Normativity and Novelty

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1. Aspect Seeing and Imagination

We humans are able to transform our ways of seeing, because we have what we call 'imagination': we are able to imagine things, situations or events that do not exist in reality. At the same time we use pictures that are based on convention. That is why it is sometimes hard to see things 'differently'.

The tension between imagination and convention provides us with the possibility for novelty, something we can come to see by means of our ability of *aspect seeing*. We situate what we perceive in a different context, and because of this are able to discover new connections (cf. *PI* 122). We can regard the concept of *continuous aspect perception* that Luntley (2003) describes, as a *constant* understanding, whereas an aspect switch can be understood as a *coming to* understand. We need them both if we want to get a hold on the problem of novelty.

Normally we are capable of performing an aspect switch, someone who is not, we call 'aspect blind'. He or she is not able to make the switch from one aspect to the other. Wittgenstein discusses the phenomenon of aspect switch in *Philosophical Investigations* part II, in connection with aspect dawning and aspect change. In *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* he discusses the related, but more specific phenomenon of 'meaning-blindness':

'If you say "As I heard this word, it meant ... for me" you refer *to a point of time and to an employment of the word*. - The remarkable thing about it is of course the relation to the point of time. The 'meaning-blind' would lose that relation.' (*RPP* I, 175 - italics in original) (Cf. *PI*, p175a)

Meaning is connected with time because a word may have different meanings at different points in time. In principle we all have the ability to assign different meanings to words at different points in time and in various circumstances. This ability also allows us to perform an aspect change. Think for instance of the word 'bank' in the sense of a bank near a river, or a bank as an institution where you can deposit your money. Although the word has one meaning at a time, both are available in that we can switch between them. Someone who is meaning-blind cannot make this aspect switch. For such a person there is only óne meaning in each case.

One consequence of meaning-blindness Wittgenstein discusses we can find in *RPP* I, 178, where he indicates that instead of the 'Blitzschnelle' of a thought, the aspect-switch 'in a flash' from one meaning to the other, the meaning-blind person has to describe what goes on step by step; at every point in time anew reorienting himself, because he misses a certain kind of imagination. In this way it is shown that our ability for aspect seeing and aspect change is connected with our power of imagination.

But it is not just the one who has some disorder and therefore fails to perform an aspect change who can be called meaning-blind. We *all* can become meaning-blind the moment certain words have become so obvious for us that they, as it were, have disappeared from our sight. Think for instance of the notion of 'God', or the concept of

'poiesis'. Whenever we loose the meaning of a word - when it is changed into 'an empty, even corrosive convention', so Steiner (2001) - this can have far-reaching consequences and implications.

We should distinguish between our use of our power of imagination and something that calls for our imagination. The first can be triggered by the second in such a way that it can give rise to change and renewal in unexpected ways. We could call this dialectical relation a *reflexive dynamics*: referring back to itself by means of a different aspect. Especially artists make use of this reflexive dynamics, breathing back life - that is to say, re-assign meaning - into notions such as 'God' or 'poiesis' by means of their ability to switch between continuous aspect perception and their *artistic aspect perception*. Something that can be called *poetic understanding* and is hinted at by Wittgenstein, but is never made explicit.

One of his remarks I want to discuss here in some detail that points to these matters, is in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* part I. Whereas we usually take diagrams such as the Duck-Rabbit and the Double Cross showing just two possibilities within one picture, Wittgenstein observes in remark 1017 that we can look at the latter in more than two ways:

[...]; the figure can be seen, not just in two but in very many different ways.

This observation squares with my own experience. The first association I had when I saw this picture was that of a sunshade on the beach. Thus, not so much a depiction I can see in two different ways, but more a picture evoking a *sphere*. To see a sunshade on the beach is, of course, due to my personal background, rooted in a European culture and tradition. Someone from a different culture, with another background, would probably have seen something completely different in this picture.

This re-assigning meaning by means of our power of imagination, something we are all capable of, is extended by the artist by way of his *artistic aspect perception*, something that is, of course, only possible against the background of our everyday perception, which is based in a continuous aspect perception. The artist lives and functions in an 'everyday community', at the same time, however, he or she experiences the world also in a different, in some respect *intensified* or *heightened* light and is able to switch between the former and the latter. Whether we should indicate this intensified attitude as something qualitatively or something quantitatively different remains to be investigated. It is the philosopher, subsequently, who reflects on these insights and brings them into perspective.

To recapitulate: we have a continuous aspect perception that can be understood as a continuous understanding; an aspect switch, which is a coming to understand and an artistic aspect perception that has its equivalence in a poetic understanding.

2. Normativity and Novelty

How are new perspectives and possibilities related to what we already know, to our rules and conventions? Wittgenstein always emphasises the need to select the right focal point for understanding and inquiry. A fruitful 'paradigm', object of comparison, 'prototype' or 'Urbild' is vital (*CV* p14, 26; *PI* 122, 130, 131, 385). As he stresses in *CV*, p26: 'The real achievement of a Copernicus or a Darwin was not the discovery of a true theory but of a fertile new point of view'.

