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# Silence, Translation, and Grammatical Therapy: Some Features of Linguistic Scepticism in the Thought of Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein

In this essay, I will attempt to investigate the different approaches of Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein as two manifestations of the constellation of *Sprachskepsis*, which—despite their apparent divergences—can be seen as the common thread linking these two very different authors. I will try to show how the importance of the apophatic moment, reflection about the limits of language, a critical attitude towards dogmatism and essentialism, and the concept of philosophy as therapy—features that we can find in the thought of both Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein—stem from a *sprach-skeptische Horizontbildung* present in the cultural debate of that time.

## Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein: a Forgotten Dialogue

The link between these authors has almost been forgotten, and in fact, with the exception of Hilary Putnam—who does not consider the linguistic matter—and an important article written by Paul Franks,<sup>1</sup> there is no critical study which gives a thorough investigation of the theoretical connection between Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). This is also due to the inadequate attention paid to the *Sprachskepsis*, which has always been considered a poetic and literary phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> However, it also has a pivotal role in philosophical debate—start-

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1 Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008); idem, “Introduction” to the English translation of Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, trans. Nahum Glatzer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999): 1–20; and Paul Franks, “Everyday speech and revelatory speech in Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein,” *Philosophy Today* 50.1 (2006): 24–39. There are some suggestions in a book by Reza Hosseini, a paper by Cora Diamond, and an article by William Franke; see Reza Hosseini, *Wittgenstein and Meaning in Life: In Search of the Human Voice* (Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and Cora Diamond, “Wittgenstein on Religious Belief: The Gulfs Between Us,” in *Religion and Wittgenstein’s Legacy*, eds. Dewi Zephaniah Philipps and Mario von der Ruhr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 99–138. Diamond thinks that Wittgenstein made significant progress with the revelatory uses of language, a problem that can be clarified with the help of Rosenzweig. Furthermore, see William Franke, “Franz Rosenzweig and the Emergence of a Postsecular Philosophy of the Unsayable,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58 (2005): 161–180.

2 See Katherine M. Arens, “Linguistic Scepticism: Towards a Productive Definition,” *Monatshefte* 74.2 (1982): 145–155 and George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Franco Rella, *Il silenzio e le parole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984).

ing from Fritz Mauthner<sup>3</sup>—because it reveals the break between word and world by turning language into one of the main topics discussed in philosophy.

The dialogue between these two authors illuminates Rosenzweig's connection with the so-called *Sprachkrise* at the turn of the last century;<sup>4</sup> if Wittgenstein's relationship with the specific constellation of *Sprachkrise*, which developed in Vienna, has already been stressed by different scholars,<sup>5</sup> critical study of Rosenzweig has not paid due attention to his connection with this phenomenon.

It is undeniable that Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein were two of the most important philosophers of language of the last century, with two distinct approaches. It is worth saying that their books, namely Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, are somehow a product of war, because they were written at the front during World War I. Without any doubt, Rosenzweig's theological and transcendental thread is completely different from the linguistic immanence of Wittgenstein's approach.<sup>6</sup> Their philosophies manifest two opposite movements: a vertical transcendence and a horizontal commonality. However, even if the former's theological aura could have been considered the opposite of Wittgenstein's critique of linguistic enchantments, there are some elements that allow us to develop an original and serious opposition between them. In my view, both attempts can be interpreted within the wider phenomenon of *Sprachskepsis*, which entails a denial of an absolute foundation of knowledge, a delimitation of human understanding, and a re-thinking of the philosophical task.

By trying not to oversimplify the complexity of these authors, let me make some methodological remarks. My essay is a hermeneutical attempt to shed light on the affinity between these two authors in order to analyse some elements of linguistic scepticism. In doing so, it is not my purpose to follow the critical debate between the different readings of Wittgenstein scepticism<sup>7</sup> or to reduce Rosenzweig's religious

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3 Cf. Libera Pisano, "Misunderstanding Metaphors: Linguistic Scepticism in Mauthner's Philosophy," in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies 2016*, eds. Giuseppe Veltri and Bill Rebigier (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2016): 95–122.

4 Leora Batnitzky maintains that Rosenzweig's hermeneutic sensibilities stem from the epistemological and existential crises of the twentieth century; cf. Leora Batnitzky, "Foreword," in Franz Rosenzweig, *Cultural Writings*, trans. Barbara Galli (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000): IX.

5 Engelmann stressed the influence of Viennese culture at the turn of the century, particularly the work of Kraus and Loos, on his friend Wittgenstein. See the masterful work by Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Touchstone, 1973) and William W. Bartley, *Wittgenstein* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1973).

6 Cf. Franks, "Everyday speech and revelatory speech in Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein," 30: 'Wittgenstein [...] sees language as natural to the human-life form, perhaps therefore as God's gift to the human being. But he does not see language as God's word to the human being,' as Rosenzweig does.

7 In his *Pyrrhonian Reflection on Knowledge and Justification*, Fogelin makes a distinction between two diametrically opposed approaches in Wittgenstein's later writings: a Pyrrhonian approach (Diamond, Conant, later Baker) according to which Wittgenstein aims to persuade us to give up all philosophical views, and anti-Pyrrhonian readings (Hacker, Hintikka, Pears, von Savigny), which replace

(and perhaps dogmatic) depth. Furthermore, I will not go into the debate about the different phases of Wittgenstein's thought.<sup>8</sup> In the analysis of his philosophy, I based my research on the work of Cora Diamond, David Stern, and Pierre Hadot;<sup>9</sup> in particular, the reading of the latter, who considers philosophy as a way of life, is the hermeneutic ground for my interpretation of scepticism. It is worth noting that Hadot's interpretation of Wittgenstein is a nonconformist reading; in fact, it was neglected and overlooked by the critics, even if his account of ancient philosophy as an ethical praxis contributed to opening up new readings of Wittgenstein.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, I will point out some features of linguistic scepticism in the *Tractatus* and in the *Philosophical Investigations*, particularly—as we will see—the issue of silence and the sceptical metaphor in the former and the problem of translation alongside grammatical therapy in the latter. As is well known, the most striking difference between the early and later phases of Wittgenstein's philosophy concerns his concep-

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the critique of certain traditional theories with a positive philosophical position in Wittgenstein's works; cf. Robert J. Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflection on Knowledge and Justification* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 205–222; see also the reconstruction of this debate made by David Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 33–36, 168–170. As is well known, there is also another struggle among Wittgenstein's interpreters: the debate between the 'quietist' (Diamond, Putnam, McDowell) who believes that the binomial 'form of life' is not the basis for a pragmatist theory of meaning and praxis, and the 'anti-quietist,' who defends the opposite position. Furthermore, I will not deal with the topic of rule-following scepticism discussed by Saul A. Kripke in his important work *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), where he contends the conjunction between scepticism and rules, because—according to a Wittgensteinian approach—it is impossible to prove whether a rule was followed in a correct way. Kripke stated that the rule-following paradox is 'the most radical and original sceptical problem that philosophy has seen to date' (*ibidem*, 60). According to him, following a rule means doing as the community does. On the debate about sceptical traits in Wittgenstein's notion of a rule, cf. Michael Dummett, "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 324–348; Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Simon Blackburn, "The Individual Strikes Back," *Synthese* 58 (1984): 281–303; Peter Winch, *The Idea of Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958); and Norman Malcolm, *Nothing is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticism of his Early Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

**8** I will follow David Stern, who saw continuities and contrasts 'between the Tractarian logical atomism, the "logical holism" of the 1929–34 period, and the "practical holism" of the later 1930s,' cf. Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigation: An Introduction*, 27. On the different interpretations of the two phases of Wittgenstein's thought, see Paul Feyerabend, "Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations," *Philosophical Review* 64 (1955): 449–483; Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); and Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

**9** See Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind*; David Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*; idem, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); and Pierre Hadot, *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage* (Paris: Vrin, 2004).

