Morpho-logical Investigations: Wittgenstein and Spengler

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Abstract: The influence of Spengler on Wittgenstein's philosophical development is considered. The point of interest is in a significant methodological restructuring which it appears to have produced. After an initial over-enthusiastic reception, Wittgenstein is seen to object on some points which he attempted to emend in his own philosophy. Spengler's name disappeared in reworked manuscripts but traces persist in the *Philosophical Investigations* and an important section (§89-133) is found to be connected with it.

Key words: Wittgenstein, history of ideas, Spengler, philosophy, language

To the unwary reader 'Wittgenstein' and 'Spengler' would still appear as two rather disparate, mismatched names, connected only by most superficial history: born within a decade in the German speaking world, both wrote their first book during World War I. Next their trajectories are seen to diverge: Spengler's book *The Decline of the West* became a stunning bestseller, while Wittgenstein had to search for a publisher and when his book appeared even the academic readership ignored it. In today's perspective the things still look wildly different but in an other turn: Wittgenstein is a world famous philosopher while Spengler is mostly forgotten. To conjecture that Wittgenstein read Spengler's book seems a sure bet for anyone who takes interest in this episode of recent intellectual history. However disciplinary considerations still make the pairing of their two names somehow exotic even if articles with 'Wittgenstein and Spengler' in their title have been published. Testimony from people who personally knew Wittgenstein and notes from his Nachlass have been exploited to substantiate such work. The topic began to develop with von Wright's edition of *Vermischte Bemerkungen [1. Vermischte Bemerkungen* (1978); translated as *Culture and Value* (1984), and quoted further as *(CV),* see Note to bibliography. No more than 20 mentions of Spengler are preserved in various notes.*],* a chronological selection from Wittgenstein's notes which he presented in 1977

with a text that has been variously reprinted[1]. Right from the beginning von Wright outlined two possible avenues of research: to look for a similarity or shared attitude toward culture and also to ponder some methodological issues. Some thirty years later DeAngelis published a book length study of the Spengler-Wittgenstein connections[2]. It includes mentions of most of the relevant material, both original and secondary, and so it is a convenient reference point – here, mainly for things which will not be discussed further. Being focused rather restrictively it appears to downplay some obvious alternatives: Wittgenstein and Spengler shared an attitude but it is rather certain that it was a more general one as witnessed by the success of *The Decline.* And Wittgenstein interest for a book, which today is seen to be of rather dubious value, has been more formal than substantial which suggest an other emphasis in exploring the theme.

After (re)reading Spengler a lengthy passage from *Philosophical Investigations* (PI §§89-131) starts to resonate with his ideas. A close scrutiny discovers more substantial clues: it begins by repeating a quotation from Augustine (§89) which Spengler uses (*Dec.*2.10) and ends with a reprise of a note on Spengler from 1937, but with his name omitted (§131)[3].

Names Lists and Prefaces

Spengler's name appears in a note from 1931 when Wittgenstein listed ten people who had influenced him *(CVp16).* Originally the list included just Frege, Russell, Spengler and Sraffa but it was extended later. It seems justified here to separate two pairs of names, the first one connecting with the elaboration of the *Tractatus* and the second one with its abandoning. Frege and Russell are expressly mentioned in the *Tractatus* preface while Sraffa figures in the preface of PI. In this text from 1945, after mentioning him,

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[1] von Wright, G.H., *Wittgenstein in relation to his Times* (1977).

[2] Deangelis W., *Ludwig Wittgenstein, a cultural point of view,*(2007), which builds upon his paper *Wittgenstein and Spengler*, Dialogue, xxxiii (1994):41–61; for the twofold aspect of influence, see Andronico M., (1999), *Morphology in Wittgenstein;* Rudolf Haller was among the first to explore the topic.

