

Research Article

The Origins of Philosophy, Pre-Socratic Philosophers, and Wittgensteinian Anti-Philosophy

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This manuscript examines the origins of Western philosophy through the emergence of pre-Socratic thought and develops a Wittgensteinian critique of philosophy as a distinctive form of linguistic activity. It argues that the persistence of philosophical problems and the absence of definitive solutions result from a particular misuse of language: the separation of words from the practical contexts, or “forms of life,” that give them meaning. Drawing on Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of language, especially the concepts of language-games and grammatical investigation, it interprets the statements of thinkers such as Thales and Anaximander as the beginnings of a new mode of discourse in which language was extended beyond its ordinary applications. The manuscript concludes that Wittgenstein’s contribution was not the rejection of philosophy but its transformation: replacing speculative theorising with the clarification of language and the dissolution of pseudo-problems. This perspective explains both the origins of philosophy and its continuing intellectual appeal.

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I. Approaching the subject

I think it would be difficult to question the claim that philosophy, as we know it, is an essential part of Western civilisation. As with many other things typical of that civilisation, for its members philosophy is a source of deep pride. After all, the series of thinkers who make it up represent the cream of intellectual life and indeed constitute a unique and incomparable tradition. Surprisingly, however, philosophy also has adversaries and critics, some of them more or less superficial and innocuous whereas others profound and decisive, both external and internal to it. I am sure that any person of good faith would

immediately want to ask: how can one be, or rather, how could possibly one want to be a critic, an adversary of such a lofty discipline as philosophy? I believe there is an answer to this question, a question to which it is important to try to answer among other reasons because it is precisely by articulating it that we will be deepening in our effort to finally apprehend and fully understand the nature of philosophy and its problems. Critics of philosophy, very unequal in scope and depth, have existed since the time of Plato, and I'll say something about this a little further on, but for the moment I would like to make explicit what is the basic motivation of this exercise in philosophical research. What serves me as a starting point and a basis for a – in my opinion devastating – critique of philosophy is a simple observation. I think that if we look exclusively at the results achieved, there is no other conclusion to be drawn than that Western philosophy is the greatest intellectual and cognitive failure of all time. We do not need to dive into the deep waters of the history of philosophy to learn that not a single philosophical problem has been solved in the course of more than 26 centuries. What is really surprising here is the remarkable conjunction of the palpable and continuous failure of philosophy with the interest and enthusiasm it continues to generate. How can we explain this duality? The central aim of this essay is to try to answer – partially at least – this question.

As has already been pointed out on numerous occasions, a curious difference between science and philosophy is that the former never questions itself, whereas the latter does so permanently. The difference is probably explained by the fact that the sciences have objective practical foundations that automatically eliminate any kind of insecurity concerning their legitimacy. Philosophical work, on the other hand, lacks such a foundation, so that its practitioners constantly feel the need to clarify the nature of their activity in order to be in a position to justify it. This task, *i.e.*, the task of self-clarification and justification, which itself has become a sub-branch of the discipline (the so-called 'meta-philosophy'), immediately becomes a somewhat cumbersome and entangled task for many reasons, not the least of which is that every philosopher who aspires to say something about philosophy offers his own **not shareable** diagnosis and a different apology from that offered by any other thinker, so that the original aim is lost and new discussions with different goals are initiated. Except for characterisations as general as they are vacuous, such as for example that philosophy is the "queen of the sciences" or the "foundation of the sciences", it is not easy to find common elements in the pronouncements that have been made throughout the history of ideas on the general character of philosophy and of its problems. However, the only thing that this unfortunate state of affairs highlights is the fact that there is no unity in the universe of philosophical practitioners with regard to the essence of their own discipline and, consequently, with

regard to the ultimate nature of philosophical problems. From the perspective of each philosopher, philosophy is assigned different goals, which presupposes different terminologies and different methods of research. Just as there is nothing simpler than the explanation that any scientist can give of the defining characteristics and aims of his discipline, so there is nothing more variegated than the explanations and descriptions that philosophers offer of theirs. Inevitably, in my opinion, what this situation calls into question is precisely the legitimacy of philosophy. One could certainly attempt to question this inference, which is obviously no more than a most uncomfortable and somewhat provocative observation, but completely devoid of any necessitating or coercive character. Therefore, it requires to reinforce any conviction of this sort something more than a mere datum, a simple description, however undeniable it might be. Let us then move in this direction.

