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Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis: Telling the Truth about Truth: The Philosopher's Frame and the Analyst's Speech

Summary:

In this text, the author comments on Lacan's statement about the impossibility of "telling the truth about the truth" (*Seminar VII*), together with Wittgenstein's idea that we cannot see our eyes seeing (*Tractatus logico-philosophicus*), nor speak about the language we are speaking. This kind of *Urverdrängung* (repression) is what both Lacan and Wittgenstein recognize not only as the main obstacle, but also the focal experience, that their practices lead to explore. The author finally shows that the contents, as well as the theatrical structure, of Plato's dialogues already expose and promote this same experience of incompleteness of the truth; he argues that Lacan's clinical gesture and Wittgenstein's idea of *das Mystische* fully belong to a speculative vein which accompanies and contests, from within and from the very beginning, the history of metaphysics.

An Anecdote

Let us begin by recalling a passage from Lacan's *Seminar VII*, lesson XIV, on "Love of One's Neighbor," more precisely the subsection entitled "The Truth about Truth". Lacan states:

One of my friends and patients had a dream which bore the traces of some yearning or other stimulated in him by the formulations of this seminar, a dream in which someone cried out concerning me, "but why doesn't he tell the truth about truth?"[1]

First and foremost, let me emphasize that Lacan is here quoting a friend of his, who had had a dream. This is indeed, not a unique case, since he frequently mentions his students, patients, friends, and various kinds of interlocutors. Lacan's seminar is marked in many ways by the communicative event in which it takes place, by the tangle of voices that accompany and sustain it. However, it is remarkable that, instead of introducing straightforwardly such a key issue, Lacan presented it in an awry, anecdotal way, in a sort of *mise-en-scène* frame. What is relevant, in other words, is the mechanism of the speech that reports another speech; of a tale that puts another tale on stage. To take issue with the question which Lacan poses in this passage ("to tell the truth about truth"), and to take issue with the anecdote, are one and the same thing.

Here, "frame" – that is, that mechanism of speech that frames another speech – is intended in an entirely classical sense. For instance, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (XIV century) is modeled after the pattern of the frame-narrative, into which many other stories are inscribed, according to a scheme that can be quickly recounted. With the plague raging, a group of people takes refuge in a villa far from town, where they entertain themselves for ten days (whence the title),[2] by delivering narratives. The story of the plague

encompasses the stories of Ser Ciappelletto, Andreuccio from Perugia, Calandrino, and so on. One might even speak of Asian roots of this dramaturgic machine worked out by Boccaccio. Think of *One Thousand and One Nights* and the analogous scheme that guides its narrative. This frame-story device can be traced back even further, namely, to the novel in Indian literature. But I shall come back to this in due time.

Anyone familiar with the history of philosophy knows that even Plato – at the origins of Western philosophy – is deeply indebted to the East. Perhaps, one of the most curious and neglected clues to that debt lies in the Platonic dialogues, which always, or very often, feature someone entering the scene, saying they have been to a banquet where someone else had said this or that, or reporting to have stumbled upon a friend who, just the day before, had listened to the speech of another friend, and so on. We shall return to this as well. For the moment, it suffices to have traced, in our own turn, some sort of succinct frame, and to have paid our debt to tradition.

But is it truly paid, or just reiterated? What nexus is there between frame and debt, between debt and repetition, and between repetition and the truth about truth?

The Metaphysicians

Let us re-read and continue analysing the above mentioned passage from *Seminar VII*:

One of my friends and patients had a dream which bore the traces of some yearning or other stimulated in him by the formulations of this seminar, a dream in which someone cried out concerning me, “But why doesn’t he tell the truth about truth?” I quote this, since it is an impatience that I have heard expressed by a great many in other forms than dreams. The formula is true to a certain extent – I perhaps don’t tell the truth about truth. But haven’t you noticed that in wanting to tell it – something that is the chief preoccupation of those who are called metaphysicians – it often happens that not much truth is left? That’s what is so risky about such a pretension.

In order to better specify the problem, let us confront this passage, then, with a couple of other quotes from Lacan; passages where the same problem recurs in a literal way. From the *Écrits*:

This lack of truth about truth—necessitating as it does all the traps that metalanguage, as sham and logic, falls into—is the rightful place of *Urverdrängung*, that is, of primal repression [...] This simply means everything there is to say about truth, the only truth; that is, that there is no metalanguage (a statement made in order to situate all of logical positivism).[3]

Here, we encounter the same themes and motives as before, but with something more: the problem of meta-language, of logic, of Logical Positivism. It would seem that the “metaphysics” with which *Seminar VII* was concerned finds here a specification: metaphysics, in one of its many supposed reincarnations, is precisely the strategy of meta-language inaugurated by Logical Positivism—hence the reference to the *Urverdrängung*, which seems to stand in some relation to the issue of truth, of logic, and of meta-language. Yet, in what kind of relation? And in what relation to the frame?

