

A. Pichler, K. Cahill, S.
Säätelä
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Cultural Relativism.
Philosophy

- Promises from «Orienteringsmøte»
- Cultural relativism
- Wittgenstein a (philosophical) realist?
- Philosophy
 - Are there philosophical theses in (Wittgenstein's) philosophy? Should / can there (according to Wittgenstein) be philosophical theses in philosophy?
 - Resolute vs. «standard» readings of Wittgenstein

Slide from „Orienteringsmøte“

What is logic? Is logic more fundamental than mathematics? Is it more fundamental than language? What does «more fundamental» mean? What is the relation between language and the world? What does the meaning of a word consist in? What does the meaning of a sentence consist in? What is «rule-following»? How can the other know what I feel? How is it possible that people understand each other? How is it possible that people from different languages, cultures and civilizations can (learn to) understand each other?... What is philosophy?

Cultural relativism

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 ... but also (knowledge) truths (1) are relative to the «Weltbild» / system they are embedded in, and (2) the «hinges» of these systems are themselves *not* subject of argument, knowledge and rationality. Does this imply that there are no rationality / knowledge / argument bridges between the different «Weltbilder», cultures ...? And as a consequence, that (extreme) cultural relativism is right?
 - Cf. Sapir–Whorf hypothesis: As many world structures as natural language structures.

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.)**

"Soft" vs. "extreme" cultural relativism

- "Soft" cultural relativism: Certainties, beliefs, truths, concepts, standards of rationality ... are relative to the «Weltbild» which they are embedded in. But this does not imply that it is not possible to build bridges between the different systems / „Weltbilder“ / cultures, and thus, that it is possible to learn to understand each other.
- "Extreme" cultural relativism: Certainties, beliefs, truths, standards of rationality ... are relative to the «Weltbild» which they are embedded in. This does, where we don't sufficiently share certainties, beliefs, truths, concepts ..., imply **that it is not possible to build bridges between the different systems / „Weltbilder“ / cultures, and thus, that it is not possible to learn to understand each other.**

Is Wittgenstein an „extreme“ cultural relativist?

- If language is at home in language games, forms of life and practice(s), and knowledge and certainties and beliefs are at home in specific «Weltbilder» - doesn't this suggest that communication between different language games and «Weltbilder» (cultures) is not possible?
 - 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?

AP: Wittgenstein is surely no «extreme» cultural relativist

- 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 can be *misleading*.
- Humans share stable hinges.
 - 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*.
- Intercultural communication is dependent on shared acting and behaving rather than shared concepts and shared rationality.
- As infants can develop an understanding for the language and culture they are born into (without yet sharing the concepts of the language and the rationality of the culture they are born into), adults can develop an understanding for other cultures' languages and rationalities without needing to already sufficiently possess these concepts and rationalities.

AP: We can from Wittgenstein even extract an argument against extreme cultural relativism

- The idea of extreme cultural relativism bases on the assumption that communication and the establishing of communication are dependent on shared *rationality*.
- Wittgenstein questions this assumption.
- Wittgenstein even shows that this assumption is wrong.

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.
 - Or, at least: Wherever intercultural communication works, it is thanks to shared ways of **acting** (rather than shared concepts / shared rationality!).
- NB: «Handlungsweise» means different things, including «complex» actions, action sequences – thus not only simple actions.

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

There is «pre-rational» communication: 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.

There is «pre-rational» communication: Understanding vs. Interpreting (PI § 201)

- 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.

There is «pre-rational» communication»: Language learning (PI §32)

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.

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

«Facts of *nature*»? **Philosophical
realism?**

(Back to Moore's concern? 😊)

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.

A. Janik (forthc.)

«Although Wittgenstein insisted that he was not doing natural history, natural history plays a crucial role in his elaboration of the nature of human thinking. Abstract language tempts us to see thought and language as having “a life of their own” as it were apart from human action/practice/life. Thus he came to conceive his task as one of “assembling reminders” (1958, § 127) of **how concept formation is rooted in nature**. In doing so he was careful to emphasize that developing that view he was not advocating a “scientific” or naturalistic view of knowledge but simply “assembling reminders” of the rootedness of thinking in the life of the kind of animal that uses language.»

