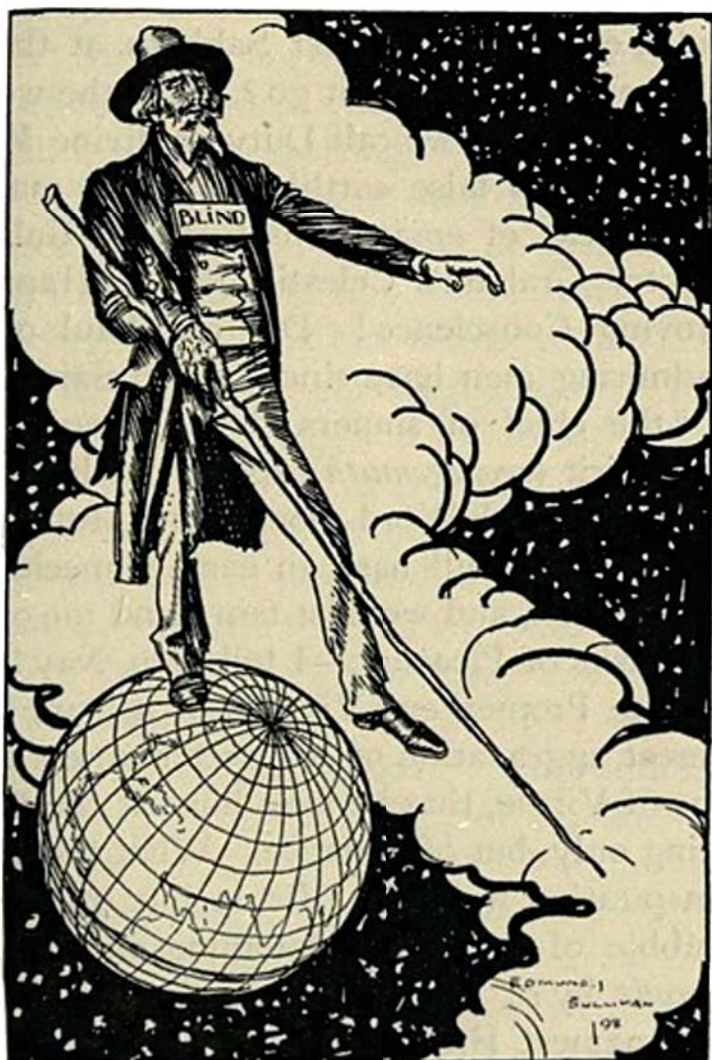


# 'OVERCOMING' METAPHYSICS



FRANCO VOLPI

# **BERSERKER**

---

## **BOOKS**

---



Franco Volpi

The "overcoming" of metaphysics

*Between analytical philosophy and continental philosophy*

## Content

Prologue.....	9
1. The Problem.....	13
c. of metaphysics in continental thought. .....	us
s. The overcoming of metaphysics in the analytical philosophy .....	i
4. Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Carnap and metaphysics. ..	47
5. "The wonder of wonders" .....	fi5
6. Conclusion: on the progress of metaphysics and our relation to it .....	ss



## Foreword

In May 2005, the School of Philosophy of the National University of Córdoba invited Franco Voljii to participate as a main panelist in the *II Jortiadus de Filosofl'i Teórica*. On that occasion, he read, in a reduced version, the text we have just mentioned, which later became part of the volume (now out of print) *Interpretación, objetividad e lii'storia: iersfietci'vas fi'losóficus*, selección de trabajos presentados en las ment:ionadas Jornadas, edited by professors Carolina Scotto and Eduardo Mattio.

Franco had previously sent me the original French text of his relation, which I translated and which we reviewed together before its inter- vention. I remember his comment on the terna: it was to show how the sharp opposition and separation that is often assumed between the analytic and continental traditions is fritiitia; cúrno

historically does not seem sustainable. For example, he said, there was the common critique of metaphysics.

and, in the attitude toward it, the remarkable proximity

from Wittgenstein, the first inspirer with Frege of analytic philosophy, to Heidegger, the antipode of the latter. In this sense, I wanted to emphasize in particular some of the motifs of the thought of the author of *What is a 'sir'?* which were fanatically mocked by Carnap and so many after him, but which found an attentive reception in the Wittgenstein of the *Conferencia sobre ézra*. He was interested, above all, in identifying the ground for a fair historical and philosophical judgment on a great theme of contemporary philosophy, such as the "overcoming of metaphysics", a judgment free of ideological simplifications or incomprehensible partisanship, such as those which, as he recalls, led the editors of that conference to suppress the passages in which Wittgenstein sought to understand the meaning of the concepts of "being" and "anguish", and which, in his opinion, were not so much a matter of "being" and "anguish" as of "being" and "anguish". employees for Heidegger and his reverberations in the field of ontology and ethics.

It is easy to notice here the clear critical rigor that characterized Franco's work, in which he followed the dictates of his training as a philosophical historian, seeking to understand what in each case was offered to his attention as a complex phenomenon, refractory to formulas and summary judgments that are not inappropriate in philosophical literature. But in equal measure, his specific sharpness, the refinement and precision that he achieves in his treatment of philosophical concepts, is equally remarkable.

The most arduous ones, as when it deals with the phenomenon of the "superation" of metaphysics in the comparison of two points of view at the same time coincident and divergent from each other, such as those of Wittgenstein and Heidegger: far from any easy and hasty "liquidation", the impossible metaphysical adventure, condemned from the beginning to theoretical failure according to the common appreciation of certain traditions, offers, for those who have been capable of an unrestricted approach, the invaluable occasion to identify in it - at the very center of its failure - the ineluctable signs of the common vertice of theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy, the unique and problematic root, in each case "eterna", from whence springs the impulse to philosophize.

A few months after his visit, Heidegger asked Franco to publish a small volume of his own with texts on "metaphysics" and "kinematics". He welcomed the idea with enthusiasm: it would be a matter of publishing the present text together with others that he would either have to rework - because they were his works written for various occasions and required additions or deletions that would make them more active and adapt them to the format of a book - or write them directly, ordering scattered notes used in courses and lectures. The last time we talked about the project, Franco had already decided that other texts would be included in the volume. We would meet in Padova, his city, and finalize the details.



relevant. A few days after the exchange of emails in which we agreed that we would do so, the accident that took his life occurred.

I remember that in one of his lectures in our faculty, Franco spoke, based on texts by the young Heidegger on Aristotle (especially the *Natorp-Dericht* and the seminars of the early twenties) of the *autotelic* character that our life can assume: not to be a constant tension towards a *telos* inscribed in a distant, unattainable future heaven, but to be such that it subtracts itself from that de-structuring teleological linearity, at every instant and sustainably counteracting its *telos* in its own proper *finis et stans*. The example I cite was that of the swimmer who has no goal in mind to reach the opposite bank of the river, but has entered it with no other purpose than to swim, with no pre-fixed direction: to swim, just to swim, as in a game.

I would like to believe that, in a similar sense, this little book made with only one of the texts that we wanted to integrate it, is not in- tainted by the fact that it is a book that is not in- tainted with the text that we wanted to integrate it, but is in- tainted with the text that we wanted to integrate. The texts that are now missing would have been added to this one in concentric circles around a center whose key is already contained in the following pages.

## The problem

---



# 1

## The problem

Metaphysics is a scandal: the scandal of philosophy. For, on the one hand, it represents the reason why philosophy exists: if one accepts its traditional definition, metaphysics leads to the ultimate things for which men have begun to do philosophy. On the other hand, it is difficult not only to establish its object - something always sought after and which constantly gives rise to aporias - but also to say what metaphysics is as such.

This is so, either for reasons of principle or for historical reasons. In our days, metaphysics is no longer something immediately evident. For today the space of knowledge is occupied by the idea that the only knowledge worthy of the name is that of science. This conviction has taken root not only in the sciences and in their epistemological conception, but also in philosophy itself, which should rather have questioned it. It is not necessary to be a Nietzschean in order to

to believe that the world metaphysics is concerned with is - to use a neologism created by Nietzsche - a *Hinterwelt* *ÇtrasmindoÇ*, a world behind the real world; consequently, a distant, nebulous, undefined and indeterminate world. To avoid this conviction, the concept of "inductive metaphysics" (O. Külpe) has been invented. This - in contrast to "speculative metaphysics", i.e. abstract metaphysics - would be based on empirical facts: a curious concept, since it indicates that an attempt is being made to solve the metaphysics through the facts, i.e. precisely through that which generates its crisis. However it may be, these negative ideas have conditioned the contemporary evaluation of metaphysics. The resuscitation of current philosophical thinking seems to have reached in this. The same results have been reached after a long time by common sense. What, then, is metaphysics according to popular wisdom? Several well-known expressions testify to the general distrust of people towards this discipline, once considered the king of sciences: metaphysics is "a lie of a thousand pages with nothing to eat"; or "the attempt to catch a black cat in a dark room without ever succeeding, but exclaiming every now and then: "We have caught it, we have caught it! A good part of contemporary philosophy compares -al

just as it is - this confusion of folk wisdom.

