**Rationality Reconsidered**

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Günter Abel and James Conant

## Volume 9

# Rationality Reconsidered

Ortega y Gasset and Wittgenstein on Knowledge, Belief, and Practice

Edited by
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# List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in this volume. Details on the editions the authors have used are given in the individual bibliographies at the end of each chapter.

Works by José Ortega y Gasset

| | |
|---|---|
| ETG | *En torno a Galileo* (Man and Crisis) |
| HG | *El hombre y la gente* (Man and People) |
| HS | *Historia como sistema* (History as a System) |
| IC | *Ideas y creencias* (Ideas and Beliefs) |
| LA | *Las Atlántidas* |
| MQ | *Meditaciones del Quijote* |

Works by Ludwig Wittgenstein

| | |
|---|---|
| CV | *Culture and Value* |
| LWPP | *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* |
| OC | *On Certainty / Über Gewissheit* |
| PI | *Philosophical Investigations / Philosophische Untersuchungen* |
| RFM | *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* |
| TLP | *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* |
| Z | *Zettel* |

José María Ariso and Astrid Wagner

# On Constraining Rationality and Revisiting the Logic of Beliefs: An Introduction

In this volume we will treat the topic of rationality, understanding the term in a broad sense. We will try to develop a constructive perspective on the topic in which elements of philosophy of language, phenomenology, pragmatism, and philosophy of life are linked with each other. Subjects that will be treated in the papers are: the relation of knowledge and belief, of implicit and explicit knowledge, the role of world-pictures and forms of life, questions regarding certainty, error, doubt, and madness, about the role of life practice, about theoretical and practical rationality, as well as about matters of pluralism and relativism.

The two reference authors of the volume, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1888 – 1951) and José Ortega y Gasset (1883 – 1955), belong to the same generation, but come from very different philosophical traditions. Wittgenstein's early work has been influenced by logical positivism; later he developed a new form of philosophy of language, in which the practice is pivotal for the generation and understanding of meaning. By contrast, Ortega's philosophy is informed by very different approaches: the Marburg neo-Kantianism, the perspectivism of Nietzsche, the life philosophy of Dilthey, and Husserl's phenomenology. While conserving some methods, main concepts, and reflections of these approaches, Ortega developed an independent, phenomenologically inspired philosophy of life that has become known under the term "ratiovitalism".

Although both authors never entered into any intellectual dialogue with each other, there are a number of conceptual and argumentative affinities and points of intersection in their philosophical works, particularly with regard to the question of rationality in a broad sense. These parallels provide the possibility of bringing both approaches into a synergetic relation. Both authors investigate the structures and limits of rationality, and both criticize the restriction of rationality concepts to the intellectual, mental sphere.

In order to analyze the role of rationality within Ortega's work, it is particularly useful to consider his attitude towards rationalism and the kind of reason he ended up devising. Such attitude towards rationalism is already revealed in the 1920s, when he positions himself in relation to the antinomy between life and culture. In explaining this position, Ortega opposes rationalism to relativism to such an extent that none of these terms can be understood without taking the other into account, for each of them gives up what the other withholds. Taking

the problem of truth as a reference point, he notices that relativism forgoes truth to bring life to the forefront, whilst rationalism relinquishes life to keep truth.

Ortega rejects both options. Relativism, he sustains, cannot take itself seriously if truth does not exist, as the amputation of faith in truth would entail that life becomes absurd. With regard to rationalism, he is averse to its denial of the historical dimension, as rationalism considers knowledge possible only if reality can penetrate the individual without deforming him, that is, if he remains unchanged and, thus, alien to history and life itself. Rationalism would thus reduce history to the account of the countless errors that will has caused people to commit by avoiding reason to manifest itself, and furthermore, by preventing the individual from discovering all the truths he can reach. Pure reason, he states, cloisters itself by focusing on the geometric perfection of its products, but it is blind to life and vital problems. Bearing this in mind, Ortega takes sides neither with relativism nor with rationalism, for he regards a life without the organ of truth as absurd as a truth which only exists if it has previously been stripped of vital fluency. However, the opposition – or rather, the complementarity – between relativism and rationalism is not restricted to the problem of truth, as this opposition exists also in the realms of ethics, law, art, religion, and, in short, in all aspects of culture. When using the term 'culture', Ortega emphasizes vital connotations at the expense of technical ones, which leads him to present thought as a function as vital as digestion or blood circulation. Hence, thought continues to be subject to an objective law, but now it is also considered a vital necessity.

In fact, Ortega proclaims that rationalism's central error lies in clinging to a fictitious reason which is not contemplated as a vital function: in other words, rationalism's main error lies in regarding culture as radically detached from life, as if culture were only guided by its objective laws, but not by the laws of life. The alternative laid down by Ortega consists in seeking balance between culture and life because, in his view, any imbalance between them does inexorably lead to degeneration. While in the time of Socrates philosophers tried to put pure reason in the place of spontaneous life, thus generating not a substitution but only a mere concealment, because what we really are – spontaneity – cannot be replaced by what we are not really – pure reason –, Ortega seeks to subject reason to vitality, for reason, in his view, is only an island that floats on the sea of vitality by which it is nourished. In facing up to Socrates' enormous task, Ortega holds that the mission consists in ensuring that culture is put at the service of life. But what seems to be a defeat of culture does clearly not imply its dissolution: far from that, traditional culture must become biological culture, whilst pure reason must cede its sovereignty to a new form of reason called vital reason. In a nutshell, Ortega is not opposed to reason in itself but

to the imperative attitude of rationalism that encourages people not to get ideas of things, but ideals to which things must conform.

Wittgenstein, for his part, had searched in his youth obsessively for a formula to which things should conform. He firmly believed that it was possible to find a simple and elemental formula that showed how propositions are logically generated. The solution he encountered was the general form of propositions (*allgemeine Satzform*), a sort of language mold that ruled out the possibility of illogical thought. Wittgenstein held that in this general form he had found the very essence of propositions, that he had reached the essence of every description and, what is more, the essence of the world itself. As he recognized later on, he had believed at that time to be tracing in this way the outline of the nature of things. Moreover, he realized that a description of reality becomes valid as soon as it is used by a speech community. From this standpoint, the general form of propositions is just one of the many ways we could have chosen to measure nature or reality. Given these circumstances, Wittgenstein presents the general form of propositions as a mere measuring rod instead of a model to which reality must necessarily correspond.

Whilst language structure was conceived in the *Tractatus* as determined by the structure of reality, Wittgenstein holds in his *Philosophical Investigations*, the main work of his later philosophy, that our view of reality is determined by language. In this way, he gave up seeking foundations of thought patterns or linguistic practices beyond such patterns of practices, which entailed, in turn, relinquishing once and for all any reference to an alleged pre-existing structure of reality. In the context of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, language must necessarily adapt to a logical and uniform structure, while in his *Philosophical Investigations* he emphasizes the extraordinary variety of linguistic uses. These uses are embedded in language games, i. e. rule-governed activities and linguistic practices through which language and world contact or relate with each other. In the way language was conceived in the *Tractatus* it lacked a social dimension, while one of the main characteristics of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* lies precisely in the emphasis he lays on the social element.

In this context, it should be noted that there are at least two ways for Wittgenstein to deal, albeit implicitly, with rationality. On the one hand, it is symptomatic that he does not distinguish between rational and irrational language games in order to then highlight the alleged priority of the formers: far from this, language games are considered valid and even important in as much as they are played or used by a community of speakers. To give an example, pure reason can be used in diverse language games, but it is not pure reason what generates our language games. In relation to this, it should be added that there is no such thing as the general form of language games, for they them-

selves are not logically necessary (even in the case they express logical necessity): rather, they arise over time as an organic expression of a given society.

On the other hand, it is worth focusing on the way Wittgenstein deals with the concept of justification, as this is one of the basic aspects of rationality. In his view, justification, just like any other rational procedure, can take place only within language games. This means that reason cannot be used autonomously or independently of any context, for it must necessarily abide by the rules of some language game. As if that were not enough, Wittgenstein establishes a clear distinction between knowledge and certainty. While he considers knowledge in the traditional way as justified true belief (wherein justification as well as what may count as true belief depend on the standards given by the language game), he regards certainty as a spontaneous attitude which is not based on grounds that might leave room for doubt and the possibility of error. Thus, knowledge claims can only be justified in accordance with the rules of the language game that is being played at that moment; meanwhile, the fact of trying to justify or call into question a certainty will be regarded either as an act proper to a child who still does not master our ordinary language game or as a claim which will only and exclusively have a place – and hence also relevance – in a philosophical language game.

