

Wittgenstein and the ladder metaphor

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The ladder metaphor appears, as is well known, at the very end of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, in 6.54, which is both the last elucidation (*Erläuterung*) of the proposition 6, which gives the general form of the proposition in terms of truth functional symbolism, and the last elucidation of sub proposition 6.5, which begins to suggest, in this frame of propositionnal realm of sense, a strong necessity of saving, within the expression and teaching of philosophical thought and activity, an absolute sense of « *showing* », « *Zeigen* » as irreducible not only to saying « *Sagen* » inside the realm of language, or logic, but to the whole sphere of *Sprache* itself. To this kind of « *Unaussprechliches* », unspeakable, which is said in 6.522 to be given as « *das Mystische* », the silence is the only way left for both its *thought*, conducted from logic to « *Gefühl* », seeing the world as a limited whole and as such qualified of « *mystical* » (*Mystische*) (6.45), and even for the specific form of logico- philosophical *activity* which can be a teaching, conducting the genuinely understanding reader to transcend every form of « *sinnvoll* » language, for example the scientific one, not only towards « *sinnlos* » propositions of Logic, whose way of showing a form is still informative on the way « *how* » things are in the world, but towards that place where the question is « *that* » the world as a whole exists, and where its sense, evocating both ancient theology, ethics and esthetics, can only be beyond the facts, seen as « *the higher* », « *das Höhere* »¹, and as such both greeted and conquered in silence, not in language.

This ladder metaphor gives therefore, as is strongly suggested by its logical context, a metaphorical content to the idea of this kind of absolute overhanging point, where the thinking reader is conducted by the master to transcend, trespass, « *überwinden* »² at the end of TLP's wending through philosophical propositions, this whole teaching itself, finally recognized as a realm of nonsense (*unsinnig*). It is only when transcending these propositions that the genuine reader or student will see the world aright (*dann sieht er die Welt richtig*). The last proposition, proposition 7, is then both explicitly the last word of the book and looking like the last step of a thinking activity conducted to an absolute

term. Nothing will elucidate it, it alone is followed by nothing, no « *remark* »³ of any kind: not because the totality of sense has been expressed, but because on the contrary this totality seems open to an immensity of silence. « *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen* »

If that absolutely new way of seeing the world aright is certainly the true expression of both the two things Wittgenstein said in TLP's Preface that gave his work a value (« *wenn diese Arbeit einen Wert hat* »), it links the two of them : expressing thoughts, and ,more, expressing thoughts whose *truth* is given as « *unassailable and definitive* » (*unantastbar und definitiv*)⁴, as well as seeing at the end their philosophical elucidation as nonsense: « *Meine Sätze erläutern dadurch, dass sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als unsinnig erkennt* » (My propositions are elucidations in that anyone who understands me recognizes them in the end as nonsense)⁵. But we may say more: not only do we have to link thinking true thoughts and mystical feeling by internal relations; but these relations are as practical as well as theoretical, or rather they are the result of a conception of thinking itself as an activity. And as this activity is that of the free thought, acting on itself and not, or not first, on external world, it links the truth to its teaching, or effective conquest, *Lehre* intended not as a *Lehrbuch* or body of doctrine, but as itself a free *Tätigkeit*. And it is in in this sense only that its results are here too equivalent to its basis, as is in Logic the case. The ladder is not a dispensable equipment .We don't only need it to climb to the higher point of view on the world, it is neither a dispensable composant of thinking itself even at its greatest height, and « *throwing away the ladder after he has climbed up it* », the proper activity of recognizing nonsense in the end, might well be not that successfull but irreversible ascension towards another world, the one of silence, but that always recurring way of ever climbing the ladder of language and thought, which is intended, as well as an « *Überwindung* » of the world of facts, as a right apprehension of the substantial eternity which in them and through them, can lead to no real surprise and no transcendant world of silence.

We shall then limit our exposition to an attempt

to explain this status of « throwing away the ladder after he (the one who understands Wittgenstein) has climbed up it ». It engages however to a parting point between recent interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Different recent ways of discussing the obviously questionable « resolute » interpretation of *Unsinn* in TLP⁶, have been advanced to the effect of somewhere restauring the logical background⁷, somewhere saving the late philosophy or its continuity with the one illustrated in TLP without being compelled to the kind of « ordinary realism » which was the other face of the resolute interpretation⁸. We shall try to give, or indicate, some new arguments for restauring both this logical background through the whole work, and a strong coherence between TLP and the late philosophy. These new arguments may be found if we look at the german and austrian context, rather than the sole english, and specially russellian, one. They naturally take place in the context of our Symposium and the links it chose to stress between thinking, doing and teaching in philosophy, and which seems to be a possible meeting point between our two oriental and occidental traditions.