In an unfinished novel, a great philosopher of the **nineteenth** century described the paradoxical situation of the grand-physicist who lives in the world of his thought, remaining a stranger to the real world and its true knowledge. There was once a young man - he tells us - who seemed to be enraptured of love. But all those who believed that he was in love with a woman were deceived. In truth, he had become enamored of something completely different: he loved philosophy, above all, in itself, conceived, not as a leisure or as a discipline between others, but as a prophetic passion, as a way of life that I would like to choose and embrace.

If his thoughtful brow drooped like a ripe ear of corn, it was not because he heard the voice of his beloved, but because he listened to the secret murmur of her thoughts; if his gaze became soporated, it was not because he coveted the image of his lady, but because the movement of thought became visible to him.

This provided him with almost the orgasm -\*r--  
culative:

He liked to start from a particular thought, to go up the ladder from there, and to

of logical implication, step after step to the top. Once he had reached the highest thought, he experienced an indescribable joy, a passionate pleasure in plunging in free fall into the same logical implications until he found again the point from which he had started.

Joliannes Cliniacus - such is his name - has been fascinated by metaphysics since he was a child: the metaphysics that other children found in stories or poetry, he found in the drowning of fantasy sun, in the l°-rsection rigorous of the IIIOViliiiento tireless of its J'cnsamientos. DO this Inancra, from movi- from innovation to innovation, from abstraction to abstraction, from abstraction to abstraction.

I ended up' i' ' losing touch with reality and becoming a stranger to the world. One day tatal went to to give in this J ro} osition: *de omnibus dubíl induni est*. This principle would be a rare marker for the whole of one's life. If one r}serves to become a philosopher and a metaphysician

-He said to himself, "It is necessary to *begin* por ar}uí. This maxim became for him a ta- rea. With the sharp weapon of dialectic in his hand, he began to apply doubt to every theory, to every subject or argument he encountered: he attacked every proposition, every accident and every predicate, he attacked every argument and every argument he encountered: he attacked every proposition, every accident and every predicate, he attacked every argument and every argument he encountered.

The whole reality and the whole world -including himself.

faced with the destruction of all certainty, he experienced the danger of metaphysics. But he was no longer able to free himself from it, as if a mysterious power were chaining him. It was a kind of vertigo: the more he tried to get rid of it, the more he was attracted by it and plunged into it. However, Johannes Cliniacus was not sure that he could doubt at all. What should he do to really doubt? Was a simple act of thought enough? Or should he commit all his 'oliintad' to it? "And

How? He then discovered this difficulty

I could understand that someone could be doubtful, I understood that. But I could not understand how he could say it to another. For if the other was not too slow in spirit, he could reply: 'Thank you very much, but excuse me if I doubt the truth of this statement '}'uc do you do'. The farce did not end there: "If the first had narrated to a third party that the two of them agreed on the matter, that they must doubt everything, they would in reality have made fun of that third party, for their apparent agreement would have been nothing more than the expression of their agreement on the matter, that they must doubt everything. all abstract from sii disagreement". This maxim was like a worm that ate everything; it would not allow itself to be taught or learn anything:



for he who claims to hold doubt to be true and would teach, in reality, seeks the dO@IIIíí. The metaphysics throws Johannes Cliinacus - and us with him - into an inextricable paradox.

From this linguistic digression it is easy to understand the reasons for the continuous trend of the rnetaphysics that we have observed after the

The first of its kind in German idealism and the undüciina *Thesis on Feuerbacli* to the present day, and c<sub>pub</sub> characterizes modern and contemporary philosophy.

"The great metaphysics is dead!": such is the motto that applies to most contemporary philosophers, continental or analytic scanners. All alike treat metaphysics as a dead dog. Considered the way of thinking of the ancient philosophers, that is, as obsolete, it has been quickly swept away by the modern way of thinking, which is considered anti-metaphysical and finally post-inctaphysical. Hence, the will to "overcome" metaphysics that we find both in continental philosophy and in analytic philosophy, clearly starting from two canonical philosophers: Heide- ggcr and Carnílp.

In 1931/82, following up on a lecture given in November 1930 at the University of Vai sovia, Riidolf Carnap published in the journal *Erkenntiii's*, the official organ of the *U/euo Circle*, which he edited together with Hans Rciclicnbach, the celebrated

article entitled "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache" Ç "The Overcoming of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of language "Ç ', in which he showed, from the perspective of logical positivism, the need for an "overcoming of metaphysics by logical analysis". This is the act of baptism of the aversion to metaphysics in contemporary analytic philosophy.

Heidegger, whose inaugural lecture in 1929 *What is metafi'sic.a?* would be the immediate target of Carnap's criticism, by indirectly answering the latter in his *Introduction to the Nietaphi' ir.a* (1935), he embarked in turn on a radical effort to overcome metaphysics, which he calls *Übr in- dung 'ter Metafiliy,sik* and later *Lermin'IiInff 'tr.r Metafihysik* -indicating with this term the deepest radicality of his gesture, which renounces all metaphysical elements, even that residue of will that is still contained in the term *Überu'indung*. Heideggerian thought re-presents the most radical opposition to metaphysics in continental philosophy.

Indeed, without ignoring the remarkable efforts of certain contemporary thinkers to draw attention to the inevitability of the inetafisira problem, it should be noted that

---

' *Erkenntnis*, 11, 193J [May 1932], pp. 219-241.

the philosophy of our century has tended to regard metaphysics as a pseudo-knowledge, or at least as something suspicious. And even when philosophy has come to deal with essentially metaphysical problems, it has been careful to pre-examine the metaphysical problems.

as such. Rather, it has been claimed that the

exigence to "overcome" meta-ethics, whether on the historical plane or on the e'thical and logical-analytical plane.

Let us take a closer look at the

The problem of the "overcoming" of metaphysics, first in continental philosophy and then in analytic philosophy.

---

<sup>2</sup> I adopt this distinction for convenience, while recognizing its asymmetrical character. See, among the earliest accounts of the use of this partition, James O. Urmson's article "Analytic Philosophy," written for the *Encyclopedia del Nover.ento* (7 vol., Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1971-1954, vol. II [1977], 1005-1015), in which analytic philosophy is opposed, not to continental philosophy, but to "synthetic philosophy." From the most recent bibliography, see Kevin Mulligan's article in the *Teities Literary Supplement* of 26-6- 1998, which recalls among other things Bernard Williams's quip: to divide philosophy into analytic philosophy and continental philosophy - says Williams - is like trying to divide cars in Japanese cars and rear-wheel drive cars. On the issue of overcoming the metaphysics see in general: W. Schweidler, *Die Ueberwindung der Metaphysik*. *Zu einem Ende der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1987.

2

Overcoming metaphysics in continental  
thought

---



## 2

### **Overcoming metaphysics in continental thought**

In continental philosophy, the overcoming of metaphysics has been declared above all for essentially historical reasons. Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger and the Frankfurt School of Horkheimer and Adorno: these are but the main names of a catalog that documents the conviction that metaphysics is not belongs to the past.

Among the continental thinkers of our century, the true one who has had, more than any other, a very lively awareness of this problem, is undoubtedly Heidegger, who has declared and sustained that he is the one who has been most aware of this problem.

The need to respect the tradition of metaphysics in his philosophical work, and precisely in his philosophical work, to

various forms:

1) The idea of a phenomenological destruction of the traditional ontology, taking into account, in fact, that the traditional ontology of *Sein und Zeit* was not the end of the era of *Sein und Zeit* through the idea of a phenomenological destruction of the traditional ontology, taking into account, in reality

In 1919 he called it "original pre-theoretical science", in 1927 "hermeneutics of facticity", later "analytics of existence" and "fundamental ontology", and in 1928 even "the *Being* itself";

2) At the time of the "turn", Heidegger radicalizes this project explicitly in the direction of the "overcoming of metaphysics" (*Überwindung der Metaphysik*), by defining the essential features that characterize the speculative and historical structure of metaphysics, namely, the "onto-theology", which is defined by the Aristotelian, and "subjectivity", traceable to Platonism;

3) Heidegger's last thought arrives at the thesis of the fin of metaphysics, which would have already metamorphosed into the essence of modern technique: this would be, for him, the consummation of metaphysics, and in turn, metaphysics would be the prehistory of technique. Against the metamorphosis of metaphysics in modern technology, Heidegger recommends the action of *Verwindung*: a variation of the *Überwindung* to indicate that metaphysics is consummated and definitively overcome only when one leaves it to itself without pretending to change anything in it, when one comes out of it as one comes out of an illness or as one comes out of a crisis, resigning it and leaving it to itself.