It is evident that a major factor that has weakened the expressions of disgust at the unbroken chain of cognitive failures on the part of philosophy and its endless debates has been the lack on the part of its critics of a solid platform from which to view and examine philosophy *in toto* from a distance in such a way that an accurate diagnosis of its strange nature could be elaborated. As a matter of fact a wide variety of proposals have been made in this regard, but the truth is that, for one reason or another, practically all of them have ended in total failure. The explanation for this, it seems to me, is simple and it is that in all these attempts a weak but non-essential flank of philosophy was chosen and therefore, even if the critique was accurate, it was always feasible if not to evade it, then to minimise it. I think, however, that the situation has changed: we now have an adequate perspective as well as the appropriate conceptual tools to account for the ultimate nature of philosophy and the very peculiar features of its strange problems. It would seem, then, that we finally have the elements to explain this *prima facie* incomprehensible conjunction of eternal failure and unaffected interest. In accordance with the latter, the view I intend to defend is that it was Ludwig Wittgenstein who, for the first time, illuminated the cave of philosophy and did so by focusing on something that is essential to it, namely, language. It is, then, reflections on language that, in principle, will allow us to understand how a philosophical problem comes into being and why philosophy continues to enjoy excellent health despite being nothing more than the great intellectual fraud of Western civilisation. Let us try to develop this idea

II. Language and philosophy

One might think that if we want to take advantage of the connection between philosophy and language, we would do well to soak up concrete empirical results, *e.g.*, from linguistics, anthropology,

neurophysiology and so on. I certainly don't think this is the right approach. It is not quantity of *data* that we need, but transparency and understanding. What we need is first and foremost a way of understanding language that allows us to generate the descriptions and clarifications that are needed to give an account of philosophy. What is at stake is a matter of understanding, and what I argue is that it is only if we have a proper conception of language that we will be able to provide answers to the questions we raise.

Perhaps it is useful to exemplify what we have stated. N. Chomsky, in an interesting work on problems and mysteries related to language, states that the question of the origin of language points to a mystery, that is, to a problem that is insoluble for us, and not to a problem that we can face and in principle solve. In my view, what Chomsky says amounts to a veiled confession that **his** conception of language is simply not capable, even in principle, of generating the explanations that linguists themselves require. In other words, it is false that the problem of the origin of language is itself a mystery. Rather, it is when it is posed from the perspective of "generative-transformational grammar" that it is not even possible to suggest in which direction we should look for the answer we seek. There is no *a priori* reason to argue that the issue of the origin of human language can only give rise to unsolvable problems. Rather, it depends on the theoretical approach and conceptual apparatus with which it is described and studied. In this paper I will deal in some sense with the issue of the origin of language, but concentrating not on human language in general but on the particular case of so-called 'philosophical language', for which I will make a quick foray into the writings of some pre-Socratic thinkers. I believe that one can indeed offer an acceptable account of the gestation of such language as long as the conception of language to which one resorts is not a variant of the universally accepted calculistic, formal or, if one prefers, *tractarian* conception of language. And as far as I know, the only alternative conception to the formal conception of language is the praxiological conception developed by Wittgenstein more or less from 1935 onwards and articulated primarily in terms of his heuristic notions "language games" and "forms of life". Let us then quickly see what we can say about this.

