The Wittgensteinian Idea of Analysis as a Base for Constructive Contemporary Scepticism

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> The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose. (Wittgenstein 1998, §127)

1. Introduction

My point of departure will be a terminological remark. Scepticism comprises a wide range of theories and particular ideas, and in order to comment or criticize its formulations, one has to determine which and whose exactly claims one has in mind. It is not my intention to analyse particular formulations of a certain kind of scepticism here. Instead, I will invite the audience to treat scepticism in general as a positive, constructive methodological approach. This runs contrary to many present-day opinions that take scepticism to be close to philosophical nihilism or radical relativism. Scepticism, as I propose to understand it, opens up many possibilities in epistemology (to resolve old problems of obtaining *episteme* knowledge, for example) and yet does not lead to metaphysical dogmatism (which is probably even more important).

We should keep in mind that the Wittgensteinian way of writing – collecting remarks on various subjects next to each other, asking questions, carrying on a specific philosophical dialogue and refraining from conclusive answers – allows his readers to formulate different interpretations. I do not claim that *Philosophical Investigations* cannot be treated as a consistent totality of thoughts (especially when we take its first part into account), as full of arguments about important philosophical problems, or even proposals on how to solve them. Nevertheless, I think one has to be very careful while looking for complete and comprehensive theories in Wittgenstein's work. There is one advantage in the very fact that Wittgenstein is not clear about his own view, namely, the possibility of interpreting his work in various ways. It inspires and motivates other thinkers to build their own interesting philosophical options, but it also allows them to attribute different conceptions to him. So, are we able to read anything interesting and useful about analysis in Wittgenstein's books? I believe that we can find there a quite reserved and reasonable solution about doing philosophy. A solution which has been both adored and criticized in the philosophical literature. I will look a bit closer at it.

2. A few words about constructive scepticism

A constructive form of scepticism can be understood as a critical, antifundamentalist, antiessentialist philosophical approach, in which we neither claim that we are unable to achieve any kind of knowledge, nor that we should suspend all our judgements, because we will never obtain episteme knowledge. Wittgenstein has showed that we can give up the idea of looking for unquestionable, undeniable, timeless, invariable, language-transcendent knowledge (usually called episteme) and at the same time we can obtain usual reliable human knowledge about contingent facts about our world and our life. It is worth to underscore that scepticism I am talking about here is a methodological approach rather than a well formulated

philosophical theory concerning knowledge for example. It is important especially when one tries to number Wittgenstein among the sceptics. He is not a sceptic in the sense Pyrrho of Elis was. It may be said that he rejects the traditional form of scepticism not by confronting it with a dogmatic metaphysical position, but rather with a different view of knowledge or obtaining knowledge. In this case scepticism is seen as an approach which simply cannot be formulated. Its formulation does not make sense because it raises doubts where no questions can be asked (Wittgenstein 1967, § 675, 676). To summarize, it can be stated that Wittgenstein refuses to accept a certain form of scepticism by showing that the very formulation of the idea itself is wrong and even nonsensical. I call it 'refusal' because of the lack of any better notion. What Wittgenstein wants is the philosophical problems rising within scepticism to disappear. When we abandon our claims about episteme knowledge, as Wittgenstein does, we will be left with descriptive analysis as a proper method of philosophising. Consequently, it can be said that his attitude towards doing philosophy is sceptical.

3. The Wittgensteinian view of philosophical analysis

The specifically Wittgensteinian way of doing philosophy is truly characteristic of both periods of his work, and it is done through the analysis of language. Both in *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein formulates philosophical conclusions after a careful and detailed analysis of language. This he does for different reasons and trying to achieve different goals. What is the correct philosophical analysis according to *Philosophical Investigations*? As it is usually understood, philosophers are trying to understand different, more or less complicated matters in philosophy. They want to clear misunderstandings, which they often notice, for example, in the common-sense views of these matters. In order to do this, they are forced to define which matters exactly need to be cleared up. Wittgenstein could not agree more. We should clear misunderstandings away, but these misunderstandings do not concern facts, sensations or other phenomena, but rather the use of words and expressions in language. It is worth mentioning in passing that language is understood here as a family resemblance of language-games, as "the family of structures more or less related to one another" (Wittgenstein 1998, § 108). Such misunderstandings can be removed by 'philosophical analysis'. Wittgenstein suggests that such an analysis is nothing more but "substituting one form of expression for another", in other words, it is a process of "taking a thing apart" and it can vary from case to case (Wittgenstein 1998, § 90). For example, when we are considering such phenomena as *pain* or *the process of understanding*, in order to make them clearer, we should recollect statements which we usually make about these phenomena (Wittgenstein 1998, § 90). As Wittgenstein puts it "our investigation (…) is directed not towards phenomena, but (…) towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena" (Wittgenstein 1998, § 90). The idea of 'analysis' should not be understood here as a method which will let us reach something like "a final analysis" or "a state of complete exactness", or let us

