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Introduction to Wittgenstein

Lecture 10, 28.10.2024:

Certainty – Relativism – Wittgenstein: A cultural relativist?
Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy

Knowledge – Doubt – Certainty

Are there absolutely certain propositions, and if there are,
why are they absolutely certain?

The quest for absolutely certain knowledge: «Aren't there absolutely certain truths?»

See 'Moore's propositions' (G.E. Moore: *A Defence of Common Sense*, 1925):

"I begin, then, with **my list of truisms, every one of which (in my own opinion) I know, with certainty, to be true.** ... **There exists at present a living human body, which is my body.** This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes; it was, for instance, much smaller when it was born, and for sometime afterwards, than it is now. **Ever since it was born, it has been either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth;** and, at every moment since it was born, there have also existed many other things having shape and size in three dimensions (in the same familiar way in which it has), ... **there have, at every moment since its birth, been large numbers of other living human bodies,** each of which has, like it, a) at some time born b) continued to exist at some time after birth c) been, at every moment of its life after birth, either in contact with or not far from the surface of earth; and many of these bodies have already died and ceased to exist before I was born. **But the earth has existed long also for many years long before my body was born:** and for many of these years, also, large numbers of human bodies had died and ceased to exist before it was born."

Moore's propositions may be absolutely certain – but do they express *knowledge*?

If knowledge is *true justified belief*, then «There is an external world», maybe, is not a matter of *knowledge / doubt*. It is not something that can be properly justified, proven - for example, via «Here is one (external) hand, and there is another».

OC §1:

If you do know that *here is one hand*, we'll grant you all the rest.

When one says that such and such a proposition can't be proved, of course that does not mean that it can't be derived from other propositions; any proposition can be derived from other ones. **But they may be no more certain than it is itself.** (On this a curious remark by H. Newman.)

«I know that the external world exists» ... Cf:
«I know that I am in pain»

PI §246:

246. In what sense are my sensations *private*? — Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it. — In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word "to know" as it is **normally** used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain.—Yes, but all the same not with the certainty with which I know it myself!—**It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I know I am in pain. ...**

«I am in pain»: I may be absolutely certain about being in pain, but this certainty is not a matter of *knowledge* ...

The fact that a specific belief cannot be proven or is not proven, does not necessarily imply that we **doubt** it; nor, that we need to or should doubt it

- Moore's certainties are not proven and not known, but not doubted either.
- Doubting and knowing certain things presuppose that certain other things, e.g Moore's certainties, are non-doubted; knowledge and doubt are actually only possible where we hold some things for certain:
 - Doubting p presupposes non-doubting q .
 - Authentic doubt is possible and makes sense only in the context of a specific practice which also includes non-doubting.
- **Universal doubt / skepticism is not possible.** (This is a **(grammatical)** remark.)
- 'Moorean propositions' belong to what is not doubted: They are of the kind of what we presuppose *when* we doubt.
- The things that we *don't* doubt can, but needn't be the subject of *knowledge*.

Hinge propositions («feststehende Sätze», «Angeln»)

The certainties that we don't doubt we can call «hinges», and if they are expressed in propositions we can call these «hinge propositions» («feststehende Sätze»): ... *the questions that we raise and our doubts depend upon the fact that **some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.***

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. **If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.** (OC §§341-343)

The propositions that we treat as certain are not subject of investigation and knowledge and proof:

- **We don't, for example, arrive at any of them as a result of investigation.** There are e.g. historical investigations and investigations into the shape and also the age of the earth, but not into whether the earth has existed during the last hundred years. (OC §138)
 - So, pace Moore («Proof of an External World», 1939): We don't arrive at the proposition "The external world exists" via an investigation, and we don't prove it.

The river-bed metaphor

OC §97: ... I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.

- Our hinge beliefs / the hinges – what we don't doubt – are like the river-bed.
- Our «contingent» beliefs – which we can and do doubt – are like the water within the river-bed; they are delimited and guided by the non-doubted, the «river-bed». They - the river water - need the river-bed!
- **N.B.:** ... there is not a sharp division of the one from the other: One can turn into the other! Some hinges were originally empirical propositions which have been turned into rules, and some of what today is an empirical proposition has earlier functioned as hinge.

