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## Introduction

Tethered in a basket floating in the air above “The Thoughtery”, withdrawn and severed from the real world in his own abstract universe, that’s how Socrates, most renowned among philosophers, is portrayed by Aristophanes in “The Clouds”, a comedy of his dating back to 423 BC.

Two and a half millennia later that is still the way philosophers and philosophy look to the common imagination as, in a way, does Professor Tolkien, whom many still imagine as a white-haired, patronizing old gentleman superciliously looking at the real world from an Oxford high-table in the few moments when he is not lost in imaginary worlds of his own or, even more abstruse, in inventing imaginary languages.

Of course *we* know none of this is true, that this trite, stereotyped image applies neither to Tolkien not to the masters of the “Art of thinking”, and yet what they really have in common has seldom, if ever, been analyzed in Tolkien-centred secondary literature.

“Tolkien and Philosophy”, we deem, is a theme that has not yet been studied with the “philological” accuracy and the textual knowledge that are required to avoid hammering the Professor’s works inside conceptual frameworks that, rather than exposing their intrinsic value, could instead put them at risk of losing, in the eyes of the readers, both their profound meaning and their inherent beauty.

In what relation does Tolkien’s work stand with respect to Philosophy? The question, if taken seriously, is by no means trivial. If it is well known that Tolkien is essentially a philologist, in fact, it is also true that inside his works, both literary and philological, there are plenty of truly authentic philosophical

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1 Associazione Romana di Studi Tolkieniani

2 Istituto Filosofico di Studi Tomistici

themes to be found, such as Power, Evil, Death and Deathlessness, Paganism, Christianity, and the relationship of the latter to the former themes, Time and Memory, Technology and Nature, the origin of Myth and Language, and many more. However, how many specific studies have been dedicated to the subtle relationships between Tolkien and philosophical thinking? To get an idea we searched the most comprehensive bibliographical resources<sup>3</sup> for titles including either words such as “philosophy”, “theology”, “psychology” and their derivatives (“philosophical”, etc.), or names of authors pertaining to those subjects. Results proved that only 1,33% of the searched titles satisfied the adopted criteria (62 out of about 4.679), a very small percentage which, when put in relation to the (almost) six decades covered (58 years from 1954 to 2012), means that hardly more than one title per year (1,1) published. In addition, 24 out of 62 titles have been published after 2001, i.e. after the first of Peter Jackson’s movies and the resulting new interest in Tolkien. Of course the reported data could, and should, be further refined, yet they clearly show that criticism has more or less ignored the subject of Tolkien and Philosophy, philosophers, and other related disciplines.

Turning again to the 62 titles, of course we cannot claim to have read all of them, the older ones being exceedingly difficult to access. Nevertheless, having read 85% of the works listed after 2001, we feel we can say that none had the direct and explicit goal of studying the relationships between Tolkien and Western thought and that, in the end, the critical works specifically centred on uncovering the relationships between Tolkien and philosophical thinking by thoroughly analysing sources and texts are admittedly almost inexistent. Moreover, as far as meetings and conventions are concerned, we feel we can say that the first to be entirely dedicated to the theme of Tolkien and Philosophy has indeed been the one whose proceedings you are about to read, held in Modena in May 2010 thanks the joined effort of *Istituto Filosofico di Studi Tomistici* and *Associazione Romana di Studi Tolkieniani*.

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<sup>3</sup> Namely, the Tolkien Studies, *Tolkien criticism: an annotated checklist* by Richard C. West (1970), *J.R.R. Tolkien: six decades of criticism* by Judith Anne Johnson (1986), “Tom Shippey’s *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* and a look back at Tolkien criticism since 1982” by Michael D.C. Drout, in *Envoi* 9.2 (2000), “Scholarly Studies of J.R.R. Tolkien and His Work (in English): 1984-2000” by Michael D.C. Drout, in *Envoi* 9.2 (Fall 2000) and, for the Italian scholarship, *Bibliografia dei libri su Tolkien* by Lorenzo Gammarelli, available at <http://www.soronet.it/>.