Summarizing: Why
Wittgenstein rather does
not support cultural
relativism

There are some philosophically relevant 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 understanding between humans are shared practice and acting.
- The fact that infants learn adults' language, concepts and practices – without yet possessing the adults' rationality – 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** (“*Abrichten*”) 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 us *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.

«Philosophy»

Positive views in philosophy?

Cf PI §128: 128. If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them.

Also see LFM p.22: I won't say anything which anyone can dispute. Or if anyone does dispute it, I will let that point drop and pass on to say something else.

and other ...

Philosophy and science

≠ science

- Wittgenstein: Science gives positive views about «the world», but philosophy is about our form of representation («Darstellungsweise», PI §50), our way of talking about / viewing the world.
→ Grammar, rules of grammar

•Naturalism?

- Naturalism: philosophy is continuous with / part of science.

Philosophy and critique of language

- Philosophy investigates our ways of talking about the world.
- Our ways of talking about the world have a surface grammar and a depth grammar level(PI §664)
 - All philosophy is a 'critique of language' (TLP 4.0031)

Critique of language – examples from the PI

- 150. The grammar of the word "knows" is evidently closely related to that of "can", "is able to". But also closely related to that of "understands". ('Mastery' of a technique.)
- [Zettel at §165] The grammar of the expression "a quite particular" (atmosphere). One says "This face has a quite *particular* expression," and maybe looks for words to characterize it.
- 182. The grammar of "to fit", "to be able", and "to understand".
- 187. "But I already knew, at the time when I gave the order, that he ought to write 1002 after 1000."—Certainly; and you can also say you *meant* it then; only you should not let yourself be misled by the grammar of the words "know" and "mean". ...
- 293. ... That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.

«Übersichtliche Darstellung»

- 122. A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words.—Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases*.

The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?)

«Übersichtliche Darstellung»

Perspicuous (re)presentation / overview can be achieved through:

- A list (e.g. PI §23)
- A simile (e.g. PI §18)
- Aspect-seeing (see PI, «Part II»)
- A thought experiment (e.g. PI §293)
- An argument (e.g. PI §40)
- ...

PI §133

... There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.

«Theses»

- So, no positive philosophical views in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, only remarks about grammar?
 - PI §43 – a thesis about the meaning of words?
 - PI §133 – theses about the nature of philosophy?
 - PI §206 – a thesis about human nature and communication?
 - PI §580 – a thesis about the relation between inner and outer?
 - ...
- Aren't at least Wittgenstein's views about grammar "positive" philosophical claims / views?
- Is the later Wittgenstein not a (moderate) philosophical **realist**?

Resolute readings of
Wittgenstein:
There is no picture theory in the
Tractatus ... there is at the end
no philosophical thesis in
Wittgenstein.

Conant 2006: Resolute reading

- «What makes something “a resolute reading” (for the purpose of their dispute) is its adherence to the claim that **as long as we continue to ascribe to the author (as doctrines that he seeks to uphold) what these sentences (seem to) say then we have not yet completed the task of reading that he has set us**, and as long as we fail to realize this we fail to understand *him*.» (p. 180)
- AP attributes to Wittgenstein the following philosophical (realist) thesis / doctrine: «There are facts of nature / extra-grammatical factors which constrain / inform our concepts and grammar».
 - AP is not a resolute reader.

Resolute readings, applied to Wittgenstein's later philosophy

- Are there doctrines in Wittgenstein's later philosophy? What about the PI's key notions? Do they imply positive claims?
- Are there «language games»?
- Are there «forms of life»?
- Cf. Mulhall 2012

Mulhall 2012: Signature concepts

“... the signature concepts with which Wittgensteinian work is so often identified (“language-game”, “grammar”, “ forms of life”) ... But if – like any other representational conventions – this set of signature concepts is sufficiently substantial or robust to acquire a life of its own, then they might on occasions stand between us and an ability simply to acknowledge how things really are; rather than helping to subvert our tendency towards the imposition of a philosophical “must”, they may actually subserve its further expression. And when a Wittgensteinian philosopher becomes so committed to the use of these signature concepts that he cannot conceive of another way of perspicuously representing the phenomena of our life with language when responding to a philosophical problem, then he has in effect imposed a set of philosophical preconditions on the reality he putatively aspires simply to describe.”

