

METAPHOR AND PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD: STUDIES OF ZWICKY

Chair: Steven Burns (Dalhousie University)

PREAMBLE

Analytical Philosophy has a reputation for thinking either that philosophy can be reduced to the natural sciences (epistemology to psychology, e.g.), or else that it cannot be so reduced: "Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences" (Wittgenstein, *TLP* 4.111). In either case, it is the natural sciences that are the object of comparison. Other disciplines, however, also have a claim; they, too, can discover truths and constitute sources of knowledge. One of these other disciplines is poetry. The relevance of poetic language to philosophy has been on philosophers' agenda since Plato, and has been a subject of special interest throughout the recent century of 'linguistic philosophy'. This symposium aims to focus attention on two contemporary poet-philosophers who have contributed to both sides of the discussion.

Many philosophers are also serious poets. Let me name Francis Sparshott, Karen Houle and Troy Jollimore as Canadian examples. None is more accomplished than Jan Zwicky (Philosophy, University of Victoria), whose *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth* won the Governor-General's Award for poetry (in English) in 1999. In her major philosophical works (*Lyric Philosophy*, and *Wisdom and Metaphor*) she has tried to show how the discipline and methods of poetic writing can extend those of philosophy. This symposium is intended to explore her claims, and to assess their successes and their difficulties. An important comparison with Michel Deguy (originally a philosopher and translator of Heidegger, but known now as a major French poet) is the topic of one paper.

ABSTRACT

Philosophers sometimes claim that metaphor can provide arguments that discursive prose cannot. This symposium discusses the work of Jan Zwicky (Philosophy, U. Victoria), whose poetry provides evidence to support the philosophical claims she defends in *Lyric Philosophy* (1992) and *Wisdom and Metaphor* (2003). The contributors investigate Zwicky's own philosophical *écriture*, her original reading of Wittgenstein, and the relevance of her method to ethical education. A comparison with another poet-philosopher, Michel Deguy, enriches the discussion.

Les philosophes prétendent parfois que la métaphore peut fournir des arguments dont la prose discursive n'est pas capable. Cette table ronde va aborder le travail de Jan Zwicky dans cette optique: son œuvre poétique fournit des exemples voire des preuves des propositions philosophiques qu'elle défend dans ses livres *Lyric Philosophy* (la philosophie lyrique – 1992) et *Wisdom and Metaphor* (sagesse et métaphore – 2003). Les participants vont examiner l'écriture philosophique propre à Zwicky, sa lecture originale de Wittgenstein et l'apport et la pertinence de sa méthode pour une éducation éthique. Une comparaison avec un autre poète-philosophe, Michel Deguy, enrichira la discussion.

Steven Burns (Dalhousie University): Zwicky's "*Trauermusik*" as Philosophy

Steven Burns is recently retired from the Department of Philosophy at Dalhousie University. He studied with the late Peter Winch at the University of London, and has published on Plato, Wittgenstein, and Simone Weil, as well on aesthetics (e.g., in *Æ*, 2002, 2004). His translation and commentary: Otto Weininger, *On Last Things*, appeared in 2001.

ZWICKY'S "TRAUERMUSIK" AS PHILOSOPHY

Zwicky concludes her *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth* (Governor-General's Award, 1999) with a remarkable prose-poem about the significance of absence in art and in human life: "*Trauermusik*" (Funeral Music). I begin with an interpretation of the poem (with illustrations), and then use it as an example of the sort of philosophical argument that Zwicky claims (in *Wisdom and Metaphor*) can only be articulated in metaphor. I consider some objections to her thesis.

Carolyn Richardson (University of Toronto): *Talk about Talk*

Carolyn Richardson is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto. She specializes in philosophy of language and epistemology, and has presented work on the relation between literature and philosophy at the 2006 Canadian Society for Aesthetics Annual Meeting, the 2006 Beijing Roundtable on Contemporary Philosophy and the 2009 University of Hawai'i Graduate Student Conference.

TALK ABOUT TALK

To what extent can professional philosophers recognize Zwicky's philosophical writings as contributions to the field? I argue that the exclusivity of the organizing principles of analytic philosophical discourse undercuts such recognition. I do this by arguing that the philosophical literature on metaphor evinces a similar failure to recognize or hear metaphors. Thus, I assimilate Zwicky's own writings to metaphor, as linguistic phenomena by their nature at odds with much professional philosophical literature.