What must be emphasized, without going into the details of the question, is the ambiguity of the Heideggerian diagnosis: the claim of the demand for a "surpassing" or "overcoming" of metaphysics, which would come to an end and is not part of the essence of technique, can be read, at the same time, as a realization of the importance of metaphysics: It is only with it that the fundamental decision of the West, which leads to modern technology, comes about, as if metaphysics were to be thought of as the epochal factor of our world. In support of this, it is easy to emphasize that the heideggerian overcoming of metaphysics takes the form of a radical traversal through the founding moments of metaphysics, a confrontation and an explanation reconciled with what is essential to it. There is no doubt, then, that Heidegger's work drew primary attention to the problem of metaphysics. And it is not by chance that he has been more or less directly the inspirer of some of the most important studies devoted to the examination of the structure of metaphysics or to the analysis of its main moments". It happens with Heide-

---

<sup>1</sup> Among the studies by direct disciples of Heidegger one should mention G. Siewerth, *Das Schicksal der Metaphysik von Thomas -u Heidegger*, now in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, Patmos, Düsseldorf 1987; H. Rombach, *Subsistenz, S5'stein, Sfruktiir*, 2 voll., Alber, Freiburg/München 1965-1966, who from



gger mias o nien'is lo rjue con want: one notices in general its rejection ble metaphysics, without taking into account cjiie escondiec in truth a "reform of metaphysics".

More recently, we have witnessed another attack on metaphysics by continental thought, namely, the attack by Jürgen Habermas in his *Post-Tnetaphysical Thought Vach- ntetophysísclics Denken*[<sup>1</sup>]. Following the opposition to traditional metaphysics that characterizes the critical theory of the Frankfurt School of Thought, Habermas wants to bury metaphysics as an outmoded form of thought that is no longer equal to the problems of our time. Metaphysics would bear inscribed on its forehead, so to speak, its impracticality for contemporary thought. This is what would be very clearly evidenced by

---

Heidegger developed the project of a "fundamental history" (*Fun'lei+iieiItul\$esc'hichte*) in which "substance", "system" and "structure" represent the three fundamental structures corresponding to medieval, modern and contemporary metaphysics and H. Boeder, *Topologie der Metaj'li ysik*, Alber, Freiburg- München 1980. See also K.-H. Volkiiann-Schluck, *Jie Metuphysik des Aristmieles*, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1979. M. 1979, and the university course of F. Wiplinger, edited posthumously by P. Kampits, *Melcijili ysik. Grtindfrugeii ihres UrsjiruIgs und ihret' Volio --e*. Alber, Freiburg-München 1976.

. J. Habermas, *Nnclimetaj'li ysisches Etenken. Philosoyhis':he Au-fsüitz.e*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1958.

.C(r. T.W. Adorno's recently published university course Av, Metnpli ysik. Adorno recently published- Av, *Metnpli ysik. Begri, ff utid Pi ohleme* (1965), Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1995.

some of its characteristic features:

1) his attempt at a comprehensive grasp of the whole, hence his effort to attain the identity of being and thinking;

2) its nostalgia for the absolute and its aspiration to occupy the traditional place of the first philosophy, and this, on the foundation of a determined subject as a conscience that in the modern age must ensure the unshakable foundation;

3) finally, the strong determination, of high peril, of the philosophy that she conceives as *theoria*. This characterization is surely steep but enough in the eyes of Habermas to conclude that metaphysics is already destined to *perish*.

to the gallery of the mistakes of the past. Today he replies:

1) The illusion of being able to comprehend the totality has been abandoned, and we have resigned ourselves to practice a rationality of the basic, procedural, of a procedural and not substantial, fallibilist and not foundationalist cut; we have renounced, adopting an attitude in accordance with our finiteness, to believe that the philosophical quest can rise to the level of the absolute;

2) we have also moved from the primacy of the perspective of the subject as consciousness, which would guarantee a universal epistemic knowledge, to the perspective of the intersubjectivity of language and the intersectionality of language.

---

Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken* 34-40.

the communication;

3) In line, the traditional dichotomy between theory and practice and the assignment of primacy to the collective activity no longer makes sense, since in the modern world they have given way to a new phenomenon, the phenomenon of work.

\* It should be emphasized that Habermas seems to implicitly identify metaphysics with his

Habermas expressions, such as rationalist (i.e. Cartesian, \*rational, Leibniz, Wolff) or idealist (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel). It takes - as it seems

the *pars pro toto*. This is because the target identified by his critique is not so much ancient or medieval metaphysical thought; today it is, so to speak, inoperant and it would be an excess of zeal to want to defeat it. His political target is rather the contemporary attempts to rehabilitate III Idealism against the "spirit".

the  $\wedge =$  ", against the *Zeitgeist*. For Habermas, these are futile attempts, even if they reappear on a small scale.

He himself recalls the undertakings of Carl Stumpf" (*Die Wiedergeburt der Philosophie*, 1907), Peter Wust (*Die Auferstehung der Metaphysik*, 1920), and Nicolai Hartmann (*Grundlegung der Ontologie*, 1935). In the same direction, i.e., against the current of the spirit of the age,

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Habermas, *Notes on the Philosophy of Language* 41-42.

and resolving in the same inevitable failure, the current attempts of Robert Spaemann and, above all, of Dietrich Henrich<sup>8</sup>, are, according to Habermas, the result of the same inevitable failure.

In saying this, Habermas is in fact referring to a general observation shared by almost everyone, namely, that metaphysics has today become an impossible path and that it is therefore necessary to move on to post-metaphysical thinking. But even if everyone agrees on this point, Habermas's diagnosis provoked in Germany a lively reaction tending to support metaphysics. In particular, Dieter Henrich, addressing the *status* of modern metaphysics, criticized in twelve theses the hasty dismissal initiated by Habermas<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. I. Habermas, "Rückkehr zur Metaphysik? Eine Tendenz in der deutschen Philosophie?", *Merkur*, 39, 1985, 595-905. Habermas alludes to R. Spaemann - R. Liéw, *Die Frage Wo-ü? Geschichte und Wiederentdeckung des teleologischen Denkens*, Piper, München 1981, and D. Henrich, *Fluchtlinien*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1982; *Ibid.*, *Selbstverhältnisse*, Reclam, Stuttgart 1982.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. D. Henrich, "Was ist Metaphysik - was Moderne? Zwölf Thesen gegen Jürgen Habermas," in *ibid.*, *Kongregate. Essays zur Philosophie in der Zeit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M., 1987, 11-43. See also the last section of the compilation *Theorie der Subjektivität*, edited by C. Cramer, H.-F. Fulda, R.-P. Horstmann and U. Pothast, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, M. 1987. C/J: also the volume *Metaphysik heute.*, W. Oelmiiller (ed.), Schöningh, Paderborn 1957, with contributions from H.-M. Baumgartner, R. Dille-Oelmiiller, C.-F. Geyer, P. Koslowski, W.

It is not a matter of examining here the merits of such a controversy. Suffice it to note that the debate, once it was settled, although it went on for a short period of time, drew attention to metaphysics, and this attention was then extended to other coincident genres.

In the first place, because of the fortune in Germany of the intellectual turn initiated within the framework of analytic philosophy, which found in this country its most favorable expression in the attention given to the ontological problem by Ernst Tugendhat<sup>1</sup>.

Then, by a fortunate coincidence: almost at the same moment that the de-

---

Kraus, H. Krings, H. Lübke, O. Marquard, R. Maurer, R. Piepmeyer, H. Poser, Th. Rentsch, M. Sommer, A. Schwan, R. Specht.

H. Staudinger, F. J. Wetz, W. C. Zimmerli and R. S. Zons. The most severe criticism was pronounced by M. Riedel. "Grenzlagen. Zur Ortsbestimmung der deutschen Philosophie", in *Neue Deutsche Heft*, 1988, Heft 1. Cf.: also V. Gerhardt, "Metaphysik und ihre Kritik. Zur Metaphysikdebatte zwischen Jürgen Habermas und Dieter Henrich," in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, XLII, 1988, 45-70, and R. Langthaler, *Nichtmetaphysisches Denken! Kritische Aufträge an Jürgen Habermas*, Dunker & Humblot, Berlin 1997.

<sup>1</sup> E. Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen über Einführung in die Sprachphilosophie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1976. Cf. also W. Künne, *Abstrakte Gegenstände. Ontologie und Semantik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1983; U. Wolf (ed.), *Eigenheiten*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1985. Also: H.-H. Castaneda, *Synthetic and Analytic. Texts from a new Ontology*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1952.

In the course of the above-mentioned bat, a number of studies have taken it upon themselves to go to the historical bottom of the problem, in other words, to analyze from a historical point of view the key passages of the metaphysics. I refer - leaving aside other more antique studies - to the research of Rolf Schönberger and Ludger Honnefelder on medieval ontology, to those of Theo Kobusch on the relationship between ontology and language, or to those of Panajotis Kondylis on the critique of neo-scholasticism in the modern period.

At this point, it is almost obligatory to open a parenthesis on the presence of the metaphysics question in French philosophical culture.

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Cf. the works of I. Stenzel, *Metaphysik der Altertümer*, and of A. Dempf, *Metaphysik des Mittelalters*, 'veröffentlicht in der *Handbuch der Philosophie*', Oldenburg, München-Berlin 1934; of this filio - see the volumes of Aristoteli Metaphysik. *Versuch einer vollen geschichtlichen Skizze*, Königshausen & Neumann-Rodopi, Würzburg-Amsterdam 1986. Also: E. Topitsch, *Entstehung und Entwicklung der Metaphysik. Eine Studie zur Weltanschauungskritik*, Springer, Wien 1955 and G. Janoska, F. Kauz (ed.), *Metaphysik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1977.

