Wittgenstein and Plato on Being, Knowledge, and Forms of Life

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Résumé :

Dans le Théétète , Platon propose comme solution au « paradoxe du faux » de Parménide le contenu d'un « rêve » selon lequel il y a certains éléments primaires (*stoichea*), analogues à certains égards à des lettres, dont tout se compose et ne peut pas être décrit mais seulement nommé. La suggestion ressemble à la solution proposée par le visiteur d'Elée au problème de Parménide dans le *Sophiste* dans lequel les éléments d'un "alphabet" de grands types ou *megesta gene* entrent dans des combinaisons logiques ou « mélanges », pour produire des contenus imaginables et jugables. Comme les commentateurs l'ont remarqué, ces suggestions présentent des similitudes avec l'atomisme logique proposée par Moore, Russell et le premier Wittgenstein. Dans les *Investigations philosophiques*, cependant, Wittgenstein critique l'atomisme logique et développe à sa place une image originale de la langue, de l'institution, et la " relation" de la pensée à la réalité est fondée en fin de compte dans ce qu'il appelle de façon énigmatique " formes de vie". S'appuyant sur quelques suggestions du Philèbe et du Théétète lui-même, je soutiens que Platon remplace de la même façon la conception atomiste par la forme logique avec une compréhension des formes comme impliquées dans la dynamique de devenir d'une vie. Ceci spécifie les méthodes et les résultats de l'enquête " grammaticale " dans les formes de vie et met l'accent sur la possibilité de connexions plus profondes de motivation et de résultat entre Platon et Wittgenstein que sont habituellement observées.

ملخّص

يقترح افلاطون في محاورة تيتاتوس كحلّ لمفارقة الكذب لبارمنيدس مضمون "حلم" توجد حسبه عناصر أولية محددة تكون متشابهة بوجه من الوجوه مع أحرف بحيث يكون الكلّ متكونا منه دون امكان وصفه و انما تسميته فقط. يشبه هذا الاقتراح الحل الذي قدّمه زائر ايليا لمشكل بارمنيدس في محاورة السوفسطائي أين تدخل عناصر ابجدية ما بأحجام كبيرة في تركيبات منطقية أو "أخلاط" لابداع مضامين يمكن تخيّلها و الحكم عليها. و مثلما لاحظ ذلك الشرّاح، تمثّل هذه المقترحات تشابها مع الذرية المنطقية التي اقترحها راسل و مور وفيتجنشتاين الأول. لكن في *التحقيقات الفلسفية* ينقد فيتجنشتاين الذرية المنطقية و يقوم بتطوير صورة أصيلة للغة و المؤسسة عوضا عنها ، فتغدو العلاقة بين الفكر و الواقع متأسسة في نهاية المطاف على ما يسميه بصورة محيّرة "أشكال الحياة". و بالاعتماد على بعض الافكار الموجودة في محاورتي الفيلاب و تيتاتوس سأزعم أن افلاطون يقوم بنفس الطريقة باستبدال التصور الذري بالشكل المنطقي بشرط فهم الأشكال من حيث هي داخلة في دينامية خاصة بحياة ما. و يقيم كل هذا علاقة خاصة بين المناهج و النتائج للمبحث النحوي و اشكال الحياة و يؤكّد على امكان أن تكون الروابط في الدوافع و النتائج بين افلاطون و فيتجنشتاين أعمق مما يمكن تصوره عادة.

Abstract :

In the *Theaetetus,* Plato offers as a solution to the "falsehood paradox" of Parmenides the content of a "dream" according to which there are certain primary elements (*stoichea*), analogous in some ways to letters, of which everything is composed and which cannot be described but only named. The suggestion resembles the solution given by the Eleatic visitor to Parmenides' problem in the *Sophist* on which elements of an "alphabet" of great types or *megesta gene* enter into logical combinations or "mixtures" to produce thinkable and judgable contents. As commentators have noticed, these suggestions bear similarities to the logical atomism suggested by Moore, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein. In the *Philosophical Investigations,* however, Wittgenstein criticizes logical atomism and develops in its place an original picture of language, institution, and the "relationship" of thinking to reality, grounded ultimately in what he enigmatically calls "forms of life". Drawing on some suggestions from the *Philebus* and the *Theaetetus* itself, I argue that Plato similarly replaces the atomist conception of logical form with an understanding of forms as involved in the dynamic becoming of a life. This specifies the methods and results of "grammatical" investigation into forms of life and points to the possibility of deeper connections of motivation and result than are usually seen between Plato and Wittgenstein.

"Thinking must be something unique." When we say, *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, then, with what we mean, we do not stop anywhere short of the fact, but mean: *such-and such –is – thus-and-so.* – But this paradox (which indeed has the form of a truism) can also be expressed in this way: one can *think* what is not the case."
(Wittgenstein, *PI,* 95)

Socrates: This appearing, and this seeming but not being, and this saying things but not true things – all these issues are full of confusion, just as they always have been. It's extremely hard, Theaetetus, to say what form of speech we should use to say that there really is such a thing as false saying or believing, and moreover to utter this without being caught in a verbal conflict.
(Plato, Sophist, 236e-237a)

In the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, Plato addresses what has been called the "falsehood paradox" of Parmenides. According to the paradox, it is impossible for falsehood to exist, for to say or assert something is to say or assert something about what is, and it is therefore impossible to say or assert about what is not. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates offers what may be construed as a suggested solution to the paradox in the form of the content of a "dream": the solution is that there are certain primary elements (*stoichea*), analogous in some ways to letters, of which everything is composed and which cannot be described but only named. The actual object of understanding and judgment is then always a complex of such objects. The suggestion resembles in some respects the solution given by the Eleatic visitor to Parmenides' problem in the *Sophist*; on this solution, the possibility of false judgment is explained by reference to an "alphabet" of great types or *megesta gene* which enter into logical combinations or "mixtures" to produce thinkable and judgable contents. The possibility of falsehood is then understood as that of saying *of* what is something that *is not* (with respect to or about it). As is explicit in the *Theaetetus*, though, the solution to the problem of true and false judgment in terms of the *stoichea* is only a seeming one. For it leads to the further paradox that knowledge of the basic elements as they are in themselves must anchor all other knowledge, whereas they are themselves unknowable.

As commentators have noticed, the "dream" theory of Plato's *Theaetetus* bears very close similarities to the logical atomism suggested by Moore, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein. In the *Tractatus,* the doctrine of simple elements that can only be named is closely related to Wittgenstein's conception of "logical form" as permeating language and the world and making propositional language and judgment possible. In the *Philosophical Investigations,* however, Wittgenstein explicitly cites Plato's "dream" theory in the course of criticizing his own earlier views in the *Tractatus*. On the partial basis of this criticism, Wittgenstein develops an original picture of language, institution, and the "relationship" of thinking to reality, on which this "relationship" is grounded ultimately in what he enigmatically calls "forms of life". Drawing on some suggestions from the *Philebus* and the *Theaetetus* itself, I shall argue that Plato similarly replaces the atomist conception of logical form with an understanding of forms as ultimately involved in the dynamic becoming of a life. This points to the possibility of deeper connections and parallels than are usually seen between Plato's late conception of dialectics and Wittgenstein's conception of a form of life. More broadly, the prospects and problems

of both conceptions point to the specific methods and results of a "grammatical" investigation of the relationship between language and life.