The ladder metaphor and the logical background. Logico philosophical activity and mystical feeling.

If the ladder metaphor is as old as western philosophy, and attested through the sceptical schools in Greece, it certainly conveys a quite new signification in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. This being precisely due to the fact that the practical, or even speculative sense, which we stressed in Introduction, seems at first sight occulted in TLP by a new conception of logical language, which is not only written in a new logic, the one inherited from Frege and Russell, as distinct or even very far from aristotelian formal logic, but still written in that austere *formal* logical style we learnt from Aristotle and which, as such, seems not necessarily understandable as a theory of being or a school for practical life, which the positivist forms of philosophy learnt many logicians to treat as distinct, if not foreign realms of thought.

In the Preface of *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein said he was indebted to Frege's and Russell's works for « much of the stimulation of (his) thoughts »⁹, in the same place he was admitting his lack of interest for any claim of originality as well of scholarship. And he was indeed first read, appreciated and divulgated, through the circles of mathematical logicians and philosophers of science. The clearest

sign of this being the famous Introduction of Russell for TLP. If it obviously failed to meet Wittgenstein's agreement, it alone permitted the publication, as Ficker obviously failed to understand the arguments Wittgenstein exposed in some more explicit words than in TLP itself for considering the book as a book of philosophy, whose more important, though unwritten part, was ethical or even speculative in the deepest sense of the word. Another sign of this reception of the TLP among new logicians rather than traditional philosophers, would of course be the story of the complex, and finally as unhappily ending as in Russell's case, relations between Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle.¹⁰

For Russell, Carnap, and many more contemporary readers, the first Wittgenstein appears as a « logicist », or a defender of a kind of philosophy as « philosophy of language », or, under a more recent label, a great name of « early analytical philosophy ». It is highly questionable. Not only for the reasons we shall present later on, say the cultural german background as well as the utterly original renewal of a greek sense of sceptical philosophy we may learn in Wittgenstein: these reasons might give a true, philosophical and not circumstantial explanation for the recurrent feeling Wittgenstein was to confess, as well as regards Russell and Moore in Cambridge as Carnap in the positivist areas of the Vienna Circle, to be radically misunderstood. And a misunderstanding leading to personal as well as theoretical break.¹¹ This way of approaching Wittgenstein was, and remains, questionable even from the logical point of view, and regarding its primordial importance for the whole work. To put it more precisely, it is the sense of the ladder itself which seems to be misunderstood here, not only the kind of philosophical attitude implied in that use of a logical ladder.

What are indeed exactly the rungs of the ladder? What is the ladder which we are invited to throw away at the end of TLP, when we have understood it, that is when the climbing is over, the activity lead to its final term? The rungs are the propositions of the book. The ladder its philosophy « *Meine Sätze erläutern dadurch, dass sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als unsinnig erkennt, wenn er durch sie-auf ihnen-über sie hinausgestiegen ist. (Er muss sozusagen die Ladder wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist.)* » These propositions are the propositions of TLP, they are elucidatory, clarifying, not scientific nor logical ones. If philosophy is defined by a

certain use and nature of language, it is a critical, not a dogmatic one « *Alle Philosophie ist « Sprachkritik* », « All philosophy is a « critique of language ». Even if the quotation marks are immediately precised « *Allerdings nicht im Sinne Mauthners* », and if it is immediately suggested to fetch the tools of this critical use in Russell's analysis of language. The aim of philosophy is « *logische Klärung der Gedanken* », and it is why « *Die Philosophie ist keine Lehre, sondern eine Tätigkeit* » This clarifying activity seems to be the very content of philosophy « *Ein philosophisches Werk besteht wesentlich aus Erläuterungen* », « a philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations ». And these elucidations do not contribute to a doctrinal content, they aim at a clarifying activity « *Das Resultat der Philosophie sind nicht « philosophische Sätze », sondern das Klarwerden von Sätzen* ». This clarification seen as the result of an activity of thinking, and as we shall see, may be as an inner, not outer result of a necessary uncessant activity, may use propositions, philosophical propositions, which, far from beeing any kind of description of a perfect language, in the way Russell and Carnap will assimilate philosophy and logic of science, retrospectively appear as « *unsinnig* », nonsense.¹²

As regards the logical rungs of the ladder, which obviously can't be assimilated, even retrospectively, as pieces of nonsense, they rather give way to « *sinnlos* » propositions. And it may be argued that Wittgenstein did have many reasons for thinking he was misunderstood as well by Russell's critical remarks on the mystical, and Carnap's ones on the elucidatory method. Both of them seem to think that the necessity of silence or the impossibility of philosophy as a doctrine are in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* a consequence both of an insufficient logical analysis, or even a logical flaw of the doctrine, and of a dispensable interpretation of the limits of language in terms of mystical need.