<sup>(2)</sup> R. Schünberger, *Die Transzendenz des klassischen Seinsverständnisses. Studien zur Vorgeschichte des neuzeitlichen Seinsbegriffs im Mittelalter*, de Gruyter, Berlin 1986; L. Honnefelder, *Scientia transcendens. Drei Formen der Bestimmung der Seiendheit und Realität in der Metaphysik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit (Dionysius Scotus - Suárez, - Wolff - Kant - Peirce)*, Meiner, Hainburg 1990.  
T. Kobusch, *Sein und Sprache. Historische Grundlegung einer Ontologie der Sprache*, Brill, Leiden 1967.  
P. Kondylis, *Die neuzeitliche Metaphysikkritik*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1990.

The importance of the studies of Pierre Aubenque and his disciples, who opened up research in a historical-speculative direction, should be underlined". Since the early sixties, in his well-known work on the question of being in Aristotle, Aubenque drew attention to the problematic character of metaphysics, highlighting the aporias of what Aristotle calls the science of being as being, and trying to understand what ontology, theology and metaphysics have been for Western thought in their demarcation and in their reciprocal relationship". One can easily recognize the speculative interest that inspires this work on the tradition of Aristotelianism: it is the need to understand what Aubenque defined, with a term borrowed from Heidegger, the "onto-theological" constitution of metaphysics.

As we know, Heidegger has interpreted the genesis of the term "metaphysics" by stating that it has its origin in a "deep philosophical indecision", namely, the philosophical indecision in which Andronicus of Rhodes found himself when he could not find any place for Aristotelian science.

---

<sup>19</sup> For a first orientation cf. R. Brague, J.-F. Courtine (eds.), *Herméneutique et ontologie. Mélanges en hommage à Pierre Aubenque*, P.U.F., Paris 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. P. Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote*, P.U.F., Paris 1962.

of being as being, in the context of the system of Hellenistic knowledge that envisages a tripartition of philosophy into logic, physics and ethics. Since the late twenties, Heidegger maintained the thesis that metaphysics is essentially constituted as "onto-theology": the investigation of the entity as such that it has carried out is configured either as an investigation of what is common to every entity, i.e., as ontology, which is a formal science (*os katholou* - *lo/non*), or as an investigation of the highest entity, i.e., as theology, which is a causal science (*os katholou* - *akrotaton os*).

As *ontology*, declaring the polysemy of being, Aristotelian metaphysics recognizes the multiplicity of reality, and thus accepts as a positive factor the irreducibility of the multiple to a single being. The company proposes to take into account the differences, diversities, plurality and diversity of the existence. In the framework of Aristotelian ontology, being is not thought of as univocal, but always according to the articulation of its multiple significations and its diverse regions. Consequently, it theorizes the need for different types of knowledge that analyze reality in its multiple aspects, according to different perspectives and in view of different ends.

As *theology*, it considers possible the scientific study of supreme, divine realities. For



God makes his entrance into philosophy, although he is no longer "narrated" in myth or "revealed" in religion, but considered and studied as a supreme being susceptible of rational investigation. Metaphysics, as *theology*, deals with the divine in its own right, obtaining by means of rational argumentation a concept of God of its own, without taking the representations of *mythology* or religion. It engenders speculative theology, that is to say, philosophical, conceptual theology. Certainly, it may be objected that in this manner Dios enters philosophy as *summiim* ens, but as such he ceases to speak in the first person: what he has to say is translated into the language of metaphysics and philosophy. On the horizon of metaphysics it does indeed make its entry into philosophy, but in order to leave it immediately.

As logic, metaphysics is not a kind of intuitive or inspired knowledge, but unfolds according to the modalities of rational argumentation, specifically, following the form par excellence of the latter, that is, dialectics in the Aristotelian sense of *are bene disseren li* (and not in the modern, Hegelian sense of logic or system of contradiction).

The Aubenque school has produced important studies that delve into the crucial moments of "onto-theology", in particular, its origins in Aristotle and its turn represented at the time.

The early modern period was marked by the metaphysics of Suarez: these are the "inonografia on Aristotle" by Rūmi Bague" and that of Jean-François Courtine on Suarez". We must also mention in this context the studies of Jean-Luc Marion who defines how the question of onto-theory acts in Descartes' thought".

The question that arises at this point is whether the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics, derived from the Aristotelian science of being as such, is an original determination or whether it is merely a derivation of what Hans Krämer has called the "metathesis of the spirit" and from which Plato's unwritten doctrine of metaphysics is derived.

-revised by the Tübingen school, i.e. by the Krämer praetorium, Ilonrad Gaiser, and Thomas

A. Szlezált- would provide the systematic formulation capital. Beyond the separation between the plane of being and the plane of becoming, between the intelligible and the sensible, between spirit and nature, the number of this esoteric teaching, which we know thanks to the testimonies of direct disciples of

---

" R. Bague, *Aristote et la question du monde*, P. U. F., Paris 1958. - J.-F. Courtine, *Suarez. et le système de la métaphysique*, P.U.F., Paris 1990.

" I.-L. Marion, *Sur le principe métaphysique de Descartes. Constitution et limites de l'ontologie/Neofugie dans la pensée cartésienne*, P.U.F., Paris 1986; *Sur l'ontologie grise de Descartes*, Vrin, Paris 1975; *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes. Analogie, création des vérités inférieures et fondement*, P.U.F., Paris 1951 .

Plato's doctrine of transcendence, namely, Spideusippus, Xenocrates and Aristotle, consists in a doctrine of transcendence, specifically in the theory of principles that lie beyond being [*efiekeina tes otisias*] and that constitute it, namely, the One and the Dyad, from which unity and multiplicity derive. In the light of Platonic metaphysics, structured according to the doctrine of principles, we can see in fact in what sense the history of Western philosophy can be compared - according to Whitehead's statement - to a "series of footnotes to Plato's works". The first philosopher who was thus placed in a new perspective is Aristotle, who no longer presents himself as a philosopher of immanence as opposed to Plato as a thinker of transcendence - such was the classical opposition figured by Raphael in the *School of Athens*, in which Plato points his finger at the sky while holding the *Tzineus* in his hand, while Aristotle, with the *Úf/ru a Nzrómaro* under his arm, directs his hand towards the earth. In the new perspective, Aristotle's system appears as one of the systems derived from Plato's doctrine, in which an attempt is made to think the unity of transcendence and inmanence, intelligence and sensibility, spirit and nature. The study of the esoteric Plato also suggests a new scenario for what concerns the congruence between metaphysics and the esoteric Plato.

The possibility of a "Christian philosophy" and finally other traditions - which can be alluded to by mentioning the idea of metaphysics mediated by René Guénon.



3

Overcoming metaphysics in analytic  
philosophy

---



## **Overcoming metaphysics in analytic philosophy**

It is well known with what hostility analytic philosophy has regarded, at least in the beginning, everything that was presented as metaphysics. Rudolf Carnap's article on *The Overcoming of Metaphysics by the Logical Analysis of Language* has long inspired the attitude of neo-positivism and analytic philosophy towards metaphysics, considered as a pseudo-knowledge that makes use either of empty concepts, to which no verifiable meaning corresponds, or of syntactically inconsistent propositions. It is known that in the discussions of the Vienna Circle, when someone proposed an inconsistent reasoning, it was rejected by simply saying, "That's metaphysics!"

After some time, we note that analytic philosophy has retraced its steps on this point, putting aside its original anti-metaphysical attitude, and has



binary and trying to elaborate a positive understanding of metaphysical knowledge. One can cite the case of a representative philosopher of science such as Popper, formed in the neo-positivist atmosphere of the Vienna Circle, who has explicitly assigned to metaphysics a productive function in

the genesis of new scientific paradigms: certain metaphysics would anticipate, albeit in an intuitive and non-falsifiable way, the theses and theories to which science would then give a rigorous formulation, based on rational argumentation. Undoubtedly impressed by Popper's position, Carnap himself, "thanks to successive more prudent analyses", attenuated his criticism of metaphysics by stating that the thesis on the inconsistency of metaphysical propositions does not apply:

1) to the metaphysicists who were in close contact with the science of their time, such as Aristotle or Kant;

2) to the metaphysical explanations born from experience through abstractions and generalizations that are too bold, but which nevertheless represent an anticipation of scientific explanations;

3) to "inductive" meta-physics, which are based on empirical knowledge and conclude cosmological systems from it.

---

'-' Cf. Carnap's replies to his critics, in particular Paul

At the very heart of analytic philosophy in the strict sense, a thinker like Strawson, introduced in *Individuals* (1959) a principled distinction between two types of metaphysics, revisionist metaphysics and descriptive metaphysics, assigning to the latter a positive function.

It should be noted, however, that the concept of metaphysics is taken in all these cases in a minimal sense, and therefore not as a discourse on the supreme realities of another time - God, the immortal soul, the World - but as a philosophical description of reality, as an ontology of objects or events. This is evidently the case of Strawson's descriptive metaphysics or, more recently, of the *reistic* ontology inspired by Brentano's thought and developed by Roderick Chisholm, Kevin Mulligan, Barry Smith and Peter Simons".