If we look closely we will see that one issue about which practitioners of meta-philosophy have said ridiculously little is the issue of the characterisation of philosophical problems. The question we immediately want to ask is: why has it been so? Because there have been no sufficiently intelligent people who could offer a satisfactory answer? This is obviously not the case. To be unclear about the nature of philosophical problems is not to be silly, but rather to be misguided or confused. I think, on the one hand, that there are historical reasons that help to understand why such an explanation was until a century ago

impossible to provide. The conditions (cultural, scientific, etc.) were simply not in place to generate the longed-for explanation; and, on the other hand, one would have to admit that no explanation is given mechanically, *i.e.*, it is not by the mere fact that the conditions are in place that the explanation automatically emerges. The conditions in question are conditions of possibility, not causal agents. It is also necessary for the appropriate individual to appear who, having satisfied the historically indispensable conditions for this, is capable of putting into words the clarifications we require. I think that these two conditions were met in the 20th century, and that the individual who was able to take advantage of them and fulfil the great mission of clarifying the nature of philosophy was precisely Wittgenstein. I will now try to encapsulate in a few lines the content of his message.

I would like to begin by quickly presenting the Wittgensteinian conception of language. Language is seen as an open conglomerate of language-games based on human practices, naturally of a collective character and called by Wittgenstein 'forms of life'. From the outset, therefore, we exclude as meaningless expressions such as 'the human form of life' and 'non-human forms of life'. The whole universe of human activities is caught up in the open network of language-games. These are constituted by words and expressions we know, but really their minimal operative units are in general sentences, as long as they are used **in accordance with their underlying activities**, *i.e.*, with their corresponding forms of life. Language games and forms of life are two sides of one and the same coin: although conceptually they are independent of each other, from the point of view of their existence they are necessarily linked. In other words, there is no language-game without its corresponding form of life, and *vice versa*. This should be obvious: the idea of a collective human activity is not intelligible without an *ad hoc* vocabulary to articulate it and make it intelligible, nor is a particular lexicon used in complete detachment from recognisable and distinguishable human activities picked up in its terms. Just as in the traditional conception language and the world are intertwined – since to think of language without referents is to think of a set of scribbles or of meaningless sounds, and to pretend to have a congruent notion of reality apart from any linguistic apparatus to capture it is a waste of time – so too in this case the proposal to visualise human life (*i.e.*, the lives of human beings) apart from words and their applications or words and their rules apart from their use in connection with people's activities is a programme *a priori* set to fail. In any case, this is the core of the conception that I will use to tackle the problem at hand.

Our starting point is the distinction between signs with life and signs without life. The philosophy of language that matters to us is not the philosophy of linguistic schemes, but the philosophy of living, moving language. Now, the only way to endow signs with life is by applying them, *i.e.*, by using them. On

the other hand, it must be emphasised that the use of signs is something that is taught and learnt and is therefore something that takes shape within a linguistic community. Obviously, in order to be introduced, signs have somehow to be connected to objects (through signs or explanations), but this connection is only an indispensable step before they can be used as words, *i.e.*, to **say** something, alone or in sentences. Naming, the supreme linguistic act in the calculistic conception of language, is only a pre-condition for saying something, but in itself does not serve to say anything at all, apart from allowing the introduction (ostensibly, for example) of the signs which are part of a particular language-game. Beyond merely naming, words can be used in coordination with very diverse activities that are socially recognised as such, so that the same word can have very different meanings. Active language, the machinery of language, has an eminently social character. Its rules of use are necessarily social in character. To the question 'how many language-games are there?', the answer is: as many as there are forms of life. And conversely, since every practice needs to be articulated and regulated, and that is something that can only be achieved by means of language, in the common meaning of the term.

What we have just said constitutes the prolegomena for the Wittgensteinian explanation of the nature of philosophy, but already here we can embed Wittgenstein's diagnosis of the emergence of philosophical problems. Given the essential connection between work, activities, human praxis and the regulated use of signs, we are now in a position to offer a diagnosis of philosophical problems: those problems arise precisely when this connection is lost, *i.e.*, when language is used **only as words (sentences)**, *i.e.*, without any praxiological support. Philosophical sentences are of course well-formed formulae of language (sentences) but without application in the human world for the simple reason that they are used in a totally decontextualised way. In Wittgenstein's now famous words, "philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday". This needs to be qualified.