Hinges vs. «Hinge *propositions*»

- Our certainties do not need to be of a *propositional* nature.
- Partly, they are of a non-propositional or practical nature (e.g. trusting the floor under my feet won't vanish).
- Partly they are matters outside of our control (e.g. «extremely general facts of nature», PI §142).

Relativism?

We don't, for example, arrive at any of them as a result of investigation ... (OC §138)

- If our (epistemological, moral ...) hinges are not open to rational investigation and questioning - how can we then make sure that they are correct / the correct ones?

“The fact that we attribute rain to meteorological causes alone while savages believe that Gods or ghosts or magic can influence the rainfall ... does not show that we "think more logically" than savages ... I did not come to this conclusion [that rain has physical causes] myself by observation and inference and have, in fact, little knowledge of the meteorological processes that lead to rain; I merely accept what everybody else in my society accepts, namely that rain is due to natural causes. This particular idea formed part of my culture long before I was born into it and little more was required of me than sufficient linguistic ability to learn it. ... It would be absurd to say that the savage is thinking mystically and that we are thinking scientifically about rainfall.” (Evans-Pritchard, in: *“Lévy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality”*, 1934)

What about logic and mathematics? Isn't logical and mathematical truths *absolutely* correct and absolutely universal knowledge?

- Is there absolute knowledge? Is there fundamental knowledge? Isn't *logic* expressing such knowledge?
 - Cf. TLP: Logic is not expressing *knowledge*. Logic does *not* contain the most general truths about the world (which we possibly can discover step by step, but maybe never fully discover). Logic is nothing but the formal properties of scientific and any other knowledge, the structure of knowledge itself. Thus, logic is not more fundamental than any knowledge and cannot therefore be the basis for it.
- What about mathematics?

The laws of logic and mathematics

Remember: Wittgenstein's turn to *practice* does not stop at mathematics and logic:

- Not: “The laws of logic and mathematics tell us which is the absolutely right way to think, count, calculate ..., and *force* us to think, count, calculate ... in this way” ...
- But rather: “*We think, count, calculate* in a certain way, and as long as we think, count and calculate in this way, this is the *right* way (in the sense of the *agreed* way)”.

Thus, are all hinges relative to, and valid in, **specific** practices, systems, cultures, *Weltbilder* only?

OC §94: But I did not get **my picture of the world** [Weltbild] by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is **the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.**

- All certainties are relative to a specific time and place and world picture ... We have different language games, forms of life, *world pictures*.
- If all certainties, beliefs, truths, standards, arguments, criteria, concepts ... (1) are relative to and valid only within a specific «Weltbild» (OC §§ 93-95, 162 ...), and (2) the Weltbild itself cannot be checked and investigated for its correctness, and its «hinges» thus have “internal” validity only,
... aren't we then getting some strong relativism?
- The strong relativist (strong perspectivist) conclusion: «Everything is relative to your specific system of reference. And since everything is relative to your specific system of reference, there will be no standards, criteria, truths, concepts, values which are *independent* of specific systems of reference or points of view. And therefore, if we have systems of reference that are radically different from each other, we cannot understand each other. And therefore, moreover, none of our systems of reference / points of view will have any privilege over others, and all systems of reference and points of views will be equally valid.»

Where two principles really do meet ...

- OC §105. All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system.
- 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.)

There seems then to be *no meta-system* of epistemic hinges which would permit to say that this Weltbild is right, and the other wrong? And which would permit those who adhere to different Weltbilder to understand each other and connect across all differences?

→ **Relativism??**

Strong cultural relativism: Cf. the following five claims by moral relativists

1. Different societies have different moral codes.
2. The moral code of a society determines what is right within that society; that is, if the moral code of a society says that a certain action is right, then that action is right, at least within that society.
3. There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one society's code as better than another's. **There are no moral truths that hold for all people at all times.**
4. The moral code of our own society has no special status; it is but one among many.
5. It is arrogant for us to judge other cultures. We should always be tolerant of them.