I

In the *Sophist* and (less centrally) in the *Theaetetus*, Plato considers the so-called "falsehood" paradox of Parmenides. According to this paradox, it is impossible to speak or consider a falsehood. For any speaking or thinking must be *about something*; hence it must be about something *that is*; hence it cannot be about *what is not*, and thus it is impossible to say or consider a falsehood if a falsehood is construed as a saying or thinking of *what is not*. The initial air of sophistry that attaches to the argument is dispelled by the obvious depth of Plato's concern with the problem in the *Sophist*; at any rate, even if there are important connections between this argument and arguments given by Protagoras and other sophists, it is clear that Plato's concern here is to provide terms for a response to what he sees as the deeply challenging logical, semantic and ontological problem posed by Parmenides. In the *Sophist*, the answer, in the voice of the Eleatic Stranger or Visitor, comes in two parts. First, the problem of the *possibility* of non-being is resolved by appealing to a primitive set of *megesta gene* or "highest" types, somewhat analogous to letters of the alphabet (253a): being, motion, rest, sameness, and difference. In particular, through the limited possibility of the mixing of difference (or otherness) with the other great types, it is possible for *what is not* each of these types and thus even *non-being* actually to exist (257a-259b). The knowledge of the possibility of these great types to combine or refuse combination with each other is explicitly analogous to the "grammatical" knowledge of the combination of letters into syllables and words (253b).

Second, though, in the actually spoken *logos*, it is possible for such a statement to be false because of the way it involves at least two structural elements: a noun or name, and a verb or "indication relating to action" (*praxesin on deloma*) (262a). It is this, according to the Stranger, that introduces the minimal structure makes it possible for any sentence to say something *about* something. Given this, it is possible to analyze the false "Theaetetus flies" as saying "what is not" (i.e. flying) about something that *is* (i.e. Theaetetus) and thus as saying something that is false in the sense of being "other than what is" (*etera ton onton*) (263b). Thus both the logos "about" what is not and the actually false logos can readily be understood through their synthetic structure, and since thought can be understood as a kind of "dialogue of the soul with itself" (*autos pros eauton psuches dialogos*) this also accounts for the actual possibility of false thought. Parmenides' problem is thus resolved, on the Stranger's official solution, by means of the twofold ontological-semantic doctrine of the combinatorial mixing of, on the one hand, the pre-existing "great" logical types and, on the other, the actually signifying individual parts of speech of the spoken sentence.

The concern of the *Theaetetus* overall is with knowledge rather than being and non-being, but both the problem of falsehood and the logical-ontological structure to which the Visitor appeals in the *Sophist* nevertheless play an essential role there in connection with the attempt of Socrates and Theaetetus to distinguish knowledge from mere opinion or

belief. In particular, with respect to what may be seen as the central suggestion that is problematized in the dialogue, that knowledge might be understood as true belief that is additionally structured by or accompanied by a *logos*, the problem posed by Parmenides appears here not only in connection with the question of the possibility of falsehood but also as the problem of the specific structure of *logos* itself. At 188d-189b, Socrates presents the "falsehood paradox" in a version bearing on the possibility of a false *doxa* or opinion; the provisional conclusion is that to hold a false opinion cannot be to hold an opinion about something that is not. Socrates then considers a conception according to which the holding of a false opinion is a kind of exchanging of an opinion about one thing for an opinion about the other. Something like this might be thought to occur when one misrecognizes someone from a distance as someone else who is also previously known to one (193c); more generally, the suggestion that failures of knowledge might consist in this kind of exchange leads Socrates to propose the metaphors of the imprinted wax and the dovecote, both of which interpret the failure of knowledge as an unwitting interchange of objects of opinion which are already in a sense acquired. However, the suggestion fails, in both cases (195e-196c) with respect to abstract knowledge, for instance of numbers (198d-199a). In particular, someone who is in a state of false opinion with respect to a mathematical truth (such as that 7+5=12) must be said, on either theory, already to possess knowledge of the relevant numbers, and yet still to be lacking knowledge of them insofar as the opinion is false (200a-b). The problems with these conceptions lead Socrates finally to renew the investigation once more (200d), this time beginning not with the attempt to define false opinion but with the suggestion that knowledge is true opinion accompanied by *logos* (*meta logou alethe doxan*). On this suggestion as Theaetetus reports it, beings of which there is no *logos* are unknowable, and Socrates accordingly asks about how the distinction between the knowable and the unknowable is thereby drawn according to the presence or absence of a *logos*. This is the occasion for his account of what he calls the "dream" of the composition of all things from basic elements (*stoichea*) that are themselves without a possible *logos*:

> Socrates: Listen then to a dream in return for a dream. In my dream, too, I thought I was listening to people saying that the primary elements (*stoichea*), as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account (*logos*). Each of them, in itself, can only be named; it is not possible to say anything else of it, either that it is or that it is not. That would mean that we were addressing being or not-being to it; whereas we must not attach anything, if we are to speak of that thing itself alone. Indeed we ought not to apply to it even such words as 'itself' or 'that', 'each', 'alone', or 'this', or any other of the many words of this kind; for these go the round and are applied to all things alike, being other than the things to which they are added, whereas if it were possible to express the element itself and it had its own proprietary account (*logon*), it would have to be expressed (*legesthai*) without any other thing. As it is, however, it is impossible that any of the primaries should be expressed in an account (*rhethenai logo*); it can only be named, for a name is all that it has. But with the things composed of these, it is another matter. Here, just in the same way as the elements

themselves are woven together, so their names may be woven together and become an account of something (*logon gegomenai*)– an account being essentially a complex of names. (*onomaton gar symploke einai logou ousian*). Thus the elements are unaccountable (*aloga*) and unknowable (*agnosta*), but they are perceivable, whereas complexes are both knowable and expressible and can be the objects of true judgment. (201d-202b)