## Structure and contributions of the volume

The present volume is divided into four parts. The first one gives an introduction to the problem of rationality first in a general way and then with a special focus on the approaches of Ortega and Wittgenstein. The second part shows the critique of the traditional conception of one universal rationality structure and, hence, treats questions of pluralism and relativism. The third part is dedicated to the relation of belief and knowledge. The central role of belief-networks addressed in the third part does consequently lead to a more in-depth discussion of the limits of rationality realized in the concluding fourth part of the book.

Part 1, dedicated to "The Problem of Rationality", starts with the chapter "Rethinking Rationality: The Use of Signs and the Rationality of Interpretation", in which Günter Abel gives a general outline and systematic overview of the main traditional conceptions of rationality and takes a critical look at them. Abel distinguishes the different perspectives in which rationality can be philosophically conceived. After sketching the main features of a traditional universalistic understanding of rationality, he presents four key distinctions in order to classify different epistemological rationality conceptions: narrow vs. broad, internal vs. external, life-world grounded vs. based on abstract principles, bounded vs. universalistic. He critically discusses the advantages and disadvantages of

the related approaches. Finally, he outlines a conception of rationality that takes account of the constructional elements and the logico-semantic presuppositions of understanding and leads to a series of principles of interpretation that can pass for rationality principles.

In the chapter "Rationality, Reason, and Wisdom. On the Significance of Meta-Philosophical Reflection in the Case of Ortega and Wittgenstein", Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer contrasts, compares, and evaluates different styles of philosophical writing in order to investigate whether there is one style that could be considered as best appropriate for philosophical reflection and what it would look like. What, at first glance, could seem to be a superficial topic of consideration, just concerning a formal, exterior aspect, turns out to reveal important differences in the understanding of what can and should be the task and aim of philosophy in distinction of e. g. natural or social sciences. Beginning with the contraposition of continental and analytical philosophy and the critique of analytical philosophers of the alleged lack of clearness, precision, and objectivity of continental philosophers, Stekeler-Weithofer analyzes what philosophical precision and clearness could mean and dismantles the supposed objective scientific attitude of analytical philosophy as a return to a pre-critical version of dogmatic metaphysics, namely to the belief-philosophy of naturalism, physicalism, biologism, or materialism. This opposition leads him to the distinction between knowledge (in the two forms of empirical/historical and generic/dispositional knowledge) and wisdom. He points out that Ortega as well as Wittgenstein (even in his *Tractatus* whose core sentences are interpreted as gnomic oracles that express performative forms of life) are paradigmatic figures for a kind of philosophy that includes meta-philosophical reflection and produces not just knowledge, but wisdom.

In the chapter "Rationality, Philosophy, and Common Sense", Javier Vilanova Arias raises the question of how we check whether a person acts, thinks, speaks, behaves, or even feels in a rational or irrational way. How do we manage to look for standards or criteria of rationality, and is this itself a rational act? He distinguishes two strategies for handling this problem: one he calls "forward checking", the other one he calls "backward checking". The first strategy consists of trying to produce a new framework, a more distant or supposedly more objective or more scientific perspective in which to examine and evaluate the present situation. The second strategy, the backward checking, is just the opposite of the first one and consists in the recourse to former, simpler or more basic situations, to familiar concepts and undoubted cases, in order to relate them to the suspicious issue. While the first strategy gets sharply criticized by Vilanova, the second one is qualified as a possible way to clarify our familiar notion of rationality and leads to a pragmatic and linguistic notion of common sense, characterized as practical, historical, vague, collective, temporally and

spatially heterogeneous, fallible, and neither always simple, nor always obvious. Vilanova argues that 21st-century philosophical reflection in order to be intelligible, valuable, and of interest must link to common sense, to the web of practices that constitute our daily lives. He concludes that the backbone of the intelligibility of philosophy regarding the problem of rationality is precisely common sense.

Part 2 of the volume is dedicated to a reconception of rationality on the basis of the approaches of Ortega and Wittgenstein. As both of them strongly connect rationality with cultural and life practices, the question of pluralism and relativism arises. This is the background for the three chapters of the second part. The first one, by Angeles J. Perona, is entitled "Pluralism and Soft Rationality in the Philosophy of Ortega and Wittgenstein" and shows how both authors come to develop two kinds of soft version of human rationality in distancing themselves from philosophical approaches that had influenced them: the linguistic idealism of the new logic of Frege and Russell and of Viennese neo-positivism in the case of Wittgenstein; neo-Kantianism and Husserl's phenomenology in confrontation with materialism and positivism in the case of Ortega. Perona characterizes these soft rationality conceptions by some main features they have in common. They are dynamic in ontological as well as epistemological respect; qualitatively plastic, open, and flexible; plural and contingent in terms of its outcome, but with limits to its plurality, i. e. avoiding an unrestricted relativism.

In the chapter "Moore and the King. Wittgenstein on the Groundlessness of World-Pictures", Stefan Majetschak deals with the question of whether it is possible to prove the correctness of the fundamental beliefs that constitute one's own world picture. He illustrates the problem by means of Wittgenstein's thought experiment of a king who has grown up with the firm conviction – taught to him and confirmed by all people around him – that the world had begun to exist with his birth. Wittgenstein asks whether it is possible to convince him of 'his error' by giving reasons, and he comes to the result that he can only be brought to change his world picture by persuasion, not by reasoning. Furthermore, he shows us why this is the case, namely because reason is always bound to a system of beliefs and practices, a system that, as a whole, has no further grounds, not even experience as there is no experience independent of our world picture. Consequently, Majetschak reconstructs Wittgenstein's position in *On Certainty* as a version of cultural or world picture relativism. However, such kind of relativism, he sustains, does not necessarily be interpreted as self-contradictory, nor does it entail a loss of orientation or of judgment capacity. On the contrary, the fact that there are no universal, over-cultural standards of rationality does not mean that within a culture standards and norms are not binding or that we are not able to give convincing reasons.

While Majetschak describes how Wittgenstein's late philosophy leads to a special form of cultural relativism and Perona emphasizes the practical importance of a restriction of relativism, Astrid Wagner dedicates her chapter "Dynamics of Basic Beliefs in the Philosophical Approaches of Ortega and Wittgenstein" explicitly to the question of whether pluralism, in its epistemic as well as normative dimension, does necessarily entail strong relativistic consequences. This leads her to an investigation of the epistemic conditions of intercultural critique, especially to the epistemic and normative role of basic beliefs, and to the mechanisms and dynamics that may induce changes of world-pictures and belief-networks. In order to understand the logic of these dynamics, she focuses on the interplay of explicit and implicit beliefs, of intellectual activities and their latent implications, of empirical propositions to be proved and the rules of testing, as well as on the role and limits of meaningful doubt.

Part 3 is devoted to the concepts of belief and knowledge. Indeed, the first chapter of this part is entitled "Are There Background Beliefs?", a question to which Thomas Gil answers negatively. To justify his position, Gil starts by highlighting the epistemologists' temptation to find beliefs everywhere, as if all our practices and activities should necessarily be belief-guided. Although Gil points out that this intellectualization of our doings and actions is due to, above all, George Santayana's idea of 'animal faith' and the behavioristic turn in the philosophy of mind whose main representative is Gilbert Ryle, he focuses on Ortega's notion of 'belief' and Wittgenstein's concept of 'certainty', which he calls 'central beliefs' because they cannot be easily given up even though evidence seems to contradict them. The basic question raised by Gil is whether these central beliefs can be regarded as part of the background, by which Searle meant a set of conditions that enable to develop intentional states. The conclusion arrived at by Gil is that beliefs are not part of the background, as in that case the appropriate reaction to the background components would consist in assenting; but a grammar of assent in Newman's sense is of no use to clarify how we could be cognitively related to the components of such background. Since background components are not beliefs, we cannot assent to them.