discover (and explain) something deeply hidden in uses of words and expressions we are analysing. The real goal of our investigation is to have a clear view of anything which, according to our purpose, needs such a clarification. The answers which we will obtain from our analysis cannot "be given once for all and independently of any future experience" (Wittgenstein 1998, § 92). It seems to me that Wittgenstein does not abandon such ideas like 'essence', 'necessity', 'facts', 'logic/grammar', and 'mental processes' in his late philosophy. Rather, he aims to look at them from a different point of view – from the point of view of their functions in language-games. The essence is not something which "lies *beneath* the surface", but rather "something that already lies open to view and that becomes surveyable by a rearrangement" (Wittgenstein 1998, § 92, 108, 308). What we are going to gain by this method is not the answers to the old, classical philosophical questions (like: *What is the essence of language*), but a rejection of such questions (Wittgenstein 1998, § 47). For we can always answer – after a detailed analysis of the use of certain words expressing the ideas above - that analysed ideas are in fact modal features of human experience. Experience which is always rooted in form of life and "surrounded" with language, and which we should be able to describe. So, it can be easily said that for Wittgenstein both categories: 'analysis' and 'experience' mark a natural starting point for doing philosophy in general.

Even when we treat analysis as an unsystematic and, in a sense, unfinished philosophical procedure, we are nevertheless forced to define the temporary target of making it in any particular case. First of all, we should settle what is our philosophical perspicuity which we are going to achieve through the analysis. Its form will be different in different therapies, as Wittgenstein would put it, and there will be no one standard for it (Wittgenstein 1998, § 132, 133). Secondly, if philosophy is a special kind of analysis and language (language described as a set of language games: "the whole consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven", Wittgenstein 1998, § 7), our aims are in a wide sense cognitive. We will be trying hard to understand language which we are using in our every day life. Because our human cognitive aims are intercorrelated with praxis, it can be said that our philosophical aims are in fact pragmatic (Putnam, 1995). We are supposed to investigate the matters which are "already in plain view", that is, human phenomena which are difficult to investigate only because their 'being there' is too natural for us. So natural that their essence (not traditionally understood) is hidden from us, because it is too close (Wittgenstein 1998, § 89, 92). And finally, if philosophers do not take seriously Wittgenstein's advice to do away with all forms of *explanation* and replace it with description alone (Wittgenstein 1998, § 109, 124, 126), philosophy will become a dead area of human activity, where language does not do its job and is like an engine idling (Wittgenstein 1998, § 132). We simply have to talk about language which is a spatial and temporal phenomenon, and not about a strange kind of phantasm (Wittgenstein 1998, § 108). There is no second-order philosophy, there is only philosophy itself, entirely connected with human forms of life, which means that the Wittgensteinian call for bringing words (especially favourite philosophical terms like: 'thought', 'proposition', 'language', 'logic') back to their everyday use must be taken for granted for any reasonable philosophical enterprise (Wittgenstein 1998, § 116, 121). Let me summarize what such an enterprise is. Philosophy should bring to light misunderstandings which are the results of bewitchment by means of language which touches philosophers (Wittgenstein 1998, § 109).

Such activities like construing theories or postulating one theoretical option against another are excluded from that very aim. Wittgenstein writes a lot about truth, thought, proposition, meaning, logic, sensations, philosophy itself, etc., but he is doing that according to the demand for describing various matters, instead of explaining them. He does not try to define them, he does not try to formulate any criteria for applying them, he does not try to formulate strict nomic rules for language, for example – in a classical sense these three requirements could build a theory. Needless to say, Wittgenstein in his late philosophy is very critical about science, its theories and methodological demands.

4. Concluding remarks

I claim that scepticism understood as a methodological position based on the Wittgensteinian idea of analysis is the only position which opens the door for pluralism in philosophy – pluralism which can be easily read from Wittgensteinian antidogmatism (Wittgenstein 1998, §131).

It can be objected that I am using the term 'scepticism' in a strange and unauthorised way, and the Wittgensteinian position I am describing above is simply a critical and descriptive philosophical point of view, not sceptical. It is well known that historically speaking the English word 'scepticism' comes from the Greek word 'skĕpsis' which can be translated as 'doubt, investigation, consideration'. Consequently, when you call someone 'skeptikoi' – to use the Greek word – you refer to somebody who refuses to take any dogmatic position and claims that he is always engaged in 'considering' and 'investigating' the matters. So, generally speaking, the constructive sceptical attitude expresses critical reflection on the world and oneself and also, more importantly, on one's own theories about this world and oneself. Such an attitude seems to be the very beginning of philosophising in general, and specifically, it fits in very well – as I was trying to show – with the Wittgensteinian idea of doing philosophy.

I do not think Wittgenstein wanted us to stop doing philosophy just because he proposed to change the way we had been doing it. Rather, he wanted philosophical problems – oddly understood as very specific – to disappear, and only simple, usual human problems – which should be solved by certain people at a certain time – to remain. Can we still call it a philosophical enterprise? I believe we can.

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