In agreement with the Editors – *Marietti* 1820 and *Walking Tree Publishers*, for the Italian and the English version, respectively – we decided to keep the lecturers' contributions in the original “conversational” form, both in the case of the two debates between Franco Manni and Tom Shippey and Andrea Monda and Wu Ming 4, and the separate lectures given by Verlyn Flieger and Christopher Garbowsky. We deem this form not only to better reflect the authentic “dialogic” nature of the meeting, but also better suited to let the readers appreciate the quality of the contributions that sometimes mark, in our opinion, a “fundamental” point in research on the complex theme of Tolkien and Philosophy. For those reasons, rather than summarizing each contribution, we prefer to diachronically list the various themes that can be found inside the proceedings:

- young Tolkien's philosophical education at secondary school (145-150) and university (27, 27 nn.10-11);
- the term “Philosophy” as used by Tolkien (21-22);
- philosophers' names quoted by Tolkien (21-22, 24);
- philosophical influences in Tolkien's works (27-33, 34-35, 44-45, 51-52);
- differences in methodology between Philosophy and Philology (22-26; 34-35);
- importance of Philosophy for some philologists (34-42);
- philosophy of Myth and Language according to Tolkien (73-83);
- Tolkien as thinker and narrator (85-87, 93-94);
- the meaning and possibility of a Christian literature (90-93);
- Tolkien as a Christian/Catholic (94-97, 99-100, 128) or a non-Catholic (96) narrator;
- Tolkien and Theology (88, 125-126, 133);
- Miscellaneous themes: Providence (55-65), Heroism (91, 117-120, 129), modernity of Tolkien's world (115); Power (120), Death (120-122, 125 ff), Tolkien and C.S. Lewis (41, 49-50, 51), the Inklings and the Bloomsbury Group (52-54), Paganism and Christianity (101-102, 115), narration and action (105-109).

In conclusion, let us say that we wish this book to become, in both method and content, an essential point of reference for anyone interested in better understanding the significant connections that sometimes link, sometimes divide, “philologist” Tolkien and the proper philosophical speculation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH CONCERNING TOLKIEN AND PHILOSOPHY

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- JOHNSON, Judith A. 1986. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Six Decades of Criticism*. Bibliographies and Indexes in World Literature 6. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Tolkien Studies*, volumes I-X, Section "Bibliography" (2001-2011)
- WEST, Richard. 1981. *Tolkien Criticism. An Annotated Checklist (Revised Edition)*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.

### Criteria

- titles including either words such as "philosophy", "theology", "psychology" and their derivatives ("philosophical", etc.),
- titles including names of authors pertaining to those subjects
- we have not listed individually the essays or chapters in either of the four volumes comprising contributions focussing on philosophy in Tolkien's works (i.e. *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*, *The Hobbit and Philosophy*, *La Filosofia del Signore degli Anelli*, and *Tolkien e la Filosofia*) but listed each book once only

## 62 titles meeting the above criteria

year	author	title	reference
1956	H.M.Y.	“Escathology”	<i>The Student Movement</i> (London) 58, 37-38
1956	L.C.S.	“Theosophical News and Notes”	<i>The Theosophical Journal</i> March-April, 24
1959	Huppe, Bernard F.	“Conjectures”	Chapter VI in <i>Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine’s Influences on Old English Poetry</i> . New York: State University of New York
1960	Wright, Marjorie Evelyn	<i>The Cosmic Kingdom of Myth: A Study in the Myth-Philosophy of Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien</i>	Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois
1966	Tunick, Barry	“Social Philosophy in <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> ”	<i>Tolkien Journal</i> 2.2, 9
1967	Sklar, Robert	“Tolkien and Hesse: Top of the Pops”	<i>Nation</i> 204 (8 May 1967), 598-601
1967	Winter, Karen Corlett	“Grendel, Gollum, and the Un-Man: The Death of the Monster as an Archetype”	<i>Orcrest</i> 2 (1967-68), 28-37
1968	Wojcik, Jan S.J.	“Tolkien and Coleridge: Remaking of the ‘Green Earth’”	<i>Renascence</i> , 20.3 (Spring 1968), 132-39, 146
1969	Duriez, Colin	“Leonardo, Tolkien, and Mr. Baggins”	<i>Mythlore</i> 2 (April 1969), 18-28
1969	Kilby, Clyde	“Tolkien and Coleridge”	<i>Orcrest</i> 3 [also <i>Tolkien Journal</i> 4.1&2] (Spring-Summer 1969), 16-19