**10** See Sandra Laugier, "Pierre Hadot as a Reader of Wittgenstein," *Paragraph* 34.3 (2001): 322–337.

tion of language: if, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein deals with a quest for the general form of propositions, an *a priori* order of the world shared by word and thought and a logical definition of language, in the later *Philosophical Investigations*, he points out a variety of language uses or language games. In my view, the passage from the explanation to the description—from a strict theory of meaning to the impossibility of formulating a definition by referring to family resemblances—is the meaningful change in Wittgenstein's thought. One can say that the passage from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations* is a shift in focus from *reductio ad unum* to the plurality of the games.

On the other hand, regarding Rosenzweig's philosophy, I will attempt to give an account of some elements of his linguistic scepticism by analysing *The Star of Redemption*, the *New Thinking*, his preface to his translation of Jehuda Halevi's poems, and his short book *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*.

### ***Sprachkrise* as Hermeneutic Horizon**

The sceptical atmosphere in which I will situate Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein is the *Sprachkrise*; that is, radical scepticism towards the language's capability to grasp reality and disclose the truth at the turn of the twentieth century. This constellation of crises was the premise for a renewed interest in the philosophy of language in many different approaches; on the other hand, it is also the tool which allows us to understand the connection between these authors.

Even if this binomial is not so common in the history of thought, linguistic scepticism can be broadly defined as philosophical doubts about the communicative, epistemological, and ontological value of language, which constitutes one of the most extensively discussed problems in Western philosophy. Certainly, at the beginning of the twentieth century with the so-called *Sprachkrise*—a complex phenomenon of language critique diffused in the philosophical and literary debate among poets and intellectuals before World War I—language attracted special attention, especially among German-Jewish thinkers.

Considering the boundaries of language was the specific trait of the theoretical constellation of *Sprachkrise* that was characterised by a general distrust of words and a struggle against the linguistic cage. Many writers, poets, and thinkers—for instance von Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler, Mombert, Rilke, Zweig, Kafka, Kraus, and many others—dealt with the crisis of a whole set of values, with the failure of the teleological concept of history, and with the collapse of language as a epistemological, logical, and ontological tool.<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon was interpreted as more literary than phil-

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Franke, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Emergence of a Postsecular Philosophy of the Unsayable," 161: 'A particularly dense and destiny-laden nodal point in the midst of this history is Viennese culture at the turn from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pivoting on figures such as Hofmannsthal, Wittgen-

osophical, but—in my view—its role is crucial for at least two reasons: firstly, the *Sprachkrise* helps us to better understand how the critique of language became the focus of philosophical thought at the beginning of the last century long before the linguistic turn; secondly, this phenomenon acquired special attention, especially among German-Jewish thinkers. In fact, since all these authors have a double mother tongue in common, or better, a double belonging both to Jewish tradition and to German philosophy, their sceptical attitudes or critical distance towards language also have their premises in autobiographical factors.

Thanks to the mediation of Mauthner, whose work was the *trait d'union* between literature and critical thought, the phenomenon of *Sprachskepsis* spread throughout the milieu of German-Jewish philosophy; in fact, it involves the whole generation of thinkers whose elective affinities were analysed by Löwy, i.e. Landauer, Benjamin, Buber, Scholem, Bloch, and others, who linked together language, messianism, libertarian utopias, and Romanticism.<sup>12</sup> Among these authors, it is worth mentioning Eugen Rosenstock, who had a strong influence on Rosenzweig's philosophy thanks to the elaboration of his 'grammatical approach' according to which language is a bridge between men.<sup>13</sup>

The *Sprachkrise* had a wide variety of aspects and was the epiphenomenon of a deep crisis of meaning, starting from Nietzsche's philosophy and a *Zeitgeist* characterised by the collapse of classical reason. One feature of this phenomenon was a kind of 'apophatic crisis,'<sup>14</sup> namely a paradoxical apophatic *koine* which combined the Neo-Platonic and mystic traditions with Jewish thought. In fact, it is not by chance that the *Sprachkrise* is also connected with the reinterpretation of mysticism, namely the *Neue Mystik* that was developed in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century by poets and writers such as Julius and Heinrich Hart, Wilhelm Bölsche,

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stein, Musil, Rilke, Klimt, Kraus and Schoenberg. The catastrophe of an entire historical epoch was here felt in all its extremity and was expressed with the utmost acuteness and oftentimes pathos too.'

12 Cf. Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe*, trans. Hope Heany (London: Verso, 1992); Elke Dubbels, *Figuren des Messianischen in Schriften deutsch-jüdischer Intellektueller 1900–1933* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2011); and Gerd Mattenklott, *Gustav Landauer. Ein Portrait*, in Gustav Landauer, *Werkausgabe*, vol. 3, eds. Gert Mattenklott and Hanna Delf (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997): VII–XXII.

13 In his *Angewandte Seelenkunde*, published in 1916, Rosenstock defined language as the essential part of the human soul which plays a pivotal role in the creation of a linguistic community. He spoke of the 'grammar of the soul' that has its origin in religion and precedes logic formal thinking; cf. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Angewandte Seelenkunde* (Darmstadt: Röther-Verlag, 1916). Concerning the influence of Rosenstock on his thought, Rosenzweig wrote: 'Without Eugen I would never have written the *Star of Redemption*,' quoted by Alexander Altmann, "Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy an Introduction to Their 'Letters on Judaism and Christianity,'" *The Journal of Religion* 24.4 (1994): 267; cf. Corinna Kaiser, *Gustav Landauer als Schriftsteller. Sprache, Schweigen, Musik* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014): 12–13.

14 Cf. Franke, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Emergence of a Postsecular Philosophy of the Unsayable," 162; Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*; Rella, *Il silenzio e le parole*.

Willy Pastor, Rainer Maria Rilke, Alfred Mombert, Bruno Wille, etc.<sup>15</sup> This new kind of mysticism does not deal with the traditional idea of a mystic union between God and the soul, but rather with an awareness of a connection between the individual and the community, the present and the past. This kind of secularised mysticism combines aesthetical-linguistic aspects—it is not by chance that most of these authors were writers and poets—with a political and social idea of the regeneration of humankind.<sup>16</sup> The act of doubting our knowledge, our language, our representations of the world, and our political institutions is not a mere theoretical exercise, but rather is connected to a political purpose.

The *Sprachkrise* is not a mere refusal of language *tout court*, but rather a questioning of some uses of language through a permanent linguistic critique which becomes the task of philosophy itself. The critical consideration of language in its political, epistemological, and aesthetical role is at the heart of this new way of thinking. Many aspects are involved, such as the relationship between ordinary language and philosophical vocabulary, the role of silence, and the theoretical conjunction between community and linguistic practice. Therefore, the comparison between Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein will be structured into four deeply connected paths: the apophatic thought of Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* and the mysticism at the end of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*; the question of translation and the problem of understanding; the grammatical therapy for philosophical illness which also concerns a critique of essentialism; and the sceptical metaphors for a redefinition of philosophy.