The first point that should be established once and for all is that it is a mistake to think that there is such a thing as "philosophical language". This view, I think, is not particularly difficult to establish. Unlike the scientific disciplines, which develop not only their own lexicons but also incorporate other symbolisms, such as those of mathematics, philosophical language is purely and simply natural language and what (so to speak) makes language philosophical is the peculiar way in which it is used. What we are faced with are **anomalous uses of language** that we later call and identify as "philosophical". The use of expressions such as 'transcendental', 'apophatic', 'denoting complex', 'monolect' or 'rigid designator' is not enough to allow us to talk freely of "philosophical language". There is no such thing, just as it is legitimate to speak, albeit by analogy, of, for example, the language of mathematics or the language of music.

Secondly, I would like to insist that we do not need the mythical philosophical notion of proposition. The sense of a sentence is a function of its use (or, if you prefer, of its rules of use) and of the advantages of its application in a given context. The same sign in a different context acquires a different meaning. What matters, what has to be ensured is the linguistic exchange, which is conditioned both by the context of the speakers and by their linguistic intentions, their purposes, the ends they pursue and for which they use the words in this or that way. Needless to say, in order to defend this view we don't need either the mentalist notion of intention since, obviously, if we did, our explanation would *ipso facto* end here. The concept of intention is, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, as objective as that of table, although it is governed by the rules of a more complex Grammar.

Finally, I wish to argue that the radical transition that led Wittgenstein from the calculistic conception of language to the praxiological conception naturally also promoted a change in the model of what work in philosophy is. Thus, there was a shift from the <problem/speculation/theory> model to the <pseudo-problem/analysis/dissolution> model. We can now present in more detail the general diagnosis of philosophy and of its impossible to disentangle conceptual knots: it is because language is used completely freed from the restrictions that its applications impose, *i.e.*, because it is used without the constrictions imposed on its employment in connection with human activities, that its problems are equally fictitious, *i.e.*, they are nothing but **pseudo-problems**. We can now establish a connection with something I mentioned at the beginning of the essay, namely, some of the thoughts with which the great tradition of Western philosophy began.

III. The anomalous use of language in the Pre-Socratics

Actually, as far as places and dates are concerned, there is absolutely no doubt: the philosophical tradition of the West begins with the Ionian philosophers, Thales of Miletus, Anaximander and Anaximenes, back in the 6th century BC. What is very varied, however, are the works of exegesis that have been carried out since the remains of the works written by them came into the public domain, especially from the second half of the 19th century onwards. There are, of course, classic studies, such as those by W. K. C. Guthrie, J. Burnet and Léon Robin, to name but a few of the most famous. Paradoxically, among the most questionable are some relatively recent ones, such as the two-volume work by J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, whose approach, consisting of "updating" the Greek philosophers, borders on the grotesque. Naturally, I won't go into the details of this piece of criticism since it's not my subject. Be that as it may, for the purposes of this essay I will make use of what in my opinion is the best succinct (and in any case,

the most beautiful) exposition of the thoughts of the early Greek thinkers, namely, Friedrich Nietzsche's (whom, incidentally, Barnes openly exploits).

Nietzsche's work, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, is a superb study of ideas and thoughts of 8 pre-Socratic philosophers, namely Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Democritus and Socrates. Nietzsche states about them:

These men are monolithic. Their thinking and their character stand in a relationship characterized by strictest necessity. They are devoid of conventionality, for in their day there was no philosophic or academic professionalism.^[1]

Naturally, Nietzsche's treatment of the pre-Socratics is not limited to a mere collection of phrases. He does two things: firstly, he expounds and explains the contents of their philosophical texts and, secondly, he uses them to outline a very broad picture of Greek culture. His treatment is among the most interesting to be found in this area of the history of philosophy because, in addition to being himself an impressive philosopher of culture, he was also an excellent philologist. This makes him someone who examines his object of study from the outside and this is particularly useful for us. He can then successfully trace various linguistic "anomalies", which he himself does not detect or take as such, but which for our purposes are of utmost importance. What does Nietzsche see, leaving aside the greatness of the early Greek thinkers, in their pronouncements?