year	author	title	reference
1969	O'Hale, Colmán	<i>The Universe of Order: Some Aspects of the Natural Law in J.R.R.Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings</i>	M.A. Thesis, University of Waterloo, Ontario, 1969; Phil.M. Thesis University of Waterloo, Ontario, 1970
1969	Urang, Gunnar	"Tolkien's Fantasy: The Phenomenology of Hope"	In Mark R. Hillegas (ed.), 1969. <i>Shadows of Imagination: The Fantasies of C.S.Lewis, J.R.R.Tolkien and Charles Williams</i> . Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press. New ed. 1979, 97-110
1970	Helms, Randell	"The Structure and Aesthetic of Tolkien's <i>Lord of the Rings</i> "	<i>Mythcon I Proceedings</i> (4-7 September 1970). Ed. Glen GoodKnight. Los Angeles: Mythopoeic Society, 5-8
1970	Helms, Randell	"Orc: The Id in Blake and Tolkien"	<i>Literature and Psychology</i> 20.1, 31-35
1973	Muirhead, Rev Jan A.	"Theology in Gandalf's Garden"	<i>Modern Churchman</i> 26.2, 118-27
1974	Purtill, Richard	<i>Lord of the Elves and Eldils: Fantasy and Philosophy in C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien</i>	Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. 2nd edition: San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006
1976	Spice, Wilma Helen	<i>A Jungian View of Tolkien's 'Gandalf': An Investigation of Enabling and Exploitative Power in Counseling and Psychotherapy from the Viewpoint of Analytical Psychology</i>	Ph.D. dissertation; University of Pittsburgh
1978	Sardello, Robert J.	"An Empirical-Phenomenological Study on Fantasy with a Note on J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis"	<i>Psychocultural Review</i> 2, 203-20

year	author	title	reference
1979	Kocher, Paul H.	“Jung in Middle-earth”	<i>Mythlore</i> , 6.4 (Fall 1979), 25
1979	O’Neil, Timothy	<i>The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth</i>	Boston: Houghton Mifflin
1979	Zipes, Jack	“The Utopian Function of Fairy Tales and Fantasy: Ernst Bloch the Marxist and J.R.R. Tolkien the Catholic”	Ch.5 in <i>Breaking of Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales</i> . London: Heinemann; Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 129-59
1980	Morse, Robert E.	“Rings of Power in Plato and Tolkien”	<i>Mythlore</i> 7.3, 38
1981	Dubs, Kathleen E.	“Providence, Fate & Chance: Boethian Philosophy in <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> ”	<i>Twentieth Century Literature</i> 27, 34-42. Reprinted in Jane Chance (ed.), 2004. <i>Tolkien and the Invention of Myth</i> . Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 133-42
1982	Rose, M.C.	“The Christian Platonism of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and Charles Williams”	In D.J. O’Meara (ed.), 1982. <i>Neoplatonism and Christian Thought</i> . Albany: State University of New York Press, 203-12
1983	Cox, John	“Tolkien’s Platonic Fantasy”	<i>Seven</i> 5, 53-69
1984	Davis, Larry Elton	<i>A Christian Philosophical Examination of the Picture of Evil in the Writings of J.R.R. Tolkien</i>	Dissertation, South Western Baptist Theological Seminary, See DAI, 44, 1984, 3712a