In the chapter "Belief and Perspective after Ortega and Wittgenstein", Jaime de Salas begins by noticing that both philosophers push Hume's skepticism to the extreme in their late work, as they assume that philosophy and science either are derived from common experience or are secondary to it. De Salas aims to contrast Ortega's work with Wittgenstein's philosophy in order to shed light on the former's notions of belief and perspective. A major difference is that Wittgenstein does not admit individual beliefs and perspectives, while the personalization of beliefs and perspectives is a fundamental issue for Ortega. According to de Salas, the gap between both thinkers is due to Wittgenstein's private language

argument, his rejection of the inner/outer distinction, the difficulties involved in the distinction between intentional speech and talking, and, above all, the idea of a form of life, which would prevent him from accepting Ortega's distinction between beliefs and usages because activity, thought, and language reinforce each other within the context of a form of life.

Karsten Schoellner analyzes, in the chapter "The Life and Logic of Our Beliefs", how it can be the case that our beliefs are vitally articulated even when they are not logically articulated. Schoellner aims to show that, according to Wittgenstein, it is not possible to distinguish between logical and vital articulation. Taking as a reference point the belief 'There are physical objects', Schoellner warns that if these words fail to make sense, it cannot then be understood how this very sentence might allow us to describe a given belief. In other words, the logical or propositional articulation would constitute the prerequisite for the vital articulation of a specific belief. It could be also added that Wittgenstein advocates in *On Certainty* a vitalistic understanding of beliefs, for he remains there faithful to the idea, just like in the rest of his work, that meaning is use: indeed, the possibility of a vital articulation of our beliefs also lies at the basis of their logical articulation. Therefore, the logical and the vital articulation turn out to be the same thing. However, Schoellner subsequently reveals the possibility of distinguishing between a logico-vital articulation of beliefs and the misunderstanding of such beliefs within intellectual discourse.

In the chapter "Knowledge and the 'Favor of Nature'", Stefan Tolksdorf analyzes three polemic passages from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, for, according to Tolksdorf, the standard view does not interpret and combine these three topics in a satisfactory way. First, Wittgenstein points out that knowledge must be justified on compelling grounds, but he does not specify what epistemic strength is needed for such a ground to turn a true belief into knowledge. Second, Wittgenstein presents the favor of nature as an essential component of empirical knowledge, yet it is not clear at all how the fact that an individual knows something depends on his own epistemic abilities and achievements. Last but not least, Wittgenstein seems to deny that knowledge is a mental state; however, Tolksdorf thinks that Wittgenstein did not address this issue in sufficient detail. Drawing on John McDowell's work, Tolksdorf poses an alternative solution to the standard view, because it leads us to lose knowledge. His solution consists in considering that knowledge is always by favor of nature, for nature is essential for constituting an epistemically satisfying position in the space of reasons.

Part 4, the last one of the volume, is intended to analyze some limits of rationality. In the chapter "On Refusing to Believe: Insensitivity and Self-Ignorance", José Medina starts by wondering how and why we become insensitive to our own ignorance to the extent that we inhabit it comfortably without feeling

it as painful, and hence without regarding it as a deficiency which must be repaired. According to Medina, self-ignorance should be addressed through a process of self-estrangement that leads us to adopt different perspectives than the habitual ones – particularly perspectives of people very different from ourselves. Our comfortable certainties generate a form of insensitivity to those experiences that may call them into question. To face the defense mechanisms that lie at the core of this insensitivity, Medina suggests that practices of self-estrangement lead people to painfully become aware of the consequences of their epistemic comfort in others' discomfort.

José María Ariso continues, in the chapter "Counterwill and Logical Priority Over Ideas: Two Constituents of Our Basic Convictions", with the analysis of beliefs in Ortega' sense as well as Wittgenstein's conception of certainties. Specifically, Ariso reminds us that Ortega did not clarify whether ideas precede beliefs in time or vice versa; nevertheless, Wittgenstein shows in his later work that there can be no ideas without prior beliefs. But Ariso also reveals that Ortega's work can serve to shed light on an issue that Wittgenstein tackled superficially, i.e. the possibility of adopting beliefs at will. In connection with this, Ortega clearly and compellingly points out that beliefs constitute our very reality, which is, in turn, counterwill – that is, something we encounter, but in no case something we furnish or make. After describing these mutual contributions, Ariso ends up showing how they can be embedded in both authors' works in such a way that the contributions do not become distorted but enriched when they are contemplated in a new philosophical context.

As it is suggested in the title of the chapter "Anatomies of foolishness 1927–1937", Kevin Mulligan exposes the descriptions of foolishness carried out by a number of eminent thinkers along the mentioned decade. However, Mulligan is not concerned with a merely empirical issue like the verification of whether a given thinker or a specific part of the population is cognitively vicious, but with understanding our relations to cognitive values which can be found in the writings of the anatomists of foolishness. Mulligan begins by presenting the anatomies carried out by some authors, most notably Benda and Ortega. Subsequently, he focuses on the main figures of the Viennese intellectual context in the late 19$^{th}$ century – above all, Wittgenstein – whose obsession with clarity was their most defining characteristic. Finally, Mulligan distinguishes between two conceptions of foolishness. According to the thick or traditional conception, foolishness is the lack of cognitive virtue and knowledge about the highest or last things, while the thin conception entails blindness, indifference, or even hostility to cognitive values.

In the concluding chapter "Scientific Rationality, Experience of Limit, and the Problem of Life and Death in 'Tractatus'. Wittgenstein in Dialogue with New-

ton and Tolstoy", Ana María Rabe offers a detailed explanation of the predecessors of two key parts of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. On the one hand, she reveals to which extent Wittgenstein's early theory of language – and, by extension, his conception of the framework of the world – is inspired by the theoretical writings of physicists such as Ernst Mach, Ludwig Boltzmann, Heinrich Hertz, and, above all, Isaac Newton to extract from them general principles which allow him to construct the logical framework for verifiable propositions. To be precise, Rabe places great emphasis on contrasting Wittgenstein's theory of language with Newton's mechanics in order to show how the principle of simultaneity was of great help to establish the conditions and the limits of what can be said with sense. On the other hand, Rabe analyzes how Tolstoy's notions of time, life, and death had a deep influence on the way in which the problems of will, subject, sense of life, death as well as the limits of the world are tackled in the *Tractatus*. Rabe ends up revealing how both aspects are interrelated, for the person who at a given moment finds the solution of the problem of life does neither stay in an immovable logical space nor has he found any concrete fact, answer, or picture, but he has experienced the world as a limited whole.

## Genesis of the project and acknowledgements

Most of the contributions of this volume proceed from an international conference on the topic of the book which was organized by the editors and which took place in June 2014 at the *Berlin Center for Knowledge Research (IZW – Innovationszentrum Wissensforschung)* at the *Technische Universität Berlin*. We are very grateful to Günter Abel, the director of the IZW, for his unconditional support, as well as to the *Fritz Thyssen Foundation* that enabled the invitation of the foreign guests with a generous project funding. The idea of the conference and book project, however, traces back to the work of a small research group at the *Spanish National Research Council* (*CSIC – Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas*) in Madrid. This group was initially composed of José María Ariso, Jaime de Salas, Jean-Claude Lévêque, and Astrid Wagner and had already organized four workshops with international specialists on Ortega and Wittgenstein between 2011 and 2013.

Given that the confrontation or co-lecture of the two reference authors proved to be quite fruitful and inspiring and that we could find nearly no publication on the

astonishing affinities between these two contemporary thinkers,[1] we decided to bring some international specialists together in order to work on the topic.

There are many reasons why it was so unusual to bring the approaches of Ortega and Wittgenstein together. Indeed, they are two thinkers as different in style as with regard to their personality and their philosophical backgrounds. At first glance, they do not share much more than to be philosophers of the same generation. But certainly the parallels between their movements in thought would have attracted the attention of their followers and commentators much earlier, if the guiding images initially made of them in the Spanish academic circles on the one hand and in the German universities on the other hand would have been less tendentious. Ortega, probably the most important, most famous, and most internationally known Spanish philosopher of the 20th century, has been perceived by German academic philosophy rather as a literary man, as an intellectual and defender of human liberalism whose work was probably worth to be discussed, but as a subject for Romance philologists. Wittgenstein, in contrast, has always been estimated as an important philosopher by the Spanish-speaking world, but with a mainstream interpretation as an analytical philosopher to which a connection with main concerns of continental philosophy seemed to be complicated.