As regards the first point Russell seems even to fail to distinguish between the two senses of showing, *Zeigen*, *sinnlos* logical and *unsinnig* philosophical propositions, since he sees here only one doctrine of inexpressibility within language of what makes it expressive.¹³ As he thinks that the aim of the book is to explore « the conditions which would have to be fulfilled by a logically perfect language », whose doctrinal perfection as a correct logical syntax would give way to critic of traditional philosophy as a consequence of « ignorance of the principles of Symbolism and () misuse of

language »¹⁴, he is not convinced by the thesis of the impossibility of an essential meta language, expressing the essential properties of logical language. And for him it is precisely the possible hierarchy of languages he suggests, as such admissible by Wittgenstein if it doesn't concern essential features of logical expressibility, but inexpressible as totality, which is the impossible condition for the mystical conception of totality, since such a totality « would be not merely logically inexpressible, but a mere fiction, a mere delusion, and in this way the supposed sphere of the mystical would be abolished »¹⁵

As regards the dispensability of the mystical doctrine of the inexpressible, Russell's Introduction confesses a difference of philosophical sensibility between Wittgenstein's and its own, which feels the defence of the mystical as existing but only shown as leaving him « with a certain sense of intellectual discomfort ». This discomfort being increased by the observation that « after all, Mr Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit »¹⁶. He then doesn't distinguish between logical form, or forms of the world as a totality within logical space, and the sense of that totality which is properly said by Wittgenstein mystical, inexpressible in language, *Unaussprechliches*, and not only shown, *zeigt*, not *sagt* in language. It is because the sense of the world is outside the world, and not because each proposition which is *sinnvoll* only shows its sense, or every *sinnlos* proposition only shows a form of the world, that the ladder leads to a deep, and different inexpressibility. The one which could answer the question « that » and not « how » the world exists and whose answer only is the mystical. If from that point of view, seeing the world as a closed totality is not for Wittgenstein a pure question of logic, engaging the interpretation of the quantification as well the hierarchies of linguistic forms of language, it is clearly commanded by the logical investigation. And the existence of an inexpressible world is manifested through it. So the subjective aspect of this access to inexpressible of that sort is not dispensable, nor an empirical question of psychology or individual taste. If the mystical is given to a feeling, *Gefühl*¹⁷, it is not to an empirical one. And it is essential to the expressibility of this *Gefühl* outside the realm of *Aussprechliches*, that a firm and strong sense should *a priori* be given to the silence as the other face of language, and the

unwritten part of TLP strictly as unambiguously suggested by the written part. This written, logical part, being the less important one, since it fails short in the face of higher questions, which are the ones Wittgenstein said he wanted to solve in this silent and rigorous negative manner, far from trying to submit that antic traditional realm to the critic through a perfect logical syntax, and choosing a scientific way of expressing an alternative philosophy.

These misunderstandings arise in a very similar way through Carnap's interpretation. And they similarly affect the reading of the ladder metaphor. §73 of *LSL*¹⁸ is written in that precise russellian background, embracing the two forms of logical and philosophical expressibility, which Carnap admits to be separate in Wittgenstein's thought, and doing so through the indistinction of form and sense of the logical language as a mirror of the world. This indistinction is, here too, a natural consequence of the choice of a scientific or logical method as the only philosophical one, and it entails the same critic or discarding of what is then said poetic, emotional, and lacking rigour in the idea of the higher. This choice leaves no place for « elucidations » inside the austere rational method of logic of science. So does Carnap comment the ladder metaphor: «According to this, the investigations of the logic of science contain no sentences, but merely more or less vague explanations which the reader must subsequently recognize as pseudo sentences and abandon¹⁹» He then mentions the objections made immediately to this « certainly unsatisfactory » result and to this « interpretation of the logic of science », in the first instance the famous Ramsey's objection to that supposed sort of « important nonsense », which as nonsense remains so and should better be abandoned by the genuine logic of science, since it is important only from a psychological point of view and as far as is concerned the individual manner of acting in the world and facing the riddles of life..

It is not surprising that Carnap had to recognize very rapidly that he was mistaken on the sort of man and philosopher Wittgenstein was, despite a first impression of community of view as had been stressed by him in *Aufbau*. And Wittgenstein was totally justified, every question of individual character or intellectual taste let aside, to find the misunderstanding as complete as amazing. And he said it as soon as august 1932 in a famous letter to Schlick regarding the total and manifest misunderstanding of Carnap's interpretation of the

last sentences of the TLP, and by the fact, of the whole book's conception.

