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The Failure of Wittgensteinian Therapy and the Philosophical Law of Truth

Wittgenstein wanted to cure us, as philosophers, from our unilateral and para-scientific cramps that arise when we strive for certainty in the face of conceptual confusions (*begriffliche Verwirrungen*). These confusions are produced by misunderstandings, by social contradictions, and by the failure of our communication with others. Our solution is to seek security by coming to agreement with ourselves, by reducing the subject-matter of our troubles to a problem of coherence within ourselves. Thus our problem is reduced to a psychological one or to a problem of agreement with our partners which could be produced by argumentation; in other words philosophically.

In Wittgenstein's diagnosis this means that we try to find a theoretical solution for a practical problem. The urge for certainty by theoretical means cannot but strengthen our conceptual confusions. Therefore, we have to look in another direction, to another context for our problems: These problems must be solved within language-games and by the language-games themselves without the intervention of our chronic reflection and cramps. Only then can we recognize that our social contradictions and our disagreement arise from the fact of not being able to apply our words to our situation in order to be aware of what we have to perceive, to know, to desire, and to do. When we look for a theoretical solution to these problems, we forget the way language-games work and become forms of life.

It would be enough to remind us of the multiple ways language-games work in order to be able to dissolve these theoretical cramps and to stop idle thought. The sign that we have succeeded in curing ourselves would be that we become able to stop this chronic use of thinking when we want to do so.

Against this diagnostic and this wishful thinking, I wish to affirm the following theses: The Wittgensteinian way of describing the use of language is the only one which dooms us to be what he wanted to prevent us from being. If we believe it, we are obliged to privatize our language-game in such a way that it cannot be cured anymore. It is the only way which obliges us to let the language-games go idle. The reason is that we try to do what we are unable to before we submit ourselves to this therapy.

The Wittgensteinian therapy is based upon a dynamical view of language which is both similar to and opposed to the logical view of language in *Tractatus*. The concept of language-game is founded upon a harmony between words and perception, words and action and words and desire. When the language-game is working, this harmony makes up the consensus with our partners, with ourselves and with the world. In this way the harmony between our words and our life is presupposed in much the same way as the logical harmony between our propositional pictures and the depicted facts was presupposed. As you may remember, this presupposition was necessary in order to state the factual truth of propositions and on this basis to calculate their molecular truth. But to state those factual truths and to achieve a complete logical determination of the world, was impossible. And this mainly for two reasons: First, the facts of the world – and not the scientists – had to judge the truth of the elementary propositions. Second, this was only possible if the world had been completely analyzed. Of course, such an analysis could

never be achieved because we do not have epistemological criteria which could allow us to identify the end of analysis.

Analogically when the language-game is working, it is supposed to produce an agreement between the thoughts or the words emitted and the phenomena of life which are "answering" it in the right way. When we are rightly using our language-game, we have to be the same good listeners to ourselves that we had to be in the *Tractatus* as we had to see the visible answers of confirmation or refutation that the world was supposed to give. Granted this theory we may feel that we are able to stop thinking about philosophical problems; the language-games, when we imagine that they are functioning as they should, are dissolving them for us. But this way of escaping our problems can only be achieved in a psychological sense: It is impossible to find in a magical way the proper use of language which gives the answer to our problems of life in a way that assures the agreement with our social partners and ourselves. The acceptance of this feeling to be able to stop thinking when we want to, is as much psychological as the acceptance of the contingency of the world by the willing subject was. When we accept to be able to stop thinking, we also accept to be unable to give the solutions of life that our use of language-games was unable to give us. Our peace is only psychological, but our problems remain unsolved.

Wittgenstein, however, is unable to recognize that these effects remain psychological and private because he cannot recognize that his theories are false. Although they are still good railings against the psychological and private intuitions of the cognitivists (as if they could be objective results of anthropological inquiries), they transform the use of language-games and of thought into a psychological short-circuited circle of speaking and listening to oneself without the intervention of reality. My argument is that the

metaphysical and anthropological premisses leading to such an effect are false and that Wittgenstein was unable both to solve the logical problems of science as well as the philosophical problems of life because it was impossible for him to realize this. I will now try to show why.

Human beings are not endowed with extra-specific instincts like the other well-formed living beings. A human being is not programmed to perceive stimuli and to link this perception to the "right" reactions and answers in order to get the consummatory actions that it needs. Confronted with the impossibility of perceiving the world and of answering its own perceptions in a pre-formed manner, a human being is obliged to feel itself in a kind of hiatus with the world. It cannot link its organs of perception with its organs of action, and, as a consequence, it cannot but feel itself as possessed by an indeterminate fear, by a phenomenon of anguish. In order to overcome this anguish, a human being has to learn a language; that is, it has to use language as an apparatus of both emitting and receiving sounds and of linking the perceptual apparatus of the ear with the apparatus of action. The reason is that language – the sounds being simultaneously emitted and received – creates the only bridge between a human being and reality; this means the reality of the world, the reality of its social partners, and its own reality.

This adjustment of language to reality (and to perception) occurs as an adherence to verbal representations endowed with a cognitive power manifesting itself by the phenomenon of belief. The adjustment of language to action expresses itself in the adoption of the intention of acting and the adjustment of language to consummatory actions manifests itself through the identification with desire. When the language-game is working, these adjustments are as given as the world we breathe within. They are therefore no

subject of reflection. But as soon as the language-game does not work, beliefs, desires, and intentions disappear. Then it produces a "social contradiction"; mutual disagreements as well as conceptual confusions following from this situation. In this way the original hiatus appears again and again.