Christopher Elson (University of King's College) : *Deux poètes-philosophes face à la figurativité de l'existence*

Christopher Elson is Associate Professor of French and Canadian Studies at the University of King's College and Dalhousie University. He is currently Vice-President of the University of King's College. He is a contributor to the volume *Lyric Ecology* forthcoming with Cormorant Books. *In the Name of Friendship: Deguy, Derrida and Deconstruction*, a book of essays and translations written and co-edited with Garry Sherbert of the University of Regina, will appear in 2010 with Rodopi Editions.

JAN ZWICKY ET MICHEL DEGUY, DEUX POÈTES-PHILOSOPHES FACE À LA FIGURATIVITÉ DE L'EXISTENCE

Il s'agit de mettre en rapport deux écrivains et penseurs contemporains dans leur pensée de la métaphore. Les deux écrivains ont affirmé le caractère double de la figure et du poème lui-même. «La Raison poétique» de Michel Deguy peut-elle tenir compte de façon adéquate de l'insistance de Zwicky sur les limites de la métaphore: «il est impossible que tout dire soit métaphorique» (*WM*, l.15)? Et l'insistance de Deguy sur le caractère propositionnel de la poésie, en quoi est-elle différente de l'affirmation de la dualité de la métaphore chez Zwicky, «la métaphore nous parle toujours de deux vérités en même temps» (*WM*, l.16)?

JAN ZWICKY AND MICHEL DEGUY: TWO POET-PHILOSOPHERS AND THE FIGURATIVITY OF EXISTENCE

The presentation will consider two contemporary poet-thinkers with a focus on their thought of metaphor. Both writers have affirmed a certain duality of the figure and indeed of the poem itself. Can Deguy's account of "Poetic Reason" accommodate Zwicky's insistence that "it is impossible that all utterances should be metaphorical" (*WM*, l.15)? And how may Deguy's thought of the propositional character of poetry be distinguished from Zwicky when she affirms that "The metaphor tells two truths at once" (*WM*, l.16)?

Warren Heiti (Dalhousie University): *Ethics, Education, and Enactive Language-Use*

Warren Heiti is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Philosophy, Dalhousie University. His research interests focus on meta-ethics and ancient Greek and modern European philosophy; and his recent presentations include “The Paradox of the *Republic*” (CPA 2009), and “Spinoza and Ecological Integrity” (ARPA 2009). Some of his literary work has been anthologized in *Breathing Fire 2: Canada’s New Poets* (Nightwood Editions, 2004) and *Best New Poets* (University of Virginia Press, 2009).

ETHICS, EDUCATION, AND ENACTIVE LANGUAGE-USE

Both Plato (in *Meno*) and Wittgenstein (in conversation with Friedrich Waismann) claim that ethics cannot be taught. Plato’s claim is ironic, while Wittgenstein’s is sincere, but the motivation for the claim can be explained, I argue, through Zwicky’s qualification of Wittgenstein’s well-known distinction between showing and saying: some things (for example, ethical truths) can be *more clearly* shown than said. Recognition of enactive language-use, indigenous to what Zwicky calls “lyric philosophy”, may further relax the distinction, and offer a resource for ethical instruction.

André Furlani (Concordia University): *Change of Aspect: Zwicky’s Wittgenstein*

André Furlani is Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of English, Concordia University. Recent publications include *Guy Davenport: Postmodern and After* (Northwestern University Press, 2007), “Jan Zwicky: Lyric Philosophy Lyric” (*Canadian Literature* 191:1, Winter 2006), “‘Yours Be the Speech’: Ronald Johnson’s Milton”, in *Ronald Johnson: Life and Works* (National Poetry Foundation, 2008), and “Robert Allen’s Cantons de l’est *Encantadas*” (*Canadian Poetry* 64, Spring 2009).

CHANGE OF ASPECT: ZWICKY’S WITTGENSTEIN

Its concepts of non-referential language games, constructivist epistemology, and anti-essentialist family resemblances, as well as its critique of private languages and hermeneutics have endeared Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* to various streams of postmodernism. Zwicky’s “lyric philosophy” realigns Wittgenstein to square with the *Philosophical Remarks*, where his stated goal is clarity and a kind of piety, and where, as in the *Tractatus*, the unsayable retains the force of an unutterable absolute. My paper will consider Zwicky’s *Lyric Philosophy*, *Wittgenstein Elegies*, and the poem “The Geology of Norway” in the context of Wittgenstein’s formulation of the Gestalt concept of change of aspect (*Aspektwechsel*). May one recover in Zwicky a more faithful image of Wittgenstein?