Since the logical character of the ladders, and even of the scaffolding of the world in logical space²⁰ is an essential part of philosophical climbing as well as surmounting the ways of language, these today obvious manifest misunderstandings on the ladder metaphor are nevertheless not such as rendering more justified the so called resolute interpretation, inviting us to a serious dismissing of all the realist logical scaffolding as well as the essential realm of sense it is opening in the end, as pure nonsenses, and leading to a purely therapeutic exercise of philosophy as an alternative to the senseless forms of its traditional thinking activity. Many arguments have been opposed, on textual as well conceptual grounds, to the idea of a totally not substantial conception of philosophical contents in the TLP, and the reduction of all its content to a form of activity, where dialectical method, ironical in the kierkegaardian sense or in the way of Zen masters would absorb the whole systematic content, even the shown content, and absorb it without giving to the logical analysis any other sense as pure non sense. P.Hacker argued with forceful arguments that this way of saving the self defeating strategy of TLP from Russell's, Ramsey's, Neurath's or Popper's objections is a far more dangerous self defeating strategy. Not only no privileged status could be given to the condemnation of nonsense, among other nonsenses. Ancient scepticism had answers ready to this objection as M.Black already noticed in his commentary of the ladder metaphor. But if the TLP was already envelopped in a form of pessimistic scepticism, rather mauthnerian or schopenhauerian than fregean or russellian or « substantialist » in any sense of the contents he elucidated, what sense could one then give to the famous autocritic he directed against his first philosophy as giving the example of a dogmatic one²¹? not dogmatic as was for him that of Russell or Carnap, but nevertheless unfaithful to its own fight against philosophical dogmatism? and what sense could one give to the logical example he then took as representative of this dogmatic weakness, the method for the logical analysis of elementary propositions?

The unstable radicality of the resolute reading is presently still more obvious. Many new studies show with powerfull arguments the strategic influence of « Wittgenstein's apprenticeship with Russell » in the formation of the details of his first philosophical thinking²² which had not yet been explained in this

precise russellian context. G.Landini gave many reasons for understanding the ladder metaphor as one of the signs of the radicalization of russellian eliminativism by tractarian logicism, when it submits every logical notions to analysis, even the supposed foundationnal and self evident ones.²³

Is Landini's interpretation the last word for our problem? No more, since it leaves the question of Wittgenstein in transition or Wittgenstein's auto criticism unsolved, and though such more satisfying and refreshing for first Wittgenstein, it doesn't help for an alternative to the resolute interpretation as regards the late Wittgenstein. We suggest to look at the influence on Wittgenstein of young Carnap's and Husserl's philosophy for the logical transition and auto criticism. But does it clarify the ladder metaphor? No more than can alone an ouroboric conception in the style of Landini. *Überwindung* is no more only ouroboric in the logical sense than it can be reduced to an empirical treatment of the riddles of life and being. As G.Landini seems to suggest in this very place, the ouroboric question engages the status of scepticism, moderate in Russell, and radical in TLP²⁴. That gives a way of conserving both what Wittgenstein stated as his fundamental idea, the conception of logical constants as not representative of any content, which is a logical, not a nonsensical conception; and the radicalism of the resolute interpretation in matter of sense. But he doesn't speaks of the philosophical, conceptual dimension of activity, and teaching, which are present in the sceptic tradition, as well of course as in the therapeutic reading. That is the point we may now consider more precisely. And it might be true that it alone can solve the ladder metaphor from a rough form of self defeating thinking as well from a more or less culturalist or naturalist conception of the activity of thought and of its only therapeutical teaching..

The ladder metaphor and the sceptical theme: Did Wittgenstein ever give up whistling for a system?

What the logical point of view, specially if restricted to russellian apprenticeship, fails to clarify, is the practical charge of the metaphor. That is the practical aspect of thought itself. It is already true of logic as a descriptive, not axiomatic, system of rules, not a logical syntax in the manner of Russell but rather in that of Gentzen. It is preminent in the question of the second sense of showing, which escapes Russell and Carnap.

This second sense escaped of course both the

objections made to 6.54 as a contradictory self defeating thesis, and those addressed to the very idea of important, or « deeply significant nonsense » we mentionned above, and which, as intended as an invitation to the elimination of metaphysics, was for long summarized in the famous Ramsey's formula: what we cannot say, we cannot say, and we cannot whistle it either.

