intellectual apprehension, but without a linguistic articulation. In Book 6 of the *Republic*, introducing the simile of the sun, Socrates says:

> the objects of knowledge [i.e., the forms] not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived from it [the form of the good], though the good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power. (*Rep.* 509b-c)

Glaucon then makes fun of Socrates for his hyperbole, to which Socrates responds:

> The fault is yours for compelling me to utter my thoughts about it. (*Rep.* 509b-c)

In a sense, the essence remains, even though it can't be stated. The Guardians have a usable understanding of the forms through their extensive training in dialectic, even if it can't be spelled out in words.

A similar pattern of difference between Socrates and Wittgenstein seems to emerge in another context. On December 17, 1930, while in Vienna between academic terms, Wittgenstein met with Moritz Schlick to discuss Schlick's just-published book *Fragen der Ethik* (*Problems of Ethics*). Waismann's notes of the meeting record Wittgenstein's comments (Waismann 1979, 115):

> Schlick says that in theological ethics there used to be two conceptions of the essence of the good: according to the shallower interpretation the good is good because it is what God wants; according to the profounder interpretation God wants the good because it is good. I think that the first interpretation is the profounder one: what God commands, that is good. For it cuts off the way to any explanation 'why' it is good, while the second is the shallow, rationalist one, which proceeds 'as if' you could give reasons for what is good.

The first conception says clearly that the essence of the good has nothing to do with facts and hence cannot be explained by any proposition. If there is any proposition expressing precisely what I think, it is the proposition 'What God commands, that is good.'

It would be hard to find a clearer statement of Euthyphro's position.

In that Platonic dialogue, after Euthyphro has proposed the view (9e) that "the pious is what all the gods love", Socrates asks him this question of conceptual priority (10a): "Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?" It is clear what Euthyphro should say – that it is pious because it is being loved by the gods – just what Wittgenstein asserted. But Euthyphro does not understand the question. After a marginally helpful explanation, Socrates returns with the question (10d): "Is it being loved then because it is pious, or for some other reason?" This is clearly a trick question, for it builds in the presupposition that it is being loved *for some reason or other*. Euthyphro does not notice the trick, and quickly answers "For no other reason". After all, if you have to come up with a reason, that seems the most plausible one. When Socrates draws out the unfortunate implication for his view, Euthyphro responds "Apparently". Euthyphro sees something has gone wrong, but can't put his finger on it.

The trick that Socrates plays, the presupposition that he builds in, is precisely the hidden assumption that many of us would accept – that the gods act for reasons, that commands can be justified. Euthyphro should have responded: "For no reason at all, Socrates". That response "cuts off the way to any explanation 'why' it is good". Socrates is so gripped by the urge to justify, that either he does not himself see that he is presupposing that, or else he is cynically using but concealing that presupposition against Euthyphro. In his diary not long after the discussion of Schlick's book, Wittgenstein writes (2003, 83; May 6, 1931):

> 'It is good because God commanded it' is the right expression for the lack of reason [*Grundlosigkeit* – absence of justification].

Here we again see the accuracy of Wittgenstein's remark:

> I can characterize my standpoint no better than by saying that it is the antithetical standpoint to the one occupied by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues.

Wittgenstein stands with Euthyphro and the divine-command tradition in ethics. Where Socrates insists on a reason behind the commands, Wittgenstein is willing to rest content without achieving the outcome that Socrates seeks. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein puts his point this way (Wittgenstein 1961, 6.372):

the view of the ancients [like Euthyphro] is clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system [in this case, Schlick] tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained.

The question when to press, or halt, the process of explanation or justification comes up in a variety of contemporary philosophical discussions. Thomas Nagel has an interesting discussion of this issue as it relates to the meaning or absurdity of life. The ability to step back from our life and press for a justification of our activities is one of the things that makes us most human (Nagel 1979, 14-15). This is indeed what Socrates seems to have had in mind when he said (*Apology* 38a): "the unexamined life is not worth living for men". What distinguishes humans from other animals is this very capacity for self-reflection and examination.