The reasons for this are then understood. have led Hilary Putnam, in *Renewing Philosophy* (199c), to declare that analytic philosophy has become the most important movement in favor of metaphysics on the world philosophical scene.

---

Henle and Karl Popper, in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, P.A. Schilpp (ed.), Open Court, La Salle (Ill.) 1963, 875. Cf'r. likewise Carnap's clarifications in *Remarks by the Author* (1957), in A. I. Ayer (ed.), *Logical Positivism*, Free Press, Glen-coe (Ill.) 1959, 80-81.

<sup>21</sup> Cf'r. H. Burckhardt - B. Smith (eds.), *Handbook of Metaphysics and Ontology*, 2 vol., Philosophia, München 1991 .



Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Carnap, and  
metaphysics.

---



## Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Carnap, and the metaphysics

But rare to truly explain the problem of metaphysics and its stipulation in analytic philosophy, there is an inevitable episode that is at the origin of this new attitude of thinking: the episode presented by Wittgenstein.

Unfortunately, Wittgenstein's attitude to metaphysics is neither simple nor univocal, but rather problematic and tormented: in a word, difficult to grasp. It is marked by an underlying dilemma which can be brought out with the help of a remark of Wittgenstein's concerning Heidegger, which deserves to be better considered than it has been hitherto. The specialists in Wittgenstein know it ,

---

<sup>2</sup>Cf. by way of example, A. Janik-S. Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, Simon & Schuster, London 1973; Th. Rentsch, *Wittgenstein und Heidegger. Existential- und Sprachanalysen zu den Grundlegenden philosophischen Anthropologie*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1955, 211 et seq. which critically discusses the remark; R.

but they have not given it much importance nor have they questioned the interpolation it has suffered on the part of those who should have guarded its integrity.

It is a brief remark made by Wittgenstein on December 3, 1929 at the home of Moritz Schlick in Vienna, which was recorded by Friedrich Waismann and published after his death. I have added the text:

*About Heidegger*

Monday, December 10, 1928 (at Schlick's)

I can well imagine what Heidegger means by being and anguish. Man has the impulse to lash out at the limits of language. Think, for example, of the astonishment that something exists. Astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, nor is there an answer to it. Anything that can be expressed in the form of a question cannot be expressed in the form of a question, nor is there an answer to it.

---

Monk, Ludwig Wittgenstein. *The Duty of Genius*, Jonathan Cape, London 1990. See also for a general idea and bibliography on the question L. Perissinotto, *Heidegger e Wittgenstein. Quattrocento di studi*, Bollettino della Società Filosofica Italiana, new series n. 151, January-April 1994, 3-20. Also D.A. Cooper, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Humility," *Philosophy. The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, LXXII, 1977, 105-125.

we give to say must, or *a priori*, be considered only as meaningless. In spite of all this, we are lashing out against the limits of language<sup>3</sup>. This fact was also seen by Kierkegaard and described in a similar way (in terms of lashing out against paradox)<sup>2</sup>. This lashing out against the limits of language is the érim. I consider this of the utmost importance in order to put an end to all the talk about ethics-whether there is knowledge in ethics, whether there are values, whether the Good can be defined, and so on. In ethics, it is constantly a question of de- ciring something that does not and can never concern the essence of the matter. *A priori*, it is true that whatever definition we give of the Good, it is wrong to assume that the formulation corresponds to what we really mean (Moore). But the tendency, the lunge,

---

\*The mystical is the feeling of the world as a limited totality". *Cfr Tractatus logico-philosophicus* 6, 45. "I have a calm conscience, whatever happens, nothing can harm me". *Cf'r "Lecture on Ethics", Philnsoyhir.el Review*, 34, 1965, fl.

\* *Cf. S. Kierkegaard, Philosoj:ihisclle Bror.ken*, ch. 3, in *Werke*, vol. VI, Diederichs, Jena 1925, 36, 41: "What is that unknowable domain against which in its paradoxical passidn the intellect gives itself and which confuses man in his knowledge of himself? It is the un-known. [...] It is the limit to which one always arrives".



*points to something. This is what St. Augustine knew when he said: "But how, cana- lla, don't you mean no nonsense? Say it, it doesn't do anything!"<sup>(2)</sup>.*

This remark of Wittgenstein's was noted by Friedrich Waisniann, who had written it down in the notebooks in which he recorded the discussions that took place during Wittgenstein's meetings with some members of the Vienna Circle. The notes have been authorized up to a certain point by Wittgens- tein himself, but were published only after Waisrnnann's death (Oxford, 1955). The observa-

The first time Heidegger's quote was published in January 1955 in the Philoso- phical Review (LXXIV, nr. 1-27) in the original.

German and in an English translation by Max Black, with the approval of the executors Elizabeth Anscombe, Rush Rhees and Georg von Wright. It appears as an appendix to the *Lecture on Ethics*, the legendary conference given by Wittgenstein at the association *The*

---

" *CJ'r. Confessiones* I, 4: "et vae tacentibus de te, quoniam loquaces muti sunt". This is a proposition that Wittgenstein liked to quote and which he translated freely in his conversations with his disciple Maurice Drury, as follows: "Woe to those who say nothing about you, just because charlatans say many nonsense!", *Cfr* Rush Rhees (ed.), *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, Oxford 1984, 90.

*Heretics of Cambri' lge*, and written between September 1929 and December 1930. Both the lecture and the observation on Heidegger were collected in 1966 in the volume *Lectors and Con- versations on Et.hics, Aesthetics, Psycltology and Reli- gious Belief* (Blackwell, Oxford).

What is surprising is that, both in the journal and in the volume, the remark has not been published in full, but the reference to Heidegger has been centralized. Thus, the title *Zti Heidegger On Heidegger* and the introductory statement that reads: "I can well imagine what Heidegger means by being and anguish" have been deleted. Nota bene: this statement determines the general sense of the whole remark,

for it indicates that what Wittgenstein says to (r-) (-)lambast the limits of language and of wonder at the existence of things is refers to the Heideggerian doctrine.

The censorship was only discovered when Waisinann's notes were published in full after his death with the commentary by Brian McGuinness, who edited them in volume I I I of the complete works under the title: *iVittgenstein null der Miener Kreís. Gesfrár.he, aufgezeir.hnet von Friedri'.h lPúismunn*. Be that as it may, this censorship is

---

<sup>21</sup> Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1967. Simultaneously in **English** edition: Blackwell, **Oxford 1967**. The remark *Zi' Heidegger* is found on pp. 65-69, preceded by the remark *Anti-*

The fact that the work is open to all sorts of criticism and assumptions, and it must be said that one would have expected a less careless philological approach on the part of the *trustees*.

As for the content, clearly the goal of metaphysics, at least three considerations are necessary:

1) First of all, it is interesting that Wittgenstein - with Frege, the main inspirer of analytic philosophy - pronounces himself on Heidegger, the continental thinker who was undoubtedly the most distant and antithetical to the analytic attitude, and who was considered by the neo-positivists as the negative paradigm of what should be absolutely avoided in philosophy.

Wittgenstein's remark, dating from 1929, is among the first reactions to Heidegger's success after the appearance of *Seeing and Time*. It was not the only one: there were immediately two further reactions in analytic and neo-positivist circles: that of Gilbert Ryle, in a review of *Being and Time* written for the journal *Mind* (XXX-VIII, 1929, 307-320),<sup>30</sup> which alternates between the poetic judgments of Heidegger and the neo-positivist ones.

---

*Husserl* and followed by one on Dedekind. See likewise the American edition with commentary by Michael Murray in *Ibid, Heidegger and Modern Philosophy: Critical Essays*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1978, 60-83.

<sup>30</sup> G. Ryle, *Collected Papers*, vol. I, Hutchinson, London 1971, 202-214.

The other is that of Rudolf Carnap, who attacked Heidegger's inaugural lecture "*What is metaphysics?*" in the article "The Overcoming of Metaphysics by the Logical Analysis of Language".

c) Although very brief, Wittgenstein's remark is fundamental because it brings, from the analytical point of view, a positive sense to two cardinal concepts of *Being and Time* and of "What is metaphysics?", namely, "being" (*Sein*) and "anguish" (*Angst*). By also establishing a

---

<sup>28</sup>Later, Ryle will overcome this hesitation by going deeper into the study of *Being and Time* and developing in *The Concept of Mind* (1949) a critique of Cartesian dualism between mind and body, which presents certain analogies with Heidegger's critique.