Lastly, let me quote from a text that appeared in *Scilicet* (Lacan 1970, p. 399):

What I must stress, is that in its rush to lend itself to teaching, the psychoanalytic discourse leads the psychoanalyst to the analysand’s position, that is, to not produce anything *maîtrisable*, despite the appearance, nothing *maîtrisable* if not in the form of a symptom.

We find the same problem here, even if on a partially different horizon. The problem which Lacan poses here, is the relation between the typical speech of the psychoanalyst and that of the analysand, the problem of their different “texture”: when the discourse of the psychoanalyst pontificates, it produces something

which is non-*maîtrisable*, something that cannot be mastered, stored, accumulated; it produces something in the order of a symptom, or that takes on the form of the symptom.

Thus, would the speech which produces something *maîtrisable* be that of the meta-language of logical positivism, the speech of “metaphysicians”? And would this disease of mastery – this “telling the truth about truth” – be their stigma?

The Original Repression

Let us summarize for our own purposes the pieces we have collected so far. There is a discourse, which is the one proper to metaphysics—a discourse that tells the truth about truth, a discourse looking at its object from without (the issue of meta-language). A discourse that surveys the object, and takes command of it in truth and in terms of truth (a discourse which, therefore, does not know anything non-*maîtrisable*). A discourse which exhausts the truth of the matter, or that exhausts the matter in its truth (at any rate, a speech that leaves us with no “thirst” for anything else, one which exhausts and is exhausted in a quite sinister satiety).

Then, we might read all this backwards. There is, instead, a discourse that functions differently from the discourse of metaphysics. It does not say the truth about truth. It does not inspect its object from the outside. It does not master it from above. It does not exhaust the truth. It does not quench the thirst. It does not quench itself. It is the discourse that Lacan wants to unfold, or which he discovers he cannot avoid unfolding. It is the discourse of the analyst, or the psychoanalytic discourse – as he calls it in the passage above. This discourse has an ethics, then, which is worth putting into focus. An ethics of truth which is an ethics of psychoanalysis conceived as a “truth-full” discourse, an ethics which has to do with the “symptomatic” texture of the discourse itself, or of the truth itself which that discourse endorses.

What remains to be clarified at this stage, rests entirely with the last tile of the mosaic, with the tile that still needs to be positioned. Where should we place the *Urverdrängung*, the primary repression, which Lacan speaks about with respect to the discourse, in relation to the language spoken by those who want to say the truth about truth, to the language of metaphysics? We might try to put the issue this way: the discourse of metaphysics does what it does (it says the truth about truth; it looks from the outside and takes over; it removes thirst, and quenches itself as thirst) because it has repressed something, it has forgotten something (and because – we should add – it has fed, with that, a deeper thirst, a restlessness for which it has failed to take responsibility).

For, as we read again:

A lack of truth about truth, which needs all the metalanguage’s falls in what it has of semblance [*faux-semblant*] and of logic: here is the precise place of *Urverdrängung*, the primary repression.[4]

What is this originary repression that underlies a certain discourse, so that it constitutes itself as a metaphysical discourse, a surveying discourse, an exhaustive discourse, a true discourse about truth? And repression of what? To what extent does there exist a discourse, different from the one affected by the *Urverdrängung*, a discourse no longer “metaphysical”, a discourse programmatically “symptomatic” (or perhaps, one might say symptomatically symptomatic)?

One last passage from Lacan, this time taken from *Seminar XVII*:

There is no other metalanguage than all the forms of knavery [*canaille*], if we thereby designate these curious operations derivable from the fact that man’s desire is the Other’s desire. All acts of bastardry are based on the fact of wishing to be someone’s Other, I mean someone’s big Other, in which the figures by which his desire will be captivated are drawn. Thus this Wittgensteinian

operation is nothing but an extraordinary parade, the detection of philosophical skullduggery.

