

## **Wittgenstein and the Creativity of Language – Workshop held at the University of Bergen June 14th**

This workshop was held under the auspices of the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, and organized jointly by Sebastian Greve (Birkbeck) and Jakub Macha (Bergen and Brno) under the title, “Wittgenstein and the Creativity of Language”.

Despite a rainy morning, Bergen was at its resplendent summer best and the small group of delegates participated in a full day of generally engaging talks. The format of the workshop, with a 20 to 25 minute presentation, followed by a 5 (and sometimes 10) minute “comment” made for slightly less interactive sessions since the response to the comments tended to take up much if not all of the remainder of the hour that was allocated to the individual sessions. However this was more than made up for during the day as the group became more comfortable with each other, and unasked questions could be tabled over a coffee or over the inevitable congregation of smokers that met during the breaks.

That the event was titled a “workshop” as opposed to a seminar or symposium (or even conference) became understandable when the speakers presented papers that were either works in progress, or smaller (but important) parts of a larger work in progress.

Events got underway relatively early, with the inestimable Alois Pichler lending a considered gravitas to the whole affair, whilst the youthful energy and intellectual acuity of Sebastian Greve, leavened with the meticulous organizational skills of Jakub Macha whose thoughtful insertion of small 5 minute breaks during the day meant that the heavy agenda of 8 full topics that might have been challenging in other circumstances was neatly navigated.

The full agenda and abstracts can be accessed from the website noted below:

<http://www.uib.no/en/fof/31233/wittgenstein-and-creativity-language>

The first presentation by Gisela Bengtsson (University of Bergen), titled

“The River: Frege and Wittgenstein on Stepping into Language”, took explicit issue with the thesis put forward by Danièle Moyal-Sharrock that humans are “constitutionally and in everything we do, fundamentally animals”.

Bengtsson’s opposition to Moyal-Sharrock was highlighted by reference to the work of Palmer and his examination of the linkages between Wittgenstein and Frege’s separate appeal to the primitive or animal. The open discussion was marked with an entertaining exchange around experimental work with primates (such as that of Savage-Rumbaugh). Commenter Alois Pichler and others suggested that Moyal-Sharrock might not be as rigid in her views as apparently taken by Bengtsson and looked forward to seeing how Gisela Bengtsson’s paper develops to a finished form.

In the much-anticipated video link with the University of Castilla-La Mancha, Jesús Padilla Gálvez took a robust approach in his views on how creativity as a tool could be abused. His paper, titled “Creativity as Problem Solving” was delivered remotely and unfortunately the quality of the video link was not consistent enough to allow for active participation. This was the only technical issue of the day, but did not detract from either the session itself or the day as a whole.

Padilla highlighted the role of creativity in problem solving by highlighting the verb “solve” and how it can be adapted through usage into several different meanings. As noted above, despite the best efforts of the technical team, Professor Padilla could not engage in the open discussion.

No such technical issues were encountered during Maria Balaska’s paper “The Running-up-against Paradox: How Can we Place it in Language?” which was also delivered via a live video link.

Balaska, a Phd student at Paris 8 University, took Wittgenstein’s writing from the Tractatus and his 1929 lecture on ethics and applied them to the twin “temptations” of language’s transcendence beyond the limits, and, on the other hand, of being limited to a mere representation of facts. By examining how these two temptations might affect, for example, the everyday conceptual experience of something such as Love, Balaska posited a passage beyond the temptations through what she describes as “...the act of giving meaning”.

The final session of the morning was presented by Benjamin Ware (University of Manchester), who spoke on the topic “Seeing the Everyday Otherwise: Vision, Ethics and Utopia in Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations”. Ware is a Literary and critical theorist who brought a somewhat different perspective to the workshop and provided the audience with the view that Wittgenstein was delivering an ethical message (perhaps even a challenge) by suggesting that “seeing the everyday otherwise” is capable of being seen as a “utopian effort” in the modernist context.

A discussion around the continuing use throughout Wittgenstein’s work of the way we might reinterpret familiar scenes and concepts followed, as well as a question on whether or not the message from Philosophical Investigations was in fact ethical, or merely accretive of knowledge. Ware’s paper is a chapter from his forthcoming monograph “Modernism and the Ethical Turn”.

The lunch break allowed those people who were new to the University and to Bergen to take advantage of the mild weather and walk around the cobbled stone streets and picturesque church square. The Wittgenstein Archives had kindly provided refreshments during the day, and these were supplemented by sandwiches and fruit for lunch.

The long afternoon session saw no diminution in the quality of the presentations, with the true spirit of the concept of a “workshop” being seen in the way that good natured and open dialogue was stimulated by the excellent work of the commenters.

First up after lunch was Joseph Zanella (University of Copenhagen) whose paper, “Seeing and Meaning”, brought together the familiar comparison of Wittgenstein with Kierkegaard in their approach towards the language of “the spirit”.

Zanella used, as his core analogy, Kierkegaard’s story of the skilled seamstress who creates the most beautiful altar cloth, putting herself wholly into its creation, and then being distressed when the observer misses the point of it (the production of the altar cloth) by focusing on the work or minor defects of the craftsman/woman.

Zanella’s style of presentation was somewhat original, as he advanced his proposition by asking questions which were sometimes left unanswered or which he answered with a degree of overt irony. The less than obvious

relation between content and form of this presentation made for a creative session.

There followed a tour de force by Ladislav Koren (University of Munich). The heart of his disposition revolved around the contrast of the skeptical (“modus tollens gambit”) versus the anti-skeptical (“modus ponens gambit”) through a paper titled “Certainties and the Sceptical Problem”.

Koren is the Alexander Von Humboldt Fellow at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, and an assistant professor at the University of Hradec Kralove in Czech Republic. He took as the starting point of his presentation Moore’s focus on the Exclusion principle, and then built towards a thoroughly engaging overview of the way in which a Wittgensteinian Discursive Model can explore the logic of the epistemic language game – again with a view to countering both Pyrrhonian and Cartesian style skepticism.

Koren also spoke with clarity on the nature and importance of Wittgenstein’s comments in *On Certainty* on the Hinge Metaphor (OC 341-3) in the overall context of his counter to the skeptic’s approach.

With barely 5 minutes between the sessions, the assembly turned to the next presentation, from Emiliano La Licata. La Licata is coming to the end of his time at Bergen where he is working on a post doctorate assignment at the Wittgenstein Archives.

His paper, “The Psychic Life and the Creativity of the Forms of Life” was introduced as a contemplation of the continuum from a mere “cry” to words (such as “I am afraid”) that form the transition (or *Übergang*) in emotional reactions. La Licata took Wittgenstein’s later work where he (La Licata) posits that Wittgenstein argues there is a transformation of subjective psychic life through the learning of language games.

The final paper of a very long day was presented with commendable freshness by the visiting Isabel G. Gamero (Complutense University of Madrid). Gamero’s abstract had situated her approach in a work that is still to be finalized, as a contrast between politically conservative (Nyiri and Meredith Williams) and politically progressive (Peg O’Connor and Jose Medina) interpretations of Wittgenstein’s exposition of rule following.

The actual presentation did not disappoint, and the quiet spoken Gamero brought the day to a fitting end with a display of scholarship on the subject in hand. The subsequent discussion raised some particularly interesting

observations especially around OC 63, led by a thoughtful series of comments by Rune Falch, an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Bergen.

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