## I Boundaries of Language: Apophatic Grammar and Mystic Silence

Rosenzweig's and Wittgenstein's philosophies wrestle with the boundaries of language. If, according to the former, speaking means staying in touch with the unsay-

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15 The connection between a new idea of community and a particular idea of language was also experienced at that time by the organisation called 'Neue Gemeinschaft,' formed by a group of artists and writers who shared the ideas of Heinrich and Julius Hart, two brothers known for their literary criticism. Their attempt was to offer a revitalisation of society in accordance with a reform of literature, and their spiritual guide was the metaphysical and religious ideas of Julius Hart, explained in his works such as *Der neue Gott* and *Die neue Welterkenntnis*.

16 Cf. Walther Hoffmann, *Neue Mystik*, in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 4, eds. Friedrich M. Schiele and Leopold Scharnack (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913): 608–611; Uwe Spörl, *Gottlose Mystik in der deutschen Literatur um die Jahrhundertwende* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997); Martina Wagner-Egelhaft, *Mystik der Moderne. Die visionäre Ästhetik der deutschen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler 1989); and Anna Wolkowicz, *Mystiker der Revolution. Der utopische Diskurs um die Jahrhundertwende* (Warsaw: WUW, 2007). In my view, the new conception of mysticism passes through the translation of Meister Eckhart by Landauer, who rethinks mystic desire as an afflatus to a harmonic union of community in a kind of social mysticism.

able otherness, in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, silence is the ethical boundary of language. Both authors consider the religious element within a linguistic perspective by dealing with its modality of expressions. However, Wittgenstein does not consider the positive content of religious revelation as an articulation of the inexpressible, as Rosenzweig does.<sup>17</sup>

In *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig stated that:

[...] there is nothing more deeply Jewish than a final suspicion of the power of the word ['Misstrauen gegen die Macht des Wortes'] and a heart-felt confidence in the power of silence ['Zutrauen zur Macht des Schweigens'].<sup>18</sup>

The apophatic gesture of Rosenzweig consists of a deep reconsideration of human existence on the basis of the negativity of knowledge as constitutive of human discourse. It could seem paradoxical to speak of an apophatic tendency in Rosenzweig's thought; however, in *The Star of Redemption*, not only do silence and gesture play a

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17 This comparison can help us to shed light on the Jewish aspect of Wittgenstein's notion of language; in fact, the unsayability of religious belief could be interpreted as a deep-rooted Jewish attitude, in which the prohibition of pronouncing the Tetragrammaton turns silence into a theological element. In particular, the relevance of silence connected to the element of religion is particularly interesting if one reads it in line with the Jewish tradition. We should not underestimate the fact that Engelmann claimed that Wittgenstein's attitude towards language was typically Jewish. Actually, as Stern stated, the debate on the relationship between Judaism and Wittgenstein is also controversial because it is difficult to give a unique definition of Judaism or Jewishness, firstly because Wittgenstein was not a religious man—even if, in a letter to his student Drury, he defined himself as 'one hundred percent Hebraic' and in 1931 he spoke of himself as a Jewish thinker—and secondly because the reception of his thought was almost always in the context of analytic philosophy. However, the connection between silence and the unsayable and religious belief, the Talmudic traits of his arguments, and explicit references to the Kabbalah play an important role in his thought. Moreover, the interpretation of language in connection with the praxis and form of life—which will be analysed as follows—could be interpreted in the wake of the Jewish tradition. Cf. Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967) and David Stern, "Was Wittgenstein a Jew?" in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James C. Klagge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 237. See in particular the work of Brian F. McGuinness, "Wittgenstein und Judentum," in *Paul Engelmann (1891–1965) Architektur Judentum Wiener Moderne*, ed. Ursula A. Schneider (Vienna: Folio Verlag, 1999); Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: The Free Press, 1990); Bela Szabados, "Autobiography after Wittgenstein," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 50 (1992): 1–12; idem, "Was Wittgenstein an Anti-Semite? The Significance of Antisemitism for Wittgenstein's Philosophy," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29 (1999): 1–28; Donatella Di Cesare, "Ethik als Lebensform. Jüdische Spuren bei Wittgenstein," *Wittgenstein-Studien* 4 (2013): 249–264; Ranjit Chatterjee, *Wittgenstein and Judaism. A Triumph of Concealment* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang Verlag, 2005); and idem, "Judaic Motifs in Wittgenstein," in *Austrians and Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (Basington, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992): 142–161.

18 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison: Wisconsin Press, 2005): 321.

crucial role, but there is also a kind of linguistic scepticism towards knowledge which crosses human experience.

In the first part of the *Star*, Rosenzweig deals with the issue of how we can speak of the pre-world, seen as an amorphous magma in which God, Man, and World cannot be distinguished and thence, named. In fact, these three elements—God, World, and Man, connected through creation, revelation, and redemption—are articulated in relation to one another, but in themselves, they remain pure enigmas and ineffable mysteries. Through the unspoken original words ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ and ‘And,’ the edifice of logos is built. In the transition from creation to revelation, from the night of these proto-words to the day of words, Rosenzweig wrote precious pages on his philosophy of language, or better his philosophy of the name that ‘is not sound and smoke, but word and fire.’<sup>19</sup> According to Rosenzweig, language is the dynamic bridge between men, but it always copes with the border of the unsayable and with a nothingness that cannot be grasped, even if it constitutes the ground, or rather background, of our discourses. From beyond all manner of verbal determinations, which constitute human experience, language can recall the unsayable abyss of nothing.<sup>20</sup>

The third part of the *Star* deals with divine ineffability and the fact that—in Rosenzweig’s view—redemption is both beyond names and beyond language:

[...] the progress of Redemption in the world happens in the Name and for the sake of the Name. But the end is nameless, above all name. The sanctification of the Name itself happens so that the Name one day may become silent. Beyond the word—and what is the name other than the completely concentrated word?—beyond the word the silence gives light.<sup>21</sup>

The word, even the word of God, is always penultimate because it is a permanent anticipation of everything that follows; therefore, the final redemption must be silent:

[...] in eternity the word ceases to exist in the silence of the harmonious gathering—for we are united only in silence; the word unites, but those who are united grow silent.<sup>22</sup>

However, the silence of redemption is opposed to the silence of creation, or better, it is its fulfilment.<sup>23</sup> In the *Star*, one can distinguish at least two different forms of silence: in the first part of the book, the silence of the tragic hero corresponds to the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, 202.

<sup>20</sup> See Franke, “Franz Rosenzweig and the Emergence of a Postsecular Philosophy of the Unsayable,” 170: ‘Precisely this Nothing is the ground, or rather the background, to which Rosenzweig constantly recalls attention in expounding the elements of his new linguistic thinking.’

<sup>21</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 406.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, 317.

<sup>23</sup> In my reading of *The Star of Redemption*, its movement and structure are deeply Hegelian and, like his *Science of Logic*, the being at the end of the book is the fulfilment of the being of the beginning.



isolated gesture of one who is separated from his community; on the other hand, at the end of the book, there is the ‘full’ silence of liturgy, rites, and prayers, which is the shared silence of redemption where every single man acknowledges himself in his silent community. If the first is an abstract silence which belongs not only to the hero but also to the mathematic symbols, the second is an ultra-linguistic silence, beyond all possible misunderstandings and varieties of languages.

