Wittgenstein and the Creativity of Language

The Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, 14 June 2013

Venue: Sydnesplassen 12, Room 129 (first floor)

Abstracts

The River: Frege and Wittgenstein on Stepping into Language

Gisela Bengtsson (University of Bergen), 10am

In her paper "Wittgenstein's Razor: the Cutting Edge of Enactivism", Moyal-Sharrock argues that Wittgenstein's predominant perspective on us humans is that we are "constitutionally and in everything we do, still fundamentally animals". This perspective is found throughout Wittgenstein's authorship in her view, but reaches its most elaborate form in On Certainty. Moyal-Sharrock's claims about Wittgenstein's philosophical concerns in On Certainty form the starting point of my paper. For the purpose of clarifying what is awry in her approach, I explore a connection between Frege's and Wittgenstein's appeal to something primitive or animal and a parallel, suggested by Palmer, between Frege's conception of 'cooperative understanding' and Wittgenstein's conception of 'agreement in judgments' as central to their discussions of language acquisition.

Creativity as Problem-Solving

Jesús Padilla Gálvez (University of Castilla-La Mancha), 11am

'Creativity' is not a suited to be abused as a tool of social engineering. It is not its function to give rise to a new group of people called "creative class". Neither does it denote any form of "self-creation". If we separate philosophy from the social sciences a profound analysis of the concept is logically impossible. We can only grasp the meaning of creativity if we understand it as an individual's ability to break from established traditions and develop new concepts which describe the world differently. Rather than developing a whole new concept, creativity may be viewed as social or psychological creativity within philosophy. Philosophy is a grammatical investigation (Wittgenstein, PI, §90) in which philosophical problems are resolved by describing our use of words, clarifying the grammar of expressions and tabulating rules (Wittgenstein, WWK, 184). The grammar of creativity, the syntactic rules we use to describe it, are similar to that of socio-psychological progress. Both the philosopher

and the sociologist or psychologist may offer a new perspective on a problem. Whereas the sociologist or psychologist does so by discovery and invention, the philosopher approaches a problem by clarification and prescription.

Creativity is required when problems need to be solved. However, the verb "solve" can adopt several meanings in this context. The conceptual field of problem solving comprises synonymous expressions such as dissolve (auflösen), overcome (überwinden), cover up (zudecken), or eliminate (beseitigen). The purpose of this work was to explore the notion of creativity and determine its role in the process of problem solving. We took Wittgenstein's considerations to shed some light into the process of problem solving. We take his suggestion into account that we are often confronted with confused conceptions of language that produce a paralysis of understanding.

The current idea that a new creative class has emerged who is equipped with a special skill to advance creativity suggests that we are facing an old theory of subjectivity. The aim is to sell creativity letting the ready market determine the value of creative objects. To clarify the background of this Cartesian egocentricity we have analyzed the semantic structures that are used in this context. A separation of philosophy from the social sciences appears as an obstacle to the comprehension of creativity. We have to view creativity as a social and psychological phenomenon.

When we speak about creativity we never use an abstract grammar. Self-referential attributions such as inventing a privileged "creative class" produce contradictions. To be creative means to overstep a familiar grammar in order to detect something new. Creativity is mainly relevant in the context of problem solving. If someone says he wants to solve a problem then this can mean several things, such as dissolve, overcome, cover or eliminate. Wittgenstein reminded us of the pitfalls of language.

If I am confronted with a problem I tend to describe the facts and intend to find a solution. But Wittgenstein warns us of the limitations of a description theory of the kind proposed by Russell. This is mainly because what forms part of my description is the indirect knowledge of what I intend to expect as a solution. This expectation is an obstacle to any new discovery. In order to find the solution we have to find a description that allows for a solution.

The Running-up-against Paradox: How Can we Place it in Language?

Maria Balaska (Paris 8 University), 12pm

In this paper I will touch upon the notion of the experience of limitation, through the perspective of Wittgenstein's treatment of the limit of language in language, as it can be found both in the Tractatus (limit of language) and in the Lecture on Ethics.

There are two temptations of placing the limit outside language involved in every experience of limitation: the temptation of transcending the limits of language and the temptation to think that language can offer us nothing more than a representation of facts (as opposed to limits). I will call these

temptations the temptation of transcendence or infinity and the temptation of facticity or finitude, respectively.

I will argue however that there can be a third position towards the experience of limitation, which places the limit in language. This is the act of giving meaning, which requires not only taking a distance from the above-mentioned temptations but also passing through them. I will try to explore this connection between giving meaning and the above mentioned temptations through the connection between giving meaning and what I take to be those temptations in language, meaninglessness and meaningfulness respectively. Giving meaning will thus be approached as a return from the temptations of meaninglessness and meaningfulness, which accompany our contact with nonsense.