[3] In another context this section (§89-133) of text has been noted as 'a set of remarks on the nature of philosophy as profound as those by Kant or Aristote", Hagberg G., p244; in §109 the term 'pneumatic conception' has been traced to Spengler by Schulte in a dedicated paper; §133 might contain a paraphrase or an echo of a similar statement occurring in the penultimate chapter of *The Decline (5.18).*

Wittgenstein expresses some doubt about his own originality and laments on the 'darkness of times'. During 1930 Wittgenstein had drafted a preface for the book later known as *Philosophical Remarks* and it provides the context where the list appears (*CVp8*). In the same manner he had put in doubt his originality and given a strikingly Spenglerian description of the current times. Some fifteen years later the mould is obviously the same, Sraffa is still acknowledged, but Spengler has been demoted. The witty anecdote about Sraffa making the gesture that 'refuted' the *Tractatus* has gained popularity[4] while the ideas gained from Spengler's book have lost their anchoring. It is still possible to reconstruct many revealing links to these ideas but they have become entangled with some other, no less important, for which Wittgenstein credits Ramsey and whose name now is found in the preface of PI. The trace becomes even fainter when one accepts as Klagge and Landerer suggest that Spengler's name stood proxy for Goethe's[5]. Wittgenstein lifelong interest in color theory has provided ample evidence that he was well acquainted with Goethe's writings. He also knew of Schopenhauer's continuation of this particular topic, but at the turn of the previous century Schopenhauer's actuality was due mainly to Nietzsche who was the inescapable presence in German culture at that time. Spengler repeatedly stresses that he owed everything to these two names Goethe and Nietzsche, borrowing from the first his method and from the second his questioning. It is rather tempting to suppose that Wittgenstein ultimately chose to cast Ramsey and Sraffa in the same roles.

Wittgenstein extended list of influences comprises just ten names: Hertz Boltzmann and Schopenhauer, all three inserted at the head, are customarily discussed in connection with the *Tractatus* and three more are put in the second half. They are Kraus, Loos and Weininger, all of them very famous Vienna people, whose role in intellectual life has been commented upon at great length. Today Otto Weininger's is perhaps the most puzzling name but his contemporaries took him rather seriously and both Kraus and Spengler had a high opinion of him[6]. Ray Monk in the *Duty of Genius*[7] emphasized

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[4] Sen A., (2003), *Sraffa, Wittgenstein and Gramsci*.

[5] Klagge J., *The puzzle of Goethe's influence* p2; the second part of Landerer is subtitled "The Goethe Connection".

[6]Wittgenstein noted that Spengler had his reasons to exclude Weininger from the European group of thinkers (*CVp23*)

[7] Monk R., *The Duty of genius.*

the existential import of Weininger for Wittgenstein life. Spengler's criticism of his times included a reassessment of the philosopher's role: 'It has come to this, that the very possibility of a real philosophy of to-day and to-morrow is in question. If not, it were far better to become a colonist or an engineer, to do something, no matter what, that is true and real, than to chew over once more the old dried-up themes under cover of an alleged "new wave of philosophic thought" — far better to construct an aero-engine than a new theory of apperception that is not wanted'. It is not exactly known when Wittgenstein first read *The Decline* but by the mid-twenties he had already tried his hand at constructing engines, he had conceived serious doubts about the truth of a philosophy which he proposed and worked as a gardener. Next he embarked in the architectural project which produced Haus Wittgenstein and ten years later there was sill an entry in Vienna's directory of a "Dr. L. Wittgenstein, architect". He worked with a pupil of Loos whom he knew personally and who was made famous by his slogan 'The ornament is a crime' - the building was fully compliant with it. People who had read Spengler' book probably knew his opinion that 'true ornamentation' was impossible at that time and also that 'Every Culture has its own philosophy, which is a part of its total symbolic expression and forms with its posing of problems and methods of thought an intellectual ornamentation that is closely related to that of architecture and the arts of form'(*Dec*.5.18).

In 1930, already in Cambridge, Wittgenstein expressedly mentions that he is reading Spengler (6 May 1930) and remarks that 'Loos, Spengler, Freud and I all belong to the same class that is characteristic for this age'[8]. The project for a preface (CVp8-9) of *Philosophical Remarks* in 1931, that created a key piece for evidencing Spengler's influence on him, has been already scrutinised[9]. (Incidentally one may note that Spengler was of the opinion that something significant was beginning in Russia and Wittgenstein was still believing it when he went there in 1935.) Some dissatisfaction with the world at large, with Vienna, Cambridge and Moscow, is not difficult to understand and this attitude did not wane in Wittgenstein with age. However, in a note from 1947 he wrote that 'Perhaps one day a culture will arise out of this civilization'(CVp73), a turn of phrase totally incompatible with Spengler's usage of these key terms and his whole theorising. Reworking his old notes for a self-standing book Wittgenstein

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[8] Wittgenstein *L., Movements of Thought: Diaries* 1930 -1932, 1936 - 1937.