In a *postscriptum* to his article, Carnap mentions two further reactions to Heidegger's inaugural lecture: that of Oskar Kraus, a disciple of Franz Brentano, and of Anton Marty in a radio lecture on May 1, 1930, *Ueber Alles und Nichts*, later published in *Philosophische Hefte*, II, 19.31, 146, and that of the mathematician David Hilbert in the lecture *Die Grundlegung der elementaren Zahlentheorie*, delivered in December 1930 at the Hamburg Philosophical Society and published in *Mathematische Annalen*, CIV, 1931, 493 ("I find in a recent philosophical lecture this proposition: 'Nothingness is the absolute negation of the totality of the entity'."). This proposition is instructive because, in spite of its brevity, it exemplifies all the main violations that can be made of the principles established by my axiomatic theory"). - Years later there will also be the reaction of A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Gollancz, London 1936, 43-44, but his knowledge of Heidegger depends on Carnap. Ayer has later deepened his analysis of Heidegger in his "Reflections on Existentialism" in *Metaphysics and Common Sense*, Macmillan, London 1969, 203-215.

In relation to Kierkegaard and St. Augustine, philosophers both of whom were decisive for Wittgenstein, the observation goes to the heart of a problem that is unavoidable in our context, namely, the problem of the ethical motivation that is at the foundation of the impossible metaphysical tendency to express the inexpressible. In other words, the question of the relationship between ethics and metaphysics, between practical philosophy and theoretical philosophy.

3) This favorable position is even more evident when compared to the contempt for Heidegger's thought that prevailed in the Vienna Circle, where his language was considered the paradigm of the incorrect use of semantics and syntax. But Heidegger's linguistic transgression is precise.

The Wittgenstein seems to appreciate this as an "attack on the limits of language", and

The original meta-ethical tendency of the metatistic tendency in the inhe

rent to man. Wittgenstein's observation thus forces us to rethink the relationship between logical understanding of the world and ethical-metaphysical understanding.

But what are the Heideggerian doctrines to which Wittgenstein alludes when he declares that he understands the meaning of the Heideggerian terms "being" and "anguish"?

What attracts your attention in a positive and negative sense?

Evidently, Wittgenstein alludes to the Heideggerian doctrine according to which anguish [*Angst*], distinguished from fear *Furcht* which is always caused by a determinate factor, is to be understood as a state of mind, a disposition or a fundamental temper (*Grund.stimmung*), in which the *Dasein* loses the everyday and familiar sense of the entity in its totality and thus finds itself thrown face to face with nothingness. In this sense, anguish has a revealing ontological function insofar as it opens the *Dasein*, more than any philosophical theory, to the experience of the entity in its totality, and also in the negative sense of a loss of meaning that leads it to the experience of true nothingness (and not to the nothingness obtained by the simple logical negation of the totality of the entity). It is a thesis that Heidegger presents in *Being and Time*, § 40 and 68 b, and who delves into "What is *in-itself*?"

As for what he calls Wittgenstein's *atheology*, two conjectures can be put forward. What attracts him is probably the new Heideggerian way of conceiving the original motivation from which philosophical questioning arises and, from there, the metaphysical attitude that goes beyond the entity in the everyday sense to interrogate its being; it is the relation that in this way Heidegger establishes

between "anguish" and the possibility of experiencing "being". In fact, the novelty introduced by Heidegger consists in this: that he does not attempt to de- termine metaphysics in historiographical terms, in the forms and figures under which it has been presented, but rather he attempts to de- termine it in its essence. Now, it is proper to metaphysics precisely to inquire into the *entity as entity*, therefore, not insofar as it presents itself under this or that particular aspect, but *in relation to its being*. Metaphysics goes beyond the natural consideration of the being in its immediate everyday being and "jumps" towards a philosophical attitude. The question that arises is that of knowing what causes this leap from one attitude to another.

This *satin* has been interpreted in several ways in the tradition. According to Husserlian phenomenology, for example, to which Heidegger refers and at the same time opposes, one passes from the immediate natural attitude to the philosophical (tenomeno- logical) attitude through the *epo]'*, that is, through a technical exercise, through a sort of "fiction" or mental experiment that the professional philosopher carries out and through which he brackets the daily vision of the world and captures, in its momentum, the secret operations necessary to constitute our experience of the world, which are not visible in the natural attitude.

In Heidegger, on the contrary, the motivation to philosophize does not arise from a superior intellectual act as sophisticated as the phenomeno- logical *epoch*, but it is provoked by a kind of *reversion* that takes place in the depths of the human being, in the deepest layers of reality and that impels him to question himself and to question things and their meaning. The experience of the entity in its totality, from which the question arises concerning its *quid es*/ and its way of being, is not formed according to Heidegger in a simple theoretical horizon, that is to say, when the question about the entity in its totality is posed in neutral, constational and veritative terms. It is truly radical only where the questioning results from a problematization that engages the entire *Dasein*, when it is engendered, not by an act of the particular will, but by something that arises from its fundamental *Stimmung*: then, "at the Inmost when it is least expected," everything appears in a different light and the familiar sense of the entity vanishes, changes, or is inverted. The *Stimmung* that procures this involvement and this experience is for Heidegger anguish, which he then exploits in its ontologically revealing function. If the metaphysical interrogation of the entity has its origin at this deep level, it concerns then the human reality in its totality and can reach in principle to every one of them.



us. The inetic necessity which is rooted in the depths of existence comes before the logical-scientific description of the entity. In that perspective, the totality does not appear any more as a profession, but as a film conversion can be a practical-moral phenomenon, a practical-moral phenomenon. It is a global conversion to which corresponds an original ethic that goes beyond all theoretical and descriptive dimensions, and has repercussions on the movement of all the people who live in the world. of life by orienting it towards its achieved form.

It is undoubtedly this practical-moral motivation of philosophy, which can be recognized at the basis of the Heideggerian concepts of being and anguish and of structural bonding, that Wittgenstein says he understands very well. This is what makes him feel closer to the Heideggerian ideal of authenticity than to Moore's ethics, which he criticizes by saying, in the above remark, that he considers it "of the greatest importance to put an end to all the talk about ethics-whether there is knowledge in ethics, whether values exist, whether the Good can be determined, etc." Evidently, he shares Heidegger's original ethical demand, although in a different perspective, realizing, at the same time, the aporia and paradox against which artists who want to express this demand pass by the way of theoretical-descriptive language.

As is well seen in the famous *Lecture on Etlii'cs*, what Wittgenstein indicates as "lashing out against the limits of language" is a phenomenon structurally analogous to the ethical tension implicit in the Lieideggerian linking of being and anguish. More than Carnap could imagine.

The latter, as is known, in his article already cited, liquidates the lecture "What is inetatisica?" by showing that Heidegger, when speaking of nothingness (and of being), uses language incorrectly by using words that have no reference to verifiable meanings, or by forming pseudo-propositions such as: *Das Nte/zfs nichtet*". Without ever mentioning his name, Heidegger will answer him in his university course in the summer semester of 19,35 *Intro'luction to the me-*

*taphysics* (published only in 1S.5 G)Hlp Clearly,

the second chapter, entitled "On the grammar and on the etymology of the word 'being'", can be read as the indirect demolition of the Carnapian critique, for Heidegger tries to show there that the logical-grammatical analysis and the etymology of the term "being" do not allow at all to capture the deep meaning of the metaethical problem al blue

<sup>oo</sup> For an analysis of the Carnapian critique of metaphysics, see

E. Berti, "Überwindung della metafisica?", in *La inetafisir.a e il proplemci del sñio suyernmento*, Gregoriana, Padova 1985, 9-43.

<sup>o1</sup> M. Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Metaph5'sik*, Niemeyer, Tübin- gen 1953.

the term refers. The indirect polemic with Carnap is explicit in the edition of that course published in the *Gesamtausgabe*, which includes an appendix where Heidegger says:

A current of thought gathered around the journal *Erkenntnis* goes even further in the direction prefigured in a certain way after Aristotle, according to which being (*Sein*) is determined and finally annulled from the "is". This current intends to found and develop for the first time, in rigorous terms, traditional logic with the means of mathematics and mathematical calculus, in order to construct in this way a "logically correct" language in which the propositions of metaphysics, which are all pseudo-propositions, will become impossible in the future. In this journal (II, 1931) appeared an essay entitled "The Overcoming of Metaphysics by the Logical Analysis of Language". There, under the guise of mathematical scientificity, the extreme applause and elimination of the traditional doctrine of judgment<sup>10</sup> is consummated.

---

<sup>10</sup> M. Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Metaphysik*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 40, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1963, 227-228. M. 1963, 227-228.

Heidegger launches another sharp remark r.ontra Car nap in a not datacla, but Pre- sumably late gloss, noted in his e]einr-' (P---).

The "What is metaphysics?" article is right at the margin of the passage criticized }aor Carna{i, where he suddenly and surreptitiously transforms the adverb io nzt/if.i into the noun *das Nichts*". In this } asa]e famous Heidegger writes:

"That to whi ch the relation to the world is directed, is the being itself - and nothing else (*und sonst nichts*). That from which every attitude receives its d i r e c t i n g conduction is the being itself - and nothing else (*und weiter nichts*). That with which, in t h e irruption, the analysis that investigates and confronts, *is* the entity itself - and nothing else (*pund darüber hinaus nichts*). [... That which the inquiry must penetrate is simply "what is", outside of it - nothing (*und sonst - nicht*): only "what is", and outside of it - nothing (*und weiter - nichts*): exclusively "what is", and beyond it - nothing (*und darüber hinaus - nichts*). What then happens to

---

" Cf. I. Taubes, "Vom Adverb "nichts" zum Substantiv "Das Nichts"" in *Ibid, Vom Ktilt zur Kultur Rciusteine z.u einer Kritik der historischen Vernunft*, Fink, München, 160-172.

this Nothing (*diesel Nichts*)!'