year	author	title	reference
1986	Flieger, Verlyn	“Naming the Unnameable: The Neoplatonic ‘One’ in Tolkien’s <i>Silmarillion</i> ”	In Thomas Halton and Joseph P. Williman (eds.), 1986. <i>Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer</i> . Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 127-32
1988	Greenman, David	“ <i>The Silmarillion</i> as Aristotelian Epic-Tragedy”	<i>Mythlore</i> 53, 14.3, 20-25
1992	Kotowski, Nathalie and Christian Rendel	“Frodo, Sam and Aragorn in Light of C.G. Jung”	<i>Inklings: Jahrbuch für Literatur und Asthetik</i> 10, 145-59
1993	Duriez, Colin	“Sub-creation and Tolkien’s Theology of Story”	In K.J. Battarbee (ed.), 1993. <i>Scholarship and Fantasy</i> . Turku: University of Turku, 133-50
1994	de Armas, Frederick A.	“Gyges’ Ring: Invisibility in Plato, Tolkien and Lope de Vega”	<i>Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts</i> 3 (1994), 120-38
1995	Houghton, John William	“Augustine and the Ainu-lindale”	<i>Mythlore</i> 21 (1995), 4-8
1995	Noad, Charles E.	“Frodo and His Spectre: Blakean Resonances in Tolkien”	In Patricia Ann Reynolds and Glen GoodKnight (eds.), 1995. <i>Proceedings of the J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference</i> . Milton Keynes: The Tolkien Society, 58-62
1995	Agøy, Nils Ivar	“Quid Hiniildus cum Christo? New Perspectives on Tolkien’s Theological Dilemma and His Sub-Creation Theory”	In Patricia Ann Reynolds and Glen GoodKnight (eds.), 1995. <i>Proceedings of the J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference</i> . Milton Keynes: The Tolkien Society, 31-38

year	author	title	reference
1995	Olszanski, Tadeusz Andrzej	“Evil and the Evil One in Tolkien’s Theology”	In Patricia Ann Reynolds and Glen GoodKnight (eds.), 1995. <i>Proceedings of the J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference</i> . Milton Keynes: The Tolkien Society, 298-300
1995	Sandner, David	“The Fall From Grace – Decline and Fall in Middle-earth: Metaphors for Nordic and Christian Theology in <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> and <i>The Silmarillion</i> ”	<i>Mallorn</i> 32, 15-20
1997	Sterling, Grant C.	“‘The Gift of Death’: Tolkien’s Philosophy of Mortality”	<i>Mythlore</i> 82, 21.4 (1997), 16-18, 38
2003	Bassham, Gregory, Bronson, Eric	<i>The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All</i>	Chicago: Open Court
2003	Evans, Jonathan	“The Anthropology of Arda: Creation, Theology and the Race of Men”	In Jane Chance (ed.), 2003. <i>Tolkien the Medievalist</i> . London: Routledge, 195-224
2004	Burns, Marjorie J.	“Norse and Christian Gods: The Integrative Theology of J.R.R. Tolkien”	In Jane Chance (ed.), 2004. <i>Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader</i> . Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 163-78
2005	Houghton, John Wm. and Neal K. Keesee	“Tolkien, King Alfred, and Boethius: Platonist Views of Evil in <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> ”	<i>Tolkien Studies</i> 2, 131-59

year	author	title	reference
2005	Kreeft, Peter	<i>The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind The Lord of the Rings</i>	San Francisco: Ignatius Press
2005	Fornet-Ponse, Thomas	“Tolkiens Theologie des Todes” [“Tolkien’s Theology of Death”]	<i>Hither Shore</i> 2, 157-86
2006	Fornet-Ponse, Thomas	“Die steigende Präsenz von Philosophie und Theologie” [“The Increasing Presence of Theology and Philosophy”]	<i>Hither Shore</i> 3, 37-50, English summary 209-10
2006	Smith, Ross	“Fitting Sense to Sound: Linguistic Aesthetics and Phonosemantics in the Work of J.R.R. Tolkien”	<i>Tolkien Studies</i> 3, 1-20
2008	Bonvecchio, Claudio	“La Filosofia del <i>Signore degli Anelli</i> (a cura di)”	<i>Mimesis</i> , Milano-Udine, 208
2008	Smith, Ross	“Steiner on Tolkien”	<i>Tolkien Studies</i> 5, 185-86
2008	Fornet-Ponse, Thomas	“Theology and Fairy-Stories: A Theological Reading of Tolkien’s Shorter Works?”	In Margaret Hiley and Frank Weinreich (eds.), 2008. <i>Tolkien’s Shorter Works: Essays of the Jena Conference 2007</i> . Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 135-65
2008	McKenzie, Tim	“I Pity Even His Slaves’: Tolkien and the Theology of Evil”	In Sarah Wells (ed.), 2008. <i>The Ring Goes Ever On: Proceedings of the Tolkien 2005 Conference: 50 Years of The Lord of the Rings</i> . 2 vols. (Coventry: The Tolkien Society). Vol. 2, 91-98

