

# Wittgenstein on Dissimulation and the Constitution of the Inner

Antonio Marques

---

"Pretending is, of course, only a special case of someone's producing (say) expressions of pain when he is not in pain. For if this is possible at all, why should it always be pretending that is taking place - this very special pattern in the weave of our lives?"  
*PI* ii, XI 228-229 e

The topic of dissimulation (*Verstellung*, *Heuchelei*) occurs recurrently in Wittgenstein's writings and plays certainly an important role in his last philosophy of psychology. It is obviously related to the concepts of inner and outer and also plays a relevant role to a deeper understanding of the logic of both concepts relationship. There are very well known declarations, which seem to confirm a clear prevalence of the outer, such as "nothing is hidden" or "An inner process requires external criteria" (*PI* 435, 580). But such claims must not be interpreted as if Wittgenstein reduces the inner to the outer or implicitly wished to mean that the inner processes are an illusion and in all cases we must try to study psychological concepts through verifiable external criteria<sup>1</sup>. First of all it is a fact of my relationship with others that mere external criteria don't resolve the problem of the uncertainty related to the eventual in-authenticity of their exteriorizations (*Äusserungen*) or behaviour. More precisely these are non-existent criteria. Nonetheless it's true that this uncertainty exists and in a certain sense it is not possible to overcome it. Which type is this uncertainty? "Uncertainty: whether a man really has this feeling, or is merely putting up an appearance of it. But of course it is also uncertain whether he is not merely putting up an appearance of pretending. This pretence is merely rarer and does not grounds that are so easily understood" (*RPP* I 137).

It is also true that I don't live permanently under a state of uncertainty about the authenticity of the other person's expressions. On the contrary dissimulation is even a "special case". Certainly one can imagine that no form of life would be possible if each one's attitude toward the other were of suspicion and we always believed that the other person dissimulates. Naturally I assume without a shadow of doubt that the other is really angry, sad, full of joy or that her pains means really pain, etc. Nevertheless this is also true: "In *certain* cases in some uncertainty whether someone else is in pain or not, I am not secure in my sympathy with him - and *no* expression on his part can remove this uncertainty" (*RPP* I 137). As a result we have not only a situation in which it is not

possible to define criteria which eliminate the uncertainty about the authenticity of the other person behaviour, through any kind of verification of the existence of a supposed sensation or internal experience. Furthermore another important outcome is an inevitable asymmetry between first and third persons. When Wittgenstein affirms that "The uncertainty of the ascription "He's got a pain" might be called a constitutional certainty" (*RPP I 141*)", he is assuming simultaneously that an asymmetry between first and third persons is also constitutional. Now what Wittgenstein shows is that this asymmetry is not grounded on a sort of structural incapacity to perceive the interior of the other, but on the own exclusive capacity of the subject to *express genuinely* or not his own feelings, sensations, etc. In other words, his capacity to express himself sincerely or to dissimulate. *So the hypothesis I defend in this paper is the following one: what can be designated by inner in Wittgenstein is not the set of experiences which are or are not expressed by primitive natural or linguistic signs, but the capacity that only the subject has to exteriorize in-authentically or to dissimulate.* By non-genuine expressions one must understand the exhibition of expressions, which are not substitutions of the primitive expressions the child has learned at the beginning of his linguistic training. A little later we'll clarify this point. These are preliminary considerations we must take in account in order to explore further the concept of dissimulation.

1. In what sense is it possible to speak of an inner as something hidden or that the subject can hide? At first view this formulation seems to be in complete contradiction with all the argumentation against the picture of an inner filled with objects to which only the subject has an access, developed by Wittgenstein, at least from § 243 of the *PI*. At that point the argumentation takes in account all the critique to the Augustinian picture of language, which derives the meaning from the ostensive and designative use of language. The most outstanding result of this critique is that the mind must not be seen as a box, where each one has something hidden (for example, a beetle) that only she can see or recognize. This is the image Wittgenstein proposes us in the well known § 293 of the *PI*. The illusion consists in thinking that the inner is the set of things, which can be designated by our language, seen under an essentially descriptive use. If we understand the inner in this way, so we'll be speaking of a false image of it. A convenient way to face the question of the meaning of hiding or revealing an inner leads us simply to see deeper in the mentioned asymmetry. The question is not formulated under the form of an asymmetry between someone who exclusively knows his immediate experiences and the other who only can surmise them, but between someone who exclusively can express his experiences and the other person who only can know them just through the expressions he observes. It is a fact that we have a strong inclination to separate the private pain and the public cry corresponding to it. But as Mary McGinn