(http://www.nordicwittgensteinreview.com/article/view/NWR-1_2012-Mulhall/html)

An alternative to both resolute and standard readings

D.G. Stern 2006: Three debates

The paper maps out and responds to some of the main areas of disagreement over the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy:

- (1) Between defenders of a “two Wittgensteins” reading (which draws a sharp distinction between early and late Wittgenstein) and the opposing “one Wittgenstein” interpretation.
- (2) Among “two-Wittgensteins” interpreters as to when the later philosophy emerged, and over the central difference between early and late Wittgenstein.
- (3) **Between those who hold that Wittgenstein opposes only past philosophy in order to do philosophy better and those who hold that Wittgenstein aimed to bring an end to philosophy and teach us to get by without a replacement. (p. 205)**

D.G. Stern 2006: A tension in Wittgenstein himself

- Pyrrhonian Wittgensteinians ... see Wittgenstein's contribution as therapeutic, a critique of all philosophy, including his own. According to these interpreters, Wittgenstein aims to get us to give up all philosophical views, not provide a better philosophy. On this reading, Wittgenstein offers us a form of scepticism that is aimed not at our everyday life, but at philosophy itself, with the aim of putting an end to philosophy and teaching us to get by without a replacement. Glock has called this the “no-position position”.
- What is really interesting about both the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* is neither a metaphysical system, nor a supposedly definitive answer to system-building, but **the unresolved tension between two forces: one aims at a definitive answer to the problems of philosophy, the other aims at doing away with them altogether.**
- **The split between non-Pyrrhonian and Pyrrhonian Wittgensteinians, between those who read him as “doing philosophy” and those who see him as “stopping doing philosophy”, arises out of an unresolved tension in Wittgenstein's writing**, a tension that helps to explain why each side finds ample support in his writing, yet neither side is able to make sense of the whole. Part of the problem is that both sides understand themselves in terms of a conception of philosophy that is itself in question in his writing. (p. 217 ff)

Back to the tension
between the strongly
therapeutic / resolute
readers and the standard
readers

Glock 1991: Two possibilities

- If the 'no-position'-position is inadequate, can we find a more plausible interpretation of the 'triviality thesis'? That 'thesis' is obviously linked to PI §126, which claims that there are no philosophical discoveries, since what concerns us in philosophy is not hidden but open to view. No new information is needed and controversies are excluded since we 'constantly move in a realm where we all have the same opinions' (AWL p. 97). The first step is therefore to clarify the nature of this uncontroversial but nevertheless philosophically relevant realm. More specifically, what types of expressions might fit the characterization of trivial theses in §§126-9?

There are two possible answers. (p. 76)

Glock 1991: Truths of *grammar*

- **Another possibility is that the pre-empirical realm of philosophy is grammar, the rules we use in determining the correct use of words. In this case, the triviality would not be due to the pervasive nature of certain facts but to the logical antecedence of grammar, which determines the distinction between sense and nonsense, to experience, which settles matters of truth and falsity (PG p. 88; PI §90). Grammatical rules are norms of representation. They cannot be true or false since they determine the prior question of what it makes sense to say. ... According to this 'grammatical' interpretation, the trivial theses of philosophy turn out to be grammatical propositions, or expressions of these rules. (p. 77)**

Glock 1991: Truths of *nature* (Realism)

- According to the first, trivial theses are statements about **framework conditions** of our language games. These are **facts** which render certain rules (im-)practical or even inapplicable, without constituting the content of these rules (PI §§240-2). **For example, our concepts of measures are useful only in a world with relatively stable rigid objects**; but this is not laid down in the rules of, for instance, metric measurement. A 'framework-reading' of §§126-9 is suggested by the fact that Wittgenstein claims, for both these **'very general facts of nature'** (PI p. 230) and the aspects described by the trivial theses of philosophy (PI §129), that they go unnoticed precisely because they are so familiar and general – a 'miss the wood for the trees' effect. (p. 76 f)