[9] see for details DeAngelis W., *L.Wittgenstein; a cultural point of view.*

omits Spengler's name but this does not mean that it has lost its importance. After the last drafting of PI, in 1946 Wittgenstein remarks 'The less somebody knows & understands himself the less great he is, however great may be his talent... For this reason Freud, Spengler, Kraus, Einstein are not great'(CVp53). This seems to mark yet another reconfiguration but it comes too late to be considered here.

Rereading Spengler

For a few years after the summer of 1918 The *Decline of the West* enjoyed a tremendous success with the large public despite the unanimously unfavorable opinion of most academics. The book created quite a stir and it is difficult to imagine that Wittgenstein was not somehow acquainted with it. An augmented two volume edition appeared in 1923 while Spengler's political position evolved but the interest seems to have rapidly died. So Wittgenstein's reading of the book in 1930 attested by his notes could not be presumed to be fully innocent. He must have been aware of the popular acception of the book which did not delve neither on its argumentation nor on its motivation but received it as a gloomy message and also of its dismissal as unscientific by the learned community. Between these two alternatives he managed to find for himself something which marked irreversibly his thinking.

Spengler attempted the restructuring of a whole discursive field established first by Christianity and consolidated during the Enligthement. Perhaps this ambitious task can be summarised by a formula to which he occasionally restores: there is no History (capital H) but only histories. These separate histories, which just happen here or there, follow a standard script and they are called 'cultures'. Focusing on them with a powerful rhetoric allows him to make other entities less unproblematic while questioning casuality and time itself. Spengler attacks both word usage and common sense by claiming e.g. that Pythagoras, Mohammad and Cromwell are contemporary – in his terminology. His approach fits well Rorty's recipe for innovation by proposing a new vocabulary and redescribing the previously known world. Rejecting the whole construction as false is not the same as seeing how the trick is done. There are good grounds to suspect that Wittgenstein was really impressed by the methodology and not by the message.

By the end of 19th c most historians had begun to suspect that is not possible to produce an ordering of their material that is both complete and meaningful. The fully ordered data is just a chronicle, but a meaning of the type sought in history is seen only in particular stories. Spengler clearly opted for the second horn of this dilemma. According to him the largest intelligible unit is a culture and there is no meaningful story to be told at a higher level: the history of a culture has a form but a World-history has none.

Apparently Spengler has not been convinced by the picture of humanity accumulating eternally valid knowledge and progressing to infinity which the Enlightenment ideology promoted. First of all, he pointed that this striving for infinity - in space and time, universally and eternally - is a of recent date. People in other times and places did not adopt it but nevertheless they also had achievements comparable to ours. The ancient had argued that the infinite is undefined, it lacks form which is the only thing we actually understand.

In an unsystematic philosophy forms usually hover somewhere between the visible and the abstract or the real and the ideal, producing ambiguities that are often put to good use. Thus Spengler argues that the most complex form we are able to conceive is an organism and this allows him to offer a striking epitome of his theory: 'Cultures are organisms. World-history is their [Gesamtbiographie] joint biography'(*Dec*.2.6).

To dismantle convincingly global History Spengler had to overcome accepted views about the cumulative development of mathematics, the perennity of philosophy and continuity in general. The first chapter of the book is indeed devoted to the history of mathematics and with his usual trenchant he informs us that 'There is no mathematic but only mathematics. What we call "the history of mathematics" — implying merely the progressive actualizing of a single invariable ideal — is in fact, below the deceptive surface of history, a complex of self-contained and independent developments'(*Dec*.1.4). This point is made right from the start and towards the end of the book the same is asserted again about philosophy: 'There is no such thing as Philosophy "in general" [überhaupt]. Every Culture has its own philosophy' (*Dec*.5.18). Spengler's pronouncements are not just a superficial nominalism but they are backed by something that in today's parlance is known as social constructivism. He insists that

seeing 'how things stand' is culturally dependent from the most general level down to the particular arts and disciplines.

On the other hand, and this the really fascinating feature of his book, he attempts to convince his readers that each worldview is coherent whole, that within a culture there is a stronger bond between, say, music and architecture than with same arts from another culture: for him music is only nominally 'the same thing' within Western and Arabian cultures. To describe these most general cultural kinds Spengler introduced new qualifiers such 'Appolonian', 'Magian' or 'Faustian'. Spengler claimed that his approach involves no more than a description of forms and called it 'morphological'. A clear cut delimitation of cultures readily offers a way to make comparisons and to display similarities. So Spengler further claimed to have observed that each known culture had displayed a set of successive features which are most aptly described by biological terms.