Against that background, the conference as well as this volume was intended to give the initial spark to an open dialogue between German, Spanish, Italian, British, and American experts, a dialogue that copes with the argumentative power, the complexity, and the radicalness of those philosophical approaches. At the same time, the lecture of both authors, each in the light of the other one's thought, helped to diagnose the advantages and disadvantages of each position. Thus, it was not astonishing for us that our initial conference has already been followed by a second symposium that took place in September 2015 at the *Universidad Complutense* in Madrid and was coordinated by Jaime de Salas and co-organized by the *Fundación Ortega-Marañon*.

We are very grateful to Günter Abel and James Conant, the series editors of the *Berlin Studies in Knowledge Research*, as well as to the De Gruyter Publishing House for the opportunity to publish this volume.

**1** The only main article on the topic was written by one of our group members: Ariso, José María (2011): "Unbegründeter Glaube bei Wittgenstein und Ortega y Gasset." In: *Wittgenstein-Studien* 2, 219 – 248. The other two relevant papers are quite short. See Navarro, José (2003): "On Life and Language: Limit, Context and Belief in Wittgenstein and Ortega y Gasset." In: P. Weingartner (ed.), *Pre-Proceedings of the 26th International Wittgenstein Symposium, Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society, Kirchberg am Wechsel*, 257 – 259. See also van den Hoven, M. Jeroen (1990): "Wittgenstein and Ortega y Gasset on Certainty." In: R. Haller/J. Brandl (eds.), *Wittgenstein – Towards a Re-Evaluation, II, Pre-Proceedings of the 14th International Wittgenstein-Symposium*, 273 – 275.

# Part 1: **The Problem of Rationality**

Günter Abel

# Rethinking Rationality: The Use of Signs and the Rationality of Interpretations

**Abstract:** This paper presents a synoptic view of the major philosophical conceptions of rationality and discusses their advantages and disadvantages. It starts with a characterization of the traditional universalistic understanding of rationality. In a second part, the conceptions providing an epistemological perspective on rationality are classified by means of four pairs of attitudes: (a) sustaining a narrow or a broad sense of rationality, (b) dealing with internal or external rules, (c) grounding rationality in the life-world or in a realm of abstract principles, (d) conceiving rationality as bounded or as universalistic. The third part outlines some central demands for an up-to-date conception of rationality focusing on features such as symbolization, ascription, performance and interpretation of signs, direct understanding, constructional elements, and the intercultural dialogue. By means of these features the paper develops a critical and feasible idea of rationality.

## 1 The universalistic understanding of rationality

In the tradition of Western metaphysical thought, rationality makes a claim to universality. The question is whether this claim is justified and what, if necessary, a rethinking of rationality might look like. The justification of rationality's claim to universality typically invokes the following five points:

(1) Man is a "zoon logon echon" or "animal rationale", as Aristotle emphasized. (2) Rationality plays a twofold role: it provides a description of what humans in fact do whenever they do anything such as act, think, or speak; and it offers a prescription or a norm for how people should act, think, and speak. (3) There is a pre-established realm and set of universal principles and rules (such as logical consistency and well-foundedness) governing cognition, values, and utilities which we can and should apply in order to optimize decision-making and normative orientation in action, thought, and speech. (4) Logical and scientific rationality are the only, or, at least, the primary forms of rationality governing our thought, speech, and action. (5) Rationality is a necessary condition for the ability to understand the speech, thought, and action of other people in the first place.

# 2 The epistemological understanding of rationality. Four distinctions

The epistemic situation of human beings is not the epistemic situation of Gods. Rationality is rationality *from a human point of view*, not from a divine one. At the same time, the idea of rationality has a *history* and takes different forms in different *cultures*. Wittgenstein once remarked:

> But what men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice-versa. But is there no objective character here? *Very* intelligent and well-educated people believe in the story of creation in the Bible, while others hold it as proven false, and the grounds of the latter are well known to the former. (OC 336)

These and other aspects make it clear that there is no such thing as 'the one timeless rationality' but rather various meanings, types, and models of 'rationality'.[1] The standards and rules of rationality are man-made. And the models of rationality that have been developed in history and in the various cultures have always been subject to adaptation and revision whenever people's basic views of the world and experiences changed and the tension between the models and people's actual conduct became too great.

I would like to specify the *epistemological* understanding of rationality by drawing four distinctions: (2.1) narrow vs. broad understanding of rationality; (2.2) internal vs. external rules of rationality; (2.3) a grounding in the life-world vs. an isolated realm of abstract principles of rationality; and (2.4) bounded rationality vs. universalistic rationality.

## 2.1 The narrow and the broad understanding of rationality

The *narrow* sense of rationality involves aspects like logical consistency, unambiguousness, inferential certainty, validity throughout changing contexts, completeness, and the capacity for discourse and consensus. The *broad* sense of rationality rather demands that what we think, believe, and know should fit and cohere with the structures of our speech, thought, and action as well as the network and background of our experiences. Hence someone can be considered ra-

**1** Cf. Elster 1982 and Lenk 1986; the two of them end up with more than twenty forms of rationality; Dagfinn Føllesdal (1982, 1986) distinguishes between four types.

tional in the *broad* understanding if he speaks, thinks, and acts in accordance with the relations that obtain, for example, between their various beliefs and desires[2] – and doesn't, for example, wish to earn money by owning Toyota stocks and at the same time wish for the stock markets to be abolished worldwide.

## 2.2 Internal and external rules of rationality

*Internal* rationality and the corresponding *internal rules* refer to the formal requirements just mentioned under point 2.1. We can best illustrate *external* rationality and the corresponding *external rules* by looking at people's actions. Actions are entangled in a network of external constraints, such as, for example,[3] communicative rules and commitments, moral rules (such as rules of fairness), rules intimately connected with an individual's personality (such as his commitment to protecting the environment), rules such as social norms and social patterns of conduct, and legal and constitutional rules (which are to be followed even without the threat of sanctions).

## 2.3 Grounding in the life-world instead of an isolated realm of abstract principles

The standards of rationality are anchored in forms of life and life-worlds.[4] This is true of both the *theoretical* domain (e. g. concerning scientific theories) and the *practical* domain (concerning morals as they are actually lived).

Hence, in the sciences, for example, the construction of a theory involves a number of various stipulations and methodological rules such as, for example, "judicial" and "normative" stipulations.[5] The former determine what counts as a confirmation or refutation (e. g. on the basis of empirical observation). The latter determine why certain theories or parts of theories are accepted and favored over others (e. g. due to the elegance and simplicity in how the theory organizes the matter).

Within a hierarchical model we find both *first-order* and *second-order rules*. The second-order rules involve those procedures by which the object-related first-order rules can be confirmed or rejected. The justification of second-order

**2** For more detail on these distinctions, see Abel 1999, chap. 4.

**3** The following examples are taken from Nida-Rümelin/Spohn 2000, vii.

**4** For a more thorough discussion of this point and the following, see Abel 2011.

**5** See also the presentation of these points in Poser 2001, 187 ff., and Abel 2004, 394 f.

rules cannot occur at the level of the object language. Ultimately they can only be justified by recourse to the world-picture of a certain life-world, time, and culture.[6] It is ultimately deep-rooted world views, *pictures* of the world (the word used in a Wittgensteinian understanding) that govern the assumptions and standards of rationality.

In the *practical domain* (i.e. with regard to the conditions of morals as they are lived), it is equally clear that the norms of moral conduct are likewise founded upon and justified within the life-world. For example: I see that a badly injured person needs help quickly, so I call an ambulance and perform first aid. If we ask where these and similar norms ultimately get their power to determine our action, we quickly come to see that it is the deeply rooted normative structures and rules of our life-world that serve as the pragmatic final authority of orientation and justification. It is these structures and rules of the life-world that guide our moral actions and thus constitute the rationality of our actions. The life-world itself cannot be called either rational or irrational, since the distinction between rationality and irrationality only arises and has application within and against the background of the life-world itself.