There is no metalanguage. Every time there is a metalanguage, underneath lies a *canaille*, a dirty trick, a swindle, a cheat. This so-called Wittgensteinian operation is an extraordinary survey, an extraordinary enquiry of the philosophical dishonesty. There is no sense of desire. This is what one must say after having read Wittgenstein. There is no truth if not that lack which desire hides, in order to pretend that nothing has happened when it faces from time to time what it finds.[5]

Once again, we find ourselves on the outskirts of logical neo-positivism, where the whole problem of metalanguage – its possibility or impossibility, the “thirst” that spreads among the readers, as well the writers, for these themes – gambles its credibility. Wittgenstein is the father – or one of the fathers – of neo-positivism, and also its spurious child – or one of them. He is neither Frege nor Carnap. Thus, one might conclude that the “so-called Wittgensteinian operation” is a showcase of dirty tricks. According to Lacan, Wittgenstein is on the side of the honest, that is, on the side of those who know that truth is lacking something, and this is, precisely, its distinctive way of being true. On the other hand, for Lacan, to speak about “this so-called Wittgensteinian operation” betrays in him some suspicion or even contempt.

It is not very clear either to which Wittgenstein Lacan is referring when he speaks of a “Wittgensteinian operation”. The Wittgenstein matching the description of a “series of dirty tricks” is probably the second Wittgenstein, who examines a sequence of various language-games. The Wittgenstein who can teach that there is no sense of desire is, perhaps, the first Wittgenstein – the one of the *Tractatus*, who argues that the sense of the world must be outside of this world: he traces, perhaps, one of those points where the discourse of philosophy splits itself in two. On the one hand, we have the path of what we may call “meta-language”, and, on the other, that of the ethics of truth. What emerges from this, to start with, is a whole solid tradition that would like to tell the truth about truth. We also have, though, an oblique path which in that ambition guesses at, or denounces, a dirty trick. Yet, Lacan is certainly saying here that “this so-called Wittgensteinian operation” is part of the dirty trick itself. It is impossible to exclude “this so-called Wittgensteinian operation”, insofar as a philosophical inquiry into the devilishness of philosophers is a doubly rogue inquiry and, as such, obliquely honest – so to speak.

Is it pure chance that Wittgenstein tries to tie two lines of research, metalanguage and ethics of truth, around this one and the same point? How should we think about this knot of paths, about such a reciprocal framing of ethics and a swindle?

Wittgenstein

Let us not forget that we need to understand which kind of *Urverdrängung*, if any, is at stake within the constitution, and as a precondition of the constitution, of the discourse of classical Metaphysics. A repression of what? In virtue of what? And with what consequences?

Let us read, then, a very well-known passage from the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, proposition 5.633, where Wittgenstein (1922) reflects on the relationship between the eye and the visual field disclosed by it. The eye, which sees everything within the visual field, is not itself part of the visual field: this is the first conceptual pin around which the entire meditation contained on this page gravitates. Because, as Wittgenstein writes: “But really you do not see the eye. And nothing in the visual field allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.”

This is one of the points in Wittgenstein’s discourse, in which being a rogue gets intertwined with something like an ethics, as we were saying—where it is shown, basically, that there is a knowledge unfolding before my eyes about the things in this landscape, and that this knowledge subsists thanks to a form of “not-knowing” which must stay unknown so as to let that knowledge exist. In this knowledge, it is shown that the glaze brings to the visibility something that is *per se* not visible nor invisible, and in doing this odd operation

it sinks in a sort of structural darkness. The goods that the eye discovers in the world can, perhaps, quench our thirst, feeding however an originary and implacable thirst, which regards the eye itself. Wittgenstein tries to bring to light an *Urverdrängung* of the eye in the field of vision; he tries to bring back into the picture of true speech and of truth, an *Urverdrängung* of the condition of possibility of the true discourse, and of truth.

A curious twist in his discourse, one might say, almost a tongue-twister, so to speak – saying this thing, which Wittgenstein says by saying that it is not possible to say it – or a reason for tearing one’s eyes out, in trying to catch sight of that threshold in the visual field, which cannot fall into the visual field itself, and that is not part of the place where it shows itself. On the other hand, there is no need to recall what we are having Wittgenstein say, or what we are showing that Lacan senses in Wittgenstein – why we need access to the problem of meta-language and to the ethics of truth on the horizon of the seminar on ethics. This is what Lacan himself says, precisely in reference to the eye and the gaze, in those well-known pages which are central to *Seminar XI*.

We might instead establish the result of our quick incursion into the *Tractatus* – in short, into the text that opens and closes the adventure of logical Neo-positivism, and which while showing the “rogue” side of Neo-positivism, begins to appear to Neo-positivism as a dirty trick – by saying that Wittgenstein’s discovery concerns the fact that truth is lacking something, precisely that something which is necessary in order for it to be “the truth”.