As was remarked in the resolute interpretation, this objection takes as granted that a supposed substantial content is here given to nonsense, intended as a real content which would be eliminated by logical analysis or logic of science. Such a presupposition clearly guides the objection of Neurath: we must eliminate the metaphysics, and not accept proposition 7, which commands to be silent on something which is in fact nothing... And it is right, as we saw, to say that it is misunderstood, and projecting Carnap's or Russell's views on TLP. But it is not only textually and conceptually arbitrary to conclude from a misunderstanding on the role of logic to the absurdity of the logical ladder itself. As M.Black put it in his Companion , discussing the « serious » reading of philosophy and ladder as nonsense, «It is one thing to say we must throw the ladder away after we have used it; it is another to maintain that there never was a ladder at all.²⁵» It is arbitrary to interpret the dialectic of sense and non sense as an invitation to quit the traditional sense of philosophy for an ordinary realism, and to conclude from an impossibility to assimilate tractarian use of elucidation to russellian analysis or carnapien constitution or explanation via logical syntax, to the absurdity of traditional problems in TLP. The question which is here decisive is the status of this relation of logic to nonsense and auto negation. P.Hacker is right when stressing that the « deconstructive » views of a James Conant project a purely negative, or ironical, kierkegaardian dialectic on a book which gives no serious evidence for it, and many evidence of the contrary, which is attested in the author's comments on his own work and intentions. But he seems more or less admitting here the sort of substantial theory that the resolute reading was right to suspect. It is particularly evident in his discussion of M.Black's attempt to save the ladder metaphor from being self defeating. He understands it as a defence of a sort of whistling attempt to express what cannot be said at all, and he is on the same line of defense against the resolute idea that Wittgenstein did not even try to whistle anything. But he seems not to see the link that could relate a true dialectical

content, not reduced to a pure auto defeating activity, and its practical aspect

This practical charge of the ladder metaphor is on the contrary preminent in the resolute interpretation, but, as we just said, it is reduced to a dialectical move without any real or intended content. It does impute a very particular form of radical scepticism to the philosophy of TLP, seeing every rung of the ladder as self destroying without leaving anything remain at the new stage, and seeing the whole ladder as an illusion of the will rather than an *Überwindung*. But if it is obviously certain that Wittgenstein did not understand the *Überwindung* of metaphysics through logic in the way Carnap did, and if, as the date of the letter to Schlick quoted above shows, Wittgenstein get amazed about Carnap's error even before the time of LSS, that is in the moderate «*Ausaltung*» rather than radical «*Überwindung*» of Metaphysics, which is assumed in *Aufbau*, it must not be only in reason of differences of interest in the content of ethical, esthetical or theological contents. These differences would precisely be as important, or even more, regarding the resolute ordinary realism than they were regarding the positivist platitude. The deep root of the misunderstanding is elsewhere, and it is already present in the final paragraph of *Aufbau*. Here Carnap clearly renounces rationalism as regards practical philosophical questions, and he claims the coherence of this renouncement with the proud thesis of the omnipotence of rational science, «*no Ignorabimus*». He gives an analysis of the TLP as sustaining this view. And he seems to understand the terms of the Preface as linking not the truth of the philosophical result and the immensity of the still unwritten part, but the proud thesis of omnipotent science and the modest constatation that we can only *überwinden* or «*verwinden*» the riddles of life and death, never solve them through logic and science since they are not questions nor problems, but experienced as kinds of «*Lebenssituation*»²⁶. It may well have been first this separation between theoretical, or logical, and practical face of philosophy which was felt by Wittgenstein both as an amazing misunderstanding, and a deep opposition between Carnap's philosophical choices and his own.

Would he be better understood, as regards this need of a philosophy integrating, not rejecting, its practical composant, by the resolute reading? Certainly not, if logic is precisely the scaffolding of his philosophical self defeating activity, and is not defeated in this activity. Here lies the

difference between his silent and in a sense impossible dialectic and the sceptical model which is instantiated through the Diamond interpretation. But the pregnance of a sceptical model as linking theoretical and practical activity inside the very realm of thinking is attested in the critical reference to Mauthner.

M.Black did quote this reference in his commentary of the ladder metaphor.²⁷ But he insists more on the need of whistling philosophical contents not expressible through language of logic or realistic experience, and his defence of the important nonsense may seem unconvincing. He does not anyway seriously use the greek model of scepticism or his modern reading through german idealism as well as Schopenhauer's or Mauthner's. The last he quotes from the studies of G.Weiler.²⁸ That is he does not stress the theme of activity as an inner one, whose result is not necessary external, nor its idealist stance. Mauthner did on the contrary stress these two aspects in the occurrences of the ladder metaphor we find in his book, and at the very beginning of the first volume. What he suggests through this metaphor is rather activity than any substantial content. And even if conducting to a radical contestation of the subjective thinking, and analysis of the *Ich Gefühl* conducted to suicide in language, and described in schopenhauerian accents, the ladder metaphor and some of the same spirit, as the ladder of the clown in a circus²⁹, or the *Tretmühle*, describe a sort of inner activity, acting upon oneself in a kind of staying on place movement. Climbing upon the rungs is not waiting for some substantial future, it is playing a negative subjective dialectic. And that is the real parting from any form of «*dogmatism*», even the logical, or formal one. That dogmatism Wittgenstein was to confess in the Viennese texts that he did identify in TLP as a capital philosophical sin, without being at first capable of identifying its powers of temptation.