Hence, the question of whether a form of life or a life-world *as a whole* is rational or not is empty. Yet individual practices can certainly be subjected to a comparative analysis and critique, such as the question of whether scientific meteorology or the natural oracles of the Native Americans provide more accurate weather predictions. Even if the comparison casts a positive light on scientific meteorology, we cannot infer from this that the Native Americans should give up their practices and customs. – Among other things because, as the story goes, the Native American chief "Black Cloud" called the high-tech meteorology station located at the edge of his reservation to ask whether the coming winter was going to be harsh, and was told by the director of the station "there must be a harsh winter coming, since the Native Americans are collecting a conspicuous amount of wood".

## 2.4 *Bounded* rationality instead of *universalistic* rationality

Human rationality operates under uncertain conditions, and its decisions are made in a finite amount of time and are based on finite knowledge, even though the stakes may be great, with life and death hanging in the balance. Generally the mechanisms we have for this purpose function astonishingly well. This success is

**6** For more on this point, see Abel 2004, chap. 3.

all the more astonishing since we do not by any means have a solid understanding of the 'internal clock' of these pragmatically founded forms of rationality.

In what follows I will explicitly take up the program of "bounded rationality" (borrowing the term from Herbert A. Simon)[7] as developed above all by Gerd Gigerenzer and his ABC Research Group (Adaptive Behavior and Cognition).[8] The core of this program is "to understand how actual people make decisions without calculating utilities and probabilities – that is without optimizing" (Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, 8) in the sense of the ideal of an "all-purposed optimization calculus" (Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, 7). We could describe the project as steering between optimization and irrationality. I will take up two examples from Gigerenzer and Selten to illustrate the program.

Example 1: An experienced baseball player knows how he has to move to catch a fly-ball. If we wished to optimize this ability by breaking down the movements of the player and the ball into their thousands of individual components and parameters in order to improve the player's ability through minimax optimization, we would just immediately induce the millepede syndrome, that is: when called upon to explain the elegant movements of his many feet, the millepede gets hopelessly tangled up as a result of paralysis by analysis.

Gigerenzer/Selten (2001) propose the following thought experiment: suppose we build a rational machine, a robot, and program it so that it is able to move itself and catch the fly-ball. Two different teams enter the game: the "optimizing team", which "proceeds by programming the family of parabolas into the robot's mind (in theory, balls fly in parabolas)"; and the "boundedly rational team", programming the robot "to make a crude estimate of whether the ball is coming down in front or behind it, and then start running in this direction while fixating its eye on the ball" and "to adjust its running speed so that the angle of gaze [...] remains constant (or within a certain range)" with the result that, by using "this simple gaze heuristic, the robot will catch the ball while running" (Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, 10). The important point here for questions of rationality is that the "rationally bounded robot pays attention to only one cue, the angle of gaze, and does not attempt to acquire information concerning the wind, spin, or the myriad of other causal variables, nor perform complex computations on these estimates" (Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, 7).

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**7** Cf. Simon 1957.

**8** For the following points see above all Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, and especially the programmatic opening paper by the editors: "Rethinking Rationality", 1 – 12. At the moment I am leaving aside the individual points of critique I have of the bounded rationality approach, which I will discuss elsewhere.

Example 2: When pilots are taught how to avoid collisions with other planes they are trained in comparably simple heuristics, "middle-ranged" and "domain-specific rather than universal strategies" (Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, 7).

Example 3: Today's scientific navigation systems or GPS devices (Global Positioning Systems) are based on astronomical knowledge concerning the movements of the earth and the satellites over the earth. Yet there were successful, functional navigational systems long before these that were based on other cultural techniques. Edwin Hutchins' descriptions of navigational processes in his book *Cognition in the Wild* (Hutchins 1995) have become famous. The important point for our context here is above all "that humans do not need to wait until all knowledge is acquired and all truth is known (which probably will never be the case)" (Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, 10). It is only decisive that there be a "match between the structure of a heuristic and the structure of an environment", a relation which as it concerns rationality is called "ecological rationality". These heuristics are "fast, frugal, and accurate all at the same time by exploiting the structure of information in natural environments" (Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, 9). They very much earn the title of being *rational.*

Here I would also like to add yet another example, namely the beautiful example of the physician that Kant mentions in the *Critique of Pure Reason:* when the doctor is faced with a patient he has to act, *even without* having the best possible knowledge concerning the observed symptom at his disposal. If he were to wait for the best possible knowledge, the patient would die.

When we have to make decisions in which there is a lot at stake, or in which our form of life itself might be profoundly changed – such as choosing a life partner, a career, or the place we live – we quickly discover that important decisions can only be rationalized in very small areas, or, in extreme cases, not at all. In these cases, we have good reasons – that is, reasons furnished by our life experience and accumulated wisdom – to follow our intuitions.

One hallmark of the models of bounded rationality is that their simple rules consist of certain prioritized processes. In our example of the baseball players and robots three types of rules are operative: (1) "*Simple search rules*" such as "to increase running speed to keep the angle of gaze constant"; (2) "*Simple stopping rules*" such as "to choose the first object that satisfies an aspiration level"; and (3) "*Simple decision rules*" such as "to choose the object that is favored by the most important reason" (Gigerenzer/Selten 2001, 8).

# 3 From "rational animals" to "symbolizing and interpreting animals"

## 3.1 A modified ground of the investigation

The narrow constriction of the idea of human beings as "rational animals" brings with it additional misinterpretations of both, the human behavior and action as well as the status of rationality. The triangular human relations to the world, oneself, and other people do not play out simply within the limits of the narrow sense of rationality. And the subjective completion or objective success of our activities in life does *not* simply result from the deployment of rationality as a norm in the narrow sense of rationality. This sobering finding changes nothing about the fact that rationality can be seen as a "norm" and as a "second-order disposition".[9] But rationality is neither part of our 'first nature' nor part of the necessary preconditions for the 'second nature' of human beings sedimented by means of cultural techniques. Rationality is an option and not a condition of our experiences and the ways we live our lives.

Moreover, this finding is in no way refuted by the fact that almost no one wishes to seem incoherent or irrational in his action, speech, or thought. When inconsistencies are pointed out to us, in many cases we are ready to revise some aspects of the given inferences as well as the network of our beliefs and non-cognitive factors, – insofar as the latter is possible. But we have no argument at our disposal that could force all other people to conduct themselves in the same manner, cost what it may.

In light of these considerations, I would like to propose expanding our perspective from humans considered as "rational animals" to humans considered as "symbolizing animals" (to use Ernst Cassirer's quite apt expression) and as "interpreting animals" (which is meant to bring out the *interpretative character* of the triangular relation to the world, oneself, and others). This move transforms the question of rationality into a question of semiotic and interpretational relations.

## 3.2 The ascriptional approach

Rationality is not an empirical fact. It is ascribed to persons, animals, institutions, and machines (such as computers or robots). Thus it makes sense to

**9** Cf. Føllesdal 1982, 1986.

favor an *ascriptional* approach. And, to be more precise, we ascribe a variety of things, including actions, sentences, thoughts, beliefs, values, and (more adventurously) feelings, emotions, and other non-cognitive factors and phenomena. We take a 'rational stance'. One methodological advantage of this ascriptional approach and of the rational stance is that it is, initially at least, ontologically neutral and that its non-factual explanations are immunized against the naturalistic fallacy of rationality.

Yet the ascriptional approach possesses two additional advantages compared to the rationalistic methodologies that threaten to falsely narrow and absolutize rationality. Firstly, the assumption of rationality's *ascriptional* character brings with it, internally, the assumption of the *indeterminacy* of rationality. This is especially true insofar as it recalls the Quinean idea of the "inscrutability of reference", which, for our purposes here, recurs as the inscrutability of rationality. Secondly, and again following Quine, we find ourselves faced with an ineliminable *underdetermination* of rationality. It is a manifestation of rationality (in the broad sense of the word "rationality") to recognize both of these limits (indeterminacy and underdetermination) as ineliminable.

Incidentally, this insight aligns neatly with the insight that the "principle of reflective equilibrium" (Rawls, Goodman, Føllsdal, Elgin) – i.e. the principle of finding a reciprocal balance between the structures of our heuristics and the structures of our reality – can also serve as a principle of rationality.