Yet absurdity results from this "perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary" (or at least open to question) from a larger perspective. Nagel thinks that this "collision within ourselves" is best faced with a sense of irony. The only way to avoid this sort of collision of self-consciousness "would be either never to attain it or to forget it – neither of which can be achieved by the will" (Nagel 1979, 13, 17, 21).

Here I can imagine we would again find Wittgenstein at odds with Socrates. Socrates doesn't know when "enough is enough", as we say. "The difficulty here", Wittgenstein says (1967, §314), "is: to stop". While the unexamined life may not be worth living, the endlessly examined life, on the other hand, is not livable. Nagel says that once the issue is raised, we cannot "forget it" through an act of will. But what one can do is willingly submit oneself to a process that might predictably lead one to forget it, or care less about it.

In another dialogue, the *Phaedo*, where Plato (through his character Socrates) is helping his friends face their fear of death, Cebes presses him (77e):

Assuming that we were afraid, Socrates, try to change our minds, or rather do not assume that we are afraid, but perhaps there is a child in us who has these fears; try to persuade him not to fear death like a bogey.

And Socrates replies:

You should [...] sing a charm over him every day until you have charmed away his fears.

'Socrates', or rather Plato, realizes that what is needed is not really an argument, but something closer to a bedtime story. Later he goes on to tell one of those comforting myths that Wittgenstein prefers.

So we find several ways in which Wittgenstein is clearly at odds with Socrates. In each of these cases it is because Socrates wishes to push questions further than his interlocutors – to find something deeper. And in each case, Wittgenstein is willing to rest content with something less, I believe.

In certain ways I think this brings Wittgenstein closer to Plato. I think an important way in which Plato differs from his mentor Socrates is that Plato came to think that Socrates' approach to issues was excessively intellectual. It made too little room for the rest of, the whole, human being. In particular, it left too little room for the emotions. So it is, for example, that Plato's so-called Middle Dialogues had mythical stories in them. Wittgenstein's friend Oets Bouwsma reported a conversation that they had in 1950 (Bouwsma 1986, 61): "Wittgenstein reads Plato – the only philosopher he reads. But he likes the allegories, the myths". Perhaps in the myths Wittgenstein saw the (Wittgenstein 1998, 71; April, 1947) "quite different artillery" that he sought, but never found, in his own work. Earlier he had confessed (Wittgenstein 1998, 28; 1933-34):

> I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one *writes a poem* [dichten]. That, it seems to me, must reveal how far my thinking belongs to the present, the future, or the past. For I was acknowledging myself, with these words, to be someone who cannot quite do what he would like to be able to do.

One striking similarity between Plato and Wittgenstein is that both employ the dialogue format – Plato almost always; Wittgenstein at least sometimes in the *Philosophical Investigations* (and elsewhere). There has been a great deal of work done on 'characterization' in Plato's dialogues (e.g. Blondell, 2002). A whole book has even been written on who the people were that make appearances in the dialogues (see Nails 2002). The dialogue format makes clear how philosophy is for Socrates an *ad hominem* activity. Socrates is not interested in philosophical theories in the abstract. He is interested in what a particular person believes, and how that fits with other things that person believes. His method of *elenchus* (or refutation) only works to show the inconsistency of a set of beliefs all held *by the same person*. This is supposed to have a special motivational force since an inconsistent set of beliefs cannot all be true, and if I am the one that holds all those beliefs, then I am holding at least one false belief. If I were to try to refute you by showing that one of your beliefs is inconsistent with some other belief that *I* hold, that is likely to have much less interest to you, since you can simply assume that I am the one holding the false belief.

But Plato's dialogue format is interesting for another reason. We generally know a good bit about Socrates' interlocutors. So we can

see how emotion and circumstance can influence belief. While Socrates himself seems to want his interlocutors to rise above these peculiarities of circumstance and attend to the pure rationality of the argument, the reader can see the limitations of this approach. And especially for readers who are familiar with ancient Greek history – in particular Plato's own contemporary readers, who would have known, or known of, the people talking with Socrates – it is possible to see how the views that the interlocutors held played out in their own lives.