year	author	title	reference
2008	Stevenson, Shandi	“The Shadow beyond the Firelight: Pre-Christian Archetypes and Imagery Meet Christian Theology in Tolkien’s Treatment of Evil and Horror”	In Lynn Forest-Hill (ed.), 2008. <i>The Mirror Crack’d: Fear and Horror in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Major Works</i> . Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 93-117
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2008	Milbank, Alison	“Tolkien, Chesterton, and Thomism”	In Stratford Caldecott and Thomas Honegger (eds.), 2008. <i>Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings: Sources of Inspiration</i> . Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 187-98
2008	Oziewicz, Marek	“From Vico to Tolkien: The Affirmation of Myth against the Tyranny of Reason”	In Stratford Caldecott and Thomas Honegger (eds.), 2008. <i>Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings: Sources of Inspiration</i> . Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 113-36
2008	Weinreich, Frank	“Metaphysics of Myth: The Platonic Ontology in ‘Mythopoeia’”	In Margaret Hiley and Frank Weinreich (eds.), 2008. <i>Tolkien’s Shorter Works: Essays of the Jena Conference 2007</i> . Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 325-47
2009	Lief, Jason	“Challenging the Objectivist Paradigm: Teaching Biblical Theology with J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Guillermo del Toro”	<i>Teaching Theology and Religion</i> 12.4 (October 2009), 321-32

year	author	title	reference
2009	McIntosh, Jonathan S.	<i>The Flame Imperishable: Tolkien, St. Thomas, and the Metaphysics of Faerie</i>	Dissertation for degree in Doctor of Philosophy, UMI dissertation service
2010	Milburn, Michael	“Coleridge’s Definition of Imagination and Tolkien’s Definition(s) of Faery”	<i>Tolkien Studies</i> 7, 55-66
2011	Arduini, Roberto & Claudio Testi	<i>Tolkien e la Filosofia</i>	Milano: Marietti 1820
2011	Lobdell, Jared	“Ymagynatyf and J.R.R. Tolkien’s Roman Catholicism, Catholic Theology and Religion in <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> ”	In Paul Kerry and Sandra Miesel (eds.), 2011. <i>Light Beyond All Shadows: Religious Experience in Tolkien’s Work</i> , Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 79-97
2011	Milburn, Michael	“Art According to Romantic Theology: Charles Williams’ Analysis of Dante Reapplied to J.R.R. Tolkien’s ‘Leaf by Niggle’”	<i>Mythlore</i> 29.3-4 (Spring-Summer 2011), 57-75
2011	Birks, Annie	“Augustinian and Boethian Insights into Tolkien’s Shaping of Middle-earth: Predestination, Prescience and Free Will”	<i>Hither Shore</i> 8, 132-47
2012	Basham, Gregory & Eric Bronson	<i>The Hobbit and Philosophy</i>	Hoboken, NJ: Wiley

## Tolkien between Philosophy and Philology

## 1. "Philosophy" and philosophers in Tolkien's works

Franco Manni

In his works Tolkien never refers to a philosopher by name,<sup>1</sup> neither classical figures such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer or Marx, nor his contemporaries such as Freud, Bergson, Croce, Dewey, Wittgenstein, Husserl, Popper or Ryle. Several ideas of the *philosophia perennis* (a syncretic compound of ancient and medieval traditions) are also frequently employed, but without reference to sources. You wrote to me saying that, although he had read and knew them, Tolkien never named philosophers such as Plato, Boethius and others due to his anti-Classical prejudices and because he wanted to make use of the neglected native English literature but could find no English medieval philosophers prior to Chaucer.<sup>2</sup>

Tolkien *never* uses the word "philosophy" in his fiction, and in other published works only in six instances (three in the lecture "On Fairy Stories" and three in that on *Beowulf*). In his writings not intended for publication, though, the word does appear – rarely in his *Letters* and but twice in the aborted *The Notion Club Papers*: once in reference to the character Rupert Dolbear (who is also interested in psychoanalysis and often falls asleep during discussions) and once in reference to the character Michael Ramer (a philologist and alter-ego of Tolkien), who says that he is *not* a philosopher, but rather an "experimenter".<sup>3</sup>

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1 Never in those published during his lifetime; among posthumous works, Plato appears once in *The Notion Club Papers* in the context of the myth of Atlantis, which is connected with that of Númenor (SD 249).