Moreover, emotions, feelings, values, existential decisions, and preferences provide equally clear examples of the limits of rationality in the narrow sense of the term, as does the principle of charity in (to use Donald Davidsons expression) "maximizing agreement".

The limitations of an overly strong version of the principle of charity as a principle of rationality are multifarious.[10] In situations of radical interpretation, the restricting acceptable interpretation to one's own standards carries with it the danger of going hopelessly astray. Ian Hacking mentions the origin of the word "kangaroo". According to a report,

> On their voyage of discovery to Australia a group of Captain Cook's sailors captured a young kangaroo and brought the strange creature back on board their ship. No one knew what it was, so some men were sent ashore to ask the natives. When the sailors returned they told their mates "It's a kangaroo." Many years later it was discovered that when

**10** See more specifically the thirteen points of critique I spelled out in Abel 1995, chap. 19.

> the aborigines said "kangaroo" they were not in fact naming the animal, but replying to their questioners "What did you say?"[11]

## 3.3 The performance of signs and the interpretation of signs

The philosophical problem of understanding signs does not consist in rectifying a misunderstanding or lack of understanding, but rather in understanding what it means to understand linguistic as well as non-linguistic signs, – hence in understanding understanding. "But", one might want to object, "what is the problem supposed to be here?" Everyone pretty much knows what it means to understand signs. We practice such understanding constantly and without any problems. But it is precisely this that we do not understand, or understand only with great difficulty. It is most irritating that, as Wittgenstein[12] emphasized, when it comes to questions about things as obvious as understanding signs, one knows the answer only so long as no one asks, but seems not to know it as soon as one attempts to spell out what one just knew.[13]

When it comes to understanding signs and the rationality of interpretations, there is a fundamental distinction between the *interpretation* of a sign and the *performance* of a sign as a sign. Think, for example, of a line of poetry or a musical sound, where there is an important distinction between the *interpretation* of the linguistic or musical sign *as expressive* and the *experience* of the sign's expressiveness that does not stand in need of interpretation. When we understand a sign, we do not interpret and explain it. Accordingly, we do not require any ascriptions of rationality or assumptions of rationality to understand it. One just understands the sign directly and *without* any intermediary assumptions of rationality.

In the context of this discussion of rationality, I would like then to introduce the distinction between the *logos of signs* (in the sense of using and understanding signs directly, i.e. *without* intervening epistemic mediators) and the *rationality of interpretation* (i.e. the constructional elements and explicit demands for coherence that are necessarily called for as soon as some disturbance arises and speech, thought, and action no longer function smoothly). In what follows, I would like to briefly describe these two components. I will begin with the more fundamental aspect: the logos of signs, the understanding of signs *without* interpretation.

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**11** *The Observer*, London, supplement from November 25, 1973; quoted here from Hacking 1984, 137.

**12** Cf. PI, No. 89.

**13** This section uses materials from Abel 1999, chap. 4.

## 3.4 The logos of signs: understanding signs directly

*Agreement:* – In order to understand signs *directly*, i. e. without any further interpretations, it is not enough to share a language or a system of signs,[14] e. g. to speak French, German, or Mandarin Chinese. In the end, there must also be agreement at the level of the life-world and our life practices. Wherever there is direct understanding of signs, we can safely assume that certain preconditions of agreement are fulfilled, including, *inter alia:* agreement in pre-linguistic comportment (this level is relevant, for example, in a situation of Quinean "radical translation",[15] wherein one begins to get a feel for the expressions of a completely foreign system of language and signs); agreement of actions with their rules; agreement in elementary experiential judgments and in definitions; and discursive agreement. The reciprocal and direct concord of all these different levels and respects can be described as a synchronicity of different semiotic and interpretive levels. The successful performance and direct understanding of signs without further interpretation can be understood as the fluid synchronicity of the various levels of semiotic and interpretive processes, a synchronicity that needs no further epistemic mediators.

*Metaphor:* – Another scene where the performative character of signs, and thus something of the logos of signs, shows itself is felicitous metaphor. Metaphor brings to light some deeply rooted structures of our practices of using and understanding signs. We cannot capture felicitous metaphors with the help of rationalizing statements.

*Showing:* – It is a fascinating phenomenon that we can often understand, say, a facial expression or a movement in dance *directly*, that is, without any additional epistemic mediators and without further rationalizations – even before we are even able to name the semantic properties of such signs as e. g., facial expressions or bodily movements. Showing activates a direct understanding of signs. In showing, the *logos of signs* manifests itself palpably and directly. Such showing is by no means limited to the visual. It is of fundamental importance in all areas of human activity, in everyday life, in the arts, in logic, in ethics, and in the sciences.

Let us now take up the second half of the distinction between the performance of signs and their interpretative explication. Here we are dealing with

**14** Cf. PI, No. 242. For a more thorough discussion of the following see Abel 1999, chap. 4, section 2.

**15** Cf. Quine 1983, § 7.

the demands for coherence and rationality that are relevant to successful interpretations of utterances, texts, actions, and persons.

I would like to clarify the domain of successful 'understanding dependent on explicative interpretations' by reference to three aspects: the constructional elements in relations of understanding, the balance of understanding and several bounded assumptions of coherence and rationality.

## 3.5 The rationality of interpretations

*Constructional elements:* – Every understanding of linguistic or non-linguistic utterances, texts, persons, institutions, or machines already presupposes and relies upon numerous creative, projective, empathetic, and constructional, in short, numerous interpretational activities. The following can be highlighted in shorthand:[16]

(1) One must view the other person's utterance as a speech act, and not, e. g. merely as an emission of noise. (2) The signs which appear must be disambiguated to a certain extent. (3) Insofar as indexicals or other elements which make direct reference to the perceived situation are involved, one must have grasped these and identified and localized the objects they pick out. (4) In understanding a sign, one must also have already understood the rules of interpretation associated with respective language or non-linguistic system of symbols. (5) In cases of translation or understanding a foreign language, one must already have formed translation-hypotheses, which can be viewed as creative interpretational constructs.[17] (6) One must have embedded the occurrent signs in a context, situation, and time. (7) One's own standards of logic and truth must already have been projected behind foreign utterances before (8) the organization of speech and the logical form of the sentences can be fixed. (9) One must also have put oneself in the position of the other person producing the signs, at least in a rudimentary way. (10) One must already have taken into account the propositional attitudes (e. g. convictions, opinions, intentions, wishes, fears) that regulate the semiotic utterances of the other person and that contribute to circumscribing the situated meaning of the employed signs. If this can be taken as an adequate characterization of the situation we find ourselves in whenever we have to interpret the utterances, texts, and actions of other people, then this is precisely the point that should make it clear how the principles of interpretation, which are, in this sense, always operative, can also be seen as principles of rationality.

**16** Cf. Abel 1992, 185 f.

**17** For more on this point, see Abel 1999, chap. 5.

*The equilibrium of understanding:* – The felicity of the relations of successful understanding and cooperation demands that the speaker and the interpreter be ready to modify or even revise their interpretive hypotheses. This process of dynamic adjustments that oscillates between speaker and hearer serves the purpose of establishing what one might call the equilibrium of understanding, a balance in the understanding of signs. By this I mean the reciprocal balancing out of horizons of understanding and cooperation. In contrast to what Hans-Georg Gadamer assumes in his hermeneutics, these horizons do not thereby "fuse together".[18] The notion of an equilibrium of understanding comprehends both difference and continuity. It is important to recognize that the horizons of other people (and cultures) can be irreducibly different from one's own. Viewed that way, I would like to argue for a "de-fusion" of horizons. At the same time we should see that the readiness to reach a balance of understanding is also a component of the rationality of communicative understanding.