In his *Tractatus*, written while he was a soldier, Wittgenstein connects world and word through a kind of axiomatic logic based on a picture theory of meaning, according to which human thoughts or mental representations are expressed in propositions whose content is the truth condition of their correspondence to reality. In the first years after its publication, the *Tractatus* was usually seen as a work of logic and as a contribution to the Vienna Circle’s<sup>24</sup> verificationists, especially regarding his attempt to put end to nonsensical language and metaphysical speculation. However, as is well known, Wittgenstein refused to be part of this philosophical circle, and when he was invited to explain his cryptic theory of meaning and representation, he preferred to read Tagore’s poems instead of answering their questions. In the 1950s, scholars interpreted the metaphysical aspects of the *Tractatus* that the positivists had not taken into account; for instance, the distinction between *Sagen und Zeigen*, namely what we can say in words and what we can only show.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein’s attempt to axiomatise knowledge, to communicate the truth, and to achieve a correct analysis of language is based on an isomorphism between world and language. According to his view, propositions—the elementary propositions which correspond to some atomic facts<sup>25</sup>—are a sort of picture of reality; in fact, both share a logical form with the thing they represent, and they are not false or true *a priori*, but rather their falsity or truth can only be verified by their comparison with facts in the world.

As Diamond stated, the main difficulty in this work consists in Wittgenstein’s understanding of the limits of the expression of thoughts and nonsense.<sup>26</sup> In Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, if a proposition does not conform to the general conditions that are met by a meaningful discourse, it is taken to be nonsensical; namely, a proposition that cannot be verified by comparison with reality.<sup>27</sup> However, according to Wittgenstein, there are some cases in which we do not need to look at the state of things to

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<sup>24</sup> The Vienna Circle was composed of philosophers and scientists who shared a logical empiricism or logical positivist position. Among its members were Schlick, Waismann, Carnap, Neurath, Gödel, etc.

<sup>25</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. David F. Pears and Brian F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974): 36 (4.22–4.2211).

<sup>26</sup> Cora Diamond, “Ethics, imagination and the method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000): 151.

<sup>27</sup> Even scepticism is defined by Wittgenstein as nonsensical since it calls into question what is unquestionable: a doubt exists if there is a question and a question exists if there is an answer. One can say that scepticism is somehow an attempt to wrestle with the limits of our language. See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, 88 (6.51).

say whether a proposition is true or false; for instance, this is the case for logical propositions, namely tautologies, which are always true, and contradictions, which are always false. These logical propositions do not correspond to the facts of the world, but show the logical form of a reality that is nonsensical because it cannot be true or false. Even if these propositions are nonsensical, Wittgenstein defines logic as a ‘mirror-image of the world,’<sup>28</sup> because it shows the possibility of language itself. In the last pages of his work, logic and ethics are defined as transcendent and therefore nonsensical, because a meaningful ‘proposition can express nothing that is higher.’<sup>29</sup>

Wittgenstein’s adjective ‘nonsensical’ must be interpreted as that which exceeds the ordinary logic of correspondence on which a meaningful proposition is based. What is ‘Unaussprechliches’—which could be logical or ethical—lies beyond any language, but shows itself in language. Thence, there are some things that cannot be said but can only be shown. Wittgenstein connects this manifestation to the realm of mysticism and the unsayable: ‘There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.’<sup>30</sup> Among what cannot be said are the fields of aesthetics, religion, art, culture, and the meaning of life, and in the face of these, logical sense collapses. If the ‘sense of the word must lie outside the word,’<sup>31</sup> it must be outside the limits of our language.

As Russell stated in his introduction to Wittgenstein’s book, language considered as a whole is nonsensical, because it cannot express itself.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, there are some ethical truths that exceed the logical space and that cannot be said because ‘they *make themselves manifest*.’<sup>33</sup> In this impossibility lies the philosophical paradox of the *Tractatus*, which deals not only with the communication of the truth, but also with what escapes our linguistic understanding.

The apophatic feature of the *Tractatus* was emphasised by Wittgenstein not only in a letter to Russell of 1919—in which he writes

The main point is the theory on what can be said by propositions [...] and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown, which I believe is the cardinal problem of philosophy.<sup>34</sup>

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**28** *Ibidem*, 87 (6.43).

**29** *Ibidem*, 86 (6.42).

**30** *Ibidem*, 89 (6.522).

**31** *Ibidem*, 86 (6.41).

**32** Bertrand Russell, “Introduction,” in *ibidem*, XXIII: ‘Everything, therefore, which is involved in the very idea of the expressiveness of language must remain incapable of being expressed in language, and is, therefore, inexpressible in a perfectly precise sense.’

**33** *Ibidem*, 89 (6.522).

**34** Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Cambridge Letter*, 124, quoted by Stern, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigation: An Introduction*, 41. As is well known, Russell, in his “Introduction” to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, also stressed the mystic traits of the book.

–, but also in the famous letter to the editor Ludwig von Ficker, in which he explains the way his book is to be interpreted by stressing the ethical point and the question of silence:

My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that it is the important one [...]. In short, I believe that where many others today are just babbling, I have managed in my book to put everything firmly in place by being silent about it.<sup>35</sup>

This interpretation based on the relevance of silence in Wittgenstein's work leads to an ethical-religious reading; in fact, even later in his *Lecture on Ethics*, he described the tendency to speak or write on ethics or religion as a hopeless experience of 'running against the walls of our cage,'<sup>36</sup> i.e. the boundaries of our language. The *Lecture on Ethics* help us to clarify his interpretation of ethics seen as nonsensical utterances based on a misuse of language, but on the other hand as a human tendency to extend the boundaries of our linguistic faculties.

My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.<sup>37</sup>

The most important part of the *Tractatus*—which remains one of the most enigmatic works in the history of philosophy—is a remnant that resists assimilation: the realm of the unsayable, which are the fields of aesthetics, religion, art, culture, and the meaning of life. In the face of these, logical sense collapses: 'There are, indeed, things which cannot be put into words.'<sup>38</sup> In fact, these spheres cannot exist within logical space and cannot be expressed within logical language, which is composed of logical propositions as mere expressions of facts. However, far from refuting this unsayability, Wittgenstein claims that some nonsense could illuminate those truths which cannot be said. In this desperate attempt to say what cannot be said, he speaks of a mystically illuminating experience which can reveal the unsayable. As Hadot stated, the word 'mystic' is used by Wittgenstein in at least three ways that reflect the same impossibility of giving meaning to the world seen as a whole: the feeling of human existence, the idea of delimited totality, and the experience of

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35 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Letters to Ludwig von Ficker," ed. Allen Janik and trans. Bruce Gillette, in *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979): 82–98.

36 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics," *The Philosophical Review* 74.1 (1965): 11.

37 *Ibidem*.

38 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, 89 (6.522).

the ‘unsayable,’ which wrestles with the boundaries of language.<sup>39</sup> The utterance at the end of the *Tractatus*—‘What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence’<sup>40</sup>—could be interpreted as a mystic call for silence.<sup>41</sup> Following Hadot, I would like to give an account of the ethical silence in the *Tractatus* within the framework of sceptical tradition, i.e. an interior *epoché* of any value judgments.<sup>42</sup> The link between ethics and silence is a form of sceptical exercise which deals with a redefinition of philosophy itself.

I suggest that the importance of silence—in both thinkers—is connected to the religious and ethical boundaries of language and should be interpreted as a feature of their linguistic scepticism. As we have seen, this phenomenon was deeply connected to a new form of mysticism in which silence is linked to a religious, ethical, and aesthetical experience.<sup>43</sup>

## II Limits of Translation. Limits of Understanding

The second path of this study concerns the issue of translation, which plays an important role in the context of *Sprachkrise*<sup>44</sup> and—albeit with some variations—also concerns the boundaries of human language and the limits of our understanding in the thought of Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein. Although this issue was discussed by philosophers for the first time in German Romanticism (Schleiermacher, Humboldt, and Hamann) and the diversity of languages was considered as a set of different articulations of the word, one can say that the crucial contributions on this matter came from the philosophy of the last century.