However, in the gloss in question, Degger declares to have taken the word "and more" and its variants from Hypolite Taine, that is, from a thinker considered to be a positivist".

In 1564 he will confirm one last time his irreducible opposition to Carnap in the appendix to the conference *Phenomenology and Theology*, in which he define his position and that of Carnap as the two "extreme opposite positions" of con- temporaneous tylosophy .

---

<sup>(34)</sup> M. Heidegger, "Was ist Metaphysik?" in *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. IX, Köslermann, Frankfurt a. M. 1976, 105. Heidegger does not indicate any bibliographical reference but one can see H. Taine, *Philosophie de l'art*, 13ème edition, Hachette, Paris 1909, 12: "My only duty is to expose the facts and to show you how these facts have come about. The modern method which I intend to follow, and which is beginning to be introduced into all the moral sciences, consists in considering human works, and in particular works of art, as facts and products, whose characteristics must be pointed out and whose causes must be sought; nothing else. Thus understood, science neither proscribes nor predicts, but confirms and explains". In a letter to Elfride dated August 11, 1936, Heidegger asks his wife to look for the book in her library and to send it to him at home. "*Mr. in liebes Seelb'lien!*" *Briefe Martin Heideggers an seine Frau Elfride, 1915 - 1970*, hg. von G. Heidegger, DVA, München 2005, 192.

M. Heidegger, "Phänomenologie und Theologie" in *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. IX, 70.

5

"Ln wonder of wonders".

---



**"Wonder of wonders."**

Beyond the polemic between the two, it is clear what distinguishes and defines their positions on metaphysics. Carnap is concerned with the "conditions of validation" of philosophical discourse, while Heidegger, abstaining from the problem of validation, perhaps freely pushing the limits of language, tries to show how the *openings of meaning* are produced.

*It is precisely this that Wittgenstein realizes when he declares that he can understand, pronouncing himself in favor of the contradictory but inevitable tendency to go against the limits of language, that is, to violate the rules of rigorous descriptivity, in order to express what is inexpressible, what cannot be contained in the logical form. And to illustrate the tendency to exceed the limits of language, in other words, to give an example of something inexpressible,*



about which, in spite of everything, we can say nothing but nonsense, Wittgenstein invites us to think, not of transcendent entities - the concept of God, according to Augustine's dictum - but rather of the simple wonder of whatever it is that exists. The fact that there is something rather than nothing

*-my fi'rst an'I fo- remost example,*" says Wittgenstein in the *Lecture on Eifiiri*" - arouses in us an astonishment which "cannot be expressed in the form of a question" and for which "there is no answer beforehand. And he concludes his remark: "Whatever we can say must, a priori, be regarded only as meaningless. In spite of all this, we are attacking the limits of language". As is well known, this is a thesis on which Wittgenstein has always insisted, as early as the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. The *Lecture on Ethics* unfolds and deepens this thesis.

1) On the one hand, Wittgenstein makes it clear that, in relation to the natural and legitimate wonder at this or that aspect of the world, at the "how it is," surprise at the simple existence of the world represents something paradoxical:

It is meaningless to say that I am amazed at the existence of the world because I cannot re-experience it.

---

" L. Wittgenstein, *Reading in Ethics*" 8.

to present it to me as not being. Naturally, I could be amazed that the world around me is the way it is. If while looking at the blue sky I had this experience, I could be amazed that the sky is blue, rather than cloudy. But this is not what I am referring to now. I marvel at the fact that there is sky, whatever it may look like.

2) On the other hand, Wittgenstein argues that this paradox is inevitable because "a certain characteristic type of abusive use of our language underlies all ethical and religious expressions".

Strictly speaking, then, within the limits and according to the rules of logical description, it is not correct to say that we are astonished by the existence of the world; nevertheless, in order to express the feeling and the ethical-metaphysical-religious requirement that is the foundation of this experience, we continue to do so.

The provisional solution suggested by Wittgenstein is that this paradox reveals the primitive division that separates the two possible ways of looking at things: "Indeed, the scientific way of looking at a fact is not that of looking at it as a wonder.

---

<sup>1</sup> - L. Wittgenstein, "*Lectura on Ethics*" 9. " L. Wittgenstein, "*Lecture on Ethics*" 9.

\* L. Wittgenstein, "*Lecture on Ethics*" 1.1 .

"But what does it mean then," he asks, "that we are aware of this mara- villa at certain times and not at others?" "Why do we sometimes see the world in the rigid form of logic and sometimes, on the contrary, have the illusion of perceiving it according to the inexplicable order of magic, wonder and even miracle?"

How do we jump from one mode of consideration to the other, and what is the relationship between the two?

In short, Wittgenstein opens cascading questions, for he recognizes the meaninglessness of ethical, religious, metaphysical propositions that would like to express the inexpressible, but, instead of rejecting them, he recognizes them as profound and importance. He admits them, then, as what inevitably and complementarily results, as an insufficient *continuum* of the rigorous representation of the inexpressible, and precisely as what is totally other than this, that is, as the ineffable that cannot be contained in any way in expression and language. And he concludes:

---

<sup>-1</sup> L. Wittgenstein, "*Lecture on Ethics*" 11.

<sup>-2</sup> *Mut'itis mutandis*, a similar paradox is found in Kant:

Why does the world appear to us, on the one hand, as subject to the unbreakable order of causality, while on the other hand, **we would like to think** that this "chimera worthy of thought" that is freedom is possible? -In another metaphysical variant, it is also found in Schopenhauer: **How is it possible**, in its unity, this strange allotrope that is the world as representation and as will?

I see now that these meaningless expressions were not meaningless because I had not yet found the right expressions, but it was their meaninglessness that constituted their very essence. Because the only thing I intended with them was precisely to go beyond the world, which is the same as *going beyond the* meaningful language. My only purpose -and I think that of all those who have ever tried to write or speak about ethics or religion-is to lash out at the limits of language.

Wittgenstein is thus neither for nor against metaphysics. Rather, he insists on the division between the expressible and the inexpressible, between logic and ethics, between life as mechanics and life as meaning. hence, the possibility of metaphysics. metaphysics as a problem inherent to finitude human:

This lashing out against the walls of our cage is perfectly and utterly hopeless. Ethics, insofar as it arises from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, about the absoluteness of life.

---

<sup>4</sup>" .L. Wittgenstein, "*Lectures on Ethics*" 11-12.

The absolutely good, the absolutely valuable, cannot *be* a science. What ethics says adds nothing, in any sense, to our knowledge. But it is a testament to a tendency of the human spirit which I personally cannot but deeply respect and which I would not ridicule for anything in the world.

Now, it is precisely the importance of adapting and expressing in the logical-theoretical plane the meaning of the entity in its totality that leads Heidegger to find the traditional solution of the metaphysical problem and to assign to this angiology, interpreted as a revealing ontological *Stimmung*, the function of manifesting this meaning: This does not allow itself to be reduced to the categorial-discursive dimension, but rather to be reduced to the dimension of an eniote disposition such as anguish. Heidegger concludes that the lecture "What is metaphysical?" taking up the great metaphysical question posed by Leibniz, Schelling, and also confronted by Wittgenstein: Why are there in general things more well than nothing? *Wann ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?*

---

"L. Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics*" 12.

\* Cf. M. Heidegger, "Was ist Metaphysik?" in *Wegdenken*,

Furthermore, in the 194,3 *Po.i/lificio* to "What is metaphysics?", Heidegger considers the ability to be involved *{concerned}* by nothingness and to associate oneself with the existence of things as a quality of the human being:

The availability to anguish [that is, the availability to open oneself to the experience of nothingness as the negation of the entity in its totality] is the yes to the insistence on the highest existence, the only one that can grasp the essence of man. Man, the only one among all entities called by the voice of being, experiences the wonder of all wonders: that the entity eP".

Even the vocabulary-specifically the use of the term "wonder" (*Munder*)-indicates that Wittgenstein, in his attitude toward metaphysics, is closer to Heidegger than to Carnap. It is true that Wittgenstein's understanding of the Heideggerian concepts of being and anguish does not imply his adherence to the true doctrine.

---

*Gesumtnus abe*, vol. IX, 122; see also 382-353. As Jean-François Courtine has pointed out to me, an early version of this formula is found in Siger de Brabant: si vero quaeratur de tota universitate entium, quare magis est in eis quam nihil.

\* M. Heidegger, "Nachwort zu "Was ist Metaphysik!" in *Jfeç-murken, Gesanitätsgebe*, vol. IX, 307.