Actually this provides the demonstration of his thesis about the end of Western culture: once cultures are isolated and disposed in parallel they exhibit the same pattern; for Europe the pattern is (nearly) complete. A naive reading would have been that the 'facts speak for themselves' but a more demanding reader, such as Wittgenstein, observes how they have been staged. In annotating another book[10] and commenting upon a "secret law" he mentions Spengler as he observes that 'I can represent this law, this idea by means of an evolutionary hypothesis, or also analogously to the schema of a plant.. but also by means of the arrangement of its factual content alone in a perspicuous arrangement'. In *The Decline* historical facts have been connected to form cultures and next these constructs are arranged side by side, making obvious what was hitherto hidden. Wittgenstein is careful to note that 'a hypothetical connecting link should in this case do nothing but direct the attention to the similarity, the relatedness of the facts'.

Spengler's cultures could be supposed to consists of such links but this is not the case. Taking rather literally their redescription as organisms Spengler assumes that they have some kind of organising principle, a vital force or a soul. A good description could replace an explanation but soul is difficult to describe, something that Spengler apparently admits. Nevertheless, for each

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[10] Wittgenstein L., *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,* in *Philosophical Occasions,* p153

culture, he claims, it is possible to provide an Ursymbol, a principle made tangible, which is expressed in any of its features. In the morphological approach championed by Goethe and Spengler the boundary between describing and explaining might be traced differently but it still exists. Most generally they opposed the extreme reductionism of mathematical physics and insisted that the knowledge does not reach farther than some intuitively grasped Urphenomena. So Spengler assured his readers that 'we shall succeed in distinguishing, amidst all that is special or unessential, the [Urgestalt der Kultur] primitive culture-form, that underlies as [Formideal] ideal all the individual cultures' (*Dec.* 2.6). A good deal ambiguities thrive at this level as the prefixes in German language seem move content from the sensible to the intelligible. Spengler writings just as those of Goethe and Wittgenstein are replete with 'Bild', 'Vorbild' or 'Urbild', reminding that ideals and ideas were originally visible eidos. Nietzsche had launched the programme for 'overcoming platonism' but this was much more easily said that done.

This brief outline of methodology and approach in Spengler's book was aimed at points which might have caught Wittgenstein's attention. Apparently most of all he has been taken by its pluralistic stance: "There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods"... PI §133 might sound like an echo without really being that. However, Spengler has placed the starting point of detotalisation in mathematics and there the pluralism looks much more strikingly. So Wittgenstein might be seen to have carried such a bold step in the area of his own interests and in this case it would amount to state that there is no Language (capital L) - there are just particular languages or linguistic practices. And like Spengler, who denied History and called its substitute parts 'cultures', Wittgenstein proposed his language games: «We are not ... regarding the language games, which we describe, as incomplete parts of a language, but as languages complete in themselves..." he told his students[11].

Criticism

Spengler's name is in good company on Wittgenstein's lists and a few more occasions show this valuing. However, its most interesting mentions are rather critical. Wittgenstein seems to appreciate his denouncing of abusive generalisations such as the One mathematics, Philosophy in general or universal History but he has also noticed

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[11] Wittgenstein L. *The Brown Book,* Oxford:Blackwell ,1958, p.81.

that idealisations, removed from above, appeared from below as Vorbild, Urphenomena and the like.

This persistence of idealistic leanings is a commonly known problem. For instance, a purely inductive approach cannot function without some preconception about the items that will be investigated. Phenomenology, in its popular form derived after Husserl's work, also could not avoid essences: even if it begins with some phenomenon a Wesenschau is needed to cut mental variations from flowing to infinities. Wittgenstein appears to have been tempted by something more akin to phenomenology[12], sticking to more or less empirical variations and avoiding essences. The two notes against Spengler could be read in this perspective, even if obscurities remain within this idealistic predicament.

The first of these remarks is dated from 1931 and starts with the name Spengler (*CV*p20); the second one seems to comment upon the previous and it has been dated 6 years later but Spengler's name appears at its end (*CV*p30). Wittgenstein might have been working on his notes so reading them first as a whole and then reversing the order of analysis should not be a methodological flaw here. His view is summarised thus:

"Injustice[Ungerechtigkeit] in Spengler: The ideal loses none of its dignity if it is posited as the principle determining the [Betrachtungsform] form of one's approach."

