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FIL217 / FIL317- *Wittgenstein
studies*

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Today's plan

- Can we know “rules”?
 - Things which I am certain about vs. Things which I can know and which can change
 - ”Hinges”, fast-standing truths, necessities, rules vs. Contingencies, empirical sentences
 - Certainties are produced by enculturation and “extremely general facts of nature”* (PI §142)
 - Knowledge is produced by investigation and couples with the possibility of doubt
 - Certainties are situated in world pictures and forms of life – and relative to them
 - The riverbed metaphor: riverbed vs. river water
 - NB: The riverbed can change back into a state of flux! What we consider necessary propositions / rules can again become empirical? All of them??
- Some resulting questions
 - What about the necessity of mathematical and logical propositions? Can they change, too?
 - What about some of our beliefs of which we think that they can *never* change? E.g. the belief that there is a world?
 - Cultural Relativism?

*I.e. there are also general facts of nature, not only facts of grammar.

Some sentences

	True?
"The earth is round"	
«My name is Alois» [uttered by Alois in this room]	
"The earth goes around the sun"	
"The sun goes down" [uttered at sunset]	
"The earth has existed for more than 10000 years"	
"The earth was created by God"	
" $2 \times 2 = 4$ "	
" $2 \times 2 = 5$ "	
"I am in pain" [uttered by someone in pain]	
"It rains in Oslo"	

Some sentences

	Do you believe ...?
"The earth is round"	
«My name is Alois» [uttered by Alois in this room]	
"The earth goes around the sun"	
"The sun goes down" [uttered at sunset]	
"The earth has existed for more than 10000 years"	
"The earth was created by God"	
" $2 \times 2 = 4$ "	
" $2 \times 2 = 5$ "	
"I am in pain" [uttered by someone in pain]	
"It rains in Oslo"	

Some sentences

	Can you give a justification for ...?
"The earth is round"	
«My name is Alois» [uttered by Alois in this room]	
"The earth goes around the sun"	
"The sun goes down" [uttered at sunset]	
"The earth has existed for more than 10000 years"	
"The earth was created by God"	
" $2 \times 2 = 4$ "	
" $2 \times 2 = 5$ "	
"I am in pain" [uttered by someone in pain]	
"It rains in Oslo"	

Some sentences

	Do you <i>know</i> ...?
"The earth is round"	
«My name is Alois» [uttered by Alois in this room]	
"The earth goes around the sun"	
"The sun goes down" [uttered at sunset]	
"The earth has existed for more than 10000 years"	
"The earth was created by God"	
" $2 \times 2 = 4$ "	
" $2 \times 2 = 5$ "	
"I am in pain" [uttered by someone in pain]	
"It rains in Oslo"	

Knowledge (“*justified* true belief“)

- Can I know that
 - It rains in Oslo
 - $2 \times 2 = 4$
 - You are in pain
 - I am in pain
 - The external world exists
 - ...
- Knowledge (doubt, truth, falsehood, mistake, reason, argument, explicitness) vs. Certainty (form of representation, necessity, cause, world picture, practice, implicitness)

PI §246

- 246. In what sense are my sensations *private*?
— Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it.
— In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word "to know" as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain.—Yes, but all the same not with the certainty with which I know it myself!—It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. ...

Knowledge: "Only I can know ..."

- "Only I can know ..." as a statement which is false:
 - There are others who can know as well
- "Only I can know ..." as a statement which is nonsense:
 - **There are things I cannot doubt, and therefore cannot justify and know either.**

Things which G.E. Moore claims to "know"

- **"There exists at present a living human body, which is my body.** This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes; it was, for instance, much smaller when it was born, and for sometime afterwards, than it is now. **Ever since it was born, it has been either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth;** and, at every moment since it was born, there have also existed many other things having shape and size in three dimensions (in the same familiar way in which it has), ... **there have, at every moment since its birth, been large numbers of other living human bodies,** each of which has, like it, a) at some time born b) continued to exist at some time after birth c) been, at every moment of its life after birth, either in contact with or not far from the surface of earth; and many of these bodies have already died and ceased to exist before I was born. **But the earth has existed long also for many years long before my body was born:** and for many of these years, also, large numbers of human bodies had died and ceased to exist before it was born." ("A Defence of Commonsense")

Moore's "proof"

- The skeptic says: "We cannot know for sure that an external world exists"
- Moore responds with his "proof":
 - This is a hand.
 - Here is another hand.
 - There are at least two external objects in the world.
 - Therefore (I know that) an external world exists.
- NB: Moore conducts his proof in a way that suggests that it doesn't need a larger context / system ("world picture") into which the proof is embedded.

