Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein[1]

Aldo Giorgio Gargani

A comparison of Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard shows how a conception of religious experience and ethics can bring forth a paradigm of analytical philosophy and philosophy of language. Both philosophers understand philosophical inquiry not in terms of a theory but as an activity in which the mode of exposition is crucial (see Conant 1995a: 250). What is decisive in this sense is the *form of their writings* that conveys the basic meaning of their philosophical work – something that usually eludes commentators. One first paradox can be found in Kierkegaard when he writes in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that the statements made under his pseudonym are not his. This is what James Conant describes as the *abdication of authorship* (Conant 1995a: 253)*. This observation is similar to proposition 6.54 of *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein states: "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes then as senseless, when has climbed out, through them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly" (Wittgenstein TR: 6.54). As this paradox shows, Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's texts should not be read as asserting philosophical theses. Wittgenstein repeatedly states that if he put forward claims or scientific hypotheses these would be such that everyone would agree: "On all questions we discuss I have no opinion; and if I had, and it disagreed with one of your opinions, I would at once give it up for the sake of argument because it would be of no importance for our discussion. We constantly move in a realm where we all have the same opinions. All I can give you is a method; I cannot teach you any new truths…"(Wittgenstein: 1980: 97). In the course of discussions he had with some of the representatives of the *Vienna Circle*, Wittgenstein declared:

As regards your Theses, I once wrote, if there were theses in philosophy, they would have to be such that they do not give rise to disputes. For they would have to be such that they do not give rise to disputes. For they would have to be put in such a way that everyone would say, oh yes, that is of course obvious (Wittgenstein 1967b: 187; Eng. tr.: 68-69).

In the *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics* that he gave at Cambridge he said: "I won't say anything which anyone can dispute" (Wittgenstein 1976: 22). And in several conversations he observed: "I don't try to make you believe something you don't believe [...]" (Rhees 1970: 43).

According to D. Z. Philips (1993), the use of pseudonyms, the *abdication of authorship* expresses an attitude of flight, a *copping out*, or what Conant defines as a *flitting about*, a shifting from one perspective to another (Conant 1995a: 253). Josiah Thompson (1973) harbors a reservation towards Kierkegaard, accusing him of "playing with possibilities", retreating to a type of aesthetic experience that seeks to delineate the ethical element while succumbing to what he defines as a *performative contradiction*. In reality, though, contrary to what Thompson claims, the contradiction between the aesthetic sphere (objectifying, sensory, perceptive) and the ethical sphere (valorative, subjective, emotional) in Kierkegaard does not relate to the author of the text, that is, his pseudonym. Or, as Conant observes, ethics is presented in an aesthetic version by an author who is motivated rather by ethical-religious grounds (Conant 1995a: 257). James Conant asks the right question: "What is the nature of the authorial strategy, which underlines the pseudonymous works?" Taking this question as a point of departure, we will explore the background of this complex discursive space that we can find in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works and then again on the various levels of discourse that led to Wittgenstein's paradoxical statement 6.54 in *Tractatus*.

Neither Kierkegaard nor Wittgenstein attack or advance theses; rather, they draw attention to the necessity of dissolving the different categories of discourse. Kierkegaard takes issue with the confusion between aesthetic experience and ethical-religious experience, while Wittgenstein brings to light the confusion of different paradigms in his analysis of grammatical techniques. Kierkegaard's refutation of philosophy as a theory and as systematic knowledge coincides with his refusal to corroborate and legitimize ethical positions with epistemic arguments – positions that Wittgenstein converges with. The latter refutes philosophical work as a theory and rejects the structuring of religious experience in terms of a theoretical rationalization, that is, in terms of a theology. One of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms is Johannes Climacus who defines himself as a non-Christian, one who, driven by a detached, objective spirit of inquiry, wants to know how one becomes a Christian. Climacus realizes that the

aesthetic version lends an objective status to ethical and religious experience, which by contrast is subjective and is supposed to be eternally persecuted. To differentiate the realms of objective aesthetic experience from those of religion and ethics, Kierkegaard introduces the distinction between 'being Christian' vs. 'Christianity'. On the one hand, Christianity implies an adherence to a complex body of theological tenets, to doctrinal elements of a systematic theory, whereas being Christian involves subjectivity, a value experience that is lived in direct tension with the infinite. As Conant writes:

> Kierkegaard sees his reader as prone to confuse the task of becoming Christian with the question of subscribing to a doctrine or formulating a true theory (about, say, God) rather than as a matter of living a certain sort of life (Conant 1995a: 267).

Now for Kierkegaard being Christian does not consist of subscribing to propositions or beliefs, but rather of letting one's own existence be informed by the values of Christendom. For Kierkegaard, greater knowledge had led man to forget the significance of existence and inwardness: "My principal thought was that in our age, because of the great increase of knowledge, we had forgotten what it means to exist, and what inwardness signifies, and that the misunderstanding between speculative philosophy and Christianity was explicable on that ground." (Kierkegaard 1941a: 223; see also Edwards 1985: 30). In his *Diary* Kierkegaard writes:

> Christendom is not a doctrine [...] If Christianity (precisely because it is not a doctrine) is not reduplicated in the life of the person expounding it, then he does not expound Christianity, for Christianity is a message about living and can only be expounded by being realized in men's lives (Kierkegaard D: 117; see also Conant 1995a: 267).