Wittgenstein is still a radical critic of both metaphysics and the philosophical attitude that Heidegger represents, *but* he evidently considers both Heidegger and metaphysics to be metaphysical. Wittgenstein remains a radical critic of both metaphysics and the philosophical attitude that Heidegger represents, but he evidently considers both Heidegger and metaphysics to be much deeper than the anti-metaphysical program of the Circle of

Vienna would allow to imagine. Rather: the esr""\_ tn that fuels and governs its opposition to the meta-

Wittgenstein knows that the problems from which metaphysics arises, and which he ascribes to the realm of the inexpressible, of ethics or mysticism, cannot be solved by the use of the metaphysical. Wittgenstein knows that the problems from which metaphysics arises, and which he ascribes to the realm of the inexpressible, of ethics or mysticism, cannot be solved by the simple rejection of metaphysics. The repression of metaphysics, easier to declare than to fulfill, is not enough to dissipate the questions raised by metaphysics.

Wittgenstein's reaction to the news of the planned publication of the volume *Die wissenschaftli'che Weltau]fassung*, i.e., the manifesto of the Vienna Circle which the friends and disciples of Moritz Schlick intended to offer him in recognition of his decision to refuse the chair of philosophy in Bonn and remain in Vienna, is very significant in this respect. The volume was published in 112S and was distributed on the occasion of the first Congress on the Theory of Knowledge, which was held in Vienna.

The meeting took place in Prague in September of the same year. Wittgenstein, who was in Cambridge, wrote to Waisinann to take note of this initiative, specifically of the strongly anti-metaphysical spirit that characterized the philosophical program of the Circle:

Precisely because Schlick is a man without peer - he declares - he and the School of Life he represents do not deserve to be covered with ridicule for vanity, even if it is done "with the best of intentions". When I say "vanity" I mean every kind of complacent narcissism, "Reject metaphysics!" As if this were something new! Whatever the Vienna School succeeds in doing, it must *show it, and not say so*. [...] It is in the masterpiece that the master is seen".

This indicates once again Wittgenstein's different attitude to metaphysics in relation to the attitude of Carnap and logical positivism.

In addition, it is consistent with the incompatibility of the bility is evident from reading the documents that relate the meetings between Wittgenstein and Carnap at Schlick's house. As is known, Wittgenstein-

---

" F. Waisinann, *Ludwig Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis*, Blackwell, Oxford 1967, 18.



tein did not participate in the meetings of the Vienna Circle which took place on Thursdays. On the other hand, he participated in the private discussions at Scilick's house on Monday evenings, in which Carnap was also present, until Wittgenstein demanded that Carnap no longer be invited. The hypersensitive, gloomy personality, surrounded by a special aura, together with the extravagant behavior and the strange and harassing way of acting of the one was at odds with the positivist and solar mentality of the other. Wittgenstein baffled his interlocutors, all avid readers of the *Tractatus*, by declaring that in his book what he had not said was far more important than what he had said. Sometimes, during the meetings, he read poetry aloud, especially texts by Rabindranath Tagore. In general, he seemed to be more interested in mysticism than in the scientific and philosophical questions that the neopositivists would have liked to discuss with him.

Carnap himself, who captured with kindly and commendable objectivity the features of Wittgenstein's original personality, gives us the best description of the bewilderment that his strange behavior produced:

Wittgenstein had a sympathetic and very gentle temperament - he writes in his

autobiography - but he was also very persistent and very irritable. Whatever he said, it was always very interesting and stimulating, and his way of expressing it was seductive. His point of view and his attitude towards people and issues, even theoretical questions, were more like those of an artist than those of a scientist: similar, one might say, to those of a religious prophet or a seer. When he expounded his point of view on specific philosophical problems, we were immediately aware of the inner struggle that was stirring within him at the time; a struggle through which he sought to clarify the darkness, prey to an intense and painful tension that was evident even in his figure. When finally, and after a prolonged and strenuous effort, he reached the answer, his judgment was presented to our eyes as an artistic product that had just come from the hands of the creator or as a revelation. It is not that he affirmed his point of view dogmatically [...], but rather the impression he gave us was that of an intuition that came to him as a result of his own intuition.

by a kind of divine inspiration, so that we could only regard as profanation any analysis or any commentary that was a little more sober on the rational plane. There was thus an obvious difference between his attitude to philosophical problems and Schlick's attitude or my own [...] I sometimes had the impression that Wittgenstein was opposed to the deliberate, unemotional rational attitude of the scientist and also to any idea that sounded to him like the "spirit of the Enlightenment".

Carnap likewise confirms his differences attitudes toward metaphysics:

At the time when we read Wittgenstein's book [the *Tractatus*] in our Circle, I was convinced, deceiving myself, that his attitude towards metaphysics was the same as mine and that of all of us. I had paid no attention to the many mystical statements contained in his book; no doubt because what he thought and experienced in that way was the same as mine and that of all of us.

---

" R. Carnap, "Intellectual Autobiography," in P.A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, 25-26.

The domain was very different from my thoughts and feelings. It was only after our personal contact that I was able to grasp more clearly his attitude in this regard. I had the impression that his ambivalence towards metaphysics was only a partial aspect of a more fundamental inner conflict in his personality, from which he suffered deeply.

Later, the opposition between the two worsened. In the summer of 1932, Wittgenstein considered Carnap's essay *Die physikalische Sprache als Universalsprache der Wissenschaft*, which said:

In two letters to Schlick and in another to Carnap he declared his moral and personal disagreement, rejecting the excuses of Carnap who replied that he had taken his inspiration from Poincaré and Neurath rather than from Ol.

This is not the time to examine the reasons why Wittgenstein developed the ideas of the *Tractatus* in a different direction from that of the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle; perhaps later,

---

- "R. Carnap, "Intellectual Autobiography," in P.A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, 27.

a bibliography already inabai cable has dealt with it in depth. As far as his attitude towards metaphysics is concerned, it suffices to recall here another remark in which Wittgenstein once again shows his pro- titidient sensitivity to the problem. In the *Demerkungen über Frazers "the Golden Bougli,"* where he criticizes the naive positivist attitude of the his- torian of religions, 'joe shows himself to be "much wilder than most of his savages," he writes:

I think I should begin my book with certain remarks on *metaphysics as a kind of magic*. In doing so, I might neither take sides with magic nor deride it. I should consider the depth of magic. Yes, the forclusion of magic has here the same character as magic\*.

In short, Wittgenstein ~~1~~thinks that metaphysics lies outside the domain of descriptive language, has a "magical" - or "ethical" or "niistic" - character that cannot be understood within the limits of language.

---

" L. Wittgenstein, "Bcmerkungen über Frazers "The Golden Bough", in Rusli Rhces (cd.), *Synihese*, XVII, 1967, 233-253.

decisive between the expressible and the inexpressible. And he wonders: in this distance, does it reveal the domain of the expressible or the domain of the inexpressible?

Wittgenstein is inclined to the second hypothesis and does not fail to show his deep respect for ethics and metaphysics, as expressions of the insuppressible desire to break through the limits of language. Hence his admiration for Kierkegaard and his understanding of Heidegger. And the conclusion of *str fracture on E-three*:

Ethics, insofar as it arises from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, about what is absolutely good, what is absolutely valuable, cannot be a science. What ethics says does not add anything, in any sense, to our knowledge. But it is a testimony to a tendency of the human spirit which I personally cannot but deeply respect and which I would not for anything in the world ridicule."

---

<sup>1</sup> L. Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics" 12.



Conclusion: on the progress of metaphysics  
and our relationship with it.

---





## **Conclusion: on the progress of metaphysics and our relationship with it.**

What is our reaction - it must be asked as a conclusion - to the useless reasons given for legitimizing the emergence of the metaethics?

We must keep up with metaphysics after all the  
tion of the contemporary attempts to solve it? It must be  
recognized that in our days

-for the logical-empirical reasons extended  
by Carnap, the logico-analytical reasons shown by  
Wittgenstein, the epocal reasons evoked by Wittgenstein,  
the epocal reasons evoked by Wittgenstein, the epocal  
reasons evoked by  
by Heidegger and the historical ones indicated by  
Habermas- it is no longer possible to use the word  
"metaphysics" without entering a debatable terrain. We no  
longer have a direct relationship with the  
that metaphysics has been, nor is a relationship to metaphysics  
possible.

of simple repetition in front of it. Only the demos have a  
critical relationship.

This means, among other things, that you must

This term is used as a regulating principle or as a term of comparison to judge our post-metaphysical connotation, in which, given our system of sciences, there is no more epistemic space for an metaphysics in its proper sense. In consequence this term is considered, what is designated by it is at most an equivalent or a synonym of classical metaphysics: which is such, that is, "classical", because, being neither ancient nor modern, it is still valid, whether in antiquity or in the modern world.

In any case, we do not think of metaphysics either in a continental way or in an analytical way: we think of it in another way. We think that metaphysics, like all true philosophical problems, has no solution, but only history. It is a question of recognizing the while safeguarding the sense of radical problematization of which philosophy stirs and in which it reverts in so far as it is a "questioning everything, which is all a questioning" - and which perhaps it would be better to call "sophophilia" to indicate that it is a passion and an understanding of the spirit, as the case of Johannes Climacus teaches.

# **BERSERKER**

---

## **BOOKS**

---