Let us first examine what he has to say in relation to Thales of Miletus. The latter is famous for having asserted that "the being of things is water". As far as is known, this is all that remains of his book whose title, like that of other thinkers, seems to have been 'On Nature'. Nietzsche acclaims Thales and gives three arguments to justify his feeling of admiration. According to him, the value of Thales' proposition consists of the following:

- a. *it tells something about the primal origin of all things*
- b. *it does so in language devoid of image or fable*
- c. *contained in it, if only embryonically, is the thought. "all things are one."*^[1]

Nietzsche's philosophical and psychological analysis is surprisingly lucid. To begin with, he draws attention to the fact that with Thales the intellect becomes independent of "the given", that is, of experience. Says Nietzsche:

It is strange how high-handedly such a faith deals with all empiricism. In connection with Thales, particularly, we can learn what philosophy has always done when it would reach its magnetically attractive goal past all the hedges of experience.^[1]

I think that what Nietzsche is asserting is as pristine as it is irrefutable: philosophy is essentially **metaphysical**, that is, it is the kind of reflection that by nature aims to concentrate on all that is **beyond experience**. In Thales' pronouncement the division between science and philosophy is already sown, even if the first philosophical thesis of history is expressed in physical terms. Nietzsche states:

Being a mathematician and astronomer, he had turned cold against everything mythical and allegorical, and if he did not become quite sober enough to reach the pure abstraction "all things are one," instead remaining at a concrete expression of it, he was nonetheless an alien rarity among the Greeks of his time.^[1]

And, more forcefully, he affirms:

When Thales says "all is water", man is stung up out of the wormlike probings and creepings-about of his separate sciences. He intuits the ultimate resolution of all things and overcomes, by means of such intuition, the vulgar restrictions of the lower levels of knowledge.^[1]

One could hardly be clearer: philosophy is born as an aspiration to a knowledge superior in quality to the vulgar and pedestrian scientific knowledge. It seems to me that in our times this attitude in philosophy towards scientific knowledge has changed, but it is far from being eradicated.

There is one last point I would like to make before I quickly consider some of what Nietzsche tells us about Anaximander. Another way of distinguishing philosophical reflection from other kinds of enquiry has to do with the potential effects of philosophical enquiry on those who engage in it. Nietzsche tells us:

The Greek word designating "sage" is etymologically related to sapia (I taste), "sapiens" (he who tastes), sisypheos (the man of keenest taste). A sharp savoring and selecting, a meaningful discriminating, in other words, makes out the peculiar art of the philosopher, in the eyes of the people.^[1]

Purity, distinction, intellectual superiority, mental refinement, depth of vision, so to speak, are the characteristics of the philosophical mind instantiated in Thales, and which naturally contrast with the features of the standard scientific mentality.

In short: Thales gave birth to a way of posing problems, of constructing sentences, of arguing and discussing, which is distinct from everything that had been associated with genuine knowledge of reality up to that time and from that time to the present day. This invention, which was to develop in a fantastic way right up to the present day, is precisely what is called 'philosophy'. Very quickly we will reinforce this picture with a couple of Nietzsche's remarks about Anaximander.