Here one sees a deep affinity to Wittgenstein's attitude when he writes that Christendom is not a doctrine (Cf. Wittgenstein 1977: 28, 53). Wittgenstein thus assumes that the Calvinist principle of predestination should not be considered a law that governs historical events but as a paradigm according to which events can be examined, as a criterion for comparing events. Kierke-gaard draws a distinction between 'Christianity' and 'Christendom': the former is an aesthetic, sensory, objective realization of a complex set of doctrines and habitual practices. The latter, by contrast, is an experience of subjectivity that genuinely thrives from the tension with the infinite. As this experience becomes condensed and crystallizes in an objective impersonal content, it loses its religious significance. In both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, the objectifying attitude and the exercise of an abstract rationality are linked to a notion of knowledge understood as a literal representation, as an iconic image, one that is reflexive and mimetic vis-à-vis reality. In Kierkegaard, the production of representations and of ideas is

linked to the absence of emotions and passions, which, in turn, is rooted in abstract thought that does not take the individual into account at all. In *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard observes that "an age without passions does not produce values and everything is transformed into representational ideas" (Kierkegaard 1940: 40). The coldness of the contemporary age is reflected in the constellation of abstractions that embrace everything without being anything, like notions such as the 'public', 'good taste', 'public opinion' and the like. As Wittgenstein would come to say, under the spell of the myth of rationality as representation, we idealize and hold sublime thought and language:

This odd conception springs from a tendency to sublimate the logic of our language – as one might put it. […] And such a strange connection really obtains, particularly when a philosopher tries to fathom the relation between name and what is named by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name, or even the word "this" innumerable times. […] For philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday [*denn die philosophischen Probleme entstehen, wenn die Sprache feiert*] (Wittgenstein PU; I, § 38).

Wittgenstein takes a formally analogous position when he asserts that psychoanalysis has been dead since Freud, and this not because Freud was the greatest master of psychoanalysis but in the sense that if Freud was the ingenious thinker who discovered the language of the unconscious, it was also he who killed it by *explaining* the contents of the psychoanalytic experience, explaining dreams and reducing them to the vocabulary of everyday language, because the *explanation* had suppressed the original *meaning* of psychological experience, which consists of that language and not its explication, not its reducibility to the idiom of causal networks.

For both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, religion demands a subjective relationship of the believer, while ordinary man, the common reader tends to confuse Christendom with the adherence and subscription to a theory, instead of conceiving it as a way of life. This confusion informs *Christendom*, the Christianity based on what Kierkegaard defines as a monstrous illusion. The aesthetic, that is, perceptive, sensory, objectifying distortion of Christendom distinguishes affiliation to Christianity from being genuinely Christian. To be actually affiliated with 'Christianity' means to acknowledge that ones attends Church regularly, that one is baptized, that one's own children are baptized, that one partakes of the Sunday rituals at Church, and the like. This group of characteristics is what constructs the identity of a person affiliated with "Christianity". However, this identity corresponds to an abstract notion of man and not to being Christian, which consists in an intentional stance that is motivated by subjectivity. As Kierkegaard writes in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

It is from this side, in the first instance, that objection must be made to modern philosophy; not that it has a mistaken presupposition, but that it has a comical presupposition, occasioned by its having forgotten, in a sort of world-historical absent-mindedness, what it means to be a human being. Not indeed, what it means to be a human being in general; for this is the sort of thing that one might even induce a speculative philosopher to agree to; but what it means that you and I and he are human beings, each one for himself (Kierkegaard 1941a: 109).

As James Edwards notes, neither Kierkegaard nor Wittgenstein "has any confidence in the worth of large-scale, impersonal, "objective" philosophizing" (Edwards 1985: 150). Disentangling the distinction made by Kierkegaard is also something that Wittgenstein conveys, be it on the level of recognizing ethical and religious authenticity, be it on the level of the paradigm of linguistic analysis. While for Kierkegaard it is about the distinction between 'Christianity' and 'Christendom', for Wittgenstein it is about the realization of a new model for analyzing grammatical techniques. Assuming, in the footsteps of the works by Stanley Cavell, Stephen Mulhall and James Conant, that the second Wittgenstein does not describe a geography of concepts, a variety of forms of life or linguistic games, but rather addresses contexts in which a categorical confusion or a "categorical error" is at stake, we can draw this profound analogy. In the first part of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein addresses the grammatical misunderstanding generated by the confusion of different grammatical models. Let's assume that someone gives a shopkeeper an order such as "five red apples". The shopkeeper opens a drawer and takes out the apples, opens another drawer and consults a chart of colors, and then opens another containing a Pythagorean chart – the philosophical error consists in assuming that the terms "apples", "red" and "five" all mean the same way. By contrast, "apple" designates a physical, discrete object, while "red" does not refer to an object but to a property; "five" denotes neither an object nor a property but an algorithmic term. "Christendom" and "Christianity" are confused just as "five", "apple" and "red" are confused. A categorical error was made throughout all of metaphysical ontology that had identified the different meanings of the word "to be": 1) as an attributive expression of a property, "the rose is red", "Mr. Green is green"; 2) as an expression of logical-mathematical identity, "5 is the same as 2 + 3"; 3) as the expression of existence: "There's Carlo Ginzburg on the chair"; 4) as an expression of co-extensive functions: "A bachelor is an unmarried man". The problem with the form of exposition – not to forget that even philosophical work is a text (as Stanley Cavell reminds us) – proves to be tightly linked to the practice of philosophy as analysis and logico-conceptual discussion, instead of an elaboration of theses and theories. In *The Point of View of My Work*, Kierkegaard acknowledges that the use of pseudonyms is

aimed at avoiding that *authorship* becomes transformed into a doctrine. As James Conant (1995a: 272) points out, the use of pseudonyms means that certain forms of philosophical work are left to the reader. The pseudonymous works serve to show that Christianity (misunderstood as Christendom) is a morbid illusion. And the illusion cannot be destroyed directly, head-on. As Kierkegaard notes:

> No, an illusion can never be destroyed directly, and only by indirect means can it be radically removed. If it is an illusion that all are Christians – - – and if there is anything to be done about it, it must be done indirectly, not by one who vociferously proclaims himself an extraordinary Christian, but by one who, better instructed, is ready to declare that he is not a Christian at all (1939: 24-25).

