The wise man or sage ... applies ... the teachings taken from lived experiences. He has ... been taught by ... personal observation, frequent contact with other men, suffering and struggle, contact with nature, and intense cultural experience. The ... truths of wisdom can be communicated, even without words, through the example of a life. Wisdom is attributed more readily to men who are old and experienced, or those who have survived many vital experiences and have known how to learn from them. We think that he is wiser who has suffered and lived intensely and has been able to keep the teachings of varied situations in which he has taken part. Wise is Odysseus, the tireless traveler, Arjun, the expert in war and tranquillity, Job, blessed and miserable; wise men are those who have sought truth or happiness for themselves through a long personal journey. ... Wisdom belongs to he who can distinguish in every situation the essential behind appearances, to he who can integrate into a concrete unity the apparent manifestations of an object. Also wise is he who, in each individual case, can distinguish better the truly important, and to do so he has a more perceptive gaze than others.

Not all can gain access to wisdom; in fact, few have conditions for sharing it. Among the crowd wisdom chooses its own; unlike science, wisdom "distinguishes among people". It is denied to vulgar or superficial spirits; it calls to sensitive, discreet, profound, beings.

Luis Villoro

The Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro thus analyzes the concept of wisdom.¹ Those who had the privilege of meeting Fernando Salmerón—his friend and colleague—would have thought that Villoro had him in mind when writing these words.

Fernando Salmerón was indeed a wise man, and one of the most distinguished Latin American philosophers of the twentieth century. He was born in 1925 in the Mexican city of Córdoba, and died in 1997, in Mexico City. His life was characterized by the coherence of his thought and actions. He was a philosopher of education and an excellent teacher and director of institutions of higher education and scientific research. He was also a moral philosopher and an incorruptible man; and he was a philosopher of culture, whose work and actions did a lot to strengthen the Spanish-speaking culture all over Latin America and Spain.

Salmerón was also interested in the history of philosophy, convinced that there is a way in which the history of philosophy is relevant for current philosophical thought. The papers collected in this book clearly show that he was right. This book reconstructs and analyzes key passages of twentieth century philosophical thought on ethics, but its interest is far from being that of the antiquarian. Rather, the book shows that Salmerón was right in thinking that traditions do matter in philosophy, not as a pure historical matter, but because they shape current philosophical ideas.

But alongside this implicit main point being made throughout the book, these papers also make evident another important commitment of Salmerón’s philosophy, namely his commitment to the idea that reason should prevail in dealing with human conflicts, at least as an ethical ideal. And this is the reason he devotes an important part of his essays to the analysis of the role and scope of reason in moral matters and ethical theory.

The first two chapters reconstruct the history of moral analytical philosophy at the beginning of the century, in an attempt to recover the wealth displayed by the discussions of Moore, Wittgenstein and Russell. Unfortunately, the richness of these discussions gradually decreased in complexity over the next fifty years, and—so Salmerón claims—are now largely ignored in the historical record. He wants to
recover that wealth, and it is for that reason that he under-
takes the concomitant study of Moore and his predecessors 
on the continent, especially Kant and Brentano, with a view 
to contrasting their ideas with the ethical concerns apparent 
in the seminal work of the early Wittgenstein.

Salmerón reconstructs in the first chapter a philosophi-
cal dialogue between Moore and Wittgenstein, at which 
Bertrand Russell attends in “the capacity of expert witness”. 
But the thought of this “expert witness” is analyzed in chap-
ter 2. Salmerón thus completes the dialogue between the fa-
thers of analytical philosophy on ethical matters. He further 
argues that at the heart of Russell’s personal contributions 
“his political ideals are not separated from the concept of 
the life of goodness: the life he defines as inspired by love 
and guided by knowledge”.

Chapter three analyzes the notion of rationality and its 
relevance for ethical theory through a discussion of ideas 
from Max Black, Karl Popper and Jürgen Habermas. He 
concludes that decisions are unavoidable on moral matters, 
as much as they are on epistemic matters, but he argues that 
the concern in both fields should be the elimination of ar-
bitrariness, not of decisions. For there are after all ways in 
which decisions can be made rationally. Furthermore; “rea-
sons and decisions need each other, and are justified recip-
rocally”. But this requires a non-algorithmic conception of 
rationality, which also transcends dialectics, at least as de-
fended by Habermas at some points.