According to the solution thus suggested, as Socrates goes on to explain, it might indeed be possible for someone accidentally to acquire a true opinion about something, without possessing the *logos*; such would be a state of true opinion without knowledge. More generally (although Socrates does not say this explicitly here) it would apparently be possible, on the view, to have an opinion that is actually *about* something while the opinion is nevertheless false. In particular, given that the "dream" theory accounts for the *logos* as a combination of names standing for the simple elements from which everything is composed, it would be possible to account for the *false* logos as such a complex, in which the things signified do not in fact combine in the way that would be suggested or displayed by the structure of the *logos* itself. Construed this way, the theory would resemble the Stranger's answer to Parmenides' problem in the Sophist on several points. Like the Stranger's account, it would explain the structure of the *logos* as a combination of significant signs corresponding to elements which must be possessed or grasped in order for the *logos* to be meaningfully spoken or understood. The elements of sentences would signify basic elements of reality that must be presupposed as existing if the true or false *logos* is to be possible, just as the letters of the alphabet must be presupposed in the correct formation of syllables and words. Finally, it would apparently be possible to explain the possibility of the false logos – and thus the actual logical appearance of "what is not" – by pointing to the possibility of such a combination of signs failing to match or correspond to the way in which the elements of reality signified by the signs are in fact configured.[1]

The "dream" theory of knowledge, however, is incoherent, as Socrates swiftly goes on to show by considering (202e-206b) the central analogy that underlies it, that of the relationship of letters to the syllables they compose. The essential consideration here is that a syllable – for example the syllable "SO" which begins Socrates' name – has an articulate unity. If this articulate unity is to be understood, as on the suggestion of the dream theory, as essentially a composition of elements, then it must be necessary to know the elements before knowing the whole; but this is just what is denied by the

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[1] It is admittedly not completely clear from what Socrates presents as the "dream" theory in the *Theaetetus* that just this account of the false logos is intended, since what is under discussion by this point in the dialogue is not the possibility of falsehood but rather the structure of knowledge as true belief accompanied with a *logos*. For all that Socrates says here, it remains open in particular that a proponent of the view sees the knowledge of the various *elements* of a logos as sufficient for having a *true opinion* about the complex they jointly signify, without yet having *knowledge* about the complex itself. The case in which the elements are individually known, but the way they are combined in a *logos* fails to correspond to the way they are combined in reality, would then apparently be a case of true belief without knowledge. However, as we shall see, Socrates soon demonstrates the incoherence of this suggestion by showing that it is not possible, in this case, even to consider the case to amount to one of *truth* (or indeed even opinion) *about* the complex (which one?)

dream theory's assertion that the simplest elements are not themselves knowable (as they, according to the theory, lack a logos and are thus unknowable). Alternatively, if we affirm the simple and undecomposable unity of the syllable, then it has neither letters nor anything else as parts and is itself one of the simple and undecomposable elements which the theory claims to be unknowable. In fact, as Socrates twice argues by appealing to the actual process of learning reading and writing, there must be a "knowledge" of letters which, in one sense, "precedes" the understanding of well-formed syllables but nevertheless develops by means of the recognition and understanding of their differences. Someone who writes one name (for instance "Theaetetus") correctly, but in another case writes incorrectly by putting the wrong combination of letters for a syllable (e.g. beginning to write "Theodorus" by putting "TE…") cannot be credited with knowledge of how to spell both names. Nevertheless such a student, given her education so far, is writing with "command of the way through … letters" (dia stoicheion diezodon echon graphei), which is all that (Socrates suggests) having the *logos* can mean. In the case where she writes "Theaetetus" correctly, the student thus possesses a true opinion as well as the *logos*; but she is nevertheless not to be credited with knowledge, by previous agreement. It follows, according to Socrates, that the whole attempt to define knowledge as true opinion together with *logos* must be abandoned (208b) along with each of the other definitions previously attempted of knowledge in terms of perception or true belief alone (210a-b).

II

Commentators have noted the closeness of the apparent commitments of the "dream" theory sketched by Socrates in the *Theaetetus* to those of the "logical atomism" expounded in different forms by Moore, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein. The core of the position is the observation that truths and falsehoods have, by contrast with names or simple signs, a structure of at least some internal complexity; minimally, in order to be true or false at all, a sentence or proposition must assert something *of* something, whereas a name is not true or false but simply stands for its object. The difference suggests an ontological or metaphysical distinction between simple objects, which thus correspond to names, and facts or states of affairs which are conceived as (in some way) composed out of such objects. As Wittgenstein puts it in the *Tractatus*, "Objects can only be *named*. Signs are their representatives. I can only speak *about* them: I cannot *put them into words*. Propositions can only say *how* things are, not *what* they are." (3.221). According to Wittgenstein, furthermore a proposition is "logically articulated" (4.032) in that it consists of a structure of terms or signs standing in certain interrelations. All propositions can be analyzed into elementary propositions; an elementary proposition is a "nexus" of names. The names stand for objects and the systematic combination of names in the proposition mirrors the relations of these objects in a state of affairs (2.131-2.14). This is also the basis of the famous "picture" theory of meaning, according to which a proposition is a "logical picture" of a possible state of affairs (2.12-2.14). The proposition is true if these objects do in fact stand in these relations and false otherwise. (2.15). This implies that all states of affairs consist of such objects entering into various changing combinations (2.032); the objects

themselves, however, are fixed in their identity and timeless. Hence: "Objects are what is unalterable and subsistent; their configuration is what is changing and unstable." (2.0271). The combinations into which the objects actually enter determine the "totality of existing states of affairs" or "positive facts" which Wittgenstein calls "the world"; whereas this totality of existing states of affairs also determines "which states of affairs do not exist" (2.05) or the "negative facts" (2.06).

One commentator who points out the detailed similarities between Wittgenstein's theory and the "dream" theory of the *Theaetetus*, as well as suggests further parallels to the logical and ontological doctrines of the *Sophist*, is Gilbert Ryle. In "Logical Atomism in Plato's 'Theaetetus'", first written and delivered in 1952 but published only in 1990, Ryle argues that what the dialogue's Socrates presents is in fact a "first-rate precognitive dream" that anticipates in detail the (then) "recent" logical atomist doctrines of Meinong, Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein.[1] Further, Ryle suggests that Socrates' criticism of the "dream" theory in the dialogue points to critical problems with these contemporary doctrines, at least on some of their formulations. As Ryle notes, the distinction between types of knowing upon which the theory turns may be formulated as that between what is indicated in French by the verb "connaitre" and that which is indicated by "savoir."[2] To have knowledge of the first sort is to stand in a relation of recognition, familiarity or acquaintance to a particular thing, whereas to have knowledge of the second sort involves believing or being able to assert something that has the logical structure and complexity of a proposition, sentence, or judgment. As Ryle also notes, the distinction in this form is substantially the basis for Russell's distinction between "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description," and for Russell's attempt to explain the latter in terms of the former, construed as involving the presence or presentation of basic elements of both sensible and (at least on some of Russell's formulations) conceptual or ideal kinds. It also underlies the realist conception of the existence of facts suggested by the early Russell and (in a more exclusively "conceptual realist" version) Moore.[3] On this conception, facts are actually existing aggregates or complexes of "concepts" or other basic particulars with which sentences in some manner correspond; sentences themselves are combinations of names and the relation of names in the sentence corresponds in some way to the relation of objects in the fact.