Quoted from: Rachels & Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (2012), p. 16

The five claims as applied to epistemology

1. Different world pictures have different epistemological codes.
2. The epistemological code of a world picture determines what is true within that world picture; that is, if the epistemological code of a world picture says that a certain statement is true, then that statement is true, at least within that world picture.
3. There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one world picture's code as better than another's. **There are no truths that hold for all people at all times.**
4. The epistemological code of our own world picture has no special status; it is but one among many.
5. It is arrogant of us to disagree with other epistemological belief systems. We should always be epistemologically tolerant of them (= say, that they are epistemologically equally correct).

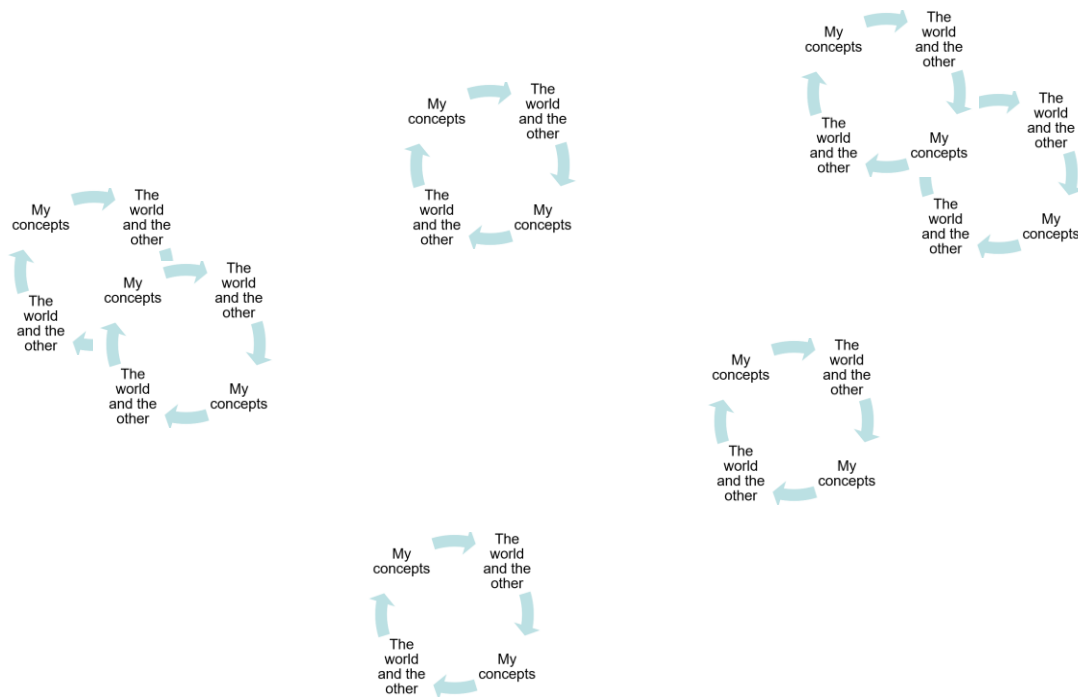
Cf. Rachels & Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (2012), p. 16

Wittgenstein: A cultural relativist?