Even without any opinion what is "the ideal" it is clear that it should have been replaced by a 'principle' or rather by the approach-determining principle. Without being a simple repeating this final pronouncement is just a slight variation of the previous passage:

"The only way namely for us to avoid prejudice-or vacuity in our claims, is to posit the ideal as what it is, namely as an object of comparison-a measuring rod/unit as it were--within our way of looking at things, & not as a preconception to which everything must conform. This namely is the dogmatism into which philosophy can so easily degenerate."

The editors have noted in it a hesitation between measuring rod or unit and it pays to ponder both variants. "Rod' would be in just an object in its gross materiality that has

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[12] Gier N., *Wittgenstein and phenomenology*; the book includes one of the first discussions connecting to Spengler.

been chosen to play a special role but it does not have any exceptional properties and totally lacks ideality. This is indeed the standard meter kept in Paris which Wittgenstein discusses (PI§50), begging 'not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game of measuring with a metre-rule'. This is the paradigm for the philosophy of comparisons as later Wittgenstein would have it. The obvious goes without saying: the platinum meter-rod is not being used for weighting, but when discussing Spengler's comparisons Wittgenstein insists 'that we have to be told the object of comparison [Vergleichsobjekt], the object [Gegenstand] from which this way of viewing things [Betrachtungsweise] is derived, otherwise the discussion will constantly be affected by distortions'. However, for more complicated cases, e.g. culture, such an object is not actually available and some kind of 'prototype' [Vorbild] takes the role, being the 'unit' as it were. 'Paradigm' is a word we may propose now for such cases but it was not commonly used then and some caveats had to be stated:

> willy-nilly we shall ascribe the properties of the prototype [Vorbild] to the object we are viewing in its light; and claim "it must always be...".
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> This is because we want to give the prototype's characteristics a purchase on our way of representing things. But since we confuse prototype and object we find ourselves dogmatically conferring on the object properties which only the prototype necessarily possesses.
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> On the other hand we think the approach will lack the generality we want to give it if it really holds only of the one case. But the prototype must just be presented for what it is; as characterizing the whole approach and determining its form.
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> In this way it stands at the head & is generally valid by virtue of determining the form of approach, not by virtue of a claim that everything which is true only of it holds for all the objects to which the approach is applied.

Thus backtracking through Wittgenstein notes we came the point which motivates all this search, namely the first recorded mention of family resemblances:

> "Spengler could better be understood if he said: I am comparing different cultural epochs[kulturperioden] with the lives of families;
> within a family there is a family-resemblance, though you will also find a resemblance between members of different families;

family-resemblance differs from the other sort of resemblance in such and such ways, etc."

Spengler indeed used 'family resemblance' [Familienahnlichkeit] most notably in a passage discussing his redescription of cultures. A culture has its own 'style' (or perhaps "Style" because in his view this a feature characteristic for the whole), an Appolonian style, a Magian or Faustion one, the usual styles, e.g. Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque, etc, being just its stages related by 'family resemblance' (*Dec*.3.11). Spengler compared cultures to annual flowers and tried to avoid connoting heritage and generations, but Wittgenstein still thought 'family' would be a better simile. However, he is seen to supplement a temporal dimension by writing about periods and lives. His change, willy nilly, introduces a substrate, the family, which allows to distinguish one particular kind of resemblance, family resemblance from other sorts of resemblance.

Wittgenstein's note here does not offer any clue about 'the ideal' but shortly after he read *The Decline* he commented it briefly before his students. The whole passage is worth considering as it obviously deals with Spengler and his method even if without explicit mention.

> The ideal is got from a specific game, and can only be explained in some specific connection, e.g., Greek sculpture. There is no way of saying what all have in common, though of course one may be able to say what is common to two sculptures by studying them. In the statement that their beauty is what approaches the ideal, the word "ideal" is not used as is the word "water"[13], which stands for something that can be pointed to[14].

