

(Review of Zabala)

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Santiago Zabala, *The Hermeneutic Nature of Analytic Philosophy: A Study of Ernst Tugendhat*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. Pp. 199.

As far as I know, this is the first book-length study of Ernst Tugendhat in English. That is a bit of a surprise since Tugendhat is the last of Heidegger's students who went on to develop a significantly distinct philosophical approach, and it was one closer to the practice of philosophy in the United States and England than in Germany. The fact that this book is the author's expanded translation from the Italian probably indicates that this lack of attention to Tugendhat remains in the English-speaking philosophical community. But we have to start somewhere, and this book is a useful introduction to a controversial and yet quite significant philosopher.

Born in 1930 in Czechoslovakia, Tugendhat did graduate degrees in classics and philosophy at the University of Freiburg (after spending 1944–49 at Stanford University studying classics). After teaching as an assistant at Tübingen, he spent 1965 at the University of Michigan. He finally won a professorship at Heidelberg in 1966. What is distinctive about Tugendhat is not just that he spent time in American universities, but that he launched a philosophical career and even a style of writing, thinking, and arguing that embraced analytic philosophy even while he claimed to use this approach to pursue problems raised by Heidegger. To say that this combination was unusual in the years of his philosophical work is an understatement. He also was distinct from many of his German contemporaries in his critical independence from and distrust of much of the mainstream of continental philosophy. His sense of being a thinker apart certainly stands in contrast to such Heideggerian acolytes as Otto Pöggeler and even Gadamer, who always presented their work as faithful to and simply a further exposition of Heidegger. After retiring from the Free University of Berlin, he made a radical shift in his intellectual life, and aspects of that shift appear in Zabala's interview with him appended to this book. (Another interview between Tugendhat and Ulrike Her-

mann appeared in *Die Tageszeitung* in July 2007.¹ This interview, unlike Zabala's, focused entirely on the late shift in Tugendhat's life, and I will briefly refer to some comments he makes there later in this review.)

Zabala divides his overview of Tugendhat's philosophical work into four sections plus the interview: first, Tugendhat's critical assessment of Husserl; second, Tugendhat's criticism, or what Zabala prefers to see as modification, of Heidegger's defense of metaphysics; third, Tugendhat's linguistic treatment of the problem of being; and fourth, a broader discussion of linguistic analysis as a philosophical method.

Before discussing some of these topics, I should make some prefatory remarks on the difficulties of the project and the constraints that Zabala has given himself. First, Tugendhat covers a very wide range of philosophical territory, often in great detail, and neither his articles nor his books are easy to summarize or digest. Tugendhat is a digressive inquirer whose conclusions are often tentative and who seeks highly refined and detailed versions of philosophical positions, and that is commonly the approach found in analytic philosophy.

He does commentary on historical figures such as Hegel, but here again the style is close to analytic philosophers such as Jonathan Bennett, Barry Stroud, or Bernard Williams (all of whom wrote extensively on the history of philosophy). What I mean is that Tugendhat parses passages to extract key philosophical claims requiring further development and argumentation that is then kept separate from the view of the thinker being studied.

He has also questioned the kind of historical work that emerged in continental philosophy after Heidegger. As others have pointed out, including Heidegger himself later in his career, Heidegger's early *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* is a case in point for contentious history of philosophy. It has a deeply idiosyncratic reading that simply fails as a historical understanding of Kant's work and yet then uses this commentary on Kant to advance a view about the significance of fundamental ontology. But Heidegger's claim to find his own view hidden in Kant by commentary, instead of arguing for it separately, is disingenuous, and furthermore it simply confuses Heidegger's project with either Kant's position or what might be held to follow from Kant's position.

Second, Zabala has views about these philosophical matters that emerge in his comments, his summaries, and even in the organization of the book. Zabala's views are strongly influenced by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Richard Rorty, among others. These influences, however, are at odds with Tugendhat. For example, while Tugendhat defends Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology, his writings repeatedly challenge Heidegger's formulations and absence of argument. Tugendhat even more deeply and unequivocally rejects both Gadamer's understanding

1. An English translation of this interview is available online at the signandsight website, at <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1487.html>.

of Heidegger and Gadamer's own philosophical approach. While Zabala keeps these matters separate for most of the book, when he is discussing, for instance, Tugendhat's criticisms of Husserl or Heidegger (discussed further below) Zabala often mutes the dissonance between himself and Tugendhat. I will discuss a specific example of this problem when I turn to what "hermeneutics" means in the title of Zabala's book.