Illusion, that is, grammatical illusion (*grammatische Täuschung*) is also the target of Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis. Illusion is the context of incoherent points of view – Christianity and Christendom, categories of objects, categories of properties, of numbers. According to Kierkegaard, the reader should not be confronted with or challenged by a theoretical or dogmatic approach; rather, he should be liberated from the confusion with which he lives, for example, from the conviction of being Christian while in reality living the *aesthetic experience* of religion. We can say that Kierkegaard's and Wittgenstein's philosophical inquiry is destined by means of an indirect model (on the basis of which Kierkegaard, in particular, defines "indirect communication"[2]) to resolve, or better, to dissolve, the illusion brought on by linguistic-conceptual misunderstandings, while false belief, a false assertion can be directly repressed by recourse to arguments of an epistemological nature.

Illusion or misunderstanding originates in a conceptual understanding, which implies that 'being Christian' and 'being Danish' are deemed identical. To be sure, no Dane would say that 'Danish' and 'Christian' are synonyms and yet effectively the two terms are ultimately treated as identical. The literal reading of the term 'Christian' ultimately allows it to falsely coincide with 'Danish' (born in Denmark, baptized, who partakes of the rites of the Christian church, who celebrates religious celebrations, and the like.) When they say 'Christian' to refer to 'religious', if they are to explain the meaning of these expressions, they state something that is not religious, but rather aesthetic (that is, objective, sensory, factual). To prevent the term 'religious' or 'Christian' from being taken literally (Edwards 1985: 211-215, 223-224), a radical turn in life is called

---

[2]   On the subject of indirect communication in Kierkegaard's work, cf. the sweeping and illuminating analysis by L. Amoroso, "L'arte della Comunicazione" (Amoroso 1990), on which my observations are largely based.

for in the life of those who simply define themselves as Christians. As Conant writes, "for the word to have a religious meaning when it is applied to itself, it would be necessary, first and foremost, that their lives be subjected to a radical transformation." This points to a strong analogy between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard. The realization of the authentic meaning of a concept is closely linked to the context of the form of life. For Wittgenstein, philosophical problems can be resolved or dissolved only by the transformation or change of the *form of life*, the *Lebensform* (Wittgenstein BGM: app., II, β 4). Kierkegaard's indirect communication and the paradoxical dialectic of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* that implies the self-elimination of his own utterances is only related to the fact that metaphysical illusions, mythologies do not spring from an intellectual source, but are rather rooted in feelings and will (Wittgestein 2000: 275). But this circumstance, for Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard, shows that where one claimed to have an insight, there was indeed nothing to think.

Probably referring to Descartes and ironizing the idolatry of science, Kierkegaard writes: "the objective tendency [...] proposes to make everyone an observer, and in its maximum to transform him into so objective an observer that he becomes almost a ghost" (Kierkegaard 1941a: 118). Commenting on Kierkegaard, James Edwards (1985: 167), in turn, sees in Descartes' subject-observer the origin of the narcissistic epistemology that culminates in Kant. The indirect communication that Kierkegaard refers to is a sort of mirror in which the reader can recognize himself and reflect on himself. For Wittgenstein the goal of philosophical analysis is to lead the reader from latent nonsense to patent nonsense. The *Tractatus* actually offers a strategy that introduces a series of assertions only to then revoke them in the end, that is to say, the *Tractatus* is a doctrine that revokes itself and subverts itself from within. In *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, Rush Rhees recalls how Wittgenstein, on numerous occasions, declared that his goal was "to demolish, if he could, the entire idea of philosophical discussion as a contest to settle who's right and who's wrong" (Rhees 1970: 42). Following in Wittgenstein's footsteps, Wilfrid Sellars claims that the answers to philosophical problems should consist of the obvious. Philosophy proves to be "a quest of which the goal is obvious" (Sellars 1948: 424-425). To his students Wittgenstein would repeat that their philosophical problems could be resolved or dissolved by illustrating the various possible applications of a term that was at the center of a dispute or a philosophical problem. The multiplicity of the uses of a term, not a counter-argument, demolishes the inexorable or irresolvable aspect of a philosophical question. As Conant writes:

Our state (that of being a prisoner of an illusion) can be rendered visible through the construction of a much larger mirror in which the entire etiology of our confu-

sion is represented. But certainly language is a complex structure, so complex that it requires a piecemeal procedure, like a series of small mirrors in which the reader can recognize him/herself, while new problems are constantly appearing (1995a: 273).

For Kierkegaard, it is from a model of discussion focusing on the religious experience of Christendom that it follows that Christianity is rendered an aesthetic paradigm and thus resembles a mythology. In his *Diary*, Kierkegaard writes:

For a moment let us admit that Christianity exists objectively, even if this is not really true, also in the sense that its objective existence is really far from being Christianity. Let us thus assume that it exists objectively speaking. What still does not exist is the type of emotion that is the condition for being able to receive the content of Christianity, an unconditioned passion, the passion of the unconditioned. This type of passion literally no longer appears in the world (…) Yet if the formal condition of being capable of receiving the content of Christianity does not exist, objective existence is now, as it were, an existence which nonetheless in another sense is not an existence, thus Christianity is mythology, poetry, and what it is by virtue of the so-called orthodoxy (D: 430).