Nietzsche does carry out a splendid analysis of Anaximander's famous *dictum*. Once more, it is the only remnant of a work that just disappeared. Famously, the Ionian thinker states:

Where the source of things is, to that place they must also pass away. according to necessity, for they must pay penance and be judged for their injustices. in accordance with the ordinance of time.^[1]

I will leave aside the issue of the correctness or inaccuracy of the translation. As is well known, in an interesting article entitled 'The Sentence of Anaximander', M. Heidegger offers an alternative translation and a completely different analysis to Nietzsche's. However, it is not my goal to discuss the various translations of Anaximander's text, but to try to discern the peculiarities of philosophical discourse in its early days because basically, as I will argue below, they are essentially unchanged. In my view, Nietzsche offers an imaginative and very convincing reconstruction of Anaximander's thought. As we know, the latter's fundamental notion is that of "the indefinite", the "*apeiron*". This "primordial being", Nietzsche explains to us:

This ultimate unity of the "indefinite", the womb of all things, can, it is true, be designated by human speech only as a negative, as something to which the existent world of coming-to-be can give no predicate. We may look upon it as the equal of the Kantian Ding an sich.

Moreover:

Instead, we must direct our glance to that lapidary sentence which we cited earlier, to the place where we may learn that Anaximander was no longer dealing with the question of the origin of this world in a purely physical way.^[1]

Given Anaximander's approach, we are suddenly confronted with a problem whose resolution excludes from the outset anything that has to do precisely with what is involved in the confirmation or refutation of statements, namely, experience, demonstrations, memory and so on. In a manner of speaking, we are suddenly placed in an atmosphere without oxygen. Very quickly I will try, before returning to the

Wittgensteinian approach, to examine (so to speak) “anatomically” the approaches of our two pre-Socratic thinkers by trying to identify their determining features.

The utterances of the pre-Socratics present a number of features that were new in those days, although quite familiar to us now, and which enable us to distinguish clearly the philosophical mode of speaking from what I will hereafter call the ‘normal use of language’. Thus, the philosopher manages to raise a question and, at the same time, categorically refuses to subject the question to the canons and rules to which all kinds of questions and statements are subject. This is tantamount to inventing a new way of speaking, but how can an individual invent out of nothing a legitimate and socially legitimised mode of expression? What the philosopher does is to break the link between the utterance of words and their applications: he retains the former but ignores the latter, although he goes on as if he were speaking meaningfully. Consider the following sentences:

- a. Where **are** the musical instruments?
- b. In which country **are** earthquakes and volcanic eruptions taking place?
- c. Which football team **is** the champion this year?

No normal speaker would have a problem with such sentences. However, if someone suddenly asks “What is this “being” you allude to in your sentences? Or I’m not asking you about the modalities of being here or there, but about being itself!”, then things do change even if we are unable to grasp the nature of the change. The question is puzzling, for the simple reason that no one was taught to use the word ‘change’ in that way. In view of the oddity of the question, answers of the known kinds, *i.e.*, in terms of perception, testimony, memories and so on, are immediately cancelled out. The problem is that although the question remains unanswered, it nevertheless **seems** to urgently require a response and not dismissing it as a spurious question opens the door to philosophical speculation and “theorisation”. Since one can proceed in the same way with any term one likes, the universe of philosophy is assured. So what Thales discovered is that any normal speaker can enter the realm of language and, so to speak, close the doors from the inside. Suddenly a new and infinite world of questions and potential answers opens up, which, for reasons not easy to articulate, as a matter of fact never arrive.

Let us quickly examine what Anaximander claims. Once more, I am sure that no normal speaker would have problems with sentences like the following:

- a. The situation was not fully **determined**
- b. That dish has a somewhat **indeterminate** taste.

c. The variable is essentially **indeterminate**.

We can explain in each case why the adjective ‘determinate’ (or ‘indeterminate’) is used, what is meant in each case and what would have to happen for the situation, the dish or the variable to cease to be indeterminate. But how is the speaker supposed to react when someone speaks of something “essentially indeterminate”, of something that just cannot be determined? It is understandable that the philosopher’s language generates total bewilderment, but since the hearer has no elements to dismiss his assertion or his question, he has no choice but to accept that philosophical questions and assertions are beyond him and that he simply does not have the capacity to deal with such subtle questions, when all that is at stake here is nothing but a linguistic trap. It is, of course, not a trap that one speaker sets for another, but such a trap that the one who sets it also falls into it.