Salmerón furthermore discusses the ethical ideas of two 
other leading intellectual figures of the twentieth century: 
Albert Einstein and Jean Paul Sartre. Salmerón reviews the 
ideas of the former with respect to a number of the most 
vibrant issues of our time: war and peace, freedom and the 
meaning of science and technology, religion, capitalism and 
socialism, the Jewish question, education, and the value of 
life.
Salmerón shows clearly how Einstein’s ideas were articulated on the basis of a deep assimilation of Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer, and above all, of Hume. He draws a neat profile of Einstein’s moral thought and concludes with him that “the real danger for humanity” comes from those doctrines “which try to present themselves as purely scientific or technical, stripped of any moral or ideological character, but at the same time, capable of influencing moral decisions.” The most dangerous assumption is the belief “that the mere advancement of science and the application of technological devices can, in themselves, furnish norms of moral behaviour and solve social and political problems, independently of fundamental moral options”.

Salmerón’s study of Sartre begins—as was usual with Salmerón’s works—by clearly pointing out the influences on the work of the French philosopher. He thus shows the significance, particularly with respect to L’être et le néant, of traditional metaphysics, up to Hegel, and of Kierkegaard and German phenomenology, especially Husserl and Heidegger. Salmerón’s analysis of Sartre’s work is critical, but at the same time it acknowledges its strengths. For instance, he explains how phenomenology passed from the study of logic and methodology, directly to ontology, but “an ontology that did not acknowledge itself in its moral commitments, and to the ethics of values”. The merit of Sartre’s work is that it was only with it that this tradition provided “a preeminent place to the problem of human action, side by side with the problem of freedom”.

Salmerón provides a clear understanding of Sartre’s ideas about the concepts of consciousness and freedom, and the polemics between determinists and defenders of free will. This is, once again, a fine piece of scholarship, but one that stresses the importance of the ideas under discussion for current preoccupations on the same field and for other philosophical traditions, such as analytic philosophy.
In the end, Salmerón claims that “re-reading Sartre is healthy, as the reading of alternative doctrines always is”. But “there is another double reason: on the one hand, many of his descriptions are quite correct and rich; on the other hand, the failures of some of his explorations have definitely sealed off certain lines of enquiry”.

The last essay included in this volume discusses one of the most important books published in Latin American philosophy in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Luis Villoro’s Creer, Saber, Conocer—the English translation of which is also published by Rodopi Studies in Philosophy, under the title Belief, Personal and Propositional Knowledge.

Villoro’s book is a well-articulated attempt to analyze key concepts of the theory of knowledge, with a view to arrive at an ethics of belief, which is defended in the last chapter of his book. Villoro’s starting point is the distinction between two aspects of what he claims to be the same concept of knowledge, stressed by Plato in different dialogues. On the one hand the idea developed in the Theaetetus, of knowledge as justified true belief, but understood as a purely intellectual event, detached from its relationship with practice. On the other hand, the idea stressed in the Meno, of knowledge as a sound guide to practice.

One of the main contributions of Villoro in that book has been to argue for the elimination of the condition of truth in the analysis of knowledge, that is in the analysis of the proposition “S knows that p”. Let us recall that the traditional analysis of “S knows that p” is as follows: A person S knows that p if and only if a) S believes that p; b) ‘p’ is true; and c) S is justified in believing that p.

Villoro has argued forcefully that condition (b) should be eliminated, thus proposing the following analysis: A person S knows that p if and only if a) S believes that p; b) S has objectively sufficient reasons to believe that p. Substantial effort is devoted in the book to the analysis and justification of the concept of “objectively sufficient reasons”.
Salmerón thus suggests that Villoro is following a tradition that can be traced back to the first generation of pragmatists, but then he must face the kind of criticism with which Bertrand Russell confronted Peirce and Dewey's ideas, and he discusses that criticism. In particular he says, Villoro's book maintains alive a tension that is manifest at the point at which—as Villoro certainly wants to claim—the true belief meets the real world, and we can claim that we have legitimate epistemic access to reality. This seems to lead Villoro in a direction not fully compatible with pragmatism.

Salmerón suggests that Villoro could avoid this tension, at the epistemological level, and still accomplish his goals at the ethical and political level, by following a third path. Indeed, Salmerón recalls that the main motivation behind Villoro's book is the analysis of the relationship between thought and the forms of domination of human societies, between knowledge and power. And furthermore, that Villoro acknowledges that belief and knowledge are not alien to will, or to desire, and thus “they can only be understood through their relationship with other concepts that deal with practical reason”. And so, the theory of knowledge “cannot be understood without reference to its relationship with the goals of man in society and, in the last instance, without reference to an ethics”.