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**39** Hadot sees a link between Wittgenstein’s idea of mysticism and Schopenhauer’s conception of knowledge liberated from the willing; cf. Hadot, *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage*, 20–26. On the conception of mysticism in Wittgenstein, see also Jacques Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein. La rime et la raison* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1973): 21–72 and Ewald Wasmuth, “Das Schweigen Ludwig Wittgensteins: über das Mystische im *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*,” *Wort und Wahrheit* 7 (1952): 315–322.

**40** Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, 89 (7).

**41** There are many discussions on the autobiographical and mystical aspects in Wittgenstein’s thought. Cf. Brian F. McGuinness, “The Mysticism of the *Tractatus*,” *The Philosophical Review* 75 (1966): 305–328 and Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius*.

**42** See Pierre Hadot, Sandra Laugier, Arnold Davidson, “‘Qu’est-ce que l’éthique?’ Interview with Pierre Hadot,” *Cités* 1.5 (2001): 134, trans. by Laugier, “Pierre Hadot as a Reader of Wittgenstein,” 328: ‘Thus, this silence can have a sceptical meaning according to the ancient meaning of the term. That is that it is a sceptical attitude consisting in living like everyone else but with total interior detachment, which implies the refusal of any value judgment. This represents a form of wisdom.’

**43** See also Adela Curtis, *Die Neue Mystik. Schule des Schweigens* (Heidelberg: Kampmann, 1923).

**44** On the theoretical conjunction between *Sprachkrise* and translation studies, cf. Alice Leal, “Linguistic Scepticism and the Jung-Wien: Towards a New Perspective,” *Translation Studies, Trans-kom* 7.1 (2014): 99–114.

Despite a coincidence between speaking and translating in line with the Romantic tradition, Rosenzweig admits that true translation is impossible; Wittgenstein states that translation, as an interruption of the *continuum* of language games, is a border experience which elucidates human understanding. For both authors, translation is a hermeneutic operation which characterises the inter- and intra-linguistic process.<sup>45</sup>

As one of the major figures of Jewish hermeneutics, Rosenzweig deals with both an interlinguistic theological translation and an intralinguistic practical one: if the former is a dialogue between the holy tongue and other languages, the latter is at the core of the process of speaking and understanding.<sup>46</sup> If the first form has an eschatological and messianic value connected to the exile of the Jewish language that coincides with the exile of the Jewish people, the second form deals with speech, in which there is always a kind of estrangement.

The interstitial space between holy languages and the other tongues turns translation into a theological question in line with the original vocation of the *Torah*, which—according to Rosenzweig—has to be translated. Referring to the gap between holy and profane tongues, he defines Hebrew as a treasure whose traces of brightness are to be found in other languages.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, far from being a substitution of label words, translation has an eschatological and messianic value because it is responsible for a silent dialogue between different languages which forces the mother tongue to rethink itself.

However, there is also an intra-linguistic translation that coincides with the mechanism of linguistic practice; in fact, Rosenzweig agrees with Hamann by stating that speaking is translating and translation is connected to every communicative act. Seen as a mode of linguistic operation, translation becomes the precondition for the dialogue and, therefore, for human understanding.<sup>48</sup> This intra-linguistic movement of translation is at the root of every language and allows openness to the dialogical dimension. However, this turns translation into an impossible attempt: there is a radical difference between the speakers and human understanding is always a paradoxical bet;<sup>49</sup> in fact, we cannot be sure of the commonality of the meaning of our words

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<sup>45</sup> On Wittgenstein's reading of translation, cf. Dinda L. Gorfée, *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994): 88–112 and eadem, *Wittgenstein in Translation* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Franz Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," in *Scripture and Translation*, eds. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) and idem, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi. Translating, Translations and Translators*, ed. Barbara E. Galli (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, "Classical and Modern Hebrew," in *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1953): 263–270.

<sup>48</sup> See Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 108–109.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Donatella Di Cesare, *Utopia of Understanding*, trans. Niall Keane (Albany: Suny Press, 2012): 35–78.

or of certain comprehension. The possibility of misunderstanding crosses all human discourse: language is face to face with the unsayable; the otherness that cannot be truly translated and, thence, said.

Concerning Wittgenstein's interpretation of translation, one can say that this issue has received very little attention from critics because we are lacking a deep analysis of translation in his work and there are only a few remarks on it. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein briefly mentions the issue of translation by stating that it does not involve the whole proposition, but the constitutive part of it,<sup>50</sup> while in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein gives many examples of linguistic activities in order to describe language games, among which he mentions the act of 'translating from one language into another.'<sup>51</sup> He radicalises the conventionality of language by admitting that between all speakers there is a kind of deal which consists of a pre-comprehension. However, when understanding is suspended, we are forced to interpret, namely to 'see as,' and—according to Wittgenstein—this interpretation is an inter-linguistic translation of signs.

This border experience reveals the operating principle of language and sheds light on the ongoing process of understanding connected to what Wittgenstein called 'perspicuous representation,'<sup>52</sup> namely a method of understanding a particular phenomenon through a network of similarities with other phenomena. It is not a logical procedure based on means-end or on causal links, but instead it is analogical, based on family resemblance ('Familienähnlichkeit'), or better, the specific features that one can recognise in some members of the same family. If we do not understand a sign, we translate it into another one or we look for other connections, and this movement of translation crosses language itself. Misunderstanding is the premise for translation, but, at the same time, it discloses the web of signs on which human understanding, which cannot do without this ongoing game of references, is based. However, if translation is an interruption of language, it is an extra-linguistic movement; in fact, it recalls gesture and the unsayable. Thence, since interpretation stems from misunderstanding, translation is an experience of alienation that shows the limit of our linguistic understanding.

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50 Cf. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, 25–26 (4.025–4.027).

51 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 12 (§23).

52 The notion of 'perspicuous representation' ('übersichtliche Darstellung') is at the core of his interpretation of ritual used for the first time in his *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein argues: 'A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of our use of words. Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation [portrayal] produces just that understanding which consists in seeing connections,' cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Gertrude E.M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958): 49 (§122). In my opinion, this attempt at analogical definition that is not a true definition is quite similar to what Vico defined as *ingenium*, which we can broadly define as a human practical and theoretical capacity to see connections; this topic is, in my view, very interesting even if it has received very little attention from critics.

In addition to this, it is worth saying that the issue of translation seems to me paradoxical from the perspective of the *Philosophical Investigations*, according to which Wittgenstein reads ceremonies as a form of language and a form of life based on shared habits and common rules.<sup>53</sup> Wittgenstein's later interpretation of language as a concrete praxis similar to a rite and a habit<sup>54</sup> calls into question the idea of translation itself. If the act of speaking is similar to the understanding of a ritual and is impossible to found theoretically, if 'the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life,'<sup>55</sup> if it is merely something that we cannot explain, think, or define, if it is only something shared and lived, how then is it possible to translate it, aside from the correct pronunciations of the sounds and following the grammatical rules? Is it possible to translate a *Lebensform*?