One example of this is the conversation with Cephalus and Polemarchus in Book I of the *Republic* (see Gifford 2001). Plato's readers would have known that Cephalus was an arms manufacturer in Athens whose weaponry supplied Athens with the means to pursue its doomed ambitions in the war with Sparta. Of course, he was paid for these arms by the democratic regime, so he was giving what was owed to madmen – the Athenian democrats – who were causing great harm through this otherwise just deal. So Cephalus's life itself constituted the very counter-example that Socrates raised (331c, 332a). But that's not all. His son Polemarchus, who "inherited the argument" (331d) from his father, also inherited his guilt. For when the Thirty Tyrants took power in the aftermath of Athens' defeat, they took revenge by summarily executing this son, Polemarchus. Of course, Polemarchus was the one who had advocated the traditional view that justice required "helping friends and harming enemies' (332a-b). And it was this very principle on which the Tyrants acted, since he and his family were an enemy of the regime, in executing him. So Polemarchus died at the hands of his own faulty principle of justice.

A similar dramatic strategy is employed by Dostoevsky, especially in the *Brothers Karamazov* (Dostoevsky 1992), in which Dostoevsky shows us in the lives of his characters the flaws in the views advocated by those characters. E.g., we witness the disintegration of Ivan's life lived according to the rejection of God.

Wittgenstein criticized Plato's dialogical approach in an interesting way. In the conversation with Bouwsma we read (1986, 60):

Plato's arguments! His pretense of discussion! The Socratic irony! The Socratic method! The arguments were bad, the pretense of discussion too obvious, the Socratic irony distasteful – why can't a man be forthright and say what's on his mind? As for the Socratic method in the dialogues, it simply isn't there. The interlocutors are ninnies, never any arguments of their own, say 'Yes' and 'No' as Socrates pleases they should. They are a stupid lot. Perhaps Plato is no good, perhaps he's very good. How should I know? But if he is good, he's doing something which is foreign to us. We do not understand. Perhaps if I could read Greek!

Or perhaps if he knew more about Greek history!

I do sympathize with his criticism of the interlocutors as 'yes-men'. In fact, I have created an assignment for my Ancient Greek Philosophy classes in which students choose portions of the dialogues and rewrite them, giving the interlocutors better lines – and then act them out. I find that the students do very well with this.

But Wittgenstein's understanding of irony here is rather shallow. Of course, there is the surface irony, where Socrates patronizes his interlocutors by pretending to want to learn from them. But there is also a deeper irony – perhaps we should call it *Platonic* irony – in which Plato undermines Socrates' interlocutors. This is very much a part of the dialogic method. And it comes from Plato's wider understanding of the problems of argument. Socrates failed in his attempts to change people. We can see that by the fact that the people he tried to change ended up executing him.

Indeed, it is not clear that we can point to *any* characters in the dialogues who are improved by their contact with Socrates – with the possible exception of Euthyphro, at least according to Diogenes Laertius (2.29): "When Euthyphro had indicted his own father for the murder of a foreigner, Socrates, after conversing with him about piety, dissuaded him from his course".[6] But Plato may have opened up a new way of addressing issues by way of engaging the whole person – the person's life and not just the person's intellect.

Wittgenstein does not write in an obviously dialogical fashion. But much of the *Philosophical Investigations* lends itself to that interpretation. For occasionally there are lines put in quotation marks or between dashes – seeming to suggest another voice entering the train of thought. Stanley Cavell has written (1976, 71): "The voice of temptation and the voice of correctness are the antagonists in Wittgenstein's dialogues". And further research (Stern 2004, 22ff) has claimed to identify a "commentator" – a third "ironic" voice – in addition to voices variously identified as "narratorial", and "interlocutory".