Zabala highlights the assertion that continental and analytic philosophy are not two separate traditions but one. He specifically raises this point in his interview with Tugendhat, who promptly rejects it. But Zabala also comments that analytic philosophy suffers in comparison with continental philosophy because analytic philosophy is both dogmatic and anti-historical. These criticisms of analytic philosophy (and they are seemingly at odds with Zabala's statement that the traditions are not distinct) echo Richard Rorty's essays on the inferiority of analytic philosophy as compared to continental philosophy. But Rorty made such criticisms to show that analytic philosophy was a dead end and based on a massive error, not that it was in the same business as continental philosophy.

Tugendhat, in contrast, argues that analytic philosophy represents the only way to study and make progress in philosophy, and specifically the only way to pursue the project of a fundamental ontology. Thus Zabala's book, as I said, too often squeezes Tugendhat within limits that Tugendhat either does not discuss or explicitly rejects.

I will begin with Tugendhat's criticism of Husserl. My discussion below has to do first with Tugendhat's criticism. However, I will then briefly discuss a passage from Zabala that raises a quite different criticism, in my opinion, from the one Tugendhat has.

Tugendhat focuses on a small part of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* where Husserl outlines a theory of meaning. Tugendhat holds that Husserl's ideas in this section are both critical to the entire project of phenomenology as well as being irreparably flawed. In this section Husserl treats meaning as resting on the phenomenon of intentionality that he argues is both basic to philosophy and the central organizing concept in *Logical Investigations*. Intentionality is the mental state of being directed toward conceptual contents (following Frege, Husserl sometimes calls them senses *Sinne*) and/or objects. To understand intentionality as foundational is to hold it is not reducible to non-intentional states and it is not capable of further conceptual analysis (intentional concepts cannot be clarified by non-intentional concepts). Thus, for Husserl, any possible philosophy of language rests upon a prior philosophy of mind since the intentionality of mental states is what makes meaningful expression itself possible.

Tugendhat's central charge is that Husserl's theory of meaning is fatally flawed because it rests exclusively upon object-designation and reference as foundational to meaning. But, Tugendhat argues, a theory of meaning cannot be constrained to cover only the phenomena of referential, object-directed thoughts.

Language is more than reference and of course non-referential features of language are meaningful. Thus if the theory of meaning behind Husserl's project is faulty, all of the results will prove inadequate.

Tugendhat's criticism actually rests on a larger claim that intentionality cannot ground linguistic phenomena, not just in Husserl but in any theory of meaning. But that larger claim is not fully defended by Tugendhat, even though he raises objections to various theories of intentionality. For instance, John Searle and Paul Grice developed theories of meaning that like Husserl's theory are based on intentionality. But neither Searle nor Grice restricts meaningful expression exclusively to naming or object-designating expressions. Thus Husserl's basic claim that linguistic phenomena are dependent on prior intentional states has not been shown to be fatally flawed, even if Tugendhat shows that Husserl failed to see its many ramifications and difficulties.

Second, and this point is more important, Husserl's *Logical Investigation* is intended to provide foundations for a theory of knowledge. His brief comments on meaning are subservient to that aim. For the purpose of studying knowledge Husserl focuses attention on referring expressions as preparatory to turning to the topic of how justification of knowledge is based on a priori aspects of reason.

But focusing on referring expressions in this way does not imply, as Tugendhat asserts it does, that Husserl also meant to restrict any theory of meaning to only the acts of reference and naming. Husserl holds that once a theory of knowledge had been properly founded the appropriate sciences (including linguistics) simply continue their empirical inquiries. It is just that those inquiries are not part of philosophy, and specifically not part of epistemology; those empirical inquiries are made possible by philosophical clarification. While Husserl's basic view about the autonomy of philosophical inquiry (especially in relation to the sciences) has been a minority position for some one hundred years and even remains controversial for philosophers today, that is not enough to show it is fatally flawed.

In summarizing Tugendhat's criticism, Zabala expands it and takes it in a different direction. "Phenomenology . . . being linked to the 'seen' model, reaches the conclusion that the fundamental phenomenon of consciousness is intentionality: being consciously directed toward an object. . . . Phenomenology, adapting itself to the model according to which an object is thought about in analogy to a visual image, believes not only that facts exist but, most of all, that these facts may be intentionally experienced" (19).