*Demands for Coherence:* – In cases where signs are not directly understood, demands for coherence placed on acceptable interpretations can become quite important.[19] Interpretations of linguistic and/or non-linguistic signs are acceptable, appropriate, and correct, or, in short, rational, if and only if they hit upon the form of interpretive practice underlying the language or the non-linguistic sign system and cohere with it. Whether or not this has been successful can be observed in whether or not communication, reference to the world, and action can get underway and be smoothly sustained and continued. The only candidates for demands of coherence or demands of rationality can be those aspects that emerge *internally* from what it means to operate within a language, non-linguistic sign system, and life-practice. The standards we are looking for would have to articulate those presuppositions of sense that we assume to be fulfilled in our own case, insofar as we understand ourselves as persons who talk, think, and act coherently. Some of the most important consequences of demands for coherence are (in no hierarchical order): (1) To give priority to the interpretation that can support and sustain communication, cooperation, and the contexts of action. (2) To favor the interpretation that situates the sign that has come into question within the framework of possible actions. (3) To avoid interpretations that are incompatible with one's own prior use of signs or that of other people. (4) To avoid interpretations that lead to inconsistencies, incoherence, or self-contradictions. (5) To favor interpretations that allocate conditions of truth or fulfill-

**18** Cf. Gadamer 1965, 289 f., 356 f., 375.

**19** For a thorough treatment of this following point see Abel 2004, 313 – 315, and Abel 1999, chap. 4.3.

ment to the sentences of the language of other persons. (6) To give preference to the interpretation that does not unnecessarily abandon solid inferential and deductive relations between judgments. (7) To give priority to the interpretation that provides the speaker with an appropriate relation to their world, environment, and fellow persons. (8) To favor the interpretation that preserves sensory evidence in perceptual situations. (9) To prefer the interpretation that coincides with the experience and the empirical validity of the expression in question. (10) To prefer the interpretation that requires as few explanations as possible, hence the one that takes us closest to the *direct* understanding of the sign and the *direct* performance of action.

If anyone should think, upon hearing this list of demands for interpretation and rationality, that these are all things that are quite self-evident and taken for granted, – well, so much the better.

## 3.6 Intercultural dialogue

In conclusion, I would like to draw attention to a consequence of the semiotic-interpretational approach sketched above for issues of rationality in intercultural dialogue. I have explicitly taken a stance against both the false absolutism of rationalistic methodologies and the notion of the "fusing of horizons" (Gadamer) as a precondition of communication and cooperation between persons and between cultures. Successful communication and cooperation require a certain overlapping of the horizons against which people speak, think, and act. Communication and cooperation are furthered by the readiness to modify, when necessary, or even revise one's own horizon and one's own perspective.

It is one of the challenges of the endeavor of *rethinking rationality* that we must always be ready to admit, as Kant says, that other people (and other cultures) might see things differently than we do. And who would be so impetuous, as Kant remarks, as to want to subsume all the different horizons under just a single one? This led Kant to the insight that justifying, on the basis of pure reason alone, the categorical imperative (according to which we must test whether any given maxim could serve as the foundation of a general law) requires just this "indispensable complement",[20] namely the insight that other people (and, I would add, other cultures) might want different things than I do. The attitude of not simply tolerating this fact but rather honoring it is what Kant calls "love". Here, rationality and love go hand-in-hand, are in fact joined like Siamese twins.

**20** Cf. Kant 1968, 188; Abel 1999, 363 – 366; and Simon 1987, 195 ff.

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# Rationality, Reason, and Wisdom

## On the Significance of Meta-Philosophical Reflection in the Case of Ortega and Wittgenstein

**Abstract:** Husserl's phenomenology, Heidegger's reflections on being in contrast to entities or objects, and Ortega's perspectivism oppose scientism by reminding us that we should look at scientific theories as parts in our linguistic techniques for special purposes and practical orientation. Despite Wittgenstein's insights into the role of gnomic oracles for wisdom and philosophical reflections on the relation between the world, language, and the subject, the so-called linguistic turn in present day analytical philosophy presents a merely mathematical, neo-Pythagorean, picture of logic and the world.

In 1930, José Ortega y Gasset gave his famous public lectures *¿Que es Filosofia?* (What is Philosophy?) in Madrid. Readers of his books today might be surprised to learn about Ortega's popularity in his times. Our way of writing and speaking has lost, perhaps fortunately, the dramatic pathos and intense rhetoric that was widespread in the first half of the last century. This applies in quite some points also to Martin Heidegger. But precisely because of this difference in style, it is necessary to look through the outer form of appearance in order to recover the essence of thought that might be of lasting significance.

The situation only seems to be different when we look at a second leading figure of 20$^{th}$-century philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein. At first sight, of course, Wittgenstein's prose is much nearer to us – just as *Bauhaus architecture* meets our modern taste much more than the still quite pathetic style of secession (*Jugendstil*) with its impressionistic stress on mere appearances, represented by all kinds of ornaments, and its expressionistic rhetoric as it shows up in dramatic figures and figurines. Ortega himself discusses the claim that we today have overcome the romantic times with its overstatements: "We demand to speak clean and clear, unambiguous, in precise expressions, disinfected as the instrument of a surgeon" (Ortega y Gasset 2008, VIII: 373; my translation). However, "precision" is a kind of *pre-editing*, a *structured patterning* for further use, just as the Latin *prae-cisio* says. Talking "precise" therefore just means using some canonized patterns of making distinctions, articulating the distinct cases and combining them with "reasonable expectations and predictions". In other words, understanding a concept always consists of *three* moments: recognizing

the relevant distinctions, reproducing the proper expressions, and counting with the relevant dispositions.

We should not overlook the pathos of talking about rigor and exactitude, and the difference between real precision and seeming precision. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, for example, is as expressionistic as it is a piece of *Bauhaus literature*. For an experienced reader, Wittgenstein's early prose is, therefore, quite mannerist and stands under quite some influence of Schopenhauer's and even Nietzsche's laconic aphorisms. In any case, we must recover the content of such sentences in lengthy interpretations. The case is not much different from that of reading ancient philosophical oracles like those of Heraclitus. Already the Latin writer Horace had realized the problem: "I wanted to be short and became dark and obscure"; and Kant adds with some dry humor that to write a shorter book than his *Critique of Pure Reason* would have taken him too much time.

Given all this, we might be today in a position to overcome at least some of the myths of the 20$^{th}$ century. One myth says that analytic philosophy with its mathematical style is clearer than philosophical phenomenology in the tradition of Husserl and Heidegger or as the allegedly dark and obscure writings of Kant and his followers, the so-called German Idealists Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Of course, their writings are difficult; but so are the mathematical similes in Frege's, Russell's, Carnap's or Quine's texts. We might take Davidson's formal truth theory in his analysis of meaning and truth in real languages as paradigm. Tarski had asked under which condition we can extend a formal system of formal axioms of first order consistently by deductive rules for a new meta-predicate "x is true" together with some features of nominalization N for sentences S. The goal was to fulfill the following truth-principle (*) "N(S) is true if and only if S", i.e. that for any instance S the formula (*) can be derived in the extended system. Davidson's philosophy of language leads from here to a formal wolf in a sheep's fur (or perhaps vice versa) with quite some disastrous consequences for the philosophical arguments following Davidson. This holds especially for all deflationary truth theories as, for example, Richard Rorty defends them.

The problem is seldom the corresponding mathematical *Urbild* – for example when Frege talks of functions and Russell about atomic or elementary sentences or names. The problem is how to apply the structures of the *Urbild* as a free simile or image to other things like the real sentences and utterances we use and understand when speaking our home languages even when we explain purely mathematical forms as ideal ideas or project them to the real world, in which we live and about which we talk.

If we think about these things, we might see, in fact, that mathematical forms in philosophy, as they appear in treatises on formal logic, are more often than not just style. Quite often, they can be humbug. When Kant says

that formal logic has not changed essentially since the times of Aristotle and in the 20th century people feel sure that Frege's new logic is the final breakthrough for clear logical thinking and rigorous argumentation, we therefore should pour some vinegar into this wine. We even could add that, since Plato, an estimated number of at most 10 persons at a time have understood fully the importance and basic problem of the notions of *form* and *content*, of *abstraction* and *idealization*, and the central role of *syntactic nominalizations* for generic reflections on forms. In other words, the most important topics of logic, the reproductions of forms and the talk about forms, are not known at all if one plays only with the syntax and semantics of "not", "and" and "for all" in sortal domains (like the so-called possible worlds) as they exist (as models) only in pure mathematics and higher set theory. The problem is how to apply these things *outside* mathematics. Plato already has seen the problem under the title of *methexis*, referring to the performative forms of applying concepts or rules as linguistic forms to the real world. The debate in the dialogue *Parmenides* shows that Plato was already aware of the distinction between a syntactic expression (*logos*) standing for such a conceptual form and the form or concept in itself. As such, it is the general meaning of the expression, taken as a generic object of reflection, the *eidos* or *idea*; but in reality, we have to look at actualizing uses of the word (*logos*) and its meaning (*eidos*) in performative speech acts – together with evaluations of essential fulfilment conditions. Wittgenstein's famous considerations on rule following and the application of functions hits on precisely the same problem – if we are able to "see" the same general form in different appearances. In fact, the generic norms of using a word in an appropriate way relate to its meaning just as the canonized form of using mathematical expressions correctly to our reflective talk about their meaning(s).