Except for the point of its being specific for some kind of game, the remark proceeds mostly by negations even if it can be read as a development of the preceding paragraph:

> To ask what "ideal" means is the same as asking what "height" and "decadence" mean. You would need to describe the instances of the ideal in a sort of serial grouping. And the word is always used in connection with one particular thing, for there is nothing in common between roast beef, Greek art, and German

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[13] Perhaps this a clue for the cryptic quote from Faraday's *The Chemical History of a Candle:* "Water is one individual thing – it never changes"

[14] Wittgenstein L., *Lectures, 1932 - 35*, lectures 1932/3, §34

music[15]. The word "decadence" cannot be explained without specific examples, and will have different meanings in the case of poetry, music, and sculpture. To explain what decadence in music means you would need to discuss music in detail.

The various arts have some analogy to each other, and it might be said that the element common to them is the ideal. But this is not the meaning of "the ideal". It is tempting to apply one more time the formula "there is no Ideal only ideals" as the comment throws some light on the objections against Spengler written five years later. Most interestingly already in 1932 Wittgenstein seems to resist the notion of general decay commonly linked to Spengler's name. The fact is that he also wrote another preface for the *Philosophical Remarks,* leaving aside the whole topic.

Reconstruction

It is rather undisputable that Wittgenstein derived important insights for his later philosophy from reading *The Decline.* One might surmise that at first he was struck by Spengler's originality but also quickly spotted some flaws. Successive emendations, reformulations, corrections and rewritings have made it difficult to reconstruct this process. Revisions of the two critical remarks published in CV were easily spotted in the text of PI (§130-1) and a few other instances (§122, (107?), 109) are not difficult to pinpoint. Insisting on further connections would qualify probably as speculation but even without conclusive proofs they might offer some interpretative help.

Wittgenstein might be seen to have attempted the same kind of overturning as Spengler. *The Decline* proposed that cultures are real and a universal history is an inappropriate fiction. This looks rather unconvincing if one starts from simple fact of chronology but Spengler sought to evade the clash by a reformulated concept of simultaneity. These moves can be found in PI where Wittgenstein proposes that language-games are real and language in general is a misunderstanding. When he has to confront logic he denounces (§88) a preconceived idea. His case is even more unpromising as he sets to argue that there is a particular activity recognised as playing (games) and that by observing certain games some things called language or

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[15] After reading and rereading Spengler the example looks rather familiar

proposition are to be conceived. Asking 'What a game is" receives no clearer answer than "Games form a family" §67, an assertion on which his whole construction seem ultimately to stand. Just as Spengler relies on the claim "cultures are organisms" which in his note Wittgenstein corrected. If cultures are explained as variations of an Urphenomenon the possibility to compare them would follow trivially. 'Culture is the Urphenomenon of the past and future world-history' (*Dec*.2.6) wrote Spengler and apparently Wittgenstein has strongly disagreed. He insisted that we should not seek for something beyond looking and seeing: 'Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon' [Urphenomenon]. That is, where we ought to have said: *this language-game is played*' (§654).

In PI after some preliminaries Wittgenstein's strategy can be seen to take shape with the programmatic §65: 'Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, - but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language"'. Family-resemblance is famously evoqued at this juncture and games are introduced. Assuming that the delineation of a family is always done albeit in different ways according to various customs, the problem in defining games is presented rather as one of vagueness, a lack of clear cuts and precision[16]. Wittgenstein steers the discussion towards hypothetical ideal cases in §88 and after wading through some deep questions offers his (non)solution: 'Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods' (§133).

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[16] Wttgenstein elaborated this tactic in the early '30s with a reference to Spengler preserved in the *Philosophical Grammar (p.300)*: "To the extent that the concept of proof is sharply circumscribed, it is only through particular proofs, or through series of proofs (like the number series), and we must keep that in mind if we want to speak absolutely precisely about proofs of relevance, of consistency etc." The vagueness of a supposed meaning is demonstrated as an additionnal idea(l): "When we speak of proofs of relevance (and other similar mathematical entities) it always looks as if in addition to the particular series of operations called proofs of relevance, we had a quite definite inclusive concept of such proofs or of mathematical proof in general; but in fact the word is applied with many different, more or less related, meanings. (Like words such as "people", "king", "religion", etc.; cf Spengler.) Just think of the role of examples in the explanation of such words. If I want to explain what I mean by "proof", I will have to point to examples of proofs, just as when explaining the word "apple" I point to apples. But the way we want to use the word "proof" in is one in which it isn't simply defined by a disjunction of proofs currently in use; we want to use it in cases of which at present we "can't have any idea".