Zabala is making two points here that are not part of Tugendhat's argument against Husserl on meaning discussed above. Zabala is claiming that Husserl's project is deeply flawed because it fails to suspend existence claims, as it intended to do. The reason for this failure, and this is his second point, is that phenomenology is modeled on visual perception (intentional states are like perceptual states) and thus committed to the existence of facts (I assume Zabala is using "facts" as synonymous with something like states of affairs and not something like a mental

idea). Thus, to perceptually experience such and such entails that such and such exists. To see facts entails that facts exist. Zabala claims that Husserl is then committed to the view that whatever one thinks about must have factual existence.

I put Zabala's argument this way since he cannot be claiming in these passages that Husserl held that intentionality is perceptual or visual. Husserl held, in contrast, that while perception is an intentional state, not all intentional states are perceptual. Nor did Husserl hold that to direct the mind toward facts entails that facts exist. Husserl repeatedly asserts the opposite (again assuming of course that Zabala is using "facts" as Husserl does). The argument must be, as I suggest, that Husserl cannot suspend existence judgments even though Husserl builds his entire phenomenological method on what he calls the act of placing the existence of all objects of thought within parentheses. Husserl has, according to Zabala, introduced a massive ontology of facts without realizing it.

But Husserl is not an empiricist nor a sense-data theorist. Without ignoring his writings, we need to start from those basic claims. Husserl's central point remains that thinking about, referring to, picturing, or remembering (in other words, all intentional states, whether or not they are perceptual) occur independently of what does or does not exist or even could or could not exist.

Should we agree to Zabala's contrary claim that directed mental states require positing the existence of facts toward which they are then directed? If we could defend such a claim, we would have a criticism of Husserl and in effect any theory of intentionality and we would also have a defense of some sort of sense-data theory of the mind, such as the one Bertrand Russell held. But I do not think Zabala's claim is defensible as stated.

In fact this point could be said to be among the least controversial of Husserl's main ideas these days. For instance, independently of Husserl, Elizabeth Anscombe and Roderick Chisholm reached the same conclusion on the basis of studying the syntax of intentional verbs. But aside from these technical matters, what supports Husserl's approach is simply a basic feature of everyday, common expression that can be seen in the following examples. We talk about, refer to, and even describe a fact we know does not exist (Santa Claus) or a fact that we are not certain as yet exists (a black hole) or a fact that, if it exists, would be beyond all accessible evidence (God, an event of the remotest past). Thus, the simple conclusion to draw is that the existence of facts cannot simply follow from the act of thinking about them or referring to them, just as Husserl held they could not.

Zabala returns to his defense of Tugendhat's criticism as follows: "Although Husserl does not make the mistake of conceiving of meanings as objects, according to Tugendhat, he still establishes the relation between expression and objects exclusively by means of their meanings. . . . Husserl is obliged by his approach to extend to all the other expressions this particular characteristic of names: every expression is also related to some object" (20). This passage is a fair summary of Tugendhat's reasons for dismissing Husserl's discussion of meaning, but I

think clearly it does not require the larger objection to intentionality Zabala raised above.

In the chapter entitled “Correcting Heidegger,” Zabala holds, rightly, that Heidegger’s *Being and Time* remains the touchstone for Tugendhat’s philosophical career. Tugendhat’s *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination* has been in English since 1986, and one can find there detailed and subtle philosophical accounts inspired by (while nonetheless rigorously critical of) the early sections of *Being and Time*. But that book cannot be discussed in the space of a review, and unfortunately Zabala does not discuss it. Instead, Zabala focuses on an earlier work by Tugendhat on the concept of truth in Heidegger.

Before we turn to Tugendhat’s criticism of Heidegger, Zabala argues that it is not a criticism at all: “I believe that Tugendhat’s criticism of Heidegger’s concept of truth, more than simply being a ‘correction’ is a ‘confirmation’ that Heidegger was not looking for a mere concept of truth or a concept of true as distinguishing true from false, un-valid from valid, good from evil, but, on the contrary, a ‘different conceptual platform’ or ‘locus’” (30).