2 E-mail 21 August 2009.

3 Cf. Manni (2012:5-10).

These occurrences (or rather non-occurrences) of references to philosophers<sup>4</sup> or the word “philosophy” bring to mind Carpenter’s reconstruction of a typical Inklings meeting: when they talk of certain thinkers, they do so polemically, disparaging “contemporary thought”. I also think that you, Tom, who claim to be totally ignorant of philosophy, harbour towards it a (latent) polemical attitude and consider that philologists have a “concrete mentality” whereas philosophers have an “abstract mentality”.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps you and Tolkien have in mind the abstruse and often basically empty philosophy of 19<sup>th</sup> century German idealism, 20<sup>th</sup> century German and French existentialism and the diversely abstruse and differently empty “Oxbridge analytical philosophy” that was already strong in English-speaking academic circles before the Second World War and became dominant afterwards.<sup>6</sup>

What do you think, Tom, about the non-occurrence of philosophers’ names or the word “philosophy” in Tolkien’s works?

### Tom Shippey

There are two reasons I can think of why Tolkien uses the word “philosophy” so rarely, and never mentions any individual philosopher. The first reason is easy to state: Tolkien was not a philosopher, he was a philologist. Indeed he declared himself that he was a “*pure philologist*” (*Letters* no. 153), and the emphasis is Tolkien’s. Furthermore, though he did not say this, I would add that he was a pure *comparative* philologist.

I need to explain briefly what these words meant for Tolkien. In the first place, for him “philology” had a much broader sense than the older classical one of studying manuscripts, making collations, and establishing authoritative texts. When “comparative philology” was first thought of, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century,

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4 Their absence is wholly deliberate, I think. For example, in the preparatory versions of the lecture “On Fairy Stories” Tolkien cites Carl G. Jung, while in the definitive version he merely uses the word “archetype”, omitting the name of the Zurich psychiatrist (cf. Flieger & Anderson 2008:129, 170, 307). Tolkien also cites Boethius in the *unpublished* draft of the lecture on *Beowulf* (cf. Drouot 2002:49).

5 Numerous communications from Shippey to me. See also Shippey (2005:334).

6 See Shippey’s critical comment regarding G.E. Moore, the father of English analytical philosophy, in Shippey (2000:158), and also a personal comment regarding a dispute with the Oxford “philosophers” (E-mail 14 July 2009).

many of the ancient Northern texts in which Tolkien took deepest interest (such as *Beowulf*) were simply inscrutable. To understand them at all, let alone edit them, comparative philologists first had to compose grammars of extinct languages for which (unlike Latin and Greek) there was no living tradition. They did this, essentially, by working out the processes of mostly phonetic change which had created the languages, and so marked off, for instance, Old English and Old Norse from their Common Germanic stem. But this involved working out the grammar and phonology of Common Germanic, of which almost nothing had ever been recorded. Only then could editors begin to refine their knowledge, understand, edit and even emend texts (as Tolkien did, for instance in his posthumously-published edition *The Old English Exodus: Text, Translation and Commentary*) which had been poorly transmitted. And only after that could they start to understand poems, names, legends, myths.

I have commented on this historical process elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> but the most important conclusions I would draw are these. First, comparative philology is about linguistic *change*. This interest is reflected in the enormous effort Tolkien put into his linguistic sub-creations, not only inventing his elvish languages, but showing how Sindarin, for instance, had developed out of Quenya. Second, comparative philology, focused on change as it was, gave deep and unexpected insights into history. Language and history, or language and legend, were not to be kept separate from each other. Third – especially important in Tolkien’s professional life – the traditional disciplinary separation of “language” and “literature” within British university departments was entirely mistaken (*Letters* no. 7). Finally, it should never be forgotten that to Tolkien comparative philology was still a new discipline, not well understood, with few defenders.