As Ryle notes, the early versions of the view conceived of sentences as themselves a kind of complex name for facts. Thus, for instance, for Meinong and Moore facts are actually existing complexes of "objects" or "concepts" which can only be named, and sentences are complex names for these complexes. The doctrine in this form is not coherent because it cannot account for the difference between the truth and falsity of sentences. In particular, as Ryle notes, a false but meaningful sentence on this view must be conceived as a name for an (actually existing) complex of concepts or objects,

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[1] Ryle (1990), p. 46.

[2] Ryle (1990), pp. 26-27.

[3] Ryle (1990), p. 30-31, p. 36.

and then it is obscure how it differs from a truth.[1] It is then also mysterious what can be meant by the claim that someone has a false belief, since to have a belief at all must be to grasp the (actually existing) complex. This is, as Ryle notes, just once more the problem of falsehood, or of how it is possible to believe "what is not" that Plato found in Parmenides: if to believe is to accept the content of a sentence which has meaning only as the name for a complex, then to have any belief is to grasp the existence of something, and it is thus really impossible to have a false belief or to believe (in Plato's somewhat awkward terminology) "what is not". The problem appears unavoidable, as Ryle suggests, on any view that treats the significance of the sentence as a whole as a simple aggregative product of the denotative significance of its words, as the "dream" theory of the *Theaetetus* appears to do.

According to Ryle, the problem is overcome, at least partially, by the conception of the mode of significance of the sentence that Wittgenstein formulates in the *Tractatus* and of which Wittgenstein convinced Russell by the time of the latter's lectures on the "Philosophy of Logical Atomism."[2] The key idea of this conception is that, as Russell puts it, that sentences or propositions are in *no* sense names for facts and indeed that facts cannot in any sense be named (but only asserted, believed, entertained, etc.) Facts can thus, as Russell says, never be "put in the position of a logical subject"; they do not figure in judgments or beliefs as the objects of any kind of name, but rather as whole articulated contents of a sentence as a whole. This also suggests that the possible significance of a sentence cannot be understood simply in terms of the denotational objects of its several parts or any simple combination or aggregate of them; as Ryle puts it, "the significance or nonsensicalness of a sentence is something unlike and irreducible to the denotatingness of a name or of a congeries or organic complex of names."[3] In particular, as Ryle emphasizes, for Wittgenstein the significance of a (significant) sentence depends on its possessing a "logical syntax," which is not (according to Ryle), a matter of its "[consisting] of or even [containing] parts"; instead, it has a "logical form" which "permeates what is signified by its constituent phrases and words."[4] In particular, the senses of the distinguishable word or phrase parts of a sentence (denotative or otherwise) are not to be understood as contributing to the meaning of the sentence as proper compositional *parts* of it, but rather as "features" of the sentence as a whole. These features are to be understood through a consideration of the role that the individual word or sentence can play in the *variety* of true or false sentences in which they can occur meaningfully; since a word or sentence "will not significantly fit into any sentences save those the logical syntax of which reserves just the right niche for it," this structural consideration also reveals the logical syntax of the language as a whole, and thereby the underlying structural basis for the possibility of any sentence's significance.[5] Thus, according to Ryle, the "terms" distinguishable in a sentence capable of truth or falsehood are not atomic parts but rather "propositional functions" that are in

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[1] Ryle (1990), p. 36.
[2] Ryle (1990), pp. 40-42.
[3] Ryle (1990), p. 40.
[4] Ryle (1990), p. 42.
[5] Ryle (1990), p. 42.

themselves incomplete but allow of completion by means of a range of particular complements. The way in which words and phrases figure in the significance of a sentence as a whole is thus, Ryle says, more like the way that individual distinguishable sounds figure in a *spoken* syllable than it is like the way that individual letters figure in a *written* one: here, the parts which in some manner "make up" the whole are not to be distinguished at all "in advance" of the unities that they form but only retrospectively, by means of a global comparison and consideration of the similarities and differences in the significant wholes themselves.[1]

Wittgenstein's conception thus provides an alternative both to the earlier "logical atomisms" that treated sentences as denotations of facts and to the kind of simple aggregative conception of the unity of the individually denotative elements of a sentence that is apparently suggested in Socrates' formulation of the "dream" theory. Ryle accordingly suggests that Wittgenstein's holistic conception of "logical syntax" as the structural order of possible combination permeating both language and the world can be seen as at least partially responsive to the same considerations that lead Plato to reject the "dream" theory in the *Theaetetus*. In particular, the dilemma that Socrates articulates for the theory between an interpretation on which the individual letters must be known in order for their compositional unity in the syllable to be known (thus making the individual letters knowable after all) and one on which the syllable is an irreducible unity (and thus not in any significant sense composed by its letters) is at least partially overcome by Wittgenstein's conception of the significant components of the sentence as *factors* to be understood in terms of the holistic structure of sentences in the language as a whole rather than as simply aggregative parts. In this respect, Ryle can also argue convincingly that Plato is "trying to solve certain problems…which have revived in our own time," namely those about the relationship between the meaning of simple expressions such as names and that of complex expressions such as sentences.[2] Equally, looking backward from the contemporary discussion to Plato, it is clear that Wittgenstein's suggested solution to the problem of composition in terms of logical form may be read as a substantially novel contribution to the more general problem that Plato generally discusses as the problem of the unity of the "form" or *eidos* as the "one over many".

Does, however, Wittgenstein's conception actually *solve* the problem of the structure of knowledge as it is posed in the *Theaetetus*, founded (as it is) on the more basic problem of falsehood that Plato finds in Parmenides? It does not, as becomes evident if we consider once more the status of false sentences on Wittgenstein's account. According to the Tractatus, a sentence is true or false according to the "agreement or disagreement" of its sense with reality (2.222); a false sentence does not picture an actual fact (*Tatsache*) or the *existence* [*Bestehen*] of a state of affairs [*Sachverhalten*] but only a *possible* state of affairs [2]. Nevertheless, *any* state of affairs is indeed a "combination of objects" [*Verbindung von Gegenständen*) (2.01). The meaningfulness of a false sentence thus demands that it correspond to a particular combination of objects, one which

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[1] Ryle (1990), p. 42.
[2] Ryle (1990), p. 43.

(however) does not exist or subsist [*Bestehen*]. The existing and non-existing states of affairs which thus jointly make possible the truth and falsity of sentences are together located, according to Wittgenstein, within the "logical space" which is defined by the objects themselves and their possibilities of combination (1.13, 2.0123-2.01244, 2.11). The possible falsity of propositions thus requires reference to a range of possible states of affairs within logical space which are apparently well-defined as combinations but do not actually exist (in the sense of *Bestehen*). This demand is, at least, puzzling, since it appears to require a kind of shadowy domain of structured complexes that both do (in one sense) and do not (in another sense) exist, and thus to replicate in a certain way the paradox suggested by Parmenides. Here, the structural requirement of the more general domain of "logical space" extending beyond the world of actually existing facts also thus appears to replicate the existential problem involved in the earlier logical atomist theories that saw propositions as names, despite the deep repudiation of this account of the significance of sentences in Wittgenstein's account.