So, truth lacks something that has nothing to do with adding or re-conquering, because the very fact of adding it would replicate the lack itself. If I see the eye that discloses the visual field, it is only thanks to another eye which I have stealthily introduced onto the scene, one which remains in debt to another eye. We are confronted with a hole that becomes deeper the more one tries to fill it.

The ethics that matters to us has to do with this paradoxical relationship between emptiness and the attempt to fill this hole, which causes it to become deeper and deeper—or, if one prefers, with a twofold question which presents itself and poses, ultimately, the same issue: what to do with debt? What to do with the frame?

Plato

Let us go back to Plato, who made a swift appearance at the beginning of our text, as if by chance. Why are the Platonic dialogues always, or in most cases, inscribed into this odd narrative frame? Why do we always find this friend so similar to Lacan’s who, whether in a dream or at a banquet, has listened to someone whose speeches he reports to us, the readers? Why is it never Plato who speaks, but Socrates, or someone to whom he refers, or someone whose speech borrows from even more tortuous passages and diversions?

Let me mention just two examples, among many, from Plato. From the beginning of the *Symposium*:

Oh, if that’s what you want to know, it isn’t long since I had occasion to refresh my memory. Only the day before yesterday, as I was coming up to the city from my place at Phalerum, a friend of mine caught sight of me from behind, and while I was still a long way ahead he shouted after me, ‘Here, I say, Apollodorus! Can’t you wait for me?’ (...) ‘Apollodorus – he said as he came up – You’re the very man I’m looking for. I want to ask you about this party at Agathon’s, when Socrates and Alcibiades and the rest of them were at dinner there.’[6]

The second example is from the beginning of the *Theaetetus*:

Euclides: “On my way down to the harbor I met them carrying Theaetetus to Athens from the camp of Corinth.” *Terpsion*: “Alive or dead?” *Euclides*: “Only just alive. He is suffering from severe wounds, and still more from having caught the sickness that has broken out in the army”[7]

Maybe one can find, in such a circumstance, a clue, a decisive symptom, with respect to our problem of saying the truth about truth and of the strategy of the discourse that wants to preserve the truth from the risk of nullifying it through excess of truthfulness. Our problem might, on the other hand, be re-translated in these other terms, so as to tie it back to another of the Lacanian passages on which we are commenting: is Plato a “metaphysician”? Where is Plato situated with respect to those “professional” metaphysicians who, by dint of saying the truth about truth, do not leave “very much” of truth on the field? And where does Lacan situate himself with respect to Plato and his “profession” of truth?

On the one hand, we are used to ascribing this Platonic strategy of the prologue, of the narrative prelude, of the frame, to the “mythologizing” taste of an author still in-between rhetoric and metaphysics. Then, we would be facing an author whom we would like to be fully metaphysical, that is, more fully scientific. Where *Id* was, there *Ego* must succeed. Where Plato used to amuse himself with his persistent inclination to dramatization and “personification” of philosophy, there Aristotle must replace him with his accomplished treatise-like style, and with the definitive resolution of the gesture of philosophy in the system of philosophy. Only in that case would the truth about truth be said, without so many hidden back-drop canvases [*tele di fondo*] or false-bottoms [*doppi fondi*], without so many figurative introductions and mysterious summaries which open the dialogue by offering a sort of preliminary, and redundant, anecdotal hieroglyph. These are theses, which variously extend themselves in the immense story of the Platonic exegesis, and which we need to drop here, after this unfortunately too-brief reference.[8]

On the other hand, it is usual to ascribe such a bent to the game of frames and joints or, even more prosaically, to the advanced age of the author. It is well known that the Platonic prologues get more convoluted in the later dialogues, and some scholars, such as Gomperz, go as far as to view them as a “symptom of senescence”,[9] an unrestrained inclination to get lost in useless details, in more and more uncertain and unwieldy itineraries – even at the simple level of consistency or narrative likelihood.[10] Characters that appear and disappear without explanation, inconsistencies related to the temporal location of the described action, wide passages devoted to circumstances that would seem to be totally extraneous to the thing itself. We keep in sight, if nothing else, the issue of the “symptom”, which Gomperz has the merit to suggest despite his own intentions. And let us come to what is, perhaps, a third possible way of coping with the Platonic issue of the frame, of the “tale” within which the dialogue is situated. We might say that, in these marginal places of the dialogue, on these thresholds of his philosophical theatre, Plato does nothing other than allude to the frame, that invokes the Wittgensteinian eye. This is a highly paradoxical operation, which would require a long meditation because it is a paradoxical operation in Wittgenstein as well. You cannot see the eye; yet, if Wittgenstein says so, it is because in some way he is also showing and seeing it, and, although inviting us to silence, he nevertheless lingers in a verbal exercise. Then, let us try to reflect on the implication of such a bizarre Platonic exercise: to see the eye, to exhibit the frame of truth, to say the truth about truth and, in so doing, expose it precisely to its catastrophe. “Saying the truth about truth”: Lacan’s witty formula begins to show a curious reverse side. To tell the truth about truth does not mean to seal the circle, as one might hypothesize, but to show the point in which the circle does not hold, which is also, and at the same time, the only way it can hold – that is, by letting go.