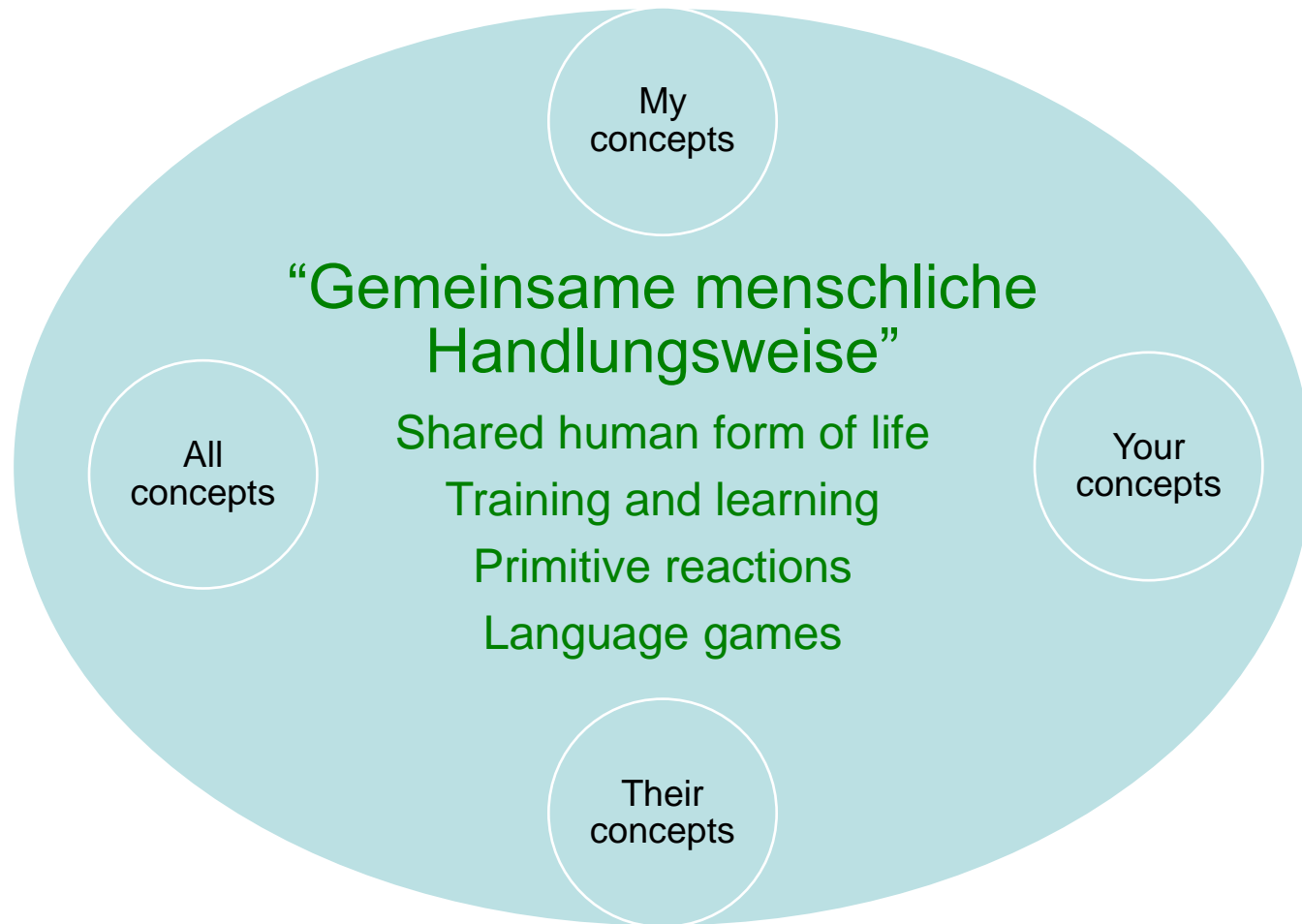
An argument for relativism, frequently associated with *On Certainty*

«Argument and truth, even though they can be grounded in *certainties*, are ultimately not grounded in justified or justifiable rational knowledge, but in pre-rational *world pictures*. World pictures can, and do, radically *differ* from each other, both diachronically and synchronically, with no bridges between them ...» -> *Relativism?!?!?*

Linguistic / Conceptual / Cultural relativism



The Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*:



Philosophical Investigations

Instead of attempting to refute relativism by seeking a single, universal meta-rationality, recognize that conceptual and cognitive disparities can be, and *are*, bridged – *and that concepts are developed* - through shared human ways of acting (practices, «gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise») and *behaving*.

”Soft” vs. ”strong” cultural relativism

Certainties, beliefs, truths, concepts, standards of rationality ... are relative to the «Weltbild» which they are embedded in ...

- ”Soft” / «inclusive» / «moderate» cultural relativism: ... But this does not 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.
- ”Strong” / «exclusive» / «extreme» cultural relativism: ... 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.**
 - Cf. Sapir–Whorf hypothesis

Is Wittgenstein a strong 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 (as also actuality) of intercultural communication?