If we pay attention to the detail of the german text, which is incompletely translated in the quotation of Mauthner from Weiler, and if we prefer Ogden's translation of proposition 6.54, we see striking similarities between the two texts, and clearly understand that the movement described is an internal, idealist move, not a material one which would pretend to grasp the world of the mystische as a real world in any material sense of exteriority to mind or to physical world.

Where Wittgenstein writes: «*wenn er durch sie-auf ihnen-über sie hinausgestiegen ist*» and uses the metaphor «*Er muss sozusagen die Leiter*

wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinauf gestiegen ist)», the Pears Mc Guinness translation unhappily hides the precise and imaged use of the prepositions «when he has used them-as steps-to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it)» If it renders the distinction between *hinaus* and *hinauf*, which might be sufficient for excluding the idea of a substantial external inexpressible which could reduce the ladder itself to illusion, it fails to grasp the threefold sense of «*durch sie, auf ihnen, über sie*» which is better grasped through Ogden translation «when he has climbed through them, on them, over them». If we open now Mauthner's book, we read «*Will ich emporklimmen in der Sprachkritik, die das wichtigste Geschäft der denkenden Menschheit ist*», quoted in Black «If I want to ascend into the critique of language, which is the most important business of thinking mankind», «*so muss ich die Sprache hinter mir und vor mir und in mir vernichten von Schritt zu Schritt, so muss ich jede Sprosse der Leiter zertrümmern, indem ich sie betrete.*» Here as in Pears translation the english quoting «I must destroy language behind me and in me, step by step: I must destroy every rung of the ladder while climbing upon it» drops one of the prepositions «*vor mir*» which suggests the suicide of language. And of course it uses a verb, «destroy» which cannot express the negative moment as does «*vernichten*». ³⁰ Let us add before quitting that comparison that the text of Mauthner is cut in Black quoting from Weiler before the end of the alinea. Mauthner writes «*Wer folgen will, der zimmere die Sprossen wieder, um sie abermals zu zertrümmern*» and this indication of the necessity of making its own ladder achieves to stress the inner link between thinking and learning as activities, irreducible to objective results, and activities whose results might be both negative and only subjective.

But this is Mauthner's ladder. It is a modern scepticism, with nihilist accents. Was the logical scepticism of Wittgenstein such a negative form of scepticism, or was his proper logical style as well as his sense of the higher responsible for a totally new form of philosophy? And, as regards the ladder metaphor, are we to follow P.Hacker when he concludes that W. was really trying to whistle in TLP what he could not express in language but, far from being a realm of nonsense, was really made manifest? we tried to give new arguments to do so. But it is not as certain as P.Hacker seems to be

sure that Wittgenstein will abandon this conception of such a kind of ineffability, and then dismissed the ladder metaphor³¹. For at least three reasons: *first*, the text of *Vermischte Bemerkungen* does not suggest a rejection of the ladder metaphor, but precisely the rejection of the ladder as referring to a naïve, realistic vision of *Überwindung* as discovery of a transcendent other world; and it stresses this celebration of rational immanence rather than progressist activism of the «*typischen westlichen Wissenschaftler*»³². Its immediate context is the text of the first version of a Preface for *Philosophische Bemerkungen*. It contrasts the speculative attitude which «*bleibt, wo er ist, und immer dasselbe erfassen will*» and the scientific one which «*steigt quasi von Stufe zu Stufe immer weiter*»; *secund* the throwing of the ladder implies the climbing, and the climbing is as we saw innerly linked with the need of a higher; *third* this higher is sensible, and Wittgenstein never said that his further renunciation to the dogmatic illusion of a future, ideal world as corresponding to a unique form of the world compelled to abandon not only the logical conception of the mystical as the other face of the logically expressible, but the evidence of a «mystical» *Gefühl*³³...

Could not we suggest that Wittgenstein did not abandon the ladder metaphor, and rather wanted to give it a more living, multiple form, and that his discarding of the scientific method in philosophy, his need of absolute immanence of the thought to the only effective realm of being was as ancient as his first philosophy?³⁴ Didn't D.Pears himself suggest this sort of thing, despite his conviction of a first realism of the first Wittgenstein, when he chooses for the presentation of the tractarian period the verses of T.S.Eliot which celebrate this same «*ouroboric*» conception, this same philosophy of identical contents under dialectical methods?³⁵