The Frame and the One

Were we to imagine a history of metaphysics “according to Lacan”, we would imagine it as inspired by that passage of *Seminar XI* where Lacan takes a look at the philosophical tradition:

[t]he tradition that begins with Plato with the promulgation of the idea, of which one may say that, setting out from an aesthetic world, it is determined by an end given to being as sovereign good, thus attaining a beauty that is also its limit. And it is not by chance that Maurice Merleau-Ponty recognized its guide in the eye.

A tradition starting from Plato, with the promotion of the idea, about which one can say—after having started in an aesthetic world—that it determines itself in assigning to Being the end of the ultimate good, thus reaching a beauty which is also its limit, [a tradition in which] Maurice Merleau-Ponty not by chance [identifies] the essential vector in the eye.[11]

In short, the history of philosophy would be the history of this eye which sees everything, and which – therefore – must see itself as well: a ceaseless attempt to see itself in seeing, an immense Sisyphean task, which knowledge accomplishes in the hope of knowing itself; an ideal coincidence of eye and gaze, of the frame of truth and the truth of the frame; a history of the eye in its becoming “one”.

If the hypothesis we were making about them as *mise-en-scène* – as a certain, distressing exhibition of the curtain of the philosophical theatre – is correct, then, to see the frame of vision, to say the truth on the threshold of truth, to say the truth about truth, is this not precisely what Plato seems to want to do by means of his prologues? How should we understand that “becoming one”?

We note, in any case, that Lacan sees in Merleau-Ponty the heir, and his thought as the most advanced outcome, of this history. Yet, he is still totally immersed in it; he is Plato’s heir who, ultimately, does not step away from Plato’s enchanted circle. But does Lacan? And, if he does, shouldn’t we rather say that he succeeds only because he stays absolutely faithful, perhaps unwittingly, to a gesture of “escape” which Plato himself inscribes on the foundation stone of the history of metaphysics as the history of a speech that wants to tell the truth about truth? Let us question how this reading of the history of philosophy (as the history of an attempt to see oneself seeing) comes into play. And let us ask ourselves, for instance, how such a reading, or allegation, comes into play when it is applied to Plato, as Lacan notably does in *Seminar XI*.

We might simply respond that this reading speculates all within the frame and that, precisely for this reason, ignores not so much the outer part of the frame itself—which is basically another inner part—but the frame itself, its pure – impossible to locate – incision. It plays within the frame, that is, it plays “with” meanings, truths, and objects which Plato has inscribed and staged within such frame. Therefore, it gambles on the side of the idea; of the doctrine of ideas; of the vision of ideas which guide the eye of the good dialectician and the words of the good politician, and so on. And consequently, by meekly lingering within the perimeter or the frame which Plato has predisposed, it reads Plato by removing that perimeter, or that frame, which Plato left well in sight, almost in the form of a symptom, of a fleeting anamorphic image placed at the threshold of his dialogues, like the anamorphic skull that divides and reunites Holbein’s well-known ambassadors by drawing itself at the margin of the scene. All this Platonizing reading of Plato forgets, in short, something which should not be forgotten, and which Plato had striven to recall, marginally, in his own “doctrine”. That is, the issue of the *Urverdrängung*, where *theoria* would be either the cause, or the victim, and for which the Platonists, much more than Plato himself, are responsible and for which the “metaphysicians” are also responsible, but – maybe – not *the* puppet master of metaphysics.

Plato would have left the frame *in plain sight* which, as we were saying before, is a symptomatic way to put it. Plato would have left in plain sight something that cannot be seen, if not in lieu of something else which remains concealed from sight, and which would therefore be a matter of seeing. Plato shows a frame that is fictional, as is every exhibited frame. It is clear that the “true” frame is by definition not demonstrable; not possible to be shown or proven “in truth”. It is the problem which Lacan retrieves in a series of Lacanian places or figures which should be read alongside this passage on “telling the truth about truth”: anamorphosis (*Seminar XI*); schisis between statement and enunciation; enigma as enunciation, whose statement cannot be found (*Seminar XXIII*); function of the picture (*Seminar X*), and so on. Oddly enough, in other circumstances, Lacan does not return to or does not recognize this problem, although it shows up in the most flamboyant ways. In these cases, he seems to slide into the risk that, he elsewhere denounces with remarkable lucidity. Just think of the theory of speech genres: the speech of the analyst, of the capitalist, of the scientist, of religion: from what discursive place can Lacan categorize those speeches? Is there a fifth one that acts as meta-discourse? But is meta-discourse not a *canaille*, a dirty trick, as Lacan himself teaches us?