Connecting precision or measuring and ideal was seen to figure in the comments about Spengler and now it is not really surprising to find in the next paragraph (§89) a quote from Augustine which was also appears in *The Decline*. Western modernity developed along with an increasing historical sensibility which Spengler took to be definitive for it. To emphasize this feature he introduced a quotation from Augustine who, participating in another culture, was puzzled by time itself. For some reason Wittgenstein was much taken by this rhetoric construction and re-uses it on quite a few occasions in his text. Essentialist questions of the kind 'what is..?' are to be answered by the philosopher just by reordering knowledge. Such questions concern 'Something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something that we need to *remind* [*besinnen sich*] ourselves of '(§89). Once the original is known it easy to spot its modifications. For instance in §69 asking "what a game is" leads to ponder 'do we know any more about it ourselves? Is it only other people whom we cannot tell exactly what a game is?' with the mention 'But this is not ignorance'. The same construction is found at §135 and other places. A general recipe for such cases is outlined in §109: 'The problems are solved, not by giving[Beibringen] new information[Erfahrung], but by arranging [Zusammenstellung] what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language'.

Language and the principles of its use, grammar, lead us to arrange and see things in a predetermined way which in some cases might be clearly deficient. 'A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words. Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity...The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?)' (§122). The ending of this paragraph, including the parenthetical insertion actually repeats the note from 1931 when Wittgenstein was reading Frazer's Golden bough: 'The concept of perspicuous representation is of fundamental importance for us. It denotes the form of our representation, the way we see things (A kind of world view [Weltanschauung] as it is apprently typical of our time. Spengler)' [17].

Omitting Spengler's name a good deal is lost. World-views according to him are culture specific and the one currently used is not truer or better. Spengler uncritically referred

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[17] Wittgenstein L., *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,* in *Philosophical Occasions,* p153

to the existence of some ideal of mathematics or culture, tacitly understanding that without it there would hardly be anything to speak about. Wittgenstein noted his disagreement with him but later used the note without the name and with just a slight modification in §131: 'For we can avoid ineptness [Ungerechtigkeit] or emptiness in our assertions only by presenting the model [Vorbild] as what it is, as an object of comparison [Vergleichsobjekt] - as, so to speak, a measuring-rod; not as a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy)'.

It is with this warning that the previous crucial remark is to be read: 'The language-games are rather set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts [Verhaltnisse] of our language by way not only of [resemblances]similarities, but also of dissimilarities' (§130).

Within the recreated Spenglerian context it appears to encapsulate most of Wittgenstein otherwise puzzling philosophy of language. Once it is admitted that these entities somehow exist, from their comparisons one should infer what is covered by 'language'. A tempting parallel would link the 'similarities'[resemblances] and 'dissemblances' [Ahnlichkeit, Unahnlichkeit] with the 'Family-resemblance [Familienahnlichkeit] that differs from the other sorts of resemblance'.

Besides their precarious definition, language-games have also some trouble in standing by themselves as they are no more than a part from something else:

'Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (§23). Where did this particular 'form' came from is not to be discussed here[18] but Wittgenstein had not committed himself much by saying that 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life'[19] (§19).

If we are to see continuity as Wittgenstein prompts us we could inscribe between 'language-games' and 'family resemblance' the obvious 'language family', something already discussed by Hans Sluga with references to Nietzsche[20].

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[18] Gier and others have suggested Spranger or Spengler.

[19] A student noted 'What belongs to a language game is a whole culture' in 1938, see Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics* p8, but there might be some confusion, as the inverse reading seems much more coherent: what a language-game belongs to is a whole culture.

[20] Sluga H., *Family Resemblance*, Grazer Philosophische Studien 71 (2006) 1; see also *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, ed. H.-J. Glock, London:Blackwell 1996

Von Wright who researched and edited Wittgenstein notes stated that in his later philosophy 'the spirit is unlike anything that I know in Western Thought'[21], which is an uncommitted formula to stress novelty - it saves the search for discutable similarities and precedents. Key figures in history of ideas, Wittgenstein being among them, can be seen both ways: either as standing at the beginning of a new line or at the end of some old one. The claim for originality shifts the burden of proof but a historicist perspective can easily reconstruct Wittgenstein within a broad outline of 19th century development of thought in the German-speaking world: disappointed Kantians turning to a Lebensphilosophie as an alternative of both Enlightenment and romantic idealism. After the failure of his *Tractatus* Wittgenstein seems to be rather close to such a stance. Possible experience had become a rather tangible limit which philosophers should not be expected to cross.

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