When Wittgenstein had to quit the unicity of «*picture theory*» as the absolute form of thought, he did not abandon the ladder metaphor. He just could not believe any longer that silence could be an absolute and unique expressive inside of language, since there were a multiplicity of forms of language. What Russell saw as a solution of the metalanguage problem by giving up mysticism was on the contrary for Wittgenstein the worst danger threatening the logically expressible form of mysticism he thought definitively unassailable in the *Tractatus* period.. But something else, and still the same, could be grammatically, if not

logically, expressible, and had to. This renouncing a *unique* form of silence was nevertheless a threat on the hidden but effective absolute contents of speculative and ethic needs as suggested so strongly in the first book.. What Wittgenstein tried then to whistle was a more sceptic, if not entirely pessimistic or nihilist, «poorness» of spirit in a time of darkness. Not the darkness of superstition and old mysticism nor the poorness Heidegger was seeing at the same time in modern science and logic, but the poorness of science and new logical methods when they are let to the dogmatic arrogance of impossible constructivist, progressive, finite substitutes for speculative thought. Was not the long lasting whistling under wittgensteinian logical and grammatical philosophy, one of the clearest and deepest signs of his craving for a way out this still too «arrogant», that is incompletely free, form of modern scepticism? And did not this whistling lead him to purify, not dismiss, the ladder metaphor in the later philosophy and think that its still arrogant fixity could be better understood through the ironical image of the moving ocean: «*Sie wie hoch die Wellen die Sprache hier gehen!*»³⁶ As if in the always moving and still remaining the same wave of the sea he saw the same immensity he whistled at the height of the *Tractatus* ascension, and just better understood its always deceiving as well stimulating way of answering the need of philosophy.

Conclusion.

The ladder metaphor may then be interpreted as a genuine form of scepticism taken in the deepest sense of the word. Its striking originality can be understood at the light of the revolution fregean and russellian logical methods introduced in philosophy. The tractarian «logicism» is a ladder logicism in that it never assimilates the scaffolding of the world to any static form of logical syntax in the axiomatic style. Logic itself is seen and exposed as a *sinnlos* corpus, whose form only is «*Spiegelbild der Welt*», and as such distinct of any kind of doctrine «*Die Logik ist keine Lehre, sondern ein Spiegelbild der Welt.*

Die Logik ist transcendantal» (6.13). That negative definition gives to the russellian idea of logic as the essence of philosophy a totally different, if not opposite sense in the wittgensteinian context. And the distinctive, positive feature of philosophy *versus* logic is to be found in a stronger sense of activity, as engaging form *and* content. When intending this aim at climbing higher, the ladder

metaphor then takes a new sense, a practical one, as exemplified by german philosophy, at least from Schopenhauer to Mauthner, and its rediscovery of antic scepticism. When Wittgenstein changed his conception of the unicity of Logic as *Spiegelbild*, and suspected both the uniqueness of the ladder activity and the dogmatic illusions of a still transcendant, uncritical and inert higher realm of thought expected at the last rungs of the ladder, he did not abandon the metaphor but rather what it left still too «dogmatic» in the sense he gave to the word. Had he be acquainted with german idealism in his youth rather than with Schopenhauer or Mauthner, and he could have found other, and then non sceptical, ways of giving sense to an «ouroboric conception». As compelled by the lack of practical rationalism to this sort of divorce between logico rational methods and philosophical content which Carnap admitted without any regret, Wittgenstein himself more probably never could resign to this divorce without a secret whistling towards the times of glory.

When he went to speak with some more detachment about the highness of seas of language would he not have understood his first ladder metaphor to be both saved and trespassed in the famous japanese picture: *Arch of the wave off Kanawaga*, one of the *36 views of Mount Fuji*? Is not on this picture the wave of language understood on the background of the old mountain, as Wittgenstein wanted his *PU* to be seen in the background of his old *Tractatus* views? Many waves, many ladders and many rungs, not only one, nor a rigid one, to climb on a sacred mountain. But always floating upon these moving and overwhelming waves, the ever recurring attempt of whistling in place of an impossible doctrine of wisdom as of an impossible final quietening down of spirit. Something like the silent but irrepressible music of human freedom, neither absolute extinction nor absolute revelation of the sense, but the only admissible form Wittgenstein thought still open to philosophy for expressing the glory of God in the darkness of present time. Is not this attempt to whistle, at least, a common philosophy, a living hope in our present exchange and a major task for our age?