Tugendhat’s approach to truth is traditional. He rejects the so-called redundancy theory of truth and thus accepts that truth is a substantive concept as well as a necessary precondition for meaningful expression in general. I say that his view is traditional because he retains something of Aristotle’s view that truth involves an assertion (or state of belief) that picks out, represents, or means that some state of affairs is the case. Thus, an assertion is said to be true when that state of affairs that it means or expresses obtains and false when it does not obtain. In Tugendhat, then, the principle of contradiction holds since it is necessarily false to assert (or believe) a claim and deny the very same claim at one and the same time.

The relevance of this point to Zabala’s book is that it leads Tugendhat into an interesting study of the concept of truth in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. To put it briefly, Tugendhat shows how critical Heidegger’s replacement of the concept of truth with disclosure or uncovering (*Unverborgenheit*) is to the entire project of that book. But as Zabala understands it, Heidegger’s rejection of the concept of truth is also a rejection of thinking of truth as embodied in sentences or expressions rather than in the “event of this unconcealment” (28). Thus, Heidegger and Tugendhat differ on the question of whether Heidegger is continuing within the traditional Aristotelian conception on this point.

Tugendhat’s criticism of Heidegger in the essay Zabala relies on holds that the concept of disclosure is ambiguous and, worse, parasitical on the concept of truth it was meant to replace. In other words, understanding Heidegger’s concept of disclosure or uncovering presupposes the traditional idea that the truth is the grasp by the mind of the thing as it is in itself. But while Tugendhat does conclude that Heidegger’s discussion of disclosure advances our philosophical understanding of truth, as Zabala emphasizes, he also holds that Heidegger’s ideas remain compatible with what Tugendhat calls the “assertoric” understanding of truth

(that is Tugendhat's name for the traditional view wherein truth requires linguistic assertions).

I want to briefly mention another approach by Tugendhat to the problem of truth in Heidegger that Zabala does not discuss. While I think it fails, it might (for reasons explained below) reinforce Tugendhat's criticism of Heidegger's search for an alternative "conceptual platform," as Zabala puts it.

In *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination*, Tugendhat argues that Heidegger fails to show that truth is coextensive with disclosure. The reason he gives is that the concept of truth shares with the concepts of the moral good and knowledge the requirement of justification, reason, or proof. Since justification or reason or proof disappear with disclosure, Tugendhat concludes that Heidegger's claim to deepen our understanding is illusory.

We can make Tugendhat's point a little clearer by using the concept of knowledge. To know that such and such is the case, one must of course believe that such and such is true (and such and such must be true), but one must also have reasons for believing it true. If not, then lucky guesses concerning whatever beliefs happen to be true would count as knowledge, and they clearly are not knowledge. Moral concepts are more complicated than Tugendhat assumes, but he appears to hold that if someone believes such and such an act is morally wrong but lacks any reason why it is wrong (and assuming moral intuitionism is false), then the very possession of a moral concept is in question.

However, even granting Tugendhat his analogy, it breaks down with the concept of truth. The truth of a belief conceptually implies that whatever the belief means is the way the world is. Heidegger and Zabala are worried, in part, about concepts such as representation, mirroring, or copying becoming a part of the account of truth. They may be right to worry, but that is another debate, since even if we think that the concept of truth does not require representation, for instance, we have not shown that it does require reason or justification. To say that some claim is true is not to say that one knows that it is true, nor even that one has a reason for it being true. Those claims concern epistemic attitudes, not truth itself. To say a claim is true is simply to say that such and such is the case, such and such is how matters stand.

Truth then does seem trivial, as Richard Rorty has emphasized in arguing that philosophy ought to abandon the concept of truth entirely. But trivial does not entail mistaken. Also the word trivial is a rhetorical device for dismissing some matter that may very well be foundational. For instance as Heidegger argues, at least he does so in his early writing, the faults of traditional philosophy lay in ignoring ordinary, pre-philosophical understanding that it then dismisses as trivial. Perhaps here is just such a case.

While Tugendhat has not made his case for the requirement of reason in the idea of truth, the notion that truth is a primitive precondition for any meaning does entail that substituting another concept, such as disclosure, will prove idle since

it can reach no deeper understanding. Perhaps then Tugendhat's criticism can in that way be salvaged.

Now I turn to philosophical methodology and the importance of hermeneutics as the central method of philosophy that is the major theme of Zabala's book. I'll begin by paraphrasing a passage in Tugendhat that lends some support to Zabala's approach, before I raise some concerns about it.