We notice *en passant* that, precisely here, the radical difference existing between two only apparently similar “strategies”, the strategy of meta-language and the strategy of the frame-tale, becomes manifest. The frame-tale, as we might say, is by no means a meta-tale. The Platonic display of the frame is by no means the appropriation of a foundation, but, we might say, the opportunity for an exercise; it is not the completion of a logical writing, but the de-completion of any existing logic in a writing mode. The Platonic text should be read at the edge of the frame, without forgetting the threshold, without taking it literally. This is what Plato seems to suggest by establishing a tension between the figure and its border. I am saying the truth, and I am saying that I am saying it. And if you move one step further, you will see that it is you, the reader, who is saying all this. Truth is this escape that cannot be said in truth. Better still, truth is the escape, which must not be said in truth. The escape is always already over, and this end of the escape is, in its own way, “true”. In Lacanian terms, the frame is an incision of contingency; it is precisely this friend who has dreamt of thirst; it is precisely myself, narrating about the thirsty friend. Thirst is always on the edge of this frame, of this event of integrally contingent enunciation, and thus, structurally enigmatic (an enigma is an enunciation whose statement is not found) or, better, symptomatic (symptomatic is the coincidence between the frame of truth and the field of truth, and the non-coincidence which that coincidence discards and produces, suffers and celebrates).

Lastly, we note that all of this, which takes place on the framework of the Platonic work, mirrors and repeats itself also within the Platonic framework, in the issue of the One, of the idea of ideas, and of the good. The One, the idea of ideas, the hyperuranic point on which all of architecture hinges or from which it descends, is the sun of good. It is a big eye, as Bataille would not have failed to notice. Or is it a phallogocentric image, as Derrida would have been allowed to notice? Perhaps not. The Platonic sun and the Wittgensteinian eye are figures not of ownership but of sovereignty; of sovereignty understood as *Fluchtpunkt* (vanishing point) and the halt of ownership. In that case, the One would not be plenitude, but what de-completes, what in effect is neither one nor many, what cannot and must not be said. Starting from this, everything is said or seen, including this saying that starting from there everything is said and seen. The One as linchpin of an exercise of knowledge on knowledge. Thus we have the one as frame, and the frame as one: the One as frame, if we look at the thing from within knowledge, if we look at the One as a figure of knowledge itself; the frame as One, inasmuch as the non-figurable edge of knowledge of those figures that appear included the One. The One is inscribed as meaning within another One that is circumscribed as the framework of meaning.

In other words, this impossibility to say the truth about the frame of truth outlines a problem which is not, philosophically speaking, a real one. Of the frame neither the truth nor the false – which are its inner effects of meaning – can be predicated. It makes no sense to tell in truth the frame of truth. What Lacan denounces as roguishness (at the ethical level) is a sign of stupidity at the logical level, or of incomprehension of what logic is all about. This is why the Platonic frames are so easily forgotten. They are in full sight precisely because they have to vanish, and they vanish precisely (in order to?) to come to the surface symptomatically, enigmatically, anamorphosically. Is it not the same movement as that of Wittgenstein’s eye? The eye is not seen, and nothing in the visual field makes us suspect that it is seen by an eye. The specific power of the eye resides precisely in this making things visible by dissolving itself in the outcome of that visibility; and in its re-appearing marginally, occasionally – for instance when I pass before a mirror, or when I find myself spied upon when I believed myself to be the spy. This means that it is not so much a matter of solving the paradox at the level of a new statement, or of saying in truth the frame of truth, nor of objecting to Plato that his tricks get resolved by showing a frame necessarily false, inasmuch as it is staged at the back of a further frame. It is, rather, a matter of inhabiting the paradox at the level of its enunciation, that is, it is a matter of “reading” the Platonic dialogue not in the function of a logic of truth, but of an ethics of truth.[12]

The dialogue, then, would be a theatrical device, a writing machine devised to produce frame effects, a text whose reading coincides with the activation of a further writing, a writing of that truth which each of us must inscribe at our own expense and “in one’s own soul” (just as in the *Phaedrus*) at that moment in which, as a reader, we discover ourselves consigned to the oscillation that subsists between what Plato writes and the threshold which, in that writing, Plato inscribes as an indescribable instance of writing itself.