puts it "it is true that the pain is not public in the way the cry is, but the pain enters into the language game insofar as this cry is woven into a pattern that has a particular significance" (Mary McGinn, 1997, 166).

It is to be stressed that this asymmetry is a necessary but not sufficient condition to sustain the notion of something which hides itself, the notion of a different Cartesian inner. "The inner is hidden from us means that it is hidden from us in a sense in which it is not hidden from *him*. And it is not hidden from the owner in this sense: *he utters (äussert) it* and we believe the utterance under certain conditions and there is no such thing as his making a mistake here. And this asymmetry of the game is brought out by saying that the inner is hidden from someone else" (LWPP 2 36e).

2. On the one hand dissimulation is not a genuine expression, on the other hand only because any expression necessarily is to be presented in the first person, can the other person take it as a genuine or authentic expression. It doesn't make sense to say from another person that she describes authentically *my* expression, although we can say that she describes it truly. So from the third person perspective it will always subsist the uncertainty in relation to the genuine character of the produced expression. The case of dissimulation, that is, the intentional exhibition of an in-authentic expression helps to clarify in what sense the first-third person asymmetry must be understood in Wittgenstein. As was already referred, the argumentation against the existence of private objects and of a language that could describe them has revealed that the true asymmetry was not between a subject who possessed in his interior certain objects (sensations, feelings), which only the owner succeeded to describe and to know. The true asymmetry starts from the fact that only I can *exteriorize* my feelings, sensations, etc. The asymmetry grounds the fundamental distinction in Wittgenstein between a descriptive use and an expressive use of language, which goes along the *PI* and is a deep line of his argumentation against the imagined interlocutor, at least from the beginning of the sections related to the so called private language argument (*PI* 243-315). Only I can express my feelings, experiences and such exteriorizations are open to the observation and description from other people. So expression is the external evidence of an inner and this one will be, so to say, *transparent* since in it nothing seems to introduce any doubt into the certainty with which the first person description is realized. Considered only per se the referred asymmetry doesn't determine any doubt in relation to the authenticity or in-authenticity of expressions from the third person point of view. In fact one could say that the asymmetrical relation doesn't imply analytically the game of suspicion and dissimulation. This is easy to confirm, for example with the expression of a baby. That's why "A child must have developed far before it can pretend,

must have learned a lot before it can simulate" (LWPP 2 42e). Nonetheless the development of the capacity to dissimulate arises so to say a crisis in the external evidence of the expression: "The possibility of pretence seems to create a difficulty. For it seems to devalue the outer evidence, i.e. to annul the evidence" (LWPP 2 42e). Now we can see that by the introduction of the language game of dissimulation, another and perhaps stronger asymmetry takes place, namely that one which is based on the possibility that only I have to exhibit non genuine expressions, without which the other person, from the third person view, becomes aware of this lack of authenticity. The complexification of language games in the education of the child, his activity in the framework of more and more complicated patterns of life, determines a better and better technique of the genuine as also of the non genuine expression. "The utterances (*Äusserungen*) of my feelings can be sham. In particular they can be feigned. That is a different language-game from the primitive one, the one of genuine utterances" (LWPP 2 39e). If we remember *PI* 244, Wittgenstein explains there the genesis of the genuine expression: the child hurts himself, cries, the adults talk to him in order to help and teach him genuine linguistic expressions of pain which *substitute* the primitive and genuine expressions. Later on the child is trained in language games of more complicated patterns of life and then can exteriorize non-authentic forms in order to reach certain practical ends. One is justified to say that he learned to express non authentically in order to reach practical ends or because it was important from his point of view dissimulating in this or that situation (LWPP 1 205, 261). Another Gedankenexperiment of Wittgenstein: a tribe doesn't know pain dissimulation; all members think the others exhibit genuine expressions, so they don't recognize any difference between genuine and non-genuine expression. Then a missionary arrives and teaches them to suspect and to introduce this difference in their language games and to give importance to that difference. So they begin to think that it is relevant to distinguish one authentic expression from an in-authentic one, eventually to praise the former and to blame the latter (LWPP 1 203). Even if it is a methodological fiction the example of the tribe teaches us something crucial. Only after the arriving of the missionary it was possible to each member of the tribe to recognize his own expression as a genuine or in-authentic one. Only after that it is possible to them to say in relation to their own inner: "An inner, in which it looks either like this or like that; we are not seeing it. In my inner it is either red or blue. I know which, no one else does" (LWPP 2 55e).