Wittgenstein is no (strong) 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?

1) Does Wittgenstein's notion of language game imply independence and incomparability / incommensurability / incompatibility of language games?

➤ No.

2) Is Wittgenstein's account of language and communication failing to account for the possibility (as also actuality) of intercultural communication?

➤ No.

Ad 1): Throwing out some misconceptions first

- Human **language** is *not* a set of autonomous and separated language games (cf. family resemblance).
- Human **acting** is *not* a set of autonomous and separated human actions (cf. family resemblance).
- Human **form of life** is *not* a set 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).
- NB: The middle Wittgenstein game analogy can be *misleading*.

Ad 2) Intercultural communication is possible – and also a *fact*

- Not only does Wittgenstein not support strong cultural relativism - we can even extract an argument from Wittgenstein against (a variant of) strong cultural relativism:
 - Some strong cultural relativism is based on the assumption that communication and the establishing of communication are dependent on there already being shared *rationality* in place.
 - Wittgenstein questions this assumption.

The argument from a purely «rationalist» point of view ...

1. «In order to communicate with each other, we must use the same concepts.»
 - Correct premis?
2. «There are no concepts that would be shared by all cultures.»
 - Correct premis?
3. «→ Intercultural communication is not possible.»
 - Valid conclusion?

Is the «rationalist» argument for cultural relativism correct?

- Premis 1) «In order to communicate with each other, we must use the same concepts» is not correct: There is communication which does not involve concepts.
- Premis 2) «There are no concepts that would be shared by all cultures» is not correct: Humans, throughout all history and cultures, seem to share at least some concepts.
 - There is more stability in human history and culture than strong cultural relativism implies:
 - constancy in principles of logic
 - constancy in concepts about extra-human and human natural history
 - constancy in concepts related to
 - human ways of behaving
 - human ways of acting

Is the «rationalist» argument for cultural relativism correct?

And even if premis (1) and premis (2) were correct
- conclusion (3) would still be invalid, because:

- Communication and intercultural communication eventually work on the basis of shared behaving and acting rather than on the basis of shared concepts and shared rationality. *And even where no shared concepts and rationality are in place, they can still be developed.*
- → *Not shared „Denkweise“, but shared „Handlungsweise“.*

«... Even where no shared concepts and rationality are in place, they can still be developed.»

Wittgenstein's prime example: The learning of one's first language

- As infants can develop an understanding for the language and culture they are born into - not by already possessing the concepts of the language and the rationality of the culture they are born into, but by being trained (abgerichtet) - adults can develop an understanding for other cultures' languages and rationalities without needing to already sufficiently possess these concepts and rationalities in advance.

Shared ways of acting

PI § 206

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 [gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise]** is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language.

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* the observer? - **Common to mankind?**

- ”gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise“, interpreted as being common to all mankind: There are shared ways of human acting. Or, at least: Wherever intercultural communication works, it does so thanks to shared ways of **acting** (rather than shared concepts / shared rationality!).

Giving and following orders as human universals

- Ms-165,108: Befehlen ist eine Technik unsrer 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-conceptual» communication

The power of giving an 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-conceptual» 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.

- Learning of one's first language does not presuppose that one already has and masters the adults' concepts, that one already can *think* and *interpret*.

There is understanding without interpretation

(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.

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.**
 - But see also: PI §656: ... **Sieh auf das Sprachspiel als das *Primäre*! Und auf die Gefühle, etc. als auf eine Betrachtungsweise, eine Deutung, des Sprachspiels! ...**

PHILOSOPHY

Wittgenstein and philosophy

(Depth) grammar (PI §664) vs. “phenomena” (PI §383: **We do not analyse a phenomenon** (for example, thinking) **but a concept** (for example, that of thinking) ...

- To what extent can Wittgenstein (and can philosophy in general) restrict himself to describing *concepts* only, rather than also describing extra-grammatical phenomena?
- To what extent is Wittgenstein’s analysis of the depth grammar of certain concepts (“knowing”, “understanding”, “thinking”, “meaning”, “believing” ...) *correct*?