Seeing the *Investigations* as a sort of dialogue has not been straightforward, because it has very few of the markings of a dialogue – most importantly, no characters are named. Names alone may accomplish rather little, though Nails does a lot with the historical associations of names mentioned in Plato's dialogues. But a case can be made – I have tried to make it in Chapter 2 of my book, *Wittgenstein's Artillery* (Klagge 2021) – that the style of the *Philosophical Investigations* owes a lot to Wittgenstein's experience in the classroom at Cambridge. In some particular cases it is possible to trace voices that Wittgenstein addresses to points raised by students in class – such as, "a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it" (Wittgenstein 1958,

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6 Transl. by Mensch 2020, 56.

1; 1993, 52) and "the picture of a visible [infinite] series, the whole of which one person [God] can survey and another can't…" (Wittgenstein 2009, § 352; McGuinness 2016, 241; and Black 2014, 55-7).

In G.E. Moore's full notes for the academic year 1932-33 (Wittgenstein 2016, 175-365) there are well over 120 instances where Wittgenstein is reported to preface comments with endless variations of 'it will be said', 'suppose one wanted to ask', 'people will say', 'you may answer', 'suppose somebody says', etc. All of these prefixes couch the discussion in the subjunctive mood. That is, they present ideas for consideration, rather than as assertions. They create a hypothetical conversation – a sort of dialogue.

Whether these phrases report things that have arisen from class discussion or not is impossible to tell, though we know they do at least sometimes. A comparison with the *Philosophical Investigations* is instructive. In addition to the numerous well-known places where the interlocutor speaks in quotation marks or within dashes, there are also many dozens of places where Wittgenstein uses these very same phrases: 'one might ask', 'you may say', 'someone says to me', 'one might object here', 'suppose it were asked', etc. So, by 1933 Wittgenstein had begun to think, in his lectures, in the dialogical fashion later exhibited in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

How we conceive of the dialogical character of the *Investigations* could well depend on what sort of picture *of Wittgenstein* has 'held *us* captive'. If one is captivated by a picture of Wittgenstein alone at his desk, pen in hand, agonizing over a subject, then it is natural to think of the voices largely as expressions from within himself. But if one thinks instead of Wittgenstein in front of a classroom of students, chalk or poker in hand, then it may seem natural to think of the voices as arising from the discussions with students.

The interpretation of Plato's dialogues raises the question of whether or when one can attribute a view to Socrates or Plato based on the fact that the character 'Socrates' makes an assertion. A similar problem arises with the *Investigations*. Just because a sentence appears in it, does not mean that Wittgenstein is asserting that. This is a problem that arises for students in both my Greek Philosophy course and my Wittgenstein course.

A value of the, at least somewhat, dialogical character of the *Investigations* is that it is a means to address some of the non-cognitive aspects of belief formation and argumentation, and to personalize that address. This is connected with what I call Wittgenstein's "evangelism", in my book *Wittgenstein's Artillery* (Klagge 2021, ch. 1). It has to be noted that in the Preface to the *Investigations* Wittgenstein confesses that he did *not* find his book to be successful, and had given up on trying to improve it.

But one might wonder how it could be changed. Could Wittgenstein have written a dialogical book in which there was a clearer sense of

what or who the voices were? As it is, they come off as anonymous voices. Might they take on more identity and character, say, as part of a narrative? Might this have given Wittgenstein more traction in engaging viewpoints that he found uncongenial? I wonder. Or perhaps engaging the non-cognitive aspects of his readers would have required him to 'write philosophy only as one *writes a poem*', and that was just what he found that he could not quite do.

In "the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (*Rep.* 607B), we can see Wittgenstein wishing to side *against* Socrates but, I would say, *with* Plato – who found ways of making philosophy poetic. However, Wittgenstein expresses the feeling that he is yet unable to participate in the quarrel except on Socrates' terms: "Quite different artillery is needed here from anything I am in a position to muster", Wittgenstein confesses. That, I believe, is the tragic turn in Wittgenstein's work.

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