It might certainly be responded, on behalf of Wittgenstein's conception, that what is involved in the meaningfulness of a false sentence is not some shadowy object which both does and does not actually exist, but rather only the structural *possibility* of a configuration of objects which assuredly do exist but do not enter into just this configuration. Indeed, as Wittgenstein makes clear, the determinacy of sense and thus the whole possibility of determinate truth and falsity is ensured, on his conception, by the necessarily existing simple objects which are "given" along with all *possible* states of affairs (2.0214). However, that this does not really solve Plato's problem can be seen by considering, once more, how a false belief, corresponding to a possible but not actual state of affairs, is related to knowledge (or the lack thereof) of the objects which make it up. On Wittgenstein's conception, to understand a false sentence (and hence to incorrectly believe one) it is apparently necessary to know the various objects referred to by its constituent names in the sense that one knows the logical-formal possibilities of their combinations with all other objects. If one is in a position to know *all* objects in this way, all *possible* states of affairs can thus also known as *possibilia*. True sentences are then distinguished from false but meaningful ones according to whether or not they structurally correspond to those *possibilia* (known in this sense) that are in fact actual. However, what is known in knowing such a state of affairs *is* actual (as opposed to merely possible) is not explained or explainable, on pain of infinite regress, in terms of the knowledge of any *further* obtaining state of affairs or existing object. If it were, then to know a fact which is composed of several objects would require either knowing another simple object (viz., the actually existing fact) which is in no way composed of these objects after all, or would require knowing another fact about this complex (viz., that *this particular complex of objects actually exists*), whereby knowing any one fact would require knowing an infinite number of facts. For the same reason, it is not possible, on this account, to distinguish between knowledge and (accidentally) true belief by reference to any further element of justification or rational accounting (such as what Plato canvasses as the *logos*).

It is thus clear that, while the atomism of the *Tractatus* improves admirably over the earlier logical atomist pictures in its account of the possible truth and falsity of sentences as rooted in the structural, logical-syntactical form of language, the conception is nevertheless not able to overcome the problem posed by Plato's inquiry in the Theaetetus if this problem is put as a problem of the conditions and structure of *knowledge.* It is true that Wittgenstein's main concern in the *Tractatus* was not with epistemology but rather with the logical form of language and world that must (as he thought at that time) exist in order to make any significant language possible. Nevertheless, the considerations that come to the fore by considering the bearing of Plato's problem about knowledge on the *Tractatus* theory also serve to cast real doubt on the actual coherence of Wittgenstein's Tractarian picture of the meaning of language and the nature of objects as jointly "given" all at once and *a priori*, along with the structure of all possible states of affairs, through the specification of the logical form that "permeates" both language and world. Here, as we have seen, doubts may well arise, not only with respect to the problematic ontological status of the domain of possible but not actual states of affairs, but about the very intelligibility of the supposition of a total (*a priori*) givenness or availability of necessarily existing objects, about which nothing can (officially) be said, but which is sufficient nevertheless to determine the totality of logical space and thus the total order of factual possibilities.

It is these doubts and ones closely related to them that lead Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, explicitly to rehearse the "dream" theory in the course of his own critical consideration of his earlier views in the *Tractatus* and the problematic philosophical tendencies he now sees them as representing:

> 46. What lies behind the idea that names really signify simples? --

Socrates says in the *Theaetetus*: "If I am not mistaken, I have heard some people say this: there is no explanation of the *primary elements* – so to speak – out of which we and everything else are composed; for everything that exists in and of itself can be *signified* only by names; no other determination is possible, either that it *is* or that it *is not* . . . But what exists in and of itself has to be . . . named without any other determination. In consequence, it is impossible to give an explanatory account of any primary element, since for it, there is nothing other than mere naming; after all, its name is all it has. But just as what is composed of the primary elements is itself an interwoven structure, so the correspondingly interwoven names become explanatory language; for the essence of the latter is the interweaving of names."

> Both Russell's 'individuals' and my 'objects' (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) were likewise such primary elements.

As we have seen, the "dream" theory which Wittgenstein here quotes substantially replicates the solution of the *Sophist*'s Eleatic Stranger to the problem of non-being. The position is once more grounded in a consideration of the structure of the *logos*, which is here translated as "explanatory account" and "explanatory language" (the

German translation that Wittgenstein used has "erklärungsweise zu reden" and "erklärenden Rede" for λόγῳ and λόγον), as composed out of simpler elements that in themselves can only be named; and according to the theory, it is on the basis of an understanding or knowledge of the elements and their specific compositional unity that one can understand a sentence whether it is true or false. This is again at least analogous, Wittgenstein suggests, with the position of the *Tractatus* on the relation between objects and the states of affairs and facts they constitute; and he proceeds to interrogate its basis by asking what can really be meant by such "simple constituent parts." For as he now points out, "composite" has many meanings, and there need not be any single, unique order of decomposition for the meaning of any sentence or for any object or configuration of objects (47). Even if we compose a figure in strict accordance with the account given in the *Theaetetus* (48), there are still a variety of ways to decompose it; for instance, we might take the individual spatial parts as distinct individuals, or we might simply take the properties or "universals" (such as distinct colors) as its constituents. The thought underlying the claim that it is impossible to attribute either being or non-being to the elements was that everything that we can rightly call "being " and "non-being" consists in the existence or non-existence of connections between the simple objects (50), so that it makes no sense to speak of the being or non-being of an element by itself. However, the simple element – about which it is supposed to be nonsense to say either that it exists or does not exist – is in this respect analogous to instruments and paradigms used in the practice of language, for instance the standard metre-stick in Paris, about which it is nonsense either to say or to deny that it is one metre long. Thus: "What looks as if it *had* to exist is part of the language. It is a paradigm in our game; something with which comparisons are made. And this may be an important observation; but it is none the less an observation about our language-game – our mode of representation." (50).

In a somewhat parallel passage in the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein considers explicitly the relationship between the problem of thinking what is false and the motivations for the Tractatarian account of simple objects:

> " 'How can one think what is not the case? If I think that King's College is on fire when it is not on fire, the fact of its being on fire does not exist. Then how can I think it? How can we hang a thief who doesn't exist?' Our answer could be put in this form: 'I can't hang him when he doesn't exist; but I can look for him when he doesn't exist'.
>
> We are here misled by the substantives 'object of thought' and 'fact', and by the different meanings of the word 'exist'.
>
> Talking of the fact as a 'complex of objects' springs from this confusion (cf. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*). Supposing we asked: 'How can one imagine what does not exist?' The answer seems to be: 'If we do, we imagine non-existent combinations of existing elements'. A centaur doesn't exist, but a man's head and torso and arms and a horse's legs do exist. 'But can't we imagine an object

utterly different from any one which exists?' – We should be inclined to answer: "No; the elements, individuals, must exist. If redness, roundness and sweetness did not exist, we could not imagine them".