This passage reveals two strong analogies with Wittgenstein's thought. On the one hand, it focuses on the fact that the distorted comprehension of a concept produces a myth and on the other hand, it states that behind this myth there is no object or content that is effectively thought or intended. But even for Wittgenstein the misunderstanding of the grammar of our language creates illusory objects, myths, "illustrated turns of speech" (*illustrierte Redewendungen*) as he says in *Philosophical Investigations*.[3] And as already noted in *Tractatus*, incomprehension, grammatical misunderstanding creates the illusion of thinking something, whereas in actual fact nothing is being thought, and what is being experienced is indeed a hallucination of meaning. Even before the semantic concepts of true and false, the concept of nonsense becomes a decisive category of philosophical inquiry. For Kierkegaard:

The actual difference between human beings is simply the way in which they prefer nonsense. It is the universal human condition to do this […]. Approaching something from a scientific, aesthetic, etc. point of view, it is easy for a person to be led to assume that he actually knows something for which he has the word. It is the concrete intuition that is lost. And now we consider the ethical approach! How easy it is for someone to be led to think man (abstraction) instead of thinking of himself, this great

---

[3]   Wittgenstein, PU: I, § 295: "Virtually a pictorial representation of our grammar. Not facts, but as it were, illustrated turns of speech".

concreteness. Herein lies the truth of Pythagorean teaching, communicating with silence. This is the way to acquire consciousness of the concrete (D: 2324).

In Kierkegaard nonsense is intimately linked to language. "How ironic it is that it is precisely by way of language that a person can lower himself below what remains unarticulated. Because nonsense is actually a category that is much lower than unarticulated being" (*Ibid.*: !!2326). Kierkegaard addresses the abuse of language, which he sees as a dangerous foe to man, even more dangerous than carnal desires. Through the abuse of language man reaches the point of not having any scruples in describing himself, deceiving himself and others. The abuse of language is even more widespread – it is like the lust of the flesh and bloodlust. The expressions of Christendom become perverted in a different or contrary meaning as it occurs in everyday language. The terms 'lost' and 'saved' in the vocabulary of Christendom mean something different than they do in the language of everyday man who, moreover, defines himself as 'Christian'. It is said, Kierkegaard continues, that "God speaks with joy to man", and now Christianity draws the consequence that "to be Christian means to enjoy life" (*Ibid.*: !!2332-2333); and what is more, the word "pastor" has lost its original sense of guidance and has now assumed the meaning of a state of servility and impotence (*Ibid.*: !!2329). For Kierkegaard this depletion of meaning is the expression of the culture, the *Zivilisation* that is also the subject of critical analysis and refutation in Wittgenstein (1984: 7).

Similarly, Wittgenstein sees as a fundamental task of his inquiry, now taken to be an activity (*Tätigkeit*) and no longer doctrine or theory (*Lehre*), to distinguish between a grammar of a real form and a spurious, superficial grammar, the confusion of both being the cause of misunderstandings from which philosophy springs forth. From this perspective, nonsense, as opposed to the traditional standard interpretation of *Tractatus*, but in keeping with what James Conant and Cora Diamond claim in *The New Wittgenstein* (Conant 2000; Diamond 2000), is not the wrong, incorrect manifestation of an object or a fact that exists but cannot be said and is thus relegated to ineffability. Indeed, it is simply pure nonsense, something, which cannot serve for thinking anything, it is "austere nonsense" in a strict understanding of nonsense and not "substantial nonsense" in a metaphysical understanding. What is crucial – and also found in both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein – is that they were able to identify the source of philosophical issues and the fundamental attitudes of human existence, such as ethics and religion in the confusion of various categories, behind the surface of grammar that renders them identical or similar. For both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, grammatical analysis is accompanied by an ethical discipline of discourse, as I tried to show in *Il Coraggio di Essere*

(*The Courage of Being*, Gargani 1992: 75-106). It is a tension of an ethical nature that must impose itself on the misguiding proclivities of sentiment, emotion and will that work in the service of reassurance, securing metaphysical ideas, idealizations and sublimations. This ethical tension has to face the sacrifice that is implicit in the renunciation of deceptive models of ideas that respond to the propensities of sentiment and of will, but not to those of the mind, as we have seen in Wittgenstein's *Big Typescript* (2000: 275). Ethics thus corresponds to a semantic disposition of a *Tiefengrammatik*, a deep grammar, as opposed to *oberflächliche Grammatik* (surface grammar), which, for both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, reflects a misunderstanding of the categories of language use – a conceptual confusion that creates what Cavell, Conant and Mulhall have, variously, defined as a "hallucination of sense" (Cavell 1969; 1979; Conant 1989; 1995b; Mulhall 2001). For Kierkegaard as well as Wittgenstein, it is about the conversion of concepts from a doctrinal level to the practical-logical level of their content as experienced in life, as in the case of the concept 'being Christian'. This appeal to the actual experience of a form of life, in which concepts assume their authentic meaning in the sense that they are put to work, constitutes a deep link between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. In Wittgenstein, this link is revealed through the reference to the practical uses of concepts and thus, most notably, to ethical-religious experience in terms of a parable, that is, actions that are endowed with an exemplary or paradigmatic sense (Edwards 1985: 61-63, 164ff.). One can thus recognize a link between the study of the meaning of 'Christian' in Kierkegaard's linguistic-conceptual analysis and in Wittgenstein's studies of grammar, against the common backdrop of a tension regarding the ethics of discourse. According to the authors of *The New Wittgenstein*, the subtle linguistic-conceptual analyses of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein do not reveal layers of truth and meaning, that is, on the one hand, "what can be said" as a manifest and explicit expression and, on the other hand, "what cannot be said", what is ineffable, as a reality or entity that exists in a certain sense but cannot be attributed to language. For these authors the assumption of there being something ineffable that refers to entities that would not lend themselves to being expressed is, as these authors argue, in reality only an illusion, simply the effect of a hallucination of sense. As James Conant notes that there is no particular thing that cannot be said. "The 'thing' in 'that cannot be said' does not refer to anything" (Conant 1989: 244).

Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein's first work are deeply moving because they shed light on a deep and subtle distinction of various types of truth. The issue in this case is that one derives a strong sense of satisfaction and of intellectual gain from a distinction whose coherence was entirely hallucinated […] I would argue that the intuition

that we can and do effectively imagine something where we don't understand anything is no less central to the teaching of the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus* (*Ibid.*: 252, 255).

Stanley Cavell (1969: 167-179; 1984: 217-234), too, describes Kierkegaard's work as "grammatical investigations". Kierkegaard had recognized the grammatical status of issues that seem to have only an empirical aspect. In *Themes out of School*, Cavell writes: "we tend to diagnose every uncertainty of ours as if there were a form of empirical uncertainty" (Cavell 1984: 255) and adds: "where faith is missing, we are able to fill the void with knowledge" (Cavell 1969: 169). What has been lost – and this is the danger that Kierkegaard points to – is the meaning of revelation and it could be, as Cavell observes, that revelation is no longer part of our life. By way of linguistic analysis, Kierkegaard, however, tries to offer an instrument, that is, a grammatical criterion for what should count as revelation (as Wittgenstein did in his polemic against the mechanisms and the automatisms of *Zivilisation*). In an age of reflection, Kierkegaard recognizes the phenomenon of the intellectualization of ethical and religious issues. In his *Diary*, he observes that the Christians are not Christians. "The strange thing about Christendom is that this cannot be taught." Kierkegaard writes:

How far Christianity is from being a living reality may be best seen in me. For even with my clear knowledge of it I am still not even a Christian… must discover Christianity by myself, must dig down to make it emerge from the perverted state it has sunken to. Their [Christian] lives, like those of heathens […]. I have never seen anyone whose life expressed that [Christendom] (D: 147-150).

In his *Diary*, Kierkegaard refers to a condition of suffering as a prerequisite for grasping the meaning of Christendom. In Wittgenstein we find an epistemology of suffering, as it were, when he declares that renouncing metaphysics is a sacrifice of sentiment and will and not of the mind, as we have already seen. This epistemology of suffering is also revealed when he notes that truth can be uttered only by someone who is in the midst of suffering and when he shows the necessity of inner force to go beyond the superficial in writing and speaking. While from an epistemological position the positivists rejected religious discourse as nonsense, Kierkegaard questions here the renunciation of it from a semantic point of view, showing that contemporary man is no longer able to understand what it means to be Christian. Kiekegaard's strategy of using pseudonyms and Wittgenstein's self-revocation and self-renunciation in *Tractatus* serve to construct other mirrors in which we can recognize in ourselves the hidden philosopher that these two philosophers spy and help us to discover (Conant 1989: 269), that is, the hallucination of meaning to which we are susceptible since we are unable to distinguish the different ways of using

concepts, assimilating them instead and thus committing the typical categorical errors. It is assimilation, in keeping with an alimentary metaphor coined by Kierkegaard, that is comparable to what he called hunter's style chicken – the roast chicken with sugar.

Let's assume that someone found a way to prepare the roast chicken with sugar and continued to call it hunter's style chicken. Wouldn't I be right to say that this is not hunter's style chicken? And after realizing that his sweet roast chicken was beginning to find favor with the other diners at the table […] he were then appeal to their good taste, asking whether they really didn't like his hunter's style chicken, wouldn't this be a trick to divert attention […] (Kierkegaard D: 3967; see also Amoroso 1990: 32ff.)

Kierkegaard's intentional, deliberate, even bold ambiguity and his struggle against the semi-conscious, incoherent and really confusing ambiguity of 'Christianity' (as opposed to 'Christendom') have something in common with the analytic approach used by Wittgenstein in demolishing philosophical myths. In Kierkegaard, the movement from aesthetics to religion corresponds to the one that Wittgenstein traces as the movement from an implicit misunderstanding to a patent misunderstanding. The dual strategy that Wittgenstein applies in *Tractatus*, as a result of which the propositions expressed revoke themselves, the sequence of intermediate connections pursued by the Austrian philosopher in the works in his second phase correspond to the strategy that Kierkegaard employs in recognizing the inefficacy of argumentations and explanations when juxtaposed with those that nurture illusions. An illusion cannot be dispelled directly but only indirectly. The idea is to take whoever is caught in illusion by surprise: "A direct attack only strengthens a person in his illusion, and at the same time embitters him" (Kierkegaard 1939: 25). This point of analogy testifies to a strong affinity between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard; the latter observes: "If one wants to successfully lead someone to a specific place, it is necessary above all to find him in a place where he is and to communicate here" (*Ibid.*: 136).

In his *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, Wittgenstein writes:

We must begin with the mistake and transform it into what is true. That is, we must uncover the source of the error; otherwise hearing what is true won't help us. It cannot penetrate when something is taking its place. To convince someone of what is true, it is not enough to state it; we must find the road from error to truth (Wittgenstein 1967a: 234; Eng. tr. 2010: 242).

Kierkegaard's bone of contention is Christianity that creates misunderstandings in aesthetic (that is objective, perceptive) terms of Christendom, which thus "moves to the realm of fantasy" (D: 1571) In Wittgenstein we

