

The Imagination's Piano In Wittgenstein's Philosophische Untersuchungen

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*"Das Ausprechen eines Wortes ist
gleichsam ein Schlagen einer Taste
auf dem Vorstellungsklavier" (PU,§6)*

1. Our Claims

Our purpose is to take into account Wittgenstein's analyses about imagination in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, in order to articulate them and elaborate a concept of imagination (*Vorstellung*). My first claim is that it is possible. My second claim is that the role of this concept has not been taken into consideration (See Arrington R. and Glock, H.-J. 1991; Hallett, G. 1977; Sluga, H. and Stern, D. 1996; Vohra, A. 1986). In some other cases, imagination has been taken into account only partially (Genova, J. 1995; Schulte, J. 1993, Chapter 7 about "Memory"). Some other accounts about Wittgenstein's concept of imagination are more developed (Glock, H.-J. 1996, see the word "imagination" in his Dictionary; Budd, M. 1989, see Chapter V; White, A. 1990, see Chapter 10), but we disagree with some of their conclusions. Our third claim concerns our disagreements. These are:

a) The role of the imagination in *Philosophische Untersuchungen* is not trivial. White says that: "There is no mention of seeing-as in Zettel where Wittgenstein's primary interest is in visualizing, but only in *Philosophical Investigations* where he displays no particular interest in visualizing" (White 1990, 114). Certainly, this concept is not specially thematized, but as an operative concept is important, because it is half way between understanding (*Verstand*) and perception (*Wahrnehmung*).

b) In my viewpoint, imagination has to be understood not only as a mental state, but also as a practice (*Praxis*), as a behaviour (*Verhalten*), as an activity (*Handlung*). In Budd's view, "this kind of concept is a concept of the performance in the imagination of an activity that, when it is not performed in the imagination, involves external behaviour" (Budd 1989, 115-116). I suppose that sometimes is more than "involving". I argue that imagination as praxis is essentially connected with our lived body (*Leib*).

c) Imagination must be sharply distinguished not only from perception, but also from understanding. Briefly, *imaginatio* differs both from *perceptio* and *intellectio*.

2. Wittgenstein's General Strategy about Imagination

Imagination is not an entity to be discovered, but a praxis connected with a special language-game. The way is to know how the word "imagination" is used. Briefly, its niche is its grammar. Consequently, it has proper rules. That implies that "imagination" is used in certain contexts. In another way it supposes a precise net of circumstances (*Umstände*).

Imagination supposes not only mental contents, but also it can turn out into a drawing or even a non-verbal behaviour: e.g. a person can pretend to be a king. Imagination can be used also in more abstract contexts such as imagination of hypotheses.

If we reduce imagination to the mental contents, even in this case, imagination has not been well understood by the imagist tradition because this tries to understand it by taking perception as a model (*PU*, § 301). Wittgenstein comprehends imagination neither as a thing, nor as a private experience that we can show (*PU*, § 382). In addition, when I imagine is determinant that I imagine (*PU*, § 377) and that I *want* imagine what I want to imagine (*PU*, 213e).

Moreover, imagination is neither a mere mental entity nor a set of linguistic features. It is also a kind of praxis. In Wittgenstein's philosophy, imagination becomes also a methodological recourse, that is to say, a procedure for searching the typical features of a language-game through the invention of imaginary cases. It becomes a technique of variation. According to this, there is a relationship between imagination and overview (*Übersicht*) because this allows us to grasp the language-game in which we are imagining. A joke always supposes an imaginative leap, that could be unintelligible without the complicity of the interlocutors concerning the inherent inverosimilitude of the joke.

3. Analysis of Three Metaphors concerning Imagination

Wittgenstein does not compare imagination with chess; nevertheless, if we consider imagination in chess and one of the chess players imagines a move in the chessboard, then this move is a praxis that cannot be reduced to a mental state or a physical movement (*PU*, § 33). That notwithstanding, the move is perceptible in the space-time. What a chess player imagines is not only a mental event, it is also something that he can draw in a diagram.

Wittgenstein compares imagination with a piano (*PU*, § 6). Certainly, it corresponds to Wittgenstein's earlier conception concerning language and thought. Nevertheless, imagination is conceived as a piano, because it has a combinatory role to combine sounds, notes, *etc.* And it is always the piano player who decides the combination. The piano as thing exists there, but as musical combinatory exists only when the piano player plays (the act of playing is similar to a move in chess).

Wittgenstein conceives imagination as a game (*Spiel*) (*PU*, § 216). Let us remark that Anscombe's translation of "Spiel" is here "play": I disagree. This comparison reinforces the combinatory role of imagination and the idea that the performance of imagination is a kind of praxis having its own rules.