In his discussion of Husserl's theory of meaning, Tugendhat begins by making the following distinction. He holds that Husserl's theory of meaning cannot coexist with the rest of analytic philosophy; if Husserl is correct, then the rest of analytic philosophy must be wrong. But Tugendhat then contrasts this disjunctive choice with the practice of hermeneutics within continental philosophy. Here he counters that hermeneutics is largely compatible with analytic philosophy, so one is not driven to choose ranks on that topic. But I think Zabala has misread this passage by taking it to support the conclusion that Tugendhat practices hermeneutics as Gadamer does or that such a view is foundational for a single philosophy, erasing the difference between analytic and continental philosophy.

It may be helpful here to insert the following clarification. Husserl defended phenomenology early in his career as a common method by which philosophers could adjudicate their disputes (while I agree with calling that proposal a method, I doubt there is such a method). Later in his career, however, he defended a version of transcendental idealism, but did so by calling it a method. But transcendental idealism is a philosophical position, not a method. One cannot claim to adjudicate philosophical disputes while building in one's desired conclusion into the definition of philosophy (though that has not stopped philosophers from trying to pull off such a trick). Neither idealism nor materialism can be stipulated as the default method of philosophy, any more than Kantian ethics can be stipulated as the default ethics of philosophy. Such an approach leads to the death of intellectual debate, as it did for instance in the Soviet Union.

Where does this point leave hermeneutics as a method? Tugendhat, in contrast to how Zabala understands his view, thinks that hermeneutics is only compatible with all philosophy when it is shorn of Gadamer's conception of it. In fact Tugendhat speaks of linguistic analysis as what he then calls "reduced hermeneutics" and "first-floor hermeneutics." Thus, for Tugendhat the term hermeneutics amounts to nothing more than basic, ordinary linguistic understanding. Tugendhat sees himself on this point as a follower of Wittgenstein, not Gadamer. I do not think this commitment is what Zabala has in mind when he speaks of all philosophy as hermeneutics. But the whole matter may well be moot. There is as yet no agreement on whether there is a philosophical method nor even on what linguistic analysis is, let alone whether hermeneutics is mere understanding or, as Gadamer thought, genuine first philosophy.

Tugendhat's intellectual shift late in his life is a matter of some irony. Tugendhat not only abandoned the study of philosophy to campaign against ecological catastrophe and for ecological ethics, but then embraced various mystical religious beliefs as well. This of course echoes Heidegger's own career to some extent. When Tugendhat studied with him, Heidegger had largely forsaken philosophy for the study of poetic mysticism that he found either in the pre-Socratics or Hölderin and he extended those insights, such as they were, into criticisms of industrial society.

When asked about this topic in the Hermann interview, Tugendhat grants that Heidegger's discussion of death in *Being and Time* influenced him in what he describes as a personal crisis late in his life, but he pursues the link no further and does not treat the religious mysticism as a vestige as well. Yet he stresses that he takes these mystical beliefs literally and therefore distinguishes himself from what he considers Habermas's purely sociological interest in religion. What is curious about all of this is not only these echoes of his teacher's life, but also Tugendhat's sudden abandonment of reason in the face of what he now calls his wonder that anything exists at all.

While the topic of the difference or similarity between continental and analytic philosophy is too messy and confused for brief comments, we can usefully ask the following question. Who among twentieth-century philosophers defended the autonomy of philosophy? Here we have very few in either tradition, while the majority of philosophers for more than a century have announced the death of their discipline so as to embrace science, religion, or ideology. For instance, Foucault shares much more with Quine than he does with Husserl, while Wittgenstein and Derrida could be seen at times in their writings as philosophy's oddest bedfellows of all. Early in his career Tugendhat was a stalwart defender of philosophy's autonomy, thus his leaving it all behind with his turn to mysticism is a matter for some regret as well as some wonder.

The so-called revolution against philosophy and the philosophical tradition (announced again and again from positivism to postmodernism) has produced little more than rhetoric and dust (as well as unintentionally lending support to the growing obsolescence of university education as against pre-professional training). While we are living through another rabidly anti-philosophical era, Tugendhat's work remains an ignored tour de force with its healthy suspicion of the quick answer, the partisan's cliché, or the comfort of obscurity. Throughout his writing there is serious and hard-won critical thought well worth the effort and attention it demands of its reader. Perhaps it was Tugendhat's search for a wider audience or simply his sense of discouragement, a point he mentions in his interview, that finally turned him from philosophy to faith. Sadly, it seems ever to be so.