### III Grammatical Therapies for Philosophical Illness

The third path concerns the similarities between Rosenzweig's criticism of philosophy and Wittgenstein's later approach, particularly in the *Philosophical Investigations*, concerning their use of grammatical thought against the metaphysicians' quest and the Socratic quest for essence. In his later book, Wittgenstein admits that 'the philosopher treats a question like an illness,'<sup>56</sup> and his therapy aims to dissolve the philosophers' puzzles and consists of attention to ordinary language, while Rosenzweig, in his *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, stresses the relevance of common sense,<sup>57</sup> interpreted as an everyday use of language against abstractions. In both attempts, there is a grammatical therapy at work aiming to save us from philosophical illness.

In his *Büchlein*, Rosenzweig described the traditional quest for essence that must go beyond experience, the reductionism of philosophy, and the nature of illness that causes it to be distanced from ordinary life.<sup>58</sup> He wrote this little book—which was

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53 They could be even considered in their political dimension; cf. Di Cesare, "Ethik als Lebensform," 249: 'Die Lebensform ist kein – wenn auch ethisches – Schicksal des Einzelnen. Wie die Sprache ist sie vielmehr die Gemeinschaft, der gemeinsame Spielraum, in dem die Menschen übereinstimmen.'

54 In my view, the key concept of 'form of life' in Wittgenstein's late work arises from his confrontation with these kinds of ritual practices.

55 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 11 (§23).

56 *Ibidem*, 91 (§255).

57 Even if first Aristotle and then Epictetus gave a classical description of common sense (*koinòs vovs*) as the use of common faculties, this term is usually associated in the eighteenth century with Thomas Reid and his critique of Hume's epistemological radicalism and Berkeley's immaterialism. In opposing them, Reid speaks of instinctive original principles and beliefs (such as the notion of an external world) that are our common sense, more trustworthy than analytical philosophies. A philosophical research project into scepticism and common sense would be very useful.

58 Cf. Luca Bertolino, *Il nulla e la filosofia: idealismo antico e esperienza filosofica in Franz Rosenzweig* (Turin: Trauben, 2005).

published posthumously—in July 1921, in order to make his position expressed in *The Star of Redemption* more understandable. In these pages, he uses medical metaphors about paralysis of philosophy and sickness of reason, which is quite odd because the first symptoms of his muscular degenerative disease appeared in 1922. According to Rosenzweig, the dissolution of experience, the abstraction of the subject, and the disappearance of the world, which are the main features of philosophy, are symptoms of a sickness of the understanding. The philosopher should be cured through a correct understanding of language as a bridge which connects creation, revelation, and redemption. In the new thinking, language, seen in its concrete practices, is the horizon in which human lives are understood.

In direct opposition to the abstractions, common sense is a healthy understanding that deals with ordinary life, individual existences, and concrete practices. Even if the philosopher renounces common sense, he cannot ignore it in practice. As Rotenstreich stated, Rosenzweig considers ‘the common sense approach intrinsically superior to all others since it is not an abstraction of man’s essential features but an acknowledgment of his actual existence.’<sup>59</sup> By criticising the permanent quest for essence, Rosenzweig stated:

‘Essential’ [*eigentlich*—no one but a philosopher asks this question or gives this answer. In life the question is invalid. He is scarcely interested in knowing what half a pound of butter costs ‘essentially.’ The terms of life are not ‘essential’ but ‘real;’ they concern not ‘essence’ but ‘fact.’<sup>60</sup>

The later phase of Wittgenstein’s thought could be interpreted as a grammatical therapy.<sup>61</sup> In fact, Wittgenstein renounced a logical systematisation of language by rethinking the role of philosophy itself as a permanent linguistic critique. The vagueness of ordinary speech does not have to be eliminated, but is rather a sceptical strategy towards philosophical abstractions. The relevance of everyday language could be interpreted as a strategy for converting philosophy into a praxis, or better, a form of life. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein claims that his task is to bring the words back from metaphysics to their everyday use. Since philosophical

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<sup>59</sup> Nathan Rotenstreich, “Common Sense and Theological Experience on the Basis of Franz Rosenzweig’s Philosophy,” *Journal of History of Philosophy* 5.4 (1967): 356.

<sup>60</sup> Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, 41.

<sup>61</sup> By referring to the therapeutic interpretation of Wittgenstein’s thought, I follow the positions contended by Diamond; cf. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* and eadem, “Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” in *Bilder der Philosophie*, eds. Richard Heinrich and Helmuth Vetter (Vienna: Oldenbourg, reprinted in Crary and Read 2000): 55–90. According to her, in order to reject traditional philosophy, the therapeutic role of Wittgenstein’s approach consists in a struggle against linguistic bewitchment and in a return to ordinary language. However, as Stern stated, in the *Philosophical Investigations* there is inevitably a ‘proto-philosophical theorization about the everyday,’ see Stern, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigation: An Introduction*, 51.



problems arise ‘when language *goes on holiday*,’<sup>62</sup> namely from a confusion induced by language, the only way to resolve them is—paradoxically—to use ordinary language as a tool to unmask abstract superstitions.

Like Mauthner, Wittgenstein speaks of a permanent linguistic critique,<sup>63</sup> and the therapeutic point of his thought is in line with a redefinition of the task of philosophy as a ‘battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.’<sup>64</sup> His injunction—‘Don’t think, but look’<sup>65</sup>—is the sign of a sceptical strategy to resist the idea of inner or private language and, thence, of private understanding that is a *contradictio in adjecto* because the words are always products of shared uses. Through a radical scepticism towards interior privacy, Wittgenstein turns the grammar of inner feelings into a public grammar.

In a conversation with Waismann in 1929, Wittgenstein distances himself from a separation of a primary phenomenological language from a secondary everyday language, which he distinguished as two different systems:

I think that essentially we have only one language, and that is our everyday language. We need to invent a new language or construct a new symbolism, but our ordinary language already is the language, provided we rid it of the obscurities that lie hidden in it.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, philosophy should not deal with a meta-language or a meta-world, but rather with everyday life and phenomena. In a Hegelian wake—according to which the familiar is not understood precisely because it is familiar<sup>67</sup>—in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein stated that ‘we must stick to the subjects of our every-day thinking, and not go astray and image that we have to describe extreme subtleties.’<sup>68</sup>

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**62** Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 19 (§38).

**63** He speaks of a mythology deposited in our language, namely a set of propositions that function as rule for our representation and practices. In his last notes, collected with the title *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein points towards some grammatical propositions that compose our world-picture and function as channels for other propositions; they can be defined as types of fluid guidelines, but Wittgenstein considers them as mythology: ‘The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules,’ cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, eds. Gertrude E.M. Anscombe and Georg H. Von Wright, trans. Gertrude E.M. Anscombe and Denis Paul (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969): 15e (§95).

**64** *Ibidem*, 47 (§109).

**65** *Ibidem*, 31 (§66).

**66** See Friedrich Waismann, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, trans. by Brian F. McGuinness and Joachim Schulte (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979): 45.

**67** Hegel’s famous sentence in the preface of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* is: ‘Das Bekannte überhaupt ist darum, weil es *bekannt* ist, nicht *erkannt*.’ Cf. Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in idem, *Werke*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986): 35.

**68** Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 47c (§106).

In this sense, the task of his philosophy is to liberate our language from bewitchment, confusions, and traps.<sup>69</sup> However, it is worth noting that Wittgenstein's account of philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations* is twofold:<sup>70</sup> on the one hand, it is a product of a distorted use of language and philosophical issues are pseudo-problems; on the other, philosophy is a grammatical therapy for our language.