4. Focusing on Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen*

If essence is expressed by grammar, then "one ought to ask not what images are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word "imagination" is used. But that does not mean that I want to talk only about words." (*PU*, §370). Accordingly, we have to find out, outside philosophy, where we use the words "I imagine that...", "Imagine that..." (*PU*, §393) The question is: which is the language-game of imagination? Consequently, circumstances have to be pointed out. We need a pragmatics of imagination, which is related to a general pragmatics in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Flores 1998). Concerning imagination, Wittgenstein uses two verbs "*sich vorstellen*" and "*sich denken*". Nevertheless, he sometimes uses both for the *same* object, for instance a rule: a) "Can't we imagine (*uns...denken*) a rule determining the application of a rule?" (*PU*, § 84); b) "Can we not now imagine (*uns... vorstellen*) further rules to explain *this* one?" (*PU*, §86) Or for a language-game: a) "Imagine (*denke dir*) a language-game in which..." (*PU*, § 21); b) "the sentence only seems queer when one imagines (*man vorstellt*) a different language-game for it from the one in which we actually use it" (*PU*, §195).

Imagination or imagining or visualization (*Vorstellung*) is first of all a praxis. This possibility is recognized insofar as sometimes we can *imagine* a pain: "it is enough to imagine it -for instance, you screw up your face a bit" (*PU*, § 311). If I imagine conscientious looking-up, "as I do this I assume a particular expression of face (say that of a conscientious bookkeeper)" (*PU*, §173). And isn't mimicking what someone looks like "just as good as imagining it"? (*PU*, § 450). In a situation similar to imagining, Wittgenstein says that "our criterion for someone's saying something to himself is what he tells us and the rest of his behaviour (*Verhalten*)" (*PU*, § 344). Although is not our target, Zettel (§§ 627, 629) confirms this conception of imagination as *activity* (*Handlung*) and as behaviour (*Verhalten*). Finally, Wittgenstein assumes that

imagination can be fully embodied: "Suppose, however, that someone were to draw while he had an image (*Vorstellung*) or instead of having it, though it were only with his finger in the air. (This might be called 'motor imagery' (*motorische Vorstellung*))" (*PU*, 177e).

Imagination is more than a mere or isolated praxis: it is a power (*Vorstellungskraft*) (*PU*, § 251 and 207 e).

There is no ownership of images of imagination: the visual room, an imagined picture of a landscape, an imaginary landscape, "inasmuch as it can not be any one else's it is not mine either" (*PU*, §398).

Imagination is imagination of human situations (*PU*, §393 and 220 e), a language (*PU*, §19), a doubt (*PU*, § 84), a language-game (*PU*, §60), a rule (*PU*, §84), people who... (*PU*, 188e), a form of life (*PU*, §19), a significant context (*PU*; 211 e) and so on.

Imagination is a power of combination (*Zusammenstellung*): "What if I imagine senseless combination of words?" (*PU*, §512). This aspect is also relevant in accordance with the metaphors of piano and game.

Imagination aspires to possess clarity: "Here we all have a quite clear idea (*Vorstellung*) of what 'above' and 'below' mean" (*PU*, §351).

The concept of an image (*Vorstellung*) is akin to the concept of an aspect, because seeing an aspect and imagining (*Vorstellen*) are subject to the will. Sometimes to see an aspect ("to take the bare triangular figure for the picture of an object that has fallen over") requires "capacity of imagination (*Vorstellungskraft*)" (*PU*, 207e). Let us remark that Anscombe translates "*Vorstellungskraft*" by "imagination": I disagree.

Imagination fulfills also a methodical role, because we can visualize imaginary cases similar to *Gedankenexperimente* (*PU*, §312).

Wittgenstein uses some other terms related to imagination (*Vorstellung*), for instance, fiction (*Erdichtung*) (*PU*, 210e), imagination (*Phantasie*) (*PU*, 213e). In (*PU*, §398), "*Phantasie*" becomes more distant from perception, and in (*PU*, §141) it seems to be less concerned with will.

An image is not a picture (*Bild*), but a picture can correspond to it (*PU*, § 301). Furthermore, Wittgenstein says: "What makes my image of him an image of *him*? Not its looking like (*Ähnlichkeit*) him" (*PU*, 177e). Accordingly, imagination cannot be understood within the perceptual framework. This is one of the limits of the imagination.

The second one is the domain of the imaginable (*Vorstellbaren*). There are unimaginable objects, for instance, the construction of the heptagon (*PU*, § 517). This

reactivates the paradigmatic example of the chilocone concerning Descartes and Leibniz's defence of the difference between *intellectio* and *imaginatio*. The third limit concerns the sharp difference between image (*Vorstellung*) and meaning (*Sinn*) (PU, § 449). This difference implies two kinds of grammar: "This shows clearly that the grammar of 'to mean' is not like that of the expression 'to imagine' and the like." (PU, 18 e). This lead us to the limit concerning imaginability insofar as this is not essential for the understanding of a proposition: "It is no more essential to the understanding of a proposition that one should imagine anything in connexion with it, than one should make a sketch from it." (PU, § 396. For Wittgenstein, "there is a lack of clarity about the role of *imaginability* (*Vorstellbarkeit*) in our investigation" (PU, § 395). The reason why is that we do not know "the extent to which it ensures that a proposition makes sense" (PU, §395). Let us remark that this lack of clarity only concerns an investigation focused on sense. Finally, Wittgenstein is not confined in a mere *actual* imagination, because his concept of imaginability emphasizes the relevance of possible imagination. In my viewpoint, this concept should be taken into account by Wittgenstein's commentators.

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We quote according to this translation.

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Endnote

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