But what do you mean by 'redness exists'? My watch exists, if it hasn't been pulled to pieces, if it hasn't been destroyed. What would we call 'destroying redness'? We might of course mean destroying all red objects; but would this make it impossible to imagine a red object? (p. 31)

The demand for simple elements which can only be named is based upon the thought that such elements *must* exist as a precondition for any meaningful thought or imagining of what does not exist. This is intimately connected with the conception of the proposition as a concatenation of such names, and hence with the thought that the descriptive or assertive work of the proposition must be secondary to the provision of meanings for such names. Together, these two thoughts led the early Wittgenstein – and may have led Plato, *if* we may identify his own view with that of the Eleatic Stranger and with the "dream" of Socrates – to understand all being as well as discourse to be jointly preconditioned by the simple elements and to posit these as eternal, unchanging existents. But the deconstruction of this assumption of constant, standing presence begins with the observation, that if it is meaningless to say of these supposed elements that they are destroyed, it is also meaningless to say that they are indestructible; if they cannot be supposed to arise and vanish in time, then it is also meaningless to attribute to them the a priori status of eternal existence. This does not mean that the basic elements simply do not exist, but rather that we can gain a better understanding of their mode of existence and even their temporal structure only by considering their role as *instruments* and *paradigms* within the complex whole of words, objects, and actions that Wittgenstein calls a "language-game." This role involves both the "simple objects" and the words for them serving as standards of evaluation and measurement against which other items are compared and discussed.

As Wittgenstein notes, the ideology that may lead us to posit elemental objects as eternal, *a priori* existents is also closely connected to the conception of the meanings or senses of sentences as "shadowy" non-physical objects whose own mode of existence is timeless or eternal:

The next step we are inclined to take is to think that as the object of our thought isn't the fact it is a shadow of the fact. There are different names for this shadow, e.g. "proposition", "sense of the sentence".

But this doesn't remove our difficulty. For the question now is: "How can anything be the shadow of a fact which doesn't exist?"

I can express our trouble in a different form by saying: "How can we know what a shadow is a shadow of?" –The shadow would be some sort of portrait; and

> therefore I can restate our problem by asking: "What makes a portrait a portrait of Mr. N?" (p. 32)

Here, Wittgenstein once again formulates the question that motivates Plato in responding to the Parmenidean problem of non-being. Put one way, this is nothing other than the problem of intentionality itself, which must apparently be solved if it is possible to account for the pseudo *logos* or the proposition *about* what does not exist. We can indeed, on Wittgenstein's account in the *Blue Book,* think of the picture of what does not exist as a kind of picture; to this extent at least, the 'picture' theory of the Tractatus was not mistaken. It is also not incorrect, according to Wittgenstein, to say that what makes a portrait (say of a particular person) into a portrait of *that* person is the intention with which it is painted or employed. Nevertheless, as he now very clearly recognizes, there can be no account of the pictorial "aboutness" of portraits *or* of propositions that rests simply on pictorial, representational, or mimetic individual relationships of similitude between the pictures and the things (or facts) pictured.[1] This leads him to raise anew the problem of what is basically meant by "intention":

> An obvious, and correct, answer to the question "What makes a portrait the portrait of so-and-so?" is that it is the *intention*. But if we wish to know what it means "intending this to be a portrait of so-and-so" let's see what actually happens when we intend this. … To intend a picture to be the portrait of so-and-so (on the part of the painter, e.g.) is neither a particular state of mind nor a particular mental process. But there are a great many combinations of actions and states of mind which we should call "intending . . ."[2]

Here, Wittgenstein does not at all (as is sometimes suggested) deny the existence of intentionality as a state, action or attitude of the mind, or even its applicability in answering the question about the source of "aboutness." But he emphasizes that "intending" the portrait to be a portrait of someone does not consist in the presence of a single or *particular* mental state; rather there are, in varying circumstances, widely various mental states, as well as actions, which we will call "intending" the portrait to be a portrait of a certain person, or connect to such intending. As Ryle discusses in his own treatment of the conditions under which Plato's problem has reappeared in recent

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[1] The shadow [of the sentence] , as we think of it, is some sort of picture; in fact, something very much like an image which comes before our mind's eye; and this again is something not unlike a painted representation in the ordinary sense. A soruce of the idea of the shadow certainly is the fact that in some cases saying, hearing, or reading a sentence brings images before our mind's eye, images which more or less strictly correspond to the sentence, and which are therefore, in a sense, translations of this sentence into a pictorial language.—But it is absolutely essential for the picture which we imagine the shadow to be that it is what I shall call a "picture by similarity". I don't mean by this that it is a picture similar to what it is intended to represent, but that it is a picture which is correct only when it is similar to what it represents. One might use for this kind of picture the word 'copy'. Roughly speaking, copies are good pictures when they can easily be mistaken for what they represent. …If we keep in mind the possibility of a picture which, though correct, has no similarity with its object, the interpolation of a shadow between the sentence and reality loses all point. For now the sentence itself can serve as such a shadow. The sentence is just such a picture, which hasn't the slightest similarity with what it represents." (Wittgenstein (1958), pp. 36-37).

[2] Wittgenstein (1958), p. 32.

discourse, the early proponents of anti-psychologism, including not only Frege but the advocates of the earlier form of "logical atomism" such as Meinong, Moore, and the early Russell, tend to identify the intentional "meaning" of mental states and processes as well as sentences with ideal propositional contents, "Platonistically" construed as timeless and unchanging. Here, this solution is off the table, since the total *a priori* availability of a space of all possible propositional contents (such as figured in the Tractatus picture of the basis of propositional sense) is to be rejected as what can now only be seen as a fantasy of the joint institution of language and the world of objects in advance of any historically or factually existing language or practice. Rather than being fixed in advance by the formal correspondence between the structural orders of language and the world, the intention to paint a portrait of a certain individual, or the "relation" in which consists the "aboutness" of a sentence toward its object or objects, is *shown* in a wide variety of different and heterogeneous actions, expressions, and practices unfolding in the varied circumstances and occasions of human life. These differ from case to case and there is no *single*, essential relationship that holds between each sentence or portrait and the object it is "about." If, indeed, we remain tempted to maintain that there must be some specific mental state in which intentionality consists, we need only conceive of that state as a sign (this is, at any rate, how it will function) in order to see that any such item is open to *multiple* interpretations and so cannot, all by itself, specify how we are to understand it.