Notes

1. T.L.P. 6.42 et 6.432
2. T.L.P. 6.54 « *Er muss diese Sätze überwinden, dann sieht er die Welt richtig* » 3.
3. *Bemerkung*: TLP, foot note after the number of the first proposition. One should remark that this is already the same word as the one Wittgenstein will advance in P.U's preface as suited to his new philosophical thinking, here as elsewhere not so different from the older.
4. TLP Preface, last alinea.
5. T.L.P.6.54.
6. See for example *The new Wittgenstein*, Crary and Reads, London, Routledge, 2000. The supposedly « resolute » interpretation is the one illustrated in particular by J. Conant and C.Diamond. For a clear and convincing critic of this interpretation, see P.Hacker « *Was he trying to whistle it?* » in the book quoted above; french translation in *Wittgenstein Etat des lieux*, E.Rigal ed., Paris, Vrin, 2008.
7. See for example G.Landini *Wittgenstein's apprenticeship with Russell*, Cambridge U.P., 2007.
8. This is the line of P.Hacker's answer to the « resolute interpretation » in the text quoted in note 6
9. « *dass ich den grossartigen Werken Freges und den Arbeiten meines Freundes Herrn Bertrand Russell einen grossen Teil der Anregung zu meinen Gedanken schulde* »
10. See for example in *Wittgenstein, réception et confrontation, in Wet la philosophie aujourd'hui*, Paris, Klincksieck 1992, the papers of B.Mc Guinness and F.Stadler; and the recent book of A.Carus on Carnap (Cambridge U.P.2007)
11. See for example *Letter to Russell*, from Skjolden january or february 1914, a long time before the Innsbruck rupture in 1922. And as regards Carnap, see for example a Letter to Schlick, (8-08-32), in *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten*, ed.Nedo&Ranchetti, Franckfort, Suhrkamp, 1983)
12. TLP, 6.54.
13. T.L.P. Russell's Introduction, p.XXI
14. *ibid.* p.IX.
15. p.XXII.
16. p.XXI
17. T.L.P. 6.45.
18. Carnap, *Logische Syntax der Sprache*, Vienna, 1934, here quoted from the english translation, 1937.
19. *Loc.cit.*, p.283.
20. 3.42 « *Das logische Gerüst um das Bild bestimmt den logischen Raum* »; 4.023 « *Der Satz konstruiert eine Welt mit Hilfe eines logisches Gerüstes* »; 6.124 « *Die logischen Sätze beschreiben das Gerüst der Welt, oder vielmehr, sie stellen es dar* »
21. in *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis*, edited from Waismann's notes , 9-12-1931, pp.182 sqq.
22. This is the title of G.Landini's book, quoted above, note 7.
23. *Loc.cit.*, pp.100-106. For example « Wittgenstein holds that we may procede with logical analysis. This the ladder. Ultimately, the analysis will envelop logic. But on Wittgenstein's ouroboric conception of philosophy, this does not undermine the process. It completes it. »
24. *Loc.cit.*, pp.105-106.
25. *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, Cambridge U.P, 1971, p.379.
26. *Aufbau*, §183
27. *Loc.cit.*, p.377 He also quotes Sextus Empiricus and an example of destructive logical dialectic, which interested G.Landini who quotes this passage, *loc.cit.*, p.105. The reader just have to correct a lapsus, and read the text as Sextus's one , and not Mauthner's.
28. *G.Weiler On Fritz Mauthner's critique of language, Mind*, 67, 1958 The author published 3 years later a whole book: *Mauthner's critique of language*.
29. F.Mauthner *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Stuttgart 1901.; OLMS reprint of the edition of Leipzig1923, vol 1, p.1_2, p.88 .
30. The french translations are differently unsatisfactory.
31. He refers to a beautiful remark of the year 1930 in V.B.
32. V.B., p.16 « *Ich könnte sagen: Wenn der Ort, zu dem ich gelangen will, nur auf einer Leiter zu ersteigen wäre, gäbe ich es auf, dahin zu gelangen. Denn dort, wo ich wirklich hin muss, dort muss ich eigentlich schon sein. Was auf einer Leiter erreichbar ist, interessiert mich nicht* »
33. TLP. 6.44 says that « *das Mystische* » is not how is the world, but that it is »Far from being recognized as a delusion, this mystical is said in 6.522 manifesting itself « *Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische* ». As intemporal or eternal at it could be thought, this mystical is said in 6.45 the qualification of a *Gefühl* « *Das Gefühl der Welt als begrenztes Ganzes ist das Mystische* » The letters to Ogden about the translation are clear. Wittgenstein writes that he prefers « *the mystical* » to « *the mystical element* » in 6.44; and he demands to correct mystical element as wrong in 6.45, since here the german is an adjective belonging to *Gefühl*. Why should have the later Wittgenstein changed his mind about such a *Gefühl*?
34. And from the beginning very different of russelian method in *Our knowledge of the external world and Mysticism and logic*. Since he was very clear on this point as early as in the Note Books 1914, it seems here not so easy to follow the elsewhere stimulating and challenging views defended by G.Landini, *loc.cit.* pp.94

sqq.

35. We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time
36. P.U. *§194*

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