Socrates: “Now, Protarchus, consider what the two theories are – the one which you mean now to take over from Philebus, and the other which I and my friends maintain, and which you are to dispute if you don’t find it to your liking. Would you like us to summarize them both?”

This is how the beginning of *Philebus resounds*,[13] and perhaps any Platonic prologue should be read as an apostrophe that inscribes that which is being said at the point of enunciation of the one who says it, and what the one who reads what is being said, re-writing it for oneself or in oneself. Just for this reason, perhaps, the well-known “unwritten” doctrines are not “oral” doctrines. Rather, they are doctrines that do not cease writing themselves exactly at the very moment in which they cannot write themselves.

These doctrines occupy the place of the writing stylus which, like Wittgenstein’s eye, does not fall within the field it discloses, even without ever being anywhere but at the foggy margin of that field. These doctrines must not be “known”, but used, precisely, as an enigmatic and *immaîtrisable* trace. The reader is called upon here not so much to know what she reads, but to do something about the trace of that knowledge which, in her, “in her soul”, gets written and produced.

The Frame and Death

Thus the whole history of philosophy strives to see itself seeing, to know itself knowing, to say the truth of truth. The self-affected structure of philosophy is a movement of redoubling. But what does this redoubling really mean?

We could say that the sole aim, or sole effect, of this redoubling, this self-affectedness, is to fail every time. Or, to put it differently: in failure it encounters its sole possible and hoped for success, i.e., the hetero-affective structure of self-affectedness or the dissipative movement of coincidence.

The exercise of coincidence, the event of the One, has no goal other than the production of non-coincidence. Or, as Merleau-Ponty had grasped in making this knot the pivot of his last reflections: to produce the coincidence of non-coincidence and non-coincidence of coincidence. Perhaps all philosophy, in its own structure of re-doubling, finds – along with the realization of its own metaphysical destiny (as regards the desire for coincidence, the dream of seeing itself see, and the totalizing which Lacan sensibly mistrusts) – the opening of its own anti-metaphysical destiny (as regards the non-coincidence of seeing oneself see and the desire of realizing non-coincidence through the radical exercise of coincidence).

If this is true, every expression of metaphysics, starting from Plato, reveals itself to be traversed by a sort of internal division, which reiterates and deepens itself at every point, while at every point it gets tangled and even cancels itself. Every metaphysics is, at the same time, more and less than what it claims to be. It exhibits a *dictum* and a place from which the *dictum* is uttered. It exhibits something ‘told’, and a place from which this something that is *told*, is told. It exhibits a truth, and a frame – neither true or false – of its own truth. The history of metaphysics is the history of a cumulative knowledge, of a *thesaurus veritatis* that crystallizes itself. But it is also the history of the incessant dissipation of that truth; of the squandering of that treasure in the name of truth itself, in the name of the treasure itself. In this sense, Lacan’s discourse, the analyst’s discourse, the discourse of psychoanalysis that “pontificates” – and yet cannot speak but “symptomatically” – is nothing other than metaphysics, but it is metaphysics itself in its inaugural intention. The later Heidegger, the one of the *End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, would probably have commented that, on the one hand, that the *Überwindung* of metaphysics is a gesture that does not overcome metaphysics itself but insists, rather, on the threshold that metaphysics itself has always inhabited, and, on the other, that we can aim at *Überwindung* only because metaphysics has always been part of that gesture, or resolves itself in it.

If one supposes an end of philosophy and a beginning of thought, it is because philosophy always “ends up” in its statements, just as it has always begun or re-begun from them, enigmatically extricating itself like the

enunciation point of those statements and in those statements.

On the other hand, one might say that every time one puts the frame on stage or passes through the frame, one also passes through a test that has to do with life and death. The frame, life, and death are connected by a subtle and tenacious, slender and necessary, thread. If in the *Decameron* the plague is the framework with its impending threat of pain and destruction, we might observe that, always and generally, the exhibition of the frame brings death or the plague into the scene which it frames (even if this exhibition brings them in precisely to the same degree that it also keeps them at a distance and neutralizes them). The light-heartedness of the tales in the villa betrays at every moment the menace of the disease, that lies outside the walls, but which brought everyone into the closed space of the villa, and which feeds everyone's own secret fears. Analogously, *One Thousand and One Nights* is framed by a novella which foresees that the tales which the authoress slowly interweaves have no other aim than to postpone a death-sentence, in some way keeping it alive and making it twinkle with every new syllable. As Viktor Sklovskij (1991) notes in a striking page from *Theory of Prose*, the narrative frame never fails to situate the narrative within a space stretched "between terrible sufferings and even between life and death".