3. Is it possible to imagine human beings who could not dissimulate? The case of the above mentioned tribe, before the missionary arriving, leads us to represent a very strange form of life. Let's again represent this tribe, whose members are completely truthful, not by any moral reason, but because they consider lying as something absurd,

a sort of dissonance. Or also because on their view lying or feigning would be a mental illness or at least a completely perverse pattern of life. No person belonging to that tribe can play a role or even to imagine a story (LWPP 2 56e). But the most relevant fact about it will be that it is not possible to speak of them as having an inner, or in other words, an inner contrasting with an outer with a different logic?

Let's consider the following aspect: the outer evidence of their sincere and genuine expressions, which are observable through the multiple exteriorizations, does impose to us with an absolute force, as happens when a little baby smiles and it is absolutely evident for us its authenticity. But in what sense could we yet to speak of an inner? Has the little baby or any of the members of the tribe something one can designate properly as an inner? In a certain way the answer is a negative one. In fact *when the outer evidence is irrefutable, then the inner in fact disappears*. Thus in the above quoted words of Wittgenstein: "The possibility of pretence seems to create a difficulty. For it seems to devalue the outer evidence, i.e. to annul the evidence". He also says that "When mien, gesture, and circumstances are unambiguous, then the inner seems to be the outer; it is only when we cannot read the outer that an inner seems to be hidden behind it" (LWPP 2 63e). So one must infer that the break of outer evidence has the major consequence of generating an inner. A person grows up, acquires more and more complicated language games, the outer evidence dissipates and an inner takes a form. Then it becomes clear that what one calls a process of development of the inner is not to separate from the expression game, from the dissimulation game and its opposite. Perhaps the most important outcome of this exploration of the dissimulation topic in later Wittgenstein can be formulated by his following words: "Feigning and its opposite exist only when there is a complicated *play of expressions* (Just as false or correct moves exist only *in a game*)" and so "if the play of *expression* develops, then indeed I can say that a soul, something inner, is developing. But now the inner is no longer the cause of the expression" (LWPP 1 946, 947).

## Literature:

Hacker, P.M.S. 1990 *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind*, Oxford: Blackwell

McGinn, Mary 1997 *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, London: Routledge

### Wittgenstein:

*LWPP 1 - Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* 1982 vol. 1, ed. G.H. von Wright and H. Nyman, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

*LWPP 2 - Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* 1992 vol. 2, ed. G.H. von Wright and H. Nyman, Oxford: Blackwell

*PI - Philosophical Investigations* 1978 Oxford: Blackwell

*RPP 1 - Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, 1980 vol. 1, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, Oxford: Blackwell

## Endnote

- 1 A systematic and autonomous treatment of the relationship between the inner, the outer and dissimulation doesn't occupy yet a significant place in the literature on Wittgenstein. Interesting perspectives are developed in following works: P.M. S. Hacker (1990, 272-286), Michel Ter Hark (1990, specially on pretence 124-135), Mary McGinn (1997, 143-176).