We are, here, in the close vicinity of the two most important interrelated skeins of argument in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the so-called "rule-following considerations" and "private language argument." The first argues that, since every actual visual or symbolic expression of a rule can have multiple interpretations, how it is correct to follow a rule cannot be determined by any such expression. Rather, it is determined in the complex course of the various events and occurrences which can be called "following the rule" in the course of a life. The "private language argument" shows that the idea of a language consisting solely of signs private to, and privately interpreted by, an individual agent or subject is conceptually incoherent; it is thus impossible to suppose the act of *meaning* something by a (public) word or sentence to be accomplished by means of the presence of such a sign, or indeed by means of the presence of any essentially private mental state or occurrence. Meaning is rather, as is suggested by the current example, shown in a vast and diverse set of circumstances and occurrences unfolding in the course of a human life.

III

The later Wittgenstein thus replaces the *Tractatus*' logical atomist conception of an *a priori* given order of necessarily existing objects, fixed in advance by the determination of the "logical form" that permeates language and world, with the more variegated activities, institutions and practices of a linguistically shaped human life. This replacement is sometimes seen as demanding the abandonment of the very idea of an illuminating philosophical investigation into the underlying structure of language, as if the actual heterogeneity of practices and "linguistic" activities meant that there is just

nothing to say, in general, about their structure or basis, or as if the traditional ambitions of philosophy to positive illumination must therefore simply give way in favor of a reflexive and self-consuming practice of "therapy." But as I shall argue briefly in closing, the later Wittgenstein does not in fact abandon the idea of an (at least) relatively *unitary* investigation into the dimension of what is given in advance of philosophical investigation or that of a specific methodology of positive philosophical inquiry corresponding to it. In particular, Wittgenstein writes in the "Fragment" on "Philosophy of Psychology" that he may have intended to be appended to the *Philosophical Investigations*:

> What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life.*[1]

The terminology of "forms of life" [*Lebensformen*] that Wittgenstein employs here is enigmatic, and it is nowhere clearly explicated or defined in the text. Nevertheless, it is possible to see in it a development rather than outright replacement of the earlier conception of "logical form" as the basic structural presupposition of language and meaning, and indeed to see in it the specific structure of the "one over many" that Plato himself understands as that of the form (*eidos*).[2] To this conception of what is given in advance of philosophical reflection, there also corresponds, as I shall argue, the particular conception of method that the late Wittgenstein specifies as that of "grammatical" investigation. Further, this particular methodological conception bears some suggestive similarities to what the later Plato himself appears to understand as the practice of dialectic and applies, for example in the *Philebus*, to the investigation of the structure or nature of the best kind of human life.

At *PI* 90, just after recalling the form of Augustine's puzzle about time (that it is something that one seems to know when no one asks, but when one is asked to explain it, one does not know), Wittgenstein specifies the kind of investigation that it is possible to undertake in view of this kind of problem as a "grammatical" one:

> We feel as if we had to *see right into* phenomena: yet our investigation is directed not towards *phenomena*, but rather, as one might say, towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena. What that means is that we call to mind the *kinds of statement* that we make about phenomena. So too, Augustine calls to mind the different statements that are made about the duration of events, about their being past, present or future. (These are, of course, not *philosophical* statements about time, the past, the present and the future.)

Our inquiry is therefore a grammatical one. And this inquiry sheds light in our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, brought about, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of our language. – Some of them can be removed by

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[1] Wittgenstein (2009), p. 238.
[2] Compare chapter 1 of my (2012), "An Investigation into Forms of Life"

substituting one form of expression for another; this may be called 'analysing' our forms of expression, for sometimes this procedure resembles taking a thing apart.

What does it mean that the investigation that illuminates the traditional problems of philosophy and clears away the misunderstandings that typically accompany them, though it no longer takes the form of an elucidation of the fixed order of *a priori* possibilities, nevertheless remains a "grammatical" one? As Wittgenstein says, it operates by reminding us of the forms of expression of our own language, something about which we indeed already know in a way, though without necessarily being able to explain it in the fixed forms of definitions or rules. "Grammar," here, thus does not any longer mean a fixed structural order of linguistic elements defined by their rule-governed possibilities of combination, but rather the complex form of our language as we learn it and use it in the diverse circumstances of a life. That a language *can* be learned, and that its learning is not (for the late Wittgenstein) a matter of the internalization of such a fixed order of possibilities, or the grasping of its basis in the necessary existence of simple elements whose regular possibilities of combination determine it, marks the specific way in which the investigation into its "grammar" that recalls to mind its possibilities of expression also illuminates its grounding in the kind of unity that he characterizes as a form of life. This is why, in the passages of the *Investigations* that have been called the "rule-following considerations," Wittgenstein's attention constantly returns to the question of learning: of what actually goes on when someone can be said to "grasp" the rule, to understand the meaning, to know how to go on, to have "mastered" a technique.[1] When a student is said to "be able" to go on in this sense, she may have grasped some particular symbolic expression, or had a peculiar kind of mental experience; but no symbolic expression, no particular experience, is able to account by itself for the unlimited application of the rule to an infinite number of cases. There is thus no answer to be given to the question of *what* must be grasped, what item must be known or internalized, what expression or symbol must be 'seen', in order to 'master' a technique of completing a series, in order to "grasp " the system (*PI* 155), in order to "understand" a linguistic expression, in order to *really* read (*PI* 156-171) as opposed to reciting from memory or making up sounds as one's eyes move across the page. There is no fixed line, in the learning of the technique of reading, between the cases in which one has "really" applied the technique and the case in which one has not; rather, there is a whole series of transitional cases (*PI* 161) and the knowledge of "how to go on" cannot be explained in terms of any *item* present to mind or consciousness. On the contrary, in each of these cases, what is called "learning" and what is called "knowing" are both grounded in the complex unity and circumstances of the "custom" [*Gepflogenheit*], "use" [*Gebrauch*], or institution [*Institution*] of a language (*PI* 199) and it is *this* kind of unity that a "grammatical" investigation brings to light.

The negative aporetic outcome of the *Theaetetus* discussion of knowledge can itself be read as pointing toward a positive investigation of this kind. In particular, as we have seen, the dilemma that Socrates poses for the atomist "dream" theory renders untenable

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[1] PI 150-151.

any account on which the combinatorial basis of propositional or rational knowledge lies in the primitive grasping of simple elements that cannot be known in this way. It is thus impossible, as Socrates argues, to maintain that knowledge of facts or propositions rests on the *prior* "grasping" of particulars; rather, as in the case of learning the "technique" of composing syllables from letters, the significance of the individual elements is learned only in connection with, and alongside, the learning of their significant combinations. At the same time, as Socrates emphasizes at 207e-208b, that a student can be credited with mastery of the *technique* or *method* of composing syllables from letters does not establish that he has knowledge of *all of them* individually, or exclude that he will at least occasionally make mistakes with respect to particular ones. This shows, as Socrates points out (208a-b), that if the kind of "knowing" involved in having mastery of the technique is thought of as consisting in the grasping of a *logos* in addition to correct opinion, then the formula will not explain knowledge of the particular cases, nor suffice to differentiate between knowledge and ignorance with respect to them. Conversely, and as a further implication, what it is to "grasp" the technique in general is neither to be correct in every instance nor to come to know an item which underlies or accounts for correct judgment in *every* case. The consideration that finally demands, at the end of the *Theaetetus* investigation, that knowledge cannot be treated as any specific addition of the *logos* to true belief thus directly parallels the upshot of Wittgenstein's own inquiry into the knowledge of "how to go on." In both cases, the methodological result is that the analytical investigation of the ingredients of knowledge, initially conceived as the inquiry into a fixed order of structural possibilities given in advance by the grasping of the simple elements from which all knowledge is composed, must cede to a more holistic reflection on the role played by the ideas of technique, method, mastery and practice in the complex institutions of knowledge, language, and meaning.