It is clear, I would say, that there is a special connection between language and philosophy, and also that language potentially enjoys an intrinsic freedom that allows it to be used totally disregarding the socially regulated applications of words. This property of language makes it difficult to visualise a society in which the purely semiotic use of language would be outlawed. In other words, there was never a group of people dedicated to protecting language from the manipulations and misrepresentations of those who like to use it totally disconnected from real life. Thales, Anaximander and the other “great thinkers” of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. never encountered anyone (with the possible exception of the great Diogenes, the Cynic) who would pointed out to them that they were uttering entirely idle propositions, propositions totally detached from their normal applications and for which it would be impossible to visualise even what would be a sketch of a satisfactory answer. Perhaps the last proposition of the *Tractatus* captures and expresses the idea to which I am pointing. Wittgenstein states:

About that about which one cannot speak one must remain silent.

But what is it that cannot be talked about? Everything which, when uttered, gives rise to nonsense, which is like a hollow linguistic shell. Since no one is interested in purely grammatical absurdities (‘water stones dream green numbers’), we are left with nothing but philosophical nonsense, and in this respect the fact is that no commission was ever formed to call to account those who transgressed the shared meanings of words with their assertions. In this sense, philosophy is simply unrooted linguistic dissent.

On the other hand, the idea that there is an essential connection between philosophy and totally unusual ways of using words makes it possible to explain not only the emergence of philosophical problems, but also historical facts and cultural differences. After all, it is most intriguing that only in the Western world

has the use of language been detached from its actual application and utility. Unlike what happens in other cultures, in the Greek society of the time of the Ionian philosophers it was never considered that the use of language had to be, in the relevant sense, justified. Why don't we find any Western kind of philosophical discourse in other countries and at other times? Is it because the people of Asia or America were too silly, too limited? No. That is definitely not the answer. The answer is that what the vast majority of people failed to do was to misuse language, to detach the use of words from their genuine applications and thus from their real meanings. That is why, in contrast to Western philosophy, what other peoples developed is wisdom, religion, ideals of life, traditions of various kinds, but it did not occur to them to use language *per se*, *i.e.*, to speak, for example, of the instrument of communication, and then to ramble on about sets of sentences. Undoubtedly, to be able to employ freely, *i.e.*, without restrictions, notions such as good, freedom, meaning, truth, knowledge, numbers and so on is, as Nietzsche did perceive it and as we all know, a pleasurable, refined activity, which requires free time to practise it and which is extremely attractive by the mere fact of being entirely abstract and impractical. That is why philosophy is so seductive. Having said that, let us now quickly look at its less beautiful side.

IV. The Wittgensteinian approach to language

It is recurrent in our *milieu* to quote again and again A. N. Whitehead's assertion to the effect that all that has been written in philosophy are nothing but footnotes to Plato's work. For Whitehead, who was a Platonist, to say this was not only to express his deep admiration for Plato, an admiration and respect which, given our upbringing, we all share, but it was also an indication that Plato is something like the greatest philosopher of all times for the simple reason that the themes he discusses are still being discussed in our times. In my view, there is some truth in what Whitehead asserts, but if we break down his meaning, what was an expression of admiration can change its *status* and become an expression of surprise and repudiation. This is so because what Whitehead claims is simply that 24 centuries after he lived exactly the same problems (or problems one way or another derived from them or somehow related to them) that Plato put on the tapestry of discussions are still being debated. The question here is: how could this constitute something worthy of praise? What could this be praise of? What would one think if one were to claim that astronomy, biology or logic are nothing more than footnotes to Aristotle's work? Why in one case such a claim would be embarrassing and in the other case laudatory?

I stated at the beginning of this paper that the real criticism of philosophy could only take place not only when the cultural conditions for it were in place but also when the right individual is there to carry it out.