These ideas about knowledge and its relationships with domination and power, which echo Einstein's preoccupations with respect to science and technology and their relationship to practical problems, lead Salmerón to suggest that for a program such as the one Villoro wants to develop—a program with which he clearly agrees—it might be useful to follow the steps of Plato, Aquinas, Vico, Kant, Schopenhauer, and more recently of Dilthey, Weber, Arendt and Gadamer. What Salmerón has in mind is to benefit from their ideas concerning a third road, a third kind of knowledge, which is neither purely theoretical nor purely
practical. Salmerón reminds us of this conception of knowledge, as examined by Plato in *The Politician*, and developed by a long tradition up to Kant, and further developed for instance by Hanna Arendt. He refers of course to their ideas with respect to the faculty of judgment.

Following Arendt, Salmerón explains that "in contrast to practical reason, which, like theoretical reason, must look for its foundation in the requirement of rational thought, the faculty of judgement is an amplified vehicle of thought, supported by the possibility of reaching an agreement with others, with which it achieves a form of specific validity. So specific, according to Kant, that it can never be the universal validity for all possible rational subjects. The roots of this thought process do not lie in the internal dialogue of strict rationality, but in the habits of common sense which reveal the world's nature only insofar as it is a common world; and judgements have validity only for concrete individuals who share this world and judge it. It is the public nature of the world which obliges dialogue with others, in the exercise of the faculty of judgement; and the possibility of agreement is what gives foundation to the specific validity of judgement. Sound logic demands, for its validity, coherence with oneself within one's own conscience; in the same way, judgement, in order to be valid, requires the presence of the Other, the discussion with him, the persuasion and the search for agreement—which are the forms of the political *par excellence*. All of this requires, as a necessary premise, the plurality of judgement, as opposed to the unity of logical reasoning, which insists on demonstrable truth”.

This suggestion is perhaps most representative of Salmerón's entire approach. Deeply concerned with problems posed by real life, above all with problems in the realms of morality, politics and education, he thought that philosophy must help us to understand those problems, but above all, that it must help in educating people and it must help people in making decisions. Philosophy should
help them to make decisions concerning moral and political problems on a rational, well-grounded and acceptable ethical basis.

The understanding of current social problems and the decision as to how to face them requires the articulation of a philosophical view, and the development of clear concepts and arguments. Salmerón's insistent claim is that for these purposes, an understanding of the great philosophical texts of the past, as well as an awareness of philosophical traditions, is not only convenient, but is necessary. For knowledge of those texts and traditions will provide not only respectability, but inspiration, to the philosopher's own views. And, above all, they constitute the raw material with which the philosopher must commence in order to build his or her own conceptions.

These are, I think, the key ideas for understanding the book now in the reader's hands. It shows the effort of a philosopher, thinking from the perspective of his own corner of the world, trying to articulate his own ideas on problems relevant for his specific cultural milieu, but also on problems that all human beings have to face. And to that effect Salmerón proceeds, exhibiting an impressive historical scholarship, drawing from different traditions—above all from the Kantian and that of analytic philosophy—but always placing that scholarship at the service of a fresh understanding of the most vibrant problems of our society and our times. Implicit in Salmerón's work is the suggestion that the education of future generations requires an immersion in these traditions, and an adequate training in drawing what is positive from them, if we want them to be able to deal with and to live up to the complexity of the problems of our contemporary world.

Fernando Salmerón was a leading philosopher in the Spanish-speaking world, not only because of the solidity of his academic work, but also because his very important role in constructing bridges and communication channels be-
tween members of this community. His life was full of love, for his family, friends, disciples and colleagues, and for all humanity. And it was also a life full of accomplishments, concerning his academic goals, but above all, concerning his commitments to moral, political and educational problems. He had the expectation of elaborating these essays in a more articulated and coherent book. Death surprised him prematurely and he was prevented from fulfilling his project. These essays, however, are representative of an important aspect of his work, and his friends and disciples thought that they should be published as he left them. We hope that this will help the English-speaking reader develop a better understanding of the thought and culture of Latin America in the last decade of the twentieth century.

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