This two-sided account of philosophy reflects the role of language as *pharmakon*, in its ancient double meaning of cure and poison. In the second phase of Wittgenstein's thought, there is a kind of permanent auto-therapy of the philosophy which can heal him from his disease. Whether this therapy, described in the *Philosophical Investigations*, is the aim of philosophy or just another articulation of philosophy itself is a much-debated question. As a medical treatment, Wittgenstein writes prescriptions to save us from metaphysical essentialism through a return to everyday language. However, the tension between philosophy as permanent therapy and philosophy as a theory, between *pars construens* and *pars destruens*, is at the heart of scepticism itself and is also to be found in the *Philosophical Investigations*, where 'examples of how "ending philosophy" and "doing philosophy" are interwoven.'<sup>71</sup>

In the therapeutic redefinition of philosophy—which is to be found in both Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein—there is a strong critique of philosophical essentialism. One can say that a *topos* that these two thinkers have in common is an anti-Socratic approach and a refusal of the *ti esti* question. They criticise the way in which philosophical problems have been raised; in fact, Rosenzweig speaks of the timeless artificiality of the question regarding essence, while Wittgenstein is critical not only of philosophical answers, but also of philosophical questions.<sup>72</sup>

In his *Büchlein*, Rosenzweig affirms that:

What is it? What is it in essence? is inevitably raised. And so once again the question is repeated. The answer to this question is always the same: whatever it is, it is not what it appears to be.<sup>73</sup>

According to Rosenzweig, the desperate search for essence denies particular experience and paralyses the act of thinking. If common sense is a healthy understanding, the philosophy that goes beyond it and ventures to criticise it is the sick one. This metaphor, as well as his grammatical therapy to cure the sick philosophical essenti-

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<sup>69</sup> See *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, trans. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian Aue, in a facing-page English-German edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004): 312e: 'Language has the same traps for everyone; the immense network of easily trodden false paths.'

<sup>70</sup> See Nyiri, "Wittgenstein and Common-Sense Philosophy," 242: 'Wittgenstein continues to use the word philosophy in two different, contrasting senses: in the sense of systematically confused thinking misled by the grammar of language; and in the sense of philosophical therapy redeeming us from our linguistic confusions-common-sense philosophy in a tenable sense of the word.'

<sup>71</sup> Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigation: an Introduction*, 54.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Franks, "Everyday speech and revelatory speech in Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein," 26.

<sup>73</sup> Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, 66.

alism, are the sceptical features in Rosenzweig's philosophy. Ordinary life and common sense are seen as the horizons where the theoretical abstractions end up.

The Socratic approach sealed the catastrophic fate of Western philosophy, from Ionia to Jena, with its reductionist approach that was distant from real life. This path from essence to factuality, from theory to praxis, is the therapy that Rosenzweig prescribes in his short book. Far from being a theoretical object, language is a relationship, a concrete bridge between men that deals with time and otherness, but the philosopher—according to Rosenzweig—gives up common sense the instant he believes that philosophising is necessary. Common sense does not care about the essence of things and places its trust in the power of existence.

In order to stress the difference between the first and second phases of his thought, Wittgenstein—in a conversation in 1931 that was noted by Waismann—spoke out against two dangerous philosophical mistakes which he made in the *Tractatus*, namely dogmatism and the subordination of philosophy to natural science, according to which there is a logical clarification of thought based on a correspondence between answers and questions.<sup>74</sup> He described dogmatism as the 'craving for generality'<sup>75</sup> and as attempts to reach the essence, seen as an ideality beyond time and space. Since Socrates, the illness of essentialism characterised the history of philosophy and also affected Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. In fact, there is a parallelism between the answer to the *ti esti* question and Wittgenstein's first attempt to define the essence of language. The strategy Wittgenstein later uses in order to reject essentialism is the refusal of a definition of language itself through games; in fact, instead of one precise characteristic that strictly defines them, the games have many resemblances to one another in common.

There is no single essence, but only crisscrossing and interwoven patterns of similarities and dissimilarities, like in a family or in the case of games. While Rosenzweig condemned the philosophical quest for essence that makes the philosopher sick, Wittgenstein writes that instead of searching for thorough explanations, it would be useful to settle for a description. His therapy moves from metaphysical explanation to a description of language games and he argues that there are some phenomena—for instance, a musical theme or the smell of coffee—that do not need any further explanation.

As is well known, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein does not explain or define, but rather describes by stating similarities between phenomena:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call 'games.' I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic Games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don't say: 'There must be something common, or they would not be called "games"'—but look and see whether

<sup>74</sup> See Luigi Perissinotto, *Wittgenstein. Una guida* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2008): 69–80.

<sup>75</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and the Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958): 18.

there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.<sup>76</sup>

One can say that—according to Wittgenstein—it is necessary to remove one’s Socratic glasses; in fact, beyond general definitions and explanations, there are many different elements that escape this generalisation. Thence, there is no such thing as *the* definition, *the* explanation, *the* theoretical fundament, but a variegated set of different language games.

#### IV Conclusion: Sceptical Metaphors for a *Lebensphilosophie*

The last path concerns the transformation of the theoretical approach towards language into a practical one. Their anti-theoretical approach is clear in the primacy of praxis.<sup>77</sup> Both thinkers propose two practical linguistic ways to go beyond metaphysics and philosophical abstractions. Quoting Goethe, Wittgenstein claimed that ‘language is a refinement, “in the beginning was the deed.”’<sup>78</sup> Rosenzweig’s and Wittgenstein’s reflections on language turn the ordinary use of words into a critical path towards a new redefinition of philosophy as a way of life, which is at the core of ancient scepticism.<sup>79</sup>

To avoid the risk of turning their thought in dogmatism, they use sceptical strategies.<sup>80</sup> Going beyond the book, this is the main trait of their scepticism, which is

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76 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 31 (§66).

77 Cf. Putnam, “Introduction,” 3: ‘Both Wittgenstein and Rosenzweig direct us away from the chimeras of a philosophical account of the ‘essence’ of this or that to the ordinary use we make of our words.’

78 ‘Im Anfang war die Tat’ is a quotation taken from Goethe’s *Faust*. It would be valuable to analyse the different ways in which Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein constantly use Goethe, especially concerning his conception of language. On Goethe and *Sprachkrise*, see Christian Mittermüller, *Sprachskepsis und Poetologie* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008). In many different places in this work, Goethe calls into doubts the communicative role of language: just think of his aphorism ‘Sobald man spricht, beginnt man schon zu irren.’

79 My interpretation is directly opposed to Hosseini’s idea, according to which the therapy provided by Wittgenstein and Rosenzweig aims to cure the sceptical approach seen as indifference (Wittgenstein) or fear of living (Rosenzweig); cf. Hosseini, *Wittgenstein and Meaning in Life: In Search of the Human Voice*, 111–113. Furthermore, I do not agree with Cavell, who claims that Wittgenstein’s return to ordinary language is a ‘formidable attack on scepticism,’ cf. Stanley Cavell, “The Ordinary as the Uneventful,” in idem, *Themes Out of School* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984): 184–194.