find a double elaboration of the Kierkegaard's theme of the authenticity of ethical-religious experience. On the one hand, there is in Wittgenstein, more explicitly, the exigency to realize ethics and religion through an authentic experience in real, experiential terms, which should then translate into actions, into assuming responsibility, into parables, that is, into actions that have been attributed a spiritual meaning. On the other hand, there is – and this is the second specifically Wittgensteinian theme – the translation in terms of logical-linguistic analysis of what, in Kierkegaard, was originally an instance of ethical-religious authenticity. This process culminates in the conversion, pursued by Wittgenstein, of the concept of meaning into that of use. In other words, one can note a parallel between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein in the sense that for Kierkegaard Christendom requires an authentic lived experience, a commitment to experience it and to live through it, without which Christendom ends up being a vacuous label, a formalism, while for Wittgenstein the notion of meaning boils down to an abstraction, a vacuous idea if it is not realized in the effective practice of a linguistic application. Faith must be lived, practiced in an existential way, while meaning must be use, an effective application of symbols. For both of these authors, it is the clarification and elimination of the illusions of philosophical and religious mythologies that is at stake. Kierkegaard's appeal to inwardness, to a earnestness consistent "in the work against oneself" (Kierkegaard 1939: 117), to the necessity of a real religious experience from a philosophical point of view is translated in Wittgenstein not only into an instance of ethical authenticity (Gargani 1992: 82-83) but also into a linguistic-conceptual paradigm that redirects the notion of meaning from an illusory abstractness of an intentional attitude based on inaccessible mental and private processes to the practical use of words. Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein share another point, which is consistent with the aforementioned, that is, the impossibility of conveying ethics by way of theory and an explicit formulation. If, in fact, as Leonardo Amoroso observes, "one does not understand *ethics* as a reflection on morality but as the same moral reality, then it is true as Kierkegaard states, that ethics cannot be taught (*docere*), because *docere* is communicating in a non-ethical sense" (1990: 43). For Wittgenstein this ineffability of ethics and the inner sphere of values extends to the actual underpinnings of communication in the sense that language cannot say *what it does* to say what it says. The profound element to be found in both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein is the restitution of meaning that is intended as an immanent condition inherent in an autonomous, independent symbolic structure. Or, as the young Wittgenstein wrote: "In this way the proposition represents the situation – as it were off its own bat [*auf eigene Faust*]" (1961: 26).

In his writings on the dialectics of ethical and ethical-religious communication, Kierkegaard observes that "when someone lectures on ataraxia ex cathedra, then this is ethically not true. No, the situation should be such that he demonstrates ataraxia at the same time. […] For ethics the principle holds completely that it cannot be an object of 'teaching'." Ethical-religious experience cannot be articulated explicitly by means of language, in what Kierkegaard defines as "direct communication". A misunderstanding that Kierkegaard links to the reading of two different categories of communication, that is, that of *knowing* (correlated to an object) and that of *power* (not correlated to any object; see Amoroso 1990: 46-47). Given its more practical nature, the latter does not convey information, knowledge, insights, but rather shapes an individual. All communication of knowledge is *direct communication*. All communication of power is more or less *indirect communication*.

Indirect communication is linked to a voluntarist basis of religious experience, which is a surrendering to the will of God but at the same time it is an affirmation of one's own will in the sense that the latter violates ethics as was the case in the sacrifice of Isaac on the part of Abraham, the "knight of faith" in *Fear and Trembling*. In this paradoxical condition, delineated by the "knight of faith", he faces his own ineffability in which for Wittgenstein one hits upon ethical-religious experience. In this connection Wittgenstein cites Kierkegaard, in *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*:

Man feels the urge to run up against the limits of language. Think for example of the astonishment that anything at all exists. This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, and there is also no answer whatsoever. […] Kierkegaard too saw that there is this running up against something and he referred to it in a fairly similar way (as running up against paradox.) This running up against the limits of language is ETHICS. I think it is definitely important to put an end to all the claptrap about ethics – whether intuitive knowledge exists, whether values exist, whether the good is definable (Wittgenstein 1967b: 68-69).

In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard writes:

But what is this unknowable thing which the mind hits against with its paradoxical passion? It is the unknowable. It is the boundary to which we keep coming back (1941a: 36).

In this sense, for Kierkegaard *comprehending* means *becoming* something, becoming the content it contains: "When I understand something in its possibility, I essentially remain unchanged, I remain in the old things and I make use of fantasy. When, by contrast, something becomes reality, it is I that changes" (D: 2650). Wittgenstein, in turn, observes that one cannot approach or

reach truth, if one is not already in the truth; it cannot be reached by extending one's hand. He also observed that man must express himself in the midst of suffering, but without making a theory out of suffering (1977: 63, 77). With his paradoxical, but in reality essential use of pseudonyms, Kierkegaard speaks about something, which, precisely in the act of being spoken, changes and transforms its meaning. This is something that also applies to him, when he declares himself to be a poet and thinker of Christendom but precisely by being a poet, that is an esthetic interpreter of the religious experience which becomes distorted by being elaborated in esthetic, external, perceptive, objective terms because such an elaboration relates to the ethical-religious ideal only through fantasy: "I will become a poet and a thinker, they are known for this but with respect to Christendom and the ideal of being Christian [...] Alas, I am not this, I am neither a poet nor a Christian thinker" (*Ibid*.: 2236) This is the position assumed by Johannes Climacus when, declaring himself not to be Christian, he rewrites the Christian in esthetic terms, thus in a way that is alien to the authentic inner reality of a Christian man.

From what has been said above, we can thus assume that there exists an intimate relationship between the ethical-religious underpinnings and the paradoxical structure of the logical-linguistic analysis of *Tractatus* in reference to proposition 6.54 which bears out the specific form of Wittgenstein's philosophy. In essence, Wittgenstein recognizes in this proposition and in everything implied by the others the paradox that consists precisely in the fact that the assertions made in *Tractatus* are not commensurable with the critical norms expressed in the very same *Tractatus*. In Wittgenstein's case, the paradox assumes that the meaning of the assertions cannot be *explained*; in Kierkegaard's case the paradox consists in it not being possible to explain or show what *being Christian* is, because the meaning of 'Christian' consists in *becoming* one, not in *describing it* or *teaching it*. The analogy can be extended to bring together Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard in one and the same intellectual strategy, that is, in the task, the duty of describing and explaining what in principle should not be described nor explained. In this sense, both bring forth elucidations that while enlightening the reader and the author with regard to the world, the state of affairs, at the same time presuppose and foresee their self-revocation.