All this may tell us why Tolkien rarely mentioned philosophers. For one thing, philosophy and old-style philology were often seen as opposed. To the philosopher, the old-style philologist – the lover of words, the lover of literature – seemed what we might call a pedant, concerned with tricks of style, with purity of expression, never going below the surface of human speech and writing to the deeper truths that lay beneath. Harmless, one might say,

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<sup>7</sup> Shippey (2005: chs. 1-2). These chapters are however little changed from the first edition of 1982.

but trivial. Tolkien would certainly reply that even if that had been true of old-style Classical philology, it was completely untrue of the new-style *comparative* philology which had been born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: for this entirely new discipline, of which Plato and Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas knew nothing, had opened up completely new perspectives on the nature of language, and the nature of history, and the nature of mythology, even the nature of humanity. What philologists like Jacob Grimm had shown was how language changed over time – which among other things showed how languages, and peoples, are related. And the techniques they developed were extraordinarily rigorous: my old professor once told me that mastering the sound-changes of comparative Germanic philology was the hardest intellectual work he ever did, and he was a man who had bought and read his own copy of the sixty-volume edition of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*.

Let me give one example, out of many millions that are possible. The Italian word for the number “five” is *cinque*, while the English word is “five”. The two words do not sound anything like each other. They do not share a single sound! And yet we can show how they are related.

- The Italian word descends from Latin *quinque*
- but in Latin the *qu-* sound corresponds exactly to *p-* in other ancient Italian languages, such as Oscan and Umbrian, where the word would be *pempe*
- we find just this alternation of *qu-* and *p-* also in the Celtic languages, so that the Irish word for “five” is *coig* (pronounced “queeg”), but the Welsh is *pimp*
- the ancestor of Latin and Oscan, then, may have had a word like *pinpe*
- but in Germanic languages, that ancient *p-* regularly becomes *f-*, so that Latin *pater* is German *Vater* (pronounced with an initial *f-*)
- which is why our ancient ancestral *pinpe* became German *fünf*
- but one of the peculiarities of English is that in it, unlike other Germanic languages, a short vowel is lengthened before a nasal sound, and the nasal sound is dropped, so that we have Old English *fif* (and note that much the same has happened with Irish *coig*)
- finally, two sound-changes, one occurring (unlike all the others) during the period of recorded history, and the other still operative to this day, the vowel *i* has become *ai*, and the final *-f* has become a *-v*.

And that is why *cinque* and “five” are the same word!

Now, you can see why philologists are thought to be pedantic! What I have said is very detailed, and it doesn't seem to mean anything. But it tells us a lot about history, or prehistory, such as the way in which languages are related. Philology – and again I mean *comparative* philology – is like language DNA-analysis. It had the same effect on the humanities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Darwin had on the biological sciences. And the changes it tracks (like DNA-analysis) are not under conscious control. No-one ever designed them, and though similar processes are still at work even today, we are rarely conscious of them, because they happen so slowly, and we do not know what causes them. You might say that phonological changes may tell us a great deal, but in themselves they do not *mean* anything. There is no philosophy in them.

Not surprisingly, therefore, philosophers do not think the same way as philologists. I will give you one example. Many years ago I was interviewing candidates for an important university scholarship, and one candidate was said to be the best philosopher of his year at the University of Oxford. He told us that he was studying the concept of “God” in Augustine, and that he was focusing on the difference in Augustine’s writings between “a god” and “the god” and “God”. I thought about this for a minute or two, and then asked, “but Augustine wrote in Latin, which has neither a definite nor an indefinite article. So how can you tell whether he meant ‘the god’ or ‘God’ or ‘a god’ when he wrote *deus*?” The brilliant young philosopher gaped at me. He had not thought of that (I expect he was working from an English translation). He did not get the scholarship, and all the philosophers were very angry with me, but what could I say? I am a philologist. I know very little of concepts of god, and I do not presume to say what Augustine may have *meant* by *deus*, but I do know something about grammar.

And there is a difference of temperament as well. It was the philosopher William James who pointed this out.<sup>8</sup> We all, he wrote, have two impulses in us, but we have them in different proportions. One is the impulse to generalise, to organise facts into systems and patterns, to see how things are connected. The other is to look at details, at specifics, to see how things are different. They should of course be balanced, but I would suggest that philosophers are the generalisers, the ones with the telescope. Philologists are the scrutinisers, the ones with the

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8 Shippey (2005:380-82 and note on 448).

microscope. Tolkien was a very extreme example of the latter. He himself noted that his intellectual fault was the tendency to “niggle” – to waste time and effort on unnecessary detail.<sup>9</sup> That is why he never finished the *Silmarillion*, despite working on it for nearly sixty years. So that is one reason for Tolkien not to mention philosophy or philosophers: because he was a philologist.