Seeing the Everyday Otherwise: Vision, Ethics and Utopia in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

Ben Ware (Leverhulme ECF, University of Manchester), 1pm

In the Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein describes his mode of philosophical composition as akin to that of the visual artist: 'The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes […] made in the course of […] long and involved journeyings'. The purpose of these sketches, as Wittgenstein suggests, is to teach 'a new style of thinking' which consists in an ability to *see clearly* the things that are always in front of our eyes, but which 'are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity'. Here Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as an activity which involves relearning how to 'look' at the world, reflects an important concern, evident throughout his writings, with the categories of 'seeing' and 'vision'. In this paper my aim will be to take up the following three questions, all of which focus explicitly upon this theme. First, how do we account for the emphasis which Wittgenstein places upon vision (especially in the later writings), and what does this reveal about his relation to what Martin Jay terms the 'ocularcentrism' of twentieth century philosophical discourse? Second, to what extent can Wittgenstein's interest in seeing – and, more specifically, what he terms 'seeing as' or 'the 'dawning' of an aspect' – be understood as having an ethical point? And third, how might the ethicality of the *Investigations* be connected with the work's *modernist* sensibility and, in particular, with its utopian efforts to bring us to see the everyday *otherwise*?

Seeing and Meaning

Joseph Zanella (University of Copenhagen), 3pm

This talk, taking a quote of Kierkegaard's as its point of departure, revolves around the notion of trying to say what cannot be said, what shows itself, feeling the world as a limited whole, running up against the limits of language, the absurd, the paradox, nonsense. This, says, Wittgenstein, "indicates

something". Not, as the straw man argument would have it, something ineffable in some platonic realm, but rather something about what it means to be human. Wittgenstein says, of philosophy but I imagine also of life in general, that "It is a great temptation to try to make the spirit explicit." (CV, p. 8) Attempts to do so, he says, end in nonsense. Attempts to do so however, at times, result in art and ethics. Ethics is, properly understood, the discipline that results from learning *how not to* fall for this temptation. Like the work of art is not a product in any commercial sense. It is without value (not price, there are those who would put a price on anything, and it is not often that price really expresses the value of a work, if at all.) It is useless, senseless. Taken as a proposition (this is an analogy) it says nothing. It does, in a sense, as a picture point beyond itself, only unlike a proposition. It does not picture anything. It is not a piece of information. This means it does not fit the idea of language as a means of communication in that it tells you nothing concrete about the world. Yet it is said. And often the one who says it feels that it needs to be said. Here we say that said (with the TLP in mind) has a different sense. Here is where the irony of our situation rears its head. By saying, e.g. *Only* that which can be given in the form of a proposition that pictures a fact *can be said* we have already stepped beyond the bounds of our dictum into nonsense. Oddly enough, by doing so we have drawn the limits to what can be said in *language*. Nonsense is, then, in a very important sense, *not outside* language. This—*what we mean*—can only be seen, not said. (In what sense?)

Certainties and the Sceptical Problem

Ladislav Koreň (University of Munich), 4pm

A widespread view has it that radical sceptical challenges are so worrying due to the fact that they appear to rest only on the commitments already inherent in our conceptual and epistemic practices. If so, it would seem as a promising diagnosis and exposure of scepticism to show that, despite appearances, sceptical argumentative strategies do rest – in some way or another – on assumptions (or principles) that we have no reason to treat as our commitments (not even as reasonable refinements or idealizations of our commitments). In precisely this spirit, I will reconstruct the diagnostic potential of what I take to be a Wittgenstein-inspired certainty-based approach to scepticism. I will try to show that, from this perspective, we have no reason to buy: (1) the idea (driving Pyrrhonian-style scepticism) that iterated doubt obligates us to supply, at each stage of the dialectical game, yet further justifying reasons, whereas our dialectical opponent in the game (the would-be sceptic) has no reciprocal epistemic responsibility (to motivate his doubts by grounds specifying relevant error-possibilities); and (2) the idea (driving Cartesian-style scepticism) that we should (but cannot) exclude sceptical alternatives (hypotheses) on the basis of our (supposedly neutral) evidence.

The Psychic Life and the Creativity of the Forms of Life

Emiliano La Licata (Universtity of Bergen), 5pm

Wittgenstein's late philosophy addresses the subject of connection between the psychic life of the individual and social context, represented by language games which are played within a form of life. Sensations and passions are part of the psychic life of the individual; far from being hidden psychological objects of a private Cartesian, they are inseparable from their social redefinition. In fact, they become visible in the context of the game. Wittgenstein argues that there is a transformation of subjective psychic life by learning language games. The psychic life of the individual is then re-organized by learning a socially defined, characteristic behavior pattern. However, the learning process of the games is complex and non-deterministic, in that it oscillates between degrees of acceptance and degrees of negation of language game rules. Through this oscillation between acceptance and denial of the game rules, it is possible to develop processes which lead to unpredictable changes in the game and in forms of life.

Normativity and Rules within a Political Frame. Blind Obedience or Dissent?

Isabel G. Gamero (Complutense University of Madrid), 6pm

The application of Wittgenstein thoughts about normativity and rules to the political field is taken as point of departure in order to contrast two different interpretations of the rule-following process. On the one hand, the quietist or collectivist, supported by J. C. Nyíri (quietist) and Meredith Williams (collectivist). Both authors understand rules as rooted in the language-games, therefore, disagreements or criticism become difficult (if not impossible). On the other hand, the conflictive and pluralist interpretation of the rule-following process: Peg O'Connor's "Wittgensteinian feminism" and Jose Medina's "Epistemology of Resistance," in which the possibility of contesting established rules is at the core of our normative behaviour. On Nyíri's and Williams' account however, they further argue, rules would seem to bear strong discriminatory potentials against certain individuals or minority groups. In contrasting these two different approaches, the aim of this paper is to analyse which one is more accurate to understand the rule-following process in language-games, within a political frame.