Descriptive vs. “reformist” philosophy of language (PI §§ 124-133 a.o.):

- To what extent does Wittgenstein restrict himself to purely *descriptive, ordinary language oriented, philosophy*? (At least as a rule: No conceptual engineering in philosophy!)

No-theses vs. theses-philosophy (PI §128):

- To what extent does Wittgenstein refrain from advancing theses?

No theses in (Wittgenstein's
later) philosophy?

«The later Wittgenstein does not advance philosophical theses»

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

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 ...

«Philosophical theses»

- The world is all facts rather than all objects.
- There is free will.
- There is no absolute or objective truth.
- All standards are relative.
- There is an external world.
- A good action is an action with good consequences.
- Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.
- Knowledge comes from our senses.
- All our knowledge is mediated by language.
- Our grammar is informed by grammar independent nature.
- ...

No philosophical theses in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, only *uncontested* 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 / *theses* – that are partly highly contested?
 - Cf. the discussion about the legitimacy of attributing mental properties to the *brain* (grammatical aspect).

«Theses have no place in philosophy – they belong into *science*»

- «Science gives us positive views about the world – but philosophy is about our way of talking about and viewing the world, about our ways of **representing** the world (*Darstellungsweise*, PI §50). Philosophy is about *grammar*, not phenomena.»
 - All philosophy is a 'critique of language' (TLP 4.0031)
- But cf. naturalism: Philosophy is continuous with / is a part of science.
 - Cf. the discussion about the legitimacy of attributing mental properties to the *brain* (philosophy vs. science, ontological aspect).
 - Wittgensteinian philosophy, e.g.: For the philosophical problem of free will experiments in psychology / medicine ... have nothing to contribute.

„Therapy“ only?

Radically «therapeutic» readings of
Wittgenstein:

There is no picture theory in the
Tractatus, there is no theory about
meaning in the *PI* ... there is at the
end no contestable 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)
- If one attributes to Wittgenstein the following theses / doctrines: «There is gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise» or «There are facts of nature / extra-grammatical factors which constrain / inform our concepts and grammar», then one is not a resolute reader.

Conant 2006: Doctrinal schema

Resolute readers urge that any reader of Wittgenstein ought to be uncomfortable with the following sort of account of the relation between Wittgenstein's early and later thought: The *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* are both trying to answer the same philosophical questions, but in each case in which early Wittgenstein aimed to show that the answer to a given philosophical question was p , later Wittgenstein aims to refute his earlier self and show instead that the answer to the question is really not p . Let's call this "**the doctrinal schema**". (p. 173)

Conant 2006: Continuity view

... why things must go **wrong** if one's reading of Wittgenstein is organized around the following question: «**Which parts of the theory that the *Tractatus* aimed to put forward did later Wittgenstein think was wrong?**» (p. 198)

Resolute readings, applied to Wittgenstein's later philosophy

- Are there doctrines or contestable theses in Wittgenstein's later philosophy? Do the PI's key notions and key statements imply positive claims?
- Are there in language language games? Is there family resemblances? ... Are there forms of life? Is there gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise?

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)

A third approach, opposed
to both resolute and
«theses» 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 (earlier) 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”.
- **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.
- In the PI we find many voices: the interlocutor – Wittgenstein the non-Pyrrhonian opponent of the interlocutor – Wittgenstein the Pyrrhonian commentator / moderator (who, for example, presents a simile). The success of the *Investigations* consists in keeping the two Wittgenstein voices in balance; what is really interesting about both the PI *and the Tractatus*(!) is **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.**

„Phenomena“, after all?

«Trivial theses»* in philosophy:
Theses about grammar, maybe
even nature?

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

Glock 1991: Positive, but still trivial views

- 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: Facts 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)

Glock 1991: Facts 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)

Nature *versus* Grammar?

Remarks on human natural history

Remarks on the natural history of human beings

415. 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.

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

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 “Part 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 (2018)

«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.»

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