At the end of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Johannes Climacus writes:

So what I write contains also a piece of information to the effect that everything is to be understood that it is understood to be revoked, and the book has not only a Conclusion but a Revocation (in Kierkegaard 1941a: 547).

Wittgenstein writes the following in the final propositions of his *Tractatus*:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally rec-
ognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over
them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He
must surmount these propositions, then he sees the world rightly. Whereof one cannot
speak, thereof one must be silent (Wittgenstein TR: 6.54).

The paradoxical nature that such strategies involve is destined to be dis-
solved as the reader is enlightened about false elucidations and can, once en-
lightened, recognize the illegitimacy of the instruments he has used to reach
the clarity of his vision of the world. Kierkegaard's tactic, in his *Concluding Un-
scientific Postscript*, of distinguishing himself and his own responsibility from
the pseudonymous figures he uses can be compared with the rejection the
author of *Tractatus* expresses in the comparisons of propositions that he had
expressed and asserted up to that point. Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein rethink
the nature of philosophical examination as a discovery and invention of new
possibilities – be it in the sense of new modes of viewing an issue, be it in the
sense of perceiving in philosophy the rejection of systems and a commitment to
work on real individual issues (see Kierkegaard 1939: 146; 1941a: 259; Wittgen-
stein 1977: 38; 2000: 275). The dual figure of the pseudonym also manifests it-
self in the paradoxical inversion of roles and attitudes that contrast the humor-
ist Climacus with the comedy of a speculative philosopher who erects theories,
losing contact with the ground of reality and of existence, but that also show
the comedy of Climacus when in the name of Christianity he would proceed
to come up with a philosophical speculation on existence (Kierkegaard 1941a:
295, 407, 468, 577). The abstract and speculative intellectual exercise cannot
explain the paradox on which the religious experience of faith is based. As
Kierkegaard writes: "To explain the paradox would mean to understand more
and more profoundly what a paradox is, and that the paradox is always the
paradox" (1941a: 197). This tactic used by Kierkegaard is of illuminating value
with regard to what is intimately linked to Wittgenstein's work in terms of the
inherence and the immanence of meaning of the symbol, which as such is thus
not capable of being explained. Therefore the scholar will grasp the paradox,
as he gains greater understanding of the paradox, that is to say, not exiting the
circle of its immanent meaning, or as Wittgenstein would say, illustrating the
inherence of meaning to the symbol, that nothing is deader than death, noth-
ing more beautiful than beauty (1967a: 242).

In *Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard rejects the position of the poet as sinful
in the sense that it relates only in fantasy to ethics and religion, but does not
make for real religious experience (1941b: 661). An analogous paradigm is re-
vealed in Wittgenstein, when he refutes religion as theology, that is, as science
of religion, refutes ethics as ethical theory, refuses to advance theses and theo-

ries in general. We could ask ourselves: where did ethics end up in the work of the second Wittgenstein? Obviously, ethics did not vanish from the horizon in these works, but unlike the Faustian position of the *Tractatus*, *of the ego facing the world* – now, in the works of the second Wittgenstein, ethics expresses itself, adhering to the consistent practices of ordinary language, in the correct use of the words, of making language. Bringing forth meaning, producing effective utterances with meaning only to the extent language is applied, to the extent that it is used and not thought, imagined, is the analytic consequence that Wittgenstein draws from a model of religious communication that shows an affinity to Kierkegaard's one. But what Kierkegaard, in the guise of Climacus and of Anti-Climacus, and Wittgenstein share is the consciousness that authenticity cannot be reached if not by passing through inauthenticity, that it constitutes the point of departure of human existence. By the same token, one does not reach faith if one does not pass through scandal, for Kierkegaard, and one does not reach truth and authenticity, for Wittgenstein, if one does not break with error, bringing it back to truth. The complexity of this process of assertion, followed by the self-revocation and self-elimination of the same proposition, converges in an experience of illumination, of the proper vision of things, on the basis of which Wittgenstein defined as a key term his "über-sichtliche Darstellung", the perspicacious representation. Such a process can find a formal analogy in the structure in *Fear and Trembling* where the knight of faith, Abraham who is about to sacrifice Isaac, violates ethics that prescribes that one should not kill. He does this to comply with the will of God (which invariably becomes his will as well) and finally, because he agreed to sacrifice his son, his son was spared. He who renounces is able to receive everything. God calls for the sacrifice and then revokes it (Wahl 1952: XXIII, XXVI). We can renounce ethics and that what we love because it will be given back to us precisely by virtue of the renunciation that we have accepted to carry out. Analogously, the clarity of which Wittgenstein speaks, obtained through the self-revocation of his own assertions, is the fruit of the renunciation of one's own assertions. For Kierkegaard (and in a certain sense also for Wittgenstein) religious belief is free of presuppositions, foundations, or argumentation. It cannot explain itself and not even describe (it thus has an infinite expansion that thrives from time). For this very reason Wittgenstein to whom Moritz Schlick suggested the alternative between two fundamental conceptions of the essence of the Good – one assumes that the Good is Good because it is what God wants; the other, in turn, that God commands the Good because it is Good – responds by saying: "I think that the first interpretation is the profounder one; what God command, that it is good. For it cuts off the way to any explanation 'why' it is good, while the second interpretation is the shallow,