Beyond this negative parallel, there are at least some suggestions in Plato's last texts of a positive methodology that itself closely resembles the method of Wittgenstein's "grammatical" investigation in its direction toward the illumination of philosophical problems by reflection on the linguistic contours of a form of life. These suggestions specify what Plato describes there as the dialectic, which is itself closely connected, in the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Philebus* with the methodology that he there terms that of "division" or "collection and division" (*synthesis* and *diaeresis*). The methodology is also specified, both in the *Sophist* (253b) and in the *Philebus* (17b) as a *grammatical* one, and in both cases the analogy which is already suggested in the *Theaetetus* between the kind of knowledge involved in the dialectic and the knowledge of the combinations of letters into syllables is explicitly repeated. In the *Sophist*, after introducing the analogy between the grammatical knowledge of the mixing of letters and the possible mixing or commingling of the "great types" such as rest and motion with one another, the Eleatic Stranger specifies the "knowledge" (*epistemes*) involved in dialectic as the knowledge involved in "adequately discriminating a single form spread out through a lot of other things" and also being able to "discriminate forms that are different from each other but are included within a single form that's outside them, or a single form that's connected

as a unit through many whose, or many forms that are completely separate from others." (253b)

This description of method, though it resembles in significant ways Wittgenstein's own description of a linguistic or grammatical methodology dedicated to producing "that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'" and yields a "surveyable presentation" or "overview" of the use of our words, (*PI* 122) also still has in view, as we have seen, the fixed vocabulary of basic or primary *elements* (here, the "great types") whose mixing is appealed to in order to explain the very possibility of change, non-being, and falsehood. However things stand with Plato's own views or preferred methods, the Eleatic Stranger himself, we may surmise, has not yet learned the lesson of Socrates' dilemma for atomism in the *Theaetetus*.

Things are, however, quite different in the *Philebus*. Here, Socrates himself reappears as the protagonist of a penetrating and theoretically involved discussion dedicated to the identification of the best kind of life and yielding the conclusion that this best life is directed neither to pleasure (*hedone*) nor to knowledge (*phronesis*) but to an orderly *mixture* of the two. The description of the dialectical method that Socrates gives near the beginning of the dialogue, though it again repeats the metaphor of the knowledge of grammatical differentiation and combination, points to a quite different basis for the possibility of this knowledge, one grounded now not in the pre-existence of a static set of primarily existing elements, but in the initial isolation of these elements from an even more basic *dynamic* of becoming. Here, the *logos* is no longer a static aggregation or combination of fixed elements, but rather that through which "the same thing flits around, becoming one and many in all sorts of ways, in whatever it may be that is said at any time, both long ago and now." (15d) And this condition of the *logos*, which "will never come to an end, nor has … just begun," determines the proper dialectical conception of the form of a life essentially shaped by it. As Socrates suggests in describing the method that is indeed responsible, like a kind of "gift of the gods to men," for "everything in any field of art (*technes*) that has ever been discovered," it demands a conception of grammar that is appropriate to this ceaseless becoming of one and many, and thus to the question of the kind of dynamic flux that is characteristic of language itself in reflecting the being of whatever is:

> And the people of old, superior to us and living in closer proximity to the gods, have bequeathed us this tale, that whatever is said to be consists of one and many, having in its nature limit and unlimitedness. Since this is the structure of things, we have to assume there is in each case always one form for every one of them, and we must search for it, as we will indeed find it there. And once we have grasped it, we must look for two, as the case would have it, or if not, for three or some other number. And we must treat every one of those further unities in the same way, until it is not only established of the original unit that it is one, many and unlimited, but also how many kinds it is. (16c-d)

The method can indeed be made clearer, as Socrates goes on to explain, by analogy to the process of learning the letters of the alphabet. But – and here is the crucial difference from the method of the Stranger in the *Sophist*, as well as the one suggested by the "dream" theory of the *Theaetetus* – here this learning does not consist in the grasping of fixed elements, but is rather to be understood as a more original and basic *introduction* of limit and differentiation the inherently infinite continuum of sound. For, though "the boundless multitude …in any and every kind of subject leaves you in boundless ignorance, and makes you count for nothing and amount to nothing," one who has gained the ability to discriminate the discrete vocal sounds that are identified with letters, or analogously to distinguish the intervals and discrete notes from boundless sound, is able to acquire expertise and wisdom with respect to grammar and music (17c-e). According to Socrates, it is, moreover, an inherent aspect of this kind of knowledge of letters that "none of us could gain any knowledge of a single one of them, taken by itself without understanding them all" without also gaining the art that "somehow unifies them all," what is called the art of grammar (*grammatike technen*). (18d).

It is in this way, and related ones, that the latest Plato appears to abandon or criticize the conception of the grammatical art of dialectic as the art of discerning the structural fixed order of already differentiated and static forms in favor of the more dynamical conception that relates it rather to the endless flux and becoming that seems to characterize the *logos*, in itself, prior to and as a condition of any such differentiation. This dynamical conception of the discernment of forms in terms of limit and the unlimited provides an alternative to any interpretation of Plato as holding our knowledge of the forms to be ascribable to a singular grasping or mystical insight beyond or before the specific structure of language itself, and is one of the ways, among others, that the problematic of temporal becoming may be thought to re-enter Plato's conception of method, in the last dialogues, in a renewed and transformative way. Furthermore, I have ventured to suggest, it marks the specific way, in the *Philebus*, that the problem of the inherent structure of the *logos* is essentially linked to the dynamic temporality of unlimited becoming within which a human life is irreducibly situated. Here, then, it might be suggested, not only that common ground can be found between Plato and Wittgenstein (quite to the contrary of the usual interpretation of the latter as a radical "anti-Platonist") at the problematic point of their shared concern with the appropriate investigative and reflective means for the formal clarification of a linguistically shaped life, but also that this common ground provides a potentially useful methodological hint for at least one possible continuance of the "traditional" philosophical inquiry into being, becoming, knowledge, and truth today.

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