But we are still not in a position to understand this situation. From the metapsychological standpoint (which is common to users of language and to Wittgenstein) everything looks as if the use of language can be described in terms of projecting sounds towards the world in order to give it meaning and in order to give meaning to others and to ourselves. A second step seems to be the following; one has to recognize the actual occurrence or lack of occurrence of the facts corresponding to our descriptions. One has to recognize oneself and others as listeners which are in agreement with us as speakers when our words organize our actions, desires or feelings. Then one would only have to confirm the agreement with ourselves by the agreement of our words with reality and with our social partners, because this intersubjective agreement occurs independently of our will to produce it and is therefore as objective as the visible world is an instance of an objective judgement. However, it is not as simple as this.

As speakers or thinkers, we cannot recognize the meaning we give to our words without presupposing *and* posing the truth of the proposition which we are thinking. We cannot identify anything we speak about without thinking our proposition to be true. Truth is prior to sense or meaning and is a condition for the use of language. Both Peirce and Prior have stated; "every proposition affirms its own truth", or "to use a proposition is to affirm its truth". Wittgenstein could not see this point because he believed (like the cognitivists today) that language comes after visual perception and builds itself

as a copy of perception. But it is the contrary which is the case; as a living being born one year too early and as thus being an aborted being, it has to utter sounds in order to see its environment and in order to do what it does and what it has to do.

This priority of truth in what we say and think, implies that we are not allowed to give the visible facts the power to judge our proposition instead of judging it ourself. For in order to affirm a proposition we must think it as true. This means that we must judge it as true as we have to think it as a true one in order to be able to think it at all. The occurrence or non-occurrence of the described facts is not sufficient for certifying the truth or falsity of our propositions. To know that snow is white, is to know that for the snow to exist is for it to be white. If we believe in the priority of the visible facts, we are obliged to believe that for the snow to be white is for it to be what it is for the eyes. But we know what snow is if, and only if, we can identify the specific process of crystallization which produced the snow and its whiteness. In order to be able to do that – to identify the snow with this process – and in order to be able to recognize the truth of the proposition that is describing that, we must think of it as true and judge that the reality of the snow has among all its appearances one and only one "property" that gives it its existence (such and such a process of crystallization).

In Wittgensteinian terms, my point could be put in the following manner: The common logical form between propositions and facts cannot be something which can be presupposed as a preexisting harmony. Instead, "the internal logical form" that Wittgenstein was looking for in the *Notebooks*, is this harmony of objectivity which is posed by the predication, the use of referring expressions and the affirmation of the proposition which judges itself as true, as if it was thought of as a true proposition in order to be thought at all. But this

interpretation is excluded by the interpretation Wittgenstein gave of propositions of the kind "Fa". One can no longer analyze it by writing: " $\exists x (fx) \cdot x=a$ ", reducing it thereby to a conjunction of the predicate of a property to an undetermined thing and of the use of the proper name referring to this thing. By affirming "Fa", we are indeed affirming the objectivity of the identity which we are thinking between the thing (we are referring to) and the mode of existence we are attributing to it by the use of a predicate. This necessity of judging the truth of our proposition without being able to found this truth upon preexisting facts, was declared impossible and "philosophical" by Wittgenstein when he declared that his own propositions were nonsense. But in doing so he was obliged to judge his own propositions – as every language-user must do – and to recognize them as "true", as "definitively true".

This philosophical judgment was excluded by Wittgenstein. It is nonetheless what is presupposed in every utterance and as such is something that nobody can prohibit. Everybody who utters or thinks a proposition must judge its objectivity by judging the objectivity of its truth. This law of truth is valid not only for the cognitive propositions – the so-called "descriptive" propositions – but also for the prescriptive ones and for the propositions expressing feelings or mental states. The time of judgment by which we submit our propositions to the law of truth is indeed necessary if one wants to escape this short-circuited use of our phono-auditive sounds by which we invoke a preexisting agreement with the facts or with the others as a kind of preexisting auditive echo, transcendent to every use of language and as such something that every picture and every language-game is judged by.

By reducing truth to correspondence with facts or to consensus with our social partners and with our life, Wittgenstein transformed the

use of every proposition into an experience of confusion or doubt; *begriffliche Verwirrung*. The reason is simply that he excluded the only move which allows us to leave our biological, original and chronic disarray. By declaring this move a nonsensical one, he could not judge its objectivity, and for the same reason it was impossible for him to recognize the falsity of the propositions he had declared definitively true; that is, his own philosophical propositions. Thus he was unable to see that this philosophical move defines our ordinary use of language as well as every illocutionary speech-act. This move – the philosophical law of truth – by means of which we judge the truth of the proposition in order to think it at all, can only be avoided at the following price: We are necessarily privatizing our language-games as well as our therapeutical efforts to dissolve our cramps. Wittgenstein was indeed unable to judge the reality of these cramps and for the same reason unable to judge the objectivity of their dissolution.

Wittgenstein's denial of the philosophical law of truth implies not only a privatization of the use of language that is repeated blindly by his followers. What is more, it gives every use of language – intended only to be "a move in a language-game" – an autistic character. He thereby prohibited himself and others to speak because he could not understand what happens when we speak; that which is given in every speech-act, the philosophical use of judgment.