Wittgenstein's response to Moore

- Where there is no doubt, there is no knowledge.
- You cannot doubt that the external world exists, thus you cannot «know» it either.
- But if you doubt that the external world exists, there is no way to prove its existence by saying: "I see (my) two hands" -> "I have two hands" -> "The external world exists".
 - None of these propositions is more certain than the others; they are all on the same epistemological level and support each other.
- **If a blind man were to ask me "Have you got two hands?" I should not make sure by looking.** If I were to have any doubt of it, then I don't know why I should trust my eyes. For why shouldn't I test my eyes by looking to find out whether I see my two hands? What should be tested by what? (OC §125)

Evidence

- **Can the sight of my two hands serve as evidence for the existence of these two hands - and can their existence in turn serve as evidence for the existence of the external world?**
- My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it.

That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it. (OC §250)

On Certainty §1

- If you do know that *here is one hand*,¹ we'll grant you all the rest.

When one says that such and such a proposition can't be proved, of course that does not mean that it can't be derived from other propositions; any proposition can be derived from other ones. **But they may be no more certain than it is itself.** (On this a curious remark by H. Newman.)

¹See G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. XXV, 1939; also "A Defence of Common Sense" in *Contemporary British Philosophy, 2nd Series*, Ed. J. H. Muirhead, 1925. Both papers are in Moore's *Philosophical Papers*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1959. *Editors*. See G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. XXV, 1939; also "A Defence of Common Sense" in *Contemporary British Philosophy, 2nd Series*, Ed. J. H. Muirhead, 1925. Both papers are in Moore's *Philosophical Papers*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1959. *Editors*.

Moore's mistake: His propositions do not express knowledge (and could can be proven) but certainties

- Moore wants to proof propositions which don't have proof and don't need proof, but rather are themselves expressions of undoubted **certainties** (vs. *knowledge*).
- There are beliefs which do not need to be proven, cannot be proven, and are nevertheless legitimately held; the sentences which (try to) express them are in *On Certainty* called "hinge propositions" ("feststehende Sätze") - they are actually the basis for other things being provable.
- The interesting thing is that **many of the "hinge propositions" are not sentences of logic or mathematics, but at least look like empirical sentences or everyday ordinary propositions.**

Hinge propositions ("feststehende Sätze")

- **We don't, for example, arrive at any of them as a result of investigation.** There are e.g. historical investigations and investigations into the shape and also the age of the earth, but not into whether the earth has existed during the last hundred years. (OC §138)
- ... the questions that we raise and our doubts depend upon the fact that **some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.**

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are in deed not doubted.

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just can't investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. **If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.** (OC §§341-343)

Hinge propositions: Some examples

- [Uttered by G.E. Moore] "I have two hands"
- [Uttered by a believing Christian] "God exists"
- [In 1951] "No one has been on the moon"
- "The world is more than 5 minutes old"
- " $2 \times 2 = 4$ "

RFM Part VI, §23

- The justification of the proposition $25 \times 25 = 625$ is, naturally, that if anyone has been trained in such-and-such a way, then under normal circumstances he gets 625 as the result of multiplying 25 by 25. But the arithmetical proposition does not assert that. It is so to speak **an empirical proposition hardened into a rule**. It stipulates that the rule has been followed only when that is the result of the multiplication. It is thus withdrawn from being checked by experience, but now serves as a paradigm for judging experience.

NB: There are propositional
and non-propositional hinges.
e.g. «extremely general facts
of nature», PI §142

Doubt

- Doubting p presupposes non-doubting q ; doubt is possible only in the context of a specific practice which also includes non-doubt.
 - language games, systems of belief and knowledge are parts of practices and forms of life
- Universal doubt is not possible since it would want to doubt everything – but doubt is not possible where nothing stands firm.

Certainty

- All our talking and acting is embedded in systems (“systems” in a weak sense) of underlying physical, biological, cognitive, emotional, societal ... certainties.
- These certainties are not fixed once for ever, but that *something* is certain, is a requisite for language and practice to work.
- Cf. river-bed metaphor (OC §97):
 - The river-bed may change, but a river will always have a river-bed as point of reference.
 - Sometimes the river moves over its bed - what is certain becomes itself fluid.
- Change and diversity occur both diachronically and synchronically.

OC § 97

- The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed thoughts may shift. But **I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself;** though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.