Is not what Sklovskij formulates with respect to the novelistic frame basically a universal and irrevocable definition of the finiteness and of the *tyche* of every enunciation and of every human gesture? "Between terrible sufferings and even between life and death", is not this *intermezzo* the exception space of existence itself in its knowing and knowing how to precipitate towards an end which has always been present? Hegel's ill-famed declaration, which proudly claimed that his own mortal lips were the voice of absolute knowledge ["used to champion his own lips as the voice of absolute knowledge", [14] should perhaps be deciphered, from this perspective, as a declaration of infinite finiteness.

The Frame and the Debt

The frame encompasses and founds the truth while it exposes and hands the truth over to the structural risk of the plague: the risk of the finiteness of its instance of enunciation, of the corrosion which the instance of enunciation introduces into the otherwise transparent space of its statements.

If, therefore, there is a given ethics; an ethics of psychoanalysis as autobiographical practice; of the psychoanalytic discourse as one not immune from the necessity of its own theoretical autobiography; of metaphysics as an exercise coinciding with the impossible task of giving an autobiographical exhibition "in truth" of the frame of truth; of the Wittgensteinian "therapeutics" and of its vocation to dissolve theoretical problems by showing that they will find a solution not at the level of objectivities and truth which make a display of themselves within these very problems, but at the level of the constitutive mechanisms of those problems and of the lines of tension which from within those problems "display" those truths and objectivities as true and objective, and at the same time as incompatible and impossible, then this ethics has to do with something which we might call debt.

That is, the debt of truth with respect to its frame. The debt of every frame "shown in truth" with respect to a "real" frame that is not shown but anamorphosically. The debt of every consistency (truth, values, desires, objects, identities, images) towards an inconsistency, which is more real than reality. The debt of every vision towards an eye that is always another eye, of a sun always shining elsewhere.

What is there to do with such a debt?

What Lacan or Plato (or Hegel or Wittgenstein) seem to suggest or do every time – to say it with a well-known Lacanian expression from *Seminar VII* – is: "Don't give ground". Here, not giving ground can perhaps mean or be interpreted as follows: do not attempt to pay off the debt (paying it off simply means to die), do not repress the debt (repressing it means to experience it, to suffer it), and do not prevent it from transferring elsewhere (transferring it means simply to live).

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Notes:

[1] Lacan 1992, p. 184.

[2] Decameron (Italian: *Decamerone*), from the Greek *deka*: “ten” + *hemera* : “day” (ten days).

[3] Lacan 1966, p. 737 (English translation by Alvis Sforza).

[4] J. Lacan 1966, p. 738 (English translation by Alvis Sforza).

[5] J. Lacan 1991, p. 61 (English translation by Alvis Sforza).

[6] *Symposium*, 172 a-b.

[7] *Theaetetus*, 142 a.

[8] See part. IV, 53, col. 658, e IV, 54, col. 659, qtd. in J.-F. Mattéi (1983, p 51).

[9] This position is held by Gomperz, as Mattéi points out (1983, p. 49). Here, Mattéi is specifically referring to Gomperz's *Griechische Denker* (1893-1909, tr. fr. Gomperz, Paris 1940, p. 606). The French translation to which Mattéi makes reference does not entirely reflect the text, which rather speaks about "a sign of that growing indifference for what concerns the literary composition, so characteristic of Plato's last creative phase"; an indifference which, elsewhere, he explains by also hypothesizing "a gradual weakening of the artistic creativity of the author".

[10] For an overview of these different options, see Mattéi (1983, p. 49 ff.) For a theoretically compelling interpretation of the (apparent) inconsistencies of the prologue of the *Timaeus* with reference to the *Republic*, see C. Sini (2004).

[11] J. Lacan 1998, p. 71.

[12] On Platonic dialectics as device "contrived" in such a way as to instill in its addressee a specific exercise, a specific experience of truth as *askesis*, see M. Foucault (2008), particularly the 16th February 1983 lecture, hour 2; see also the 2nd March 1983 2nd hour. A second reading (an anti-Derridian one) of Plato, which turns the dialogue as a theatrical device whose performative capacity generates an effect of truth, which is such inasmuch as it coincides with a self-deconstruction of truth, is one developed by Ronchi (2004, pp. 149 ss.).

[13] *Philebus*, 11a.

[14] Sklovskij 1991.

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