The other reason is this. Philosophy is too important to be left to philosophers. Philosophy deals with the great questions of human life, and anyone who has lived for very long is at least aware of them. Why must we die? Why are our lives so different from each other? Is there no justice in the world? Are we merely the victims of chance? Anyone who has asked any of these questions – and surely that means all of us – is beginning to be a philosopher. And we all develop our own answers, our own personal philosophy. We may not be able to put it into words, and our personal philosophies may not be as powerful, as thoughtful, as wide-ranging as those of Plato or Boethius, but we are all philosophers of a kind.

Now, in our time, academic philosophers have ceased to have much to do with ordinary people. They do not talk the same language, and the language of academic philosophers is more and more impenetrable. So are ordinary people to be left to their own thought? To construct, as Kurt Vonnegut said cruelly but truthfully in his 1963 novel *Cat's Cradle*, a philosophy of life out of bumperstickers? It was one aim of the Inklings, I believe, and especially of Tolkien's great friend C.S. Lewis, to bridge this gap. We might note, incidentally, that Lewis had completed the Oxford Classics course, “Greats”, which had in it a large element of philosophy, whereas Tolkien did rather badly in his first Oxford examination in this course (despite an alpha in his one paper on Comparative Philology), and at that point, in 1913, abandoned the Oxford Classics course and began to read the then-unfashionable subject of English instead (Carpenter 2000:70-71). Nevertheless, I think even Lewis would agree that we do not need to know the history of philosophy to be philosophers.

So those are my two explanations for Tolkien's reluctance to mention philosophy and philosophers. He was a philologist. And his philosophy was personal.

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<sup>9</sup> In a letter to his publisher, Rayner Unwin, he wrote “I am a natural niggler, alas!” (*Letters* no. 236). It is clear that the painter Niggle who cannot finish his great work is a self-image of Tolkien – see his short story “Leaf by Niggle”, and my comments on it (Shippey 2000:266-77).

## 2. The possible influence of philosophical ideas on Tolkien's works

### Franco Manni

I would like to list briefly the ideas of ancient and medieval philosophers that are present in Tolkien's works.

Plato:<sup>10</sup> the use of myths to illustrate ideas; light described in the *Silmarillion* as the Sun (symbol of the Idea of Good) as in the *Republic*; the use of the term "демиургic" from Plato's *Timaeus*; the Isle of Númenor from Plato's story of Atlantis in *Critias*; the One Ring from that of Gyges, again in the *Republic*; the Elves' reincarnation from *Phaedo*; the idea expressed in *Gorgias* ("it is better to suffer an injustice than to perpetrate it") is the basis of Tolkien's idea on the use of the One Ring, namely that it is better to suffer not using it than to obtain victory by using it; the problematic mind/body dualism in the *Athrabeth* compares the ideas of Plato, Aristotle and several biblical authors.

Augustine: against Manichaeism, the idea that God created everything and Evil is not a fundamental principle; against Pelagianism, the idea that predestination and grace make obedience to divine will unnecessary.

Boethius:<sup>11</sup> divine omniscience does not determine future events;<sup>12</sup> that "consolation" is one of the benefits of reading fables; the notions of "chance" and "luck" do not exist because "providence" does; the followers of Evil will come to nothing because it is only "privation"; the idea, derived in turn from *Gorgias*, that the wicked follow their desires but do not obtain their wishes, which explains the differing purposes and achievements of Gandalf and Saruman; the idea (also taken from *Gorgias*) that a punished evildoer is more fortunate than he who escapes punishment, illustrated by episodes concerning Melkor, Sauron, Boromir and Gollum.

Thomas Aquinas: in Note 8 to the comment that Tolkien made on *Athrabeth* he discusses "desire" and distinguishes three types: "natural" desire which is

<sup>10</sup> It should be remembered that in 1913 Tolkien sat an examination on two dialogues from *Gorgias*, *Phaedo* and *Protagoras* (Hammond & Scull 2006:37).

<sup>11</sup> In 1915 Tolkien sat an examination on *De consolazione philosophiae* (Hammond & Scull 2006:39).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Note 6 to *Ósanwe-kenta* in *LTP* 21-22.