«Mistake» (domain of knowledge) vs. "mental disturbance"
(outside of both the domains of knowledge *and* certainty)

- If my friend were to imagine one day that he had been living for a long time past in such and such a place etc. etc, I should not call this a **mistake [Irrtum]**, but rather a **mental disturbance**, perhaps a transient one. (OC § 71)
- Not every false belief of this sort is a **mistake**. (OC § 72)
- Can we say: a *mistake* does not only have a cause, it also has a ground [...] roughly: **when someone makes a mistake, this can be fitted into what he knows aright**. (OC § 74)
- In certain circumstances a man cannot make a ***mistake***. (Can here is used logically, and the proposition does not mean that a man cannot say anything false in those circumstances). **If Moore were to pronounce the opposite of those propositions which he declares certain, we should not just not share his opinion: we should regard him as demented**. (OC § 155)

Evans-Pritchard, in: "*Lévy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality*" (1934)

- “The fact that we attribute rain to meteorological causes alone while savages believe that Gods or ghosts or magic can influence the rainfall is no evidence that our brains function differently from their brains. It does not show that we "think more logically" than savages (...) **It is no sign of superior intelligence on my part that I attribute rain to physical causes. I did not come to this conclusion myself by observation and inference and have, in fact, little knowledge of the meteorological processes that lead to rain; I merely accept what everybody else in my society accepts, namely that rain is due to natural causes.** This particular idea formed part of my culture long before I was born into it and little more was required of me than sufficient linguistic ability to learn it. (...) It would be absurd to say that the savage is thinking mystically and that we are thinking scientifically about rainfall. In either case like mental processes are involved and, moreover, the content of thought is similarly derived.”

«The river bed can again
become fluid ...»

- What about mathematical propositions?
- What about logical «laws»?

What the PI say about the question: §§371-372

- 371. *Essence* is expressed by grammar.
- 372. Consider: "The only correlate in language to an intrinsic necessity is an arbitrary rule. It is the only thing which one can milk out of this intrinsic necessity into a proposition."

On Certainty: Wittgenstein a cultural relativist?

- OC §105. **All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system.** And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.
- Certainties, beliefs, truths ... are relative to the «Weltbild» / system they are embedded in, and the «hinges» of these systems are *not* a subject of argument and knowledge. This implies that there are no rational bridges between the different systems? And in turn (extreme) cultural relativism?
 - Cf. Child p. 207 ff

"Soft" vs. "extreme" cultural relativism

- "Soft" cultural relativism: Certainties, beliefs, truths ... are relative to the «Weltbild» they are embedded in. But it is still possible to build bridges between the different systems / „Weltbilder“ / cultures, and thus, to learn to understand each other.
- "Extreme" cultural relativism: Certainties, beliefs, truths ... are relative to the «Weltbild» they are embedded in. Our „Weltbilder“ / cultures are so different that it is not possible to build bridges between them and thus not possible to learn to understand each other.

Wittgenstein an „extreme“ relativist?

- Does Wittgenstein's notion of language game imply independence and incomparability / incommensurability / incompatibility of language games?
- Is Wittgenstein's account of language and communication failing to account for the possibility and actuality of intercultural communication?

Inter-cultural communication?

- If language is at home in language games and practice(s), and knowledge and certainties and beliefs are at home in specific «Weltbilder» - doesn't this prompt the question to what extent communication between different language games and «Weltbilder» (cultures) is possible?

See OC §§609-612

- OC §609. Supposing we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for that we consider them primitive.) **Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it?—If we call this "wrong" aren't we using our language-game as a base from which to *combat* theirs?**
- OC §610. And are we right or wrong to combat it? Of course there are all sorts of slogans which will be used to support our proceedings.
- OC §611. **Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic.**
- OC §612. I said I would 'combat' the other man,—but wouldn't I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)

Some important Wittgensteinian points

- Human language is not a sum of autonomous and separated language games (cf. family resemblance).
- Human form of life is not a sum of autonomous and separated human forms of lives (cf. family resemblance).
- The domain of concepts is not made up of autonomous and separated conceptual subdomains / subsystems (cf. family resemblance).
 - The game analogy is a *misleading* analogy.
- As infants can develop an understanding for the language and culture they are born into, adults can develop an understanding for radically different languages and cultures.
- Humans share hinges that never(?) change from river-bed to fluid status.
 - There are stable facts of communicative nature.
 - E.g. The principle of non-contradiction.
 - There are stable facts of anthropological nature.
 - Feeling my tooth-ache in my body.
 - There are stable facts of biological nature.
 - There are stable facts of non-living nature.
- **There is shared human ways of *behaving*.**
- **There is shared human ways of *acting*.**

Shared ways of behaving

Primitive reactions

- RPP I: §915: Here it is a help to remember that it is a **primitive reaction** to take care of, to treat, the place that hurts when someone else is in pain, and not merely when one is so oneself—hence it is a primitive reaction to attend to the pain-behavior of another, as, also, *not* to attend to one's own pain-behavior.
- RPP I: §916. What, however, is the word "primitive" meant to say here? Presumably, that the mode of behavior is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*: that it is the prototype of a mode of thought and **not the result of thought**.