80 On Sextus’s philosophy of language, cf. Emidio Spinelli, *Questioni scettiche. Letture introduttive al pirronismo antico* (Rome: Lithos, 2005): 114–130. On the influence of Sextus’s conception of language on contemporary philosophy, see Lorenzo Corti, *Scepticisme et langage* (Paris: Vrin, 2009). On the ladder metaphor in the history of philosophy, see Dimitri Gakis, “Throwing Away the Ladder Before Climbing it,” in *Papers of the 33rd IWS*, eds. Elisabeth Nemeth, Richard Heinrich, and Wolfram Pichler (Kirchberg am Wechsel: ALWS, 2010): 98–100.

deeply connected to their critique of philosophy. This transition from theory to a linguistic praxis could be seen as a sceptical movement, due also to some metaphors that may be found in the works of both authors. Most of all, the famous image of the ladder that Wittgenstein took from Sextus thanks to the mediation of Mauthner, one of the few authors quoted in his *Tractatus*. As is well known, the first person to use the ladder metaphor was Sextus, together with the images of fire and the purgative by describing the sceptical strategy used to prevent the risk of dogmatic arguments.<sup>81</sup>

The ‘final solution of the philosophical problems’<sup>82</sup> that arises out of a misunderstanding of the logic of our sentences is nothing but the drawing of a boundary to language and philosophy; in this attempt lies the ‘anti-philosophical aim’<sup>83</sup> of Wittgenstein’s book. The *Tractatus* should not be used as a ladder that must be climbed and then discarded,<sup>84</sup> but rather—as Hadot stated—every discourse on this book will be a useless ladder, an ancient sceptical purgative that aims at silence.

However, the ladder offers different meanings and, not least, develops an idea of progress that is misleading and was later rejected by Wittgenstein himself.<sup>85</sup> The act of climbing a ladder is much closer to an old philosophical approach, which seeks a clear view of the word from one’s special standpoint. This idea of a privileged perspective is strongly rejected by the later Wittgenstein in order to show how philosophies are nothing but peculiar language games based on our ordinary position in the word. Furthermore, the symbol of the ladder refers to the idea of progress and to a teleological idea of history that Wittgenstein denied.<sup>86</sup>

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**81** See Sextus Empiricus, *M VIII* 481: ‘And again just as it is not impossible for the man who has ascended to a high place by a ladder to overturn the ladder with his foot after his ascent, so also it is not unlikely that the Sceptic after he has arrived at the demonstration of his thesis by means of the argument proving the non-existence of proof, as it were by a step-ladder, should then abolish this very argument.’

**82** Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.

**83** Stern, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, 32.

**84** Cora Diamond reads the image of throwing away the ladder as the key to understanding the *Tractatus* as an anti-philosophical strategy. However, we have to be careful, because the image of the ladder suggests an idea of progress that Wittgenstein rejects. As Stern stated: ‘instead of climbing a ladder in order to get a clear view of our predicament, he now thought the task of the philosopher was to describe where we currently stand, in a way that would make ladder-climbing unattractive,’ cf. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind*, 19; Stern, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, 48.

**85** Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998): 10: ‘I might say: if the place I want to reach could only be climbed up to by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place to which I really have to go is one that I must actually be at already. *Anything that can be reached with a ladder does not interest me*” (the emphasis is mine),’ and further *ibidem*, 38: ‘You write about yourself from your own height. You don’t stand on stilts or on a ladder but on your bare feet.’

**86** It is worth noting that the motto of the *Philosophical Investigations*, a quotation by Nestroy’s *Der Schützling*, was: ‘Anyway the thing about progress is that it looks much greater than it really is,’ quot-

In order to define the sceptical strategy against dogmatism, I find the last passages of *The Star of Redemption* more interesting, in which Rosenzweig stresses the necessity of going beyond the book and beyond his own work. His active engagement in turning theological problems into lived philosophy and human terms could be accomplished only by an overcoming of theory itself. This is at the core of his new thinking that is distant from theory and develops an epochal change between logical and grammatical thinking:

In the old philosophy, ‘thinking’ means thinking for no one else and speaking to no one else (and here, if you prefer, you may substitute ‘everyone’ or the well-known ‘all the world’ for ‘no one’). But ‘speaking’ means speaking to some one and thinking for some one. And this some one is always a quite definite some one, and he has not merely ears, like ‘all the world,’ but also a mouth.<sup>87</sup>

Instead of abstractions, Rosenzweig’s grammatical thought is based on pronouns and the concrete practice of speech. The ‘speaking thinking’ (‘das sprechende Denken’) is directly opposed to ‘thinking thinking’ (‘das denkende Denken’); whereas the latter knows its own thought before its expression, the former does not know in advance where it will end up and is touched by time and otherness.

As we have seen in the first path of this study, in *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig suggests a kind of sacrifice of the word in order to reach the shared gesture and silence of community. His word could be seen as a ladder that has to be climbed in order to reach the silence of redemption:

For where a man expresses himself entirely in his gesture, there, the space that separates man from man sinks away in a ‘wondrously quiet’ emotion; there the word evaporates that had thrown itself headfirst into the dividing space in between in order to fill it in with its own body and thus become through this heroic self-sacrifice a bridge between man and man.<sup>88</sup>

I believe that this gesture summarises his scepticism towards language; moreover, as language in this redemption must evaporate into silence, the *Star* has to go beyond itself. In fact, the conclusion of the *Star* is an invitation to go through the gate on which the following words are written:

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ed by Stern, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, 7–8. On the relevance of Nestroy as part of Austrian culture, see John R.P. McKenzie, “Nestroy’s Political Plays,” in *Viennese Popular Theatre: A Symposium*, eds. William E. Yates and John R.P. McKenzie (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1985): 123–138. On the important mediation of Krauss, which led a revival of Nestroy with his “Nestroy und die Nachwelt,” *Die Fackel*, 349/350 (1912): 1–23, see Jacques Bouveresse, “The Darkness of This Time: Wittgenstein and the Modern World,” in *Wittgenstein: Centenary Essays*, ed. Allen P. Griffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 33.

<sup>87</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, “The New Thinking,” in *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, 200.

<sup>88</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 394.

[...] the words are above the gate, the gate that leads out from the mysterious, wonderful illumination of the divine sanctuary where no man can remain alive. But whither do the wings of the gate open? You do not know? INTO LIFE.<sup>89</sup>

Therefore, since language—as scepticism—is a concrete praxis and a form of life which allows us to make the changeover from a philosophy of essence to an *erfahrende Philosophie*, the return to a healthy understanding is a sceptical strategy towards traditional dogmatism, which acquired a performative role for philosophy itself. One can say that—according to Rosenzweig—the promise of the success of his linguistic therapy deals with the sceptical jump beyond the book, word, and theory in order to reach a form of life that could save us from the sick abstractions of thought.

Against the essentialism of philosophical traditions, in my view, Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein offer two different strategies in order to recall the importance of life and everyday speech through which they worked for a (dis)solution of previous philosophies. As we have already seen, language is the *pharmakon* for doing or undoing philosophy, namely the danger and the salvation of thought. The grammatical therapy of both authors leads to a philosophical path which deals with life (Rosenzweig) or with a form of life (Wittgenstein). The rehabilitation of everyday linguistic praxis as the hermeneutic horizon is—following Hadot’s vision—the space of the conversion/transformation of philosophy, which characterised ancient thinkers and scepticism as well. I believe that this form of ‘philosophical exercise’ is also to be found in Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein. If there is an aim in their attempt, it is not to advance abstract theories, but rather to work out of philosophical abstractions and linguistic misuses. However, far from being an anti-philosophical approach, this kind of *Lebensphilosophie* is based on a sceptical rejection of essentialism, a critique of dogmatism, and a necessary quest for a living form of thought by coping at the same time with the boundaries of language and, thence, with the finiteness of the human being.

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89 *Ibidem*, 447.