For Wittgenstein, human behaviour is both individual and social: it arises from patterns of social life intertwined with individual actions. He characterised these patterns as requiring for their identification the participation in a 'conceptual world' (Begriffswelt). On that model, institutions as Bloor understands them, could be called *conceptual worlds* (cf. *Z* 567-580). But, although we share the same concepts within a certain community, future applications of a term are not 'in some *unique* way predetermined, anticipated - as only the act of meaning can anticipate reality' (*PI* 188).

Questions of normativity and novelty relate to the problem of the epistemological inaccessibility of the future and the compulsion, that is to say, the hardness of the logical must (cf. *RFM* I, 121). This 'must' constitutes the form of life against which error, truth and falsity can be discerned. What must be, stands fast for us. But how then can we account for innovation and creation, especially in such a 'social-stage-setting', constituted by conventions and logical must? When we are taught in a practice, we have learned things that are already known within the community, by our teachers. Yet, in learning a rule there is always the problem of the next step, the move from past to new instances of a concept (*RFM* VI 29; *PI* 29). From this, where something 'new' can come from becomes an intriguing question.

The discussion whether rule-following is primarily individual or social expands to the problem of novelty. For Luntley, who takes up the individual stance, we have an active, directed attitude to the world that has to do with aspect perception: it is a form of aspect switch when I suddenly see how to play a game. Luntley exchanges Cartesian transparency for opaque uncertainty: understanding consists in how you go on, it will depend on what you will do and that is something that is not always transparent to you, for you cannot know for sure how that will go until you do it (Luntley, p104ff). Loosing transparency about my own experience we thereby loose the gap between the world and ourselves. The exchange of transparent Cartesian certainty for opaque uncertainty implies that the subject must be an active agent, with an attitude, a goal-directness to the world. It is this opaque uncertainty that gives us the possibility of novelty and that is bearer of the *meaning potential* of the language.

According to those who take up the social stance, like for instance Bloor, new inventions and creations are scarcely done by one single person and they need a community to get consensus in order to get accepted. Creativity for Bloor cannot be an individual accomplishment, because for him the community decides whether a creation is an error, confusion, or misinterpretation of a rule, the innovative following of an old rule, or the beginning of a new rule. Innovation for him is a communal process. Being a process, it has a historical dimension and an internal structure. This internal structure for Bloor, is essentially social (Bloor, p96-97).

One ground for challenging Bloor's analysis is that he understands individual innovation as an *event*. But, this cannot be correct: individual innovation, too, has the properties of a *process*.

On the individual level the problem of creativity has been connected with two concepts: the concept of intuition and the concept of the unconscious. Intuition is understood as an instinctive form of knowledge or insight - something not gained by reason. The notion of intuition is contrasted with rational thinking and is considered as something that cannot be tested, proven or refuted. Moreover, the process by which intuition works is supposed to be unconscious. Much more should be said about this, but I cannot do so here. Therefore, I want to restrict myself to the most important point for my argument, namely, that the various steps from intuition, through the unconscious towards a consciously verifying of the conclusion or the insight, is not a 'thing' that happens - an event - but a series of actions or steps that lead to a particular end and that evolve over time; thus a process. Also, there is no absolute difference, no split or opposition, between what we call intuition and conscious reasoning: it is a matter of degree, a continuum. In any problem-solving some varying degree of intuition is involved. On the other hand, intuitions may present us with a problem, but they do not offer a verified solution or proof.

If this is right, it provides an argument for saying that the same holds for the individual and the social. The individual innovation is not a point event, but much more a continuum, a matter of degree. When no 'need' for individual innovation in a person is triggered, there is no possibility for the community to pick it up and accept it. And the other way around: the individual, being part of the community uses his continuous aspect perception as well as his (artistic) aspect switch for ideas evolving in time and over persons. From this we see, that it is impossible and even misleading to distinguish categorically between the individual and social.

In the rule-governed practice the dynamic becomes reflexive through the creative aspects brought in that can account for transgressions in meaning and change in form of life. Something Wittgenstein takes up explicitly in his remarks every time he urges us to imagine something: 'we could imagine that..' (*PI* 2), 'suppose that..', 'think of..'

3. Conclusion

Perhaps we should consider creativity not as an ability, but as a particular kind of cognitive *sphere*. Tools for creativity and artistic power, thus for 'renewal' and 'change' are complexity, for instance in the artistic creation of a new rule; surprisingness: think of the aspect switch, when we 'suddenly' see something we didn't notice before; incongruity of domains; ambiguity of meaning and reference and variability in problem-solving and artistic appreciation - the very same notions we can detect in an analysis of aspect perception, of rule-following and its connection with the individual and the social.

In the reflexive dynamics between what is obvious, conventional and everyday, and what is uncertain, opaque and inexpressible, poetic understanding can emerge. This poetic understanding is possible due to the meaning potential of the language use. Because of this meaning potential, it is always possible to see something more 'than what it is'. Because of this, we are able to take a different point of view in which the obvious can be seen anew: everything can be new - even the most ordinary (Baz, 2000).

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