Shared ways of acting

PI § 206 (English)

206. Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way. But what if one person reacts in one way and another in another to the order and the training? Which one is right?

Suppose you came as an explorer into an unknown country with a language quite strange to you. In what circumstances would you say that the people there **gave orders, understood them, obeyed them, rebelled against them**, and so on?

The **common behaviour of mankind** is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language.

PI § 206 (German)

206. ... Denke, du kämst als Forscher in ein unbekanntes Land mit einer dir gänzlich fremden Sprache. Unter welchen Umständen würdest du sagen, daß die Leute dort **Befehle geben, Befehle verstehen, befolgen, sich gegen Befehle auflehnen**, u.s.w.?

Die **gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise** ist das Bezugssystem, mittels welches wir uns eine fremde Sprache deuten.

”gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise“: common to whom?

- Common to the observed only?
- Common to the observed *and* observer?
- **Common to mankind?**
- -> There are shared ways of human acting.
 - «Handlungsweise» can also mean a sequence of «micro-actions», like shopping.

Giving and following orders as human universals

- Ms-165,108: Befehlen ist eine Technik unserer Sprache. **Wer in ein fremdes Land käme dessen Sprache er nicht versteht wird im allgemeinen unschwer herausfinden, wann ein Befehl gegeben wurde.**
- Ms-165,109 f: Ist es aber genug daß Einer etwas sagt & ein anderer irgend etwas tut, daß ein Befehl befolgt werde? Worin besteht das Phänomen des Befehlens & Gehorchens? Es ist **eine Technik des menschlichen Lebens & unserer Sprache. Es ist schwer oder unmöglich eine allgemeine Beschreibung, aber leicht, Beispiele dieser Technik zu geben.**
- Ms-124,208ff: In den Reaktionen auf einen Befehl muß es **Gleichförmigkeit** geben.

PI § 25

25. ... Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much **a part of our natural history** as walking, eating, drinking, playing

PI § 415

206. What we are supplying are really **remarks on the natural history of human beings**; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes.

Zettel at PI § 142

- What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept, are often **extremely general facts of nature**: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality.

PI II: xii

If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of **grammar?** — Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and **very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.)** But our interest does not fall back upon these possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history—since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes.

PI §208: The power of example

PI §208

208. Then am I defining "order" and "rule" by means of "regularity"?—**How do I explain the meaning of "regular", "uniform", "same" to anyone?**—I shall explain these words to someone who, say, only speaks French by means of the corresponding French words. But if a person has not yet got the concepts, I shall teach him to use the words by means of examples and by practice.—And when I do this I do not communicate less to him than I know myself.

In the course of this teaching I shall shew him the same colours, the same lengths, the same shapes, I shall make him find them and produce them, and so on. I shall, for instance, get him to continue an ornamental pattern uniformly when told to do so.—And also to continue progressions. And so, for example, when given: to go on:

I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on.

PI § 201: Interpreting vs. understanding

- 201. This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that **there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases.**

Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term "interpretation" to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.

PI §32: Language learning

32. ... Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one. Or again: as if the child could already think, only not yet speak.

Summarizing: Why
Wittgenstein rather does
not support cultural
relativism

There are some important anthropological facts

- Humans not only share a **pre-rational and pre-linguistic basis**, incl. primitive reactions (see Moyal-Sharrock 2010), but also **shared ways of acting**.
- At the bottom and in the heart of the human, there is shared practice (rather than unifying rationality).
- The fact that infants learn language, concepts and practices – without having shared rationality already in place – shows that it is possible to develop intercultural understanding “from scratch”, by joining in.
 - Cf. Frege’s view that the “language of logic” has to be and can be learned through hints.
- Joining-in becomes possible through **training** in practices and does not require an already existing shared cognitive and rational fundament.
- Humans are capable of joining-in practices after being given **examples**.
- There seems to be a sufficiently common “**human form of life**” which makes it possible that we share ways of responding to teaching and training.

Discussing with the cultural relativist

If a world picture is conditioned by a form of life, then radically different forms of life condition radically different world pictures and frameworks of conceptualization, validity and reference.

Who says that humans do not share a sufficiently common form of life and common ways of acting?

If some humans do not share a sufficiently common form of life - who says, that their form of life cannot become sharable?

Cf. the way children learn language: training, agreement in judgment, common practice ... at some point arises shared understanding.

A challenge may be that we cannot share our practices because of *moral* differences – but this is not a problem of cultural relativism, since it applies already on the intracultural level.