That is exactly what, without realising that he was uttering a prophesy, Bertrand Russell did when, speaking about Ludwig, he said to Wittgenstein's sister in 1912 during her short visiting him in Cambridge: "All of us hope", said who at the time was the most important philosopher in the world, "that the next great step in philosophy will be taken by your brother". And that is precisely what happened 25 years later, being himself the first great victim of the Wittgensteinian revolution. Naturally, the in-depth critique of philosophy, the transformation of philosophy that history demanded by then could only be internal to it, not external. External attacks on philosophy, for example from the perspective of politics, history, psychology or anthropology, leave it untouched. The radical critique of philosophy can only be philosophical in character. However, this is neither contradictory nor a mere play on words. Let us try to make this clear.

Perhaps the most appropriate place to start is with a simile to better understand the situation. As we know, there are flags which instead of an eagle's head have two identical heads, but which face in opposite directions. Similarly, the flag of philosophy could be a twofold headed flag, one of which would represent traditional philosophical discourse, facing a universe of insoluble problems, debating *ad nauseam* and never arriving at any generally accepted and definitive result, and the other pointing in the opposite side a towards a peculiar form of research that would have as its subject conventional philosophical claims but whose ultimate aim being neutralizations of the theses and results of first group. Thus although the subject-matter is the same both parties, their aims are cancel each other out. Regarding the differences between the degrees of difficulty of conventional philosophical speculation and of Grammatical research, what is being confronted is the difficulty of free philosophical pseudo-theorising with that of the tracing of rules of depth Grammar. In any case, the simile of the flag with two eagle heads looking in opposite directions allows us to draw some important conclusions, such as the following:

- a. although the Wittgensteinian way of thinking allows us to destroy philosophical myths, it does not take away our subjects. Those of us who belong to the post-Wittgensteinian period continue to talk about meaning, logical truth, certainty, the nature of psychological states, aesthetic experience, and so on and so forth. What we no longer do is theorise about them.
- b. It is therefore clear that Grammatical research, which is what replaces the usual philosophical metaphysical theorising, keeps our intellect alert and our interest alive for the topics we already know and for those that the misuse of words generates.

- c. Wittgensteinian research saves us from uttering nonsense, oral or written, and from getting lost in the infinite labyrinths of philosophical entanglements.
- d. The way of doing philosophy bequeathed by Wittgenstein reveals the true aim of what we could call 'anti-philosophy', which is nothing but a hard work of linguistic sanitisation with no other aim than to dissolve the conceptual knots created by traditional philosophy.

Thus, it could hardly be argued that Wittgenstein's work was merely destructive. If he had been nothing more than a mere destroyer of philosophical myths, his contribution would undoubtedly have been valuable but would have been essentially incomplete. Fortunately, this is not the case. Wittgenstein's work has a positive, liberating and enriching facet, which takes shape in a multitude of concrete grammatical analyses that allow us to overcome concrete philosophical pseudo-problems. But is it not a crime against humanity to do away with conventional philosophy? No, for what is destroyed is nothing but castles of cards and sterile chimeras. Let us see how he puts it himself. He says:

Whence does our reflection draw its importance, since it only seems to destroy everything interesting, that is, everything great and important (so to speak, the whole edifice; leaving only pieces of stone and debris)? But it is only castles in the air that we destroy and leave free the language base on which they stand.^[2]

V. Final considerations

I think we are now in a position to answer our initial question: how can we explain the fact that, despite its permanent failures, philosophy remains so popular? The answer is: because its, so to speak, intimate nature had not been properly understood. It had not been understood that philosophy can only come into being through a purely lexical use of words, a use that is entirely decontextualised, when words are stripped of their real meanings, disconnected completely from forms of life, used without any specific function other than that of manipulating signs, all the time relying on, so to speak, frozen meanings and fabricating complex conceptual knots for which there is in principle no possible solution. The good news is that now, thanks to the formidable efforts of an absolutely exceptional thinker, the human mind will be able to take a rest and face nothing else than the real challenges of knowledge and life.

References

1. ^{a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h}Nietzsche F (1962). *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Washington: Regnery Publishing Inc. p. 31.
2. ^ΔWittgenstein L (1974). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. sec. 118.

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