rationalist one, which proceeds as if you could give reasons for what is good"
(Wittgenstein 1967b: 115). Faith, like all meaning, is an immanent condition,
inherent in what it manifests. There is no access to this from the outside, and
there is no explanation or cause that reveals the meaning. Without the anxiety
and desperation that constitute the middle point between the terms of paradox
that Abraham experiences, he would not be the man of faith he is. It is in this
tension, on this crest of a paradox between faith and ethics, faith and aesthet-
ics that religious experience becomes effective, this paradox of a much larger
scope that is synthetically manifested in God as man who is Jesus Christ. It is
in this sense that Wittgenstein wrote to the architect Paul Engelmann that he
had become a man, better: a more decent man ("*ein anständiger Mensch*"), re-
ally, because he recognized that he was at the same time an indecent man ("*ein
unanständiger Mensch*"; Gargani 1992: 85). But it is only on the paradoxical
crest of proposition 6.54 of *Tractatus* that while being uttered was also being
self-revoked, that man has access to the right vision of things. Retracting the
affirmation, the obtainment of what is desired by renouncing it constitutes the
requisites and characteristics of a distinctive understanding as the one that is
realized in the tension, which for Kierkegaard is the actual measure of inward-
ness (Kierkegaard 1941a: 400).

 The book – Climacus writes – is superfluous because no one goes to the trouble to
 refer to it; because whoever refers to it has eo ipso misunderstood it […]. What I write
 contains at the same time a warning that everything should be understood in the way
 of being retracted […]. The book does not only contain a conclusion, but more of a
 retraction. You cannot ask for more than this, neither before, nor after (1941a: 603).

In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus retracts his discourse, "to
make amends" (583), as he states, in keeping with this dual movement, this
paradoxical reversal without which, for Kierkegaard, there is no religious faith
and, for Wittgenstein, the vision of truth does not see the light of day. Without
this, there also cannot be, for Kierkegaard, any human subjectivity, which is
a direct discourse with God, and without which, for Wittgenstein, man suc-
cumbs to nonsense.

References

Amoroso, Leonardo, 1990, "L'arte della Comunicazione", in *Maschere kierkegaardiane*,
    Rosenberg&Sellier, Torino: 13-104.
Cavell, Stanley, 1984, *Themes Out of School*, North Point Press, San Francisco.
Cavell, Stanley, 1979, *The Claim of Reason*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Cavell, Stanley, 1969, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Conant, James, 2000, *Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and early Wittgenstein*, in *The New Wittgenstein*, A. Crary and R. Read eds., Routledge, London-New York.

Conant, James, 1995a, "Putting Two and Two Together", in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, T. Tersin and M. von der Ruhr eds., Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, London.

Conant, James, 1995b, "Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard and Nonsense", in *Pursuits of Reason*, T. Cohen, P. Guyer and H. Putnam eds., Texas Technical University Press, Lubbock.

Conant, James, 1989, "Must We Show What We Cannot Say?", in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, eds. R. Fleming and M. Payne, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg.

Diamond, Cora, 2000, "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's Tractatus", in *The New Wittgenstein*, A. Crary and R. Read eds., Routledge, London-New York 2000.

Edwards, James, C., 1985, *Ethics Without Philosophy. Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, University Press of Florida, Tampa.

Gargani, Aldo, Giorgio, 1992, *Il coraggio di essere. Saggio sulla cultura mitteleuropea*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.

Kierkegaard, Søren, D = *Diary of S. Kierkegaard*, R. Rohde ed., The Philosophical Library, New York.

Kierkegaard, Søren, 1941a, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, eds. D.F. Swenson and W. Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ.

Kierkegaard, Søren, 1941b, "Sickness unto Death", in *Fear and Trembling*, ed. W. Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ.

Kierkegaard, Søren, 1940, *The Present Age and Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treatises*, ed by A. Dru and W. Lowrie, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Kierkegaard, Søren, 1939, *The Point of View of my Work, including Two Notes about the Individual and On My Work as an Author*, ed. W. Lowrie, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Mulhall, Stephen, 2001, *Inheritance and Originality. Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001.

Philips, Dewi Zephaniah, 1993, "Authority and Authenticity. Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein", in Id., *Wittgenstein and Religion*, Macmillian, S. Martin's Press, London.

Rhees, Rush, 1970, *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

Sellars, Wilfrid, 1948, "Realism and the New Way of World", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, v. 8, 4: 424-425.

Thompson, Josah, 1973, *Kierkegaard*, Knopf, New York.

Wahl, Jean, 1952, "Preface to Kierkegaard", in *Timore e Tremore*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 2000, *The Big Typescript, Wiener Ausgabe*, Michael Nedo ed., Springer, Vienna-New York.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1984, *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M,
    Eng. tr. 1975 by Rush Rhees, *Philosophical Remarks*, Barnes&Noble, New York.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1980, *Lectures. Cambridge 1932-1935*, ed. A. Ambrose, from the
    notes of G.E.M. Anscombe and M. MacDonald, Blackwell, Oxford: 97.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1977, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1976, *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*,
    C. Diamond ed., Cornell University Press, New York, Ithaca.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1967a, "Bemerkungen über Frazers *The Golden Bough*", in *Syn-
    these*, XVII, 3: 233-253; Eng. tr. 2010 by A.C. Miles, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden
    Bough*, Rush Rhees ed., The Brynmill Press Ltd, Herefordshire.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1967b, *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis von Friedrich Wais-
    mann*, ed. by B.F. McGuinness, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M; Eng. tr. repr. 2003,
    Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations, Friedrich Waismann and Brian
    McGuinness ed., Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1961, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, BGM = *Bemerkunger über die Grundlagen der Mathematik*,
    Blackwell, Oxford, 1956.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, PU = *Philosophische Untersuchungen*; Eng. tr. 2009[4] by G.E.M.
    Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and and Joachim Schulte, revised by P.M.S. Hacker and
    Joachim Schulte, Blackwell Publishing, London.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, TR = *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, D.F. Pears and B.F. Mc-
    Guinnness ed., Routledge Classics, London.

Translated from Italian by Camilla R. Nielsen