Logical semantic neglects the problems of performative use when it stays merely formal and talks only about ideal forms of conceptual meaning. This is the reason why the paradigm of mathematical meaning and truth is grossly misleading. This is the problem of Pythagorean thinking, the childhood of philosophizing, as Hegel says. We see such Pythagoreanism reappear in all versions of materialism, physicalism, and even logical empiricism. We could have learned about this problem by reading Plato and Aristotle, especially where the latter complains that the Later Academy has turned philosophy back into mere mathematics, even though already Socrates' dialectical criticism of the sophists rests on an insight into the limits of formal arguments and the ambivalent role of formal logics. Logic is an ideal form of reflecting on formally valid forms of inference. However, such forms hold only in ideal or generic cases. They are valid in general, not always, if we leave pure mathematics and talk about nature or the world. As a result, a merely formal or schematic use of words outside of pure

mathematics will always lead to some sophistic fallacy or scholastic abuse. A reconstruction of this line of philosophical thought is overdue.

The clarity of mathematical modelling and the exactness of mathematical proof stand in nice contrast to the indefinite content of a philosophical oracle. We know the style of such a gnomon in philosophy from the times of Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. The wide public prefers such short statements and seems to believe that only they are clear – despite the fact that Socrates and Plato already have protested against the idea that everything that can be thought can be said clearly and distinctly, in the *laconic* form of Lakedaimon, i. e. Sparta, which resembles in many respects the language of a tabloid. Think of gnomic aphorisms like "nothing too much" (Latin: "*nequid nimis*", Greek: "*meden agan*") or "everything has its beginning and its end". Such tautologies are almost too true to be very useful – and are nevertheless words of wisdom.

So what is real clarity? When and where do we need the exactness of mathematical models by which we allegedly make general structures of human language, human knowledge or the world explicit? When and where do we prefer laconic oracles in the tautological or paradoxical forms of "what will be, will be" and "I know that I do not *know*"? They at least *sell* well. However, how does the *rhetoric tradition*, in which Ortega or Heidegger stand, relate to the *aphoristic tradition*, in which Wittgenstein stands together with all kinds of *romantic* writers like Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) and Friedrich von Schlegel, but also G. C. Lichtenberg, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, not to mention their joint *Urbilder*, namely Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère and Vauvenargues? How can these different styles or logical forms say something clear about knowledge, science, philosophy or, in other words, about rationality, reason, and wisdom? Writing "essays" in Hume's *elegant* style, as Kant famously says with some praise, but also with some hidden poison, rather is no real way out.

## 1 Philosophical reflections on knowledge and science

*Science is the self-consciousness of ordinary language.* It is astounding that Quine, who has articulated this gnomic oracle, did not really draw the right conclusions with respect to the merely relational status of scientific knowledge; and he does not add that philosophy is the self-consciousness of the sciences. We find some deeper readings of these two insights in Hegel, but also in Wittgenstein's criticism of scientism as an ideological and metaphysical world-view. We find it also in Ortega's philosophy of life and human existence, in the tradition of the philosophy of

culture in Neo-Kantianism (especially the Marburg School from R. Cohen to E. Cassirer), in Husserl's phenomenology, in Scheler's philosophical anthropology, and in Heidegger's reflection on the basic logical forms of human existence.

In our everyday use of ordinary language without scientific criticism and terminological precision we can be as "unconscious" of what we really talk about – just as scientists are when they talk about their toy models of the world and confuse them with the one and only world there really is, the world in which we live. In fact, the model worlds of the sciences are until today most frequently confused with the world itself. This is especially so if we identify the world with nature. Nature in its usual sense is not the whole world. It is only that part of the world, in which things happen without interference of human action. The world, of course, includes human culture. Therefore, it includes free action.

Things get even worse when we look at nature as the inner "object" of some theories of natural science. This inner object of ideal theories is an abstract structure, a purely ideal system of concepts, an ideal model. As such, it is already categorically distinct from nature, understood as the surrounding world of our life, the world we live in. Again, the Socratic distinction between a complex *eidos*, an ideal structure or generic form on the one side, the empirical phenomena or experienced appearances explained by it gets crucial here.

However, 20$^{th}$-century philosophy has returned in its second half to a precritical version of dogmatic metaphysics, namely to the belief-philosophy of naturalism, physicalism, biologism, or materialism. All these "isms" amount, in the end, to the same metaphysical or ontological error. It is the view that our scientific theories and models were a kind of mirror of nature (Richard Rorty). A basic feature of this view is the contention that "the world" is made up from "matter" which is seen as a set of atomic particles that move around in space (or spacetime) according to some eternal laws of nature, which science "uncovers" or "detects", allegedly by direct observation and experience. Science "articulates" these laws, as the story goes, by its "mathematical" theories. From the perspective of this "objectivist" belief-philosophy, the "perspectivism" of Ortega appears as mere "subjectivism".

Ortega already had quite well understood Heidegger's insight into the basic logical and onto-logical difference between being in the sense of being a mere object of experience and thought and being in the sense of performing a life process. Think, for example, of an active interaction with nature: this is performing being. In judging and inferring, expecting consequences or drawing conclusions, we perform speech acts. We perform other acts by leading an active human life. In contrast to this, we talk of objects as entities, frequently without noticing that *our notion of* being and our conceptual *reconstruction of beings* always depend *on us*. The way we perform our life in the world, our being here, and the

way we develop forms of our life, including our knowledge about the world, is methodologically prior to any generic conceptual content of such knowledge. We therefore have to reflect not only on the abstract objects we talk about when we talk about things but also on the contrast between the inner form of being an object of our talk in itself and the ways we are for ourselves and the things are for themselves, as Hegel would have said.

The will to be general and to abstract from subjective perspectives leads the sciences to ignore these things. By focusing on generic truth, on general knowledge with various applications, the sciences cannot and do not talk about being for itself, but about how we should refer to generic or particular cases. The sciences therefore forget *being*, says Heidegger and do not *think* – namely about the *ontological difference* between *being* as a whole of processes in time – like our life or *Dasein* – and being a possible or real *object* of our cognition and knowledge. A crucial consequence is that the performative forms of living the life of a human person are not topics of descriptive and explanatory sciences, of historical and causal knowledge. The sciences rather talk about allegedly objective laws that want to tell us something about causes of a (recurrent) behavior of things. This is especially so in a "scientific" philosophy which does not grasp the meta-philosophical distinction between philosophy as a reflection on doing science (and philosophy) and belief-philosophy as a kind of object-level claims about how the natural world allegedly "really" is – including the "natural" and "cultural" forms of animal and human cognition. Such a naturalist, scientific, philosophy is, however, only an ideological world-view. It confuses the theoretical pictures of some important but local aspects of nature with the whole world. It does not understand the different ways of thinking about some local parts of nature and about the world as a whole, including the world of culture.

Ironically, scientists avoid the words "metaphysics" and "essence of things" but claim to know better than anybody else what the things really are, how the world really is, and what really is true. This notion of "real scientific knowledge" means, however, just the same as what traditional metaphysics has called "knowledge of the essence of things". Avoidance of allegedly metaphysical words like "essence" and "truth" therefore does not help at all.

Hegel attempts to articulate a distinction between *philosophy of nature* in the most general sense of what we today might call "object-level" theories of science (*Naturwissenschaften*, *philosophia naturalis*), *philosophy of spirit* in the broad sense of all object-level theories of *Sozial-* and *Geisteswissenschaften* and *speculative philosophy* as a "meta-level" and "holistic" reflection on our institutions of knowledge in general. All this is not really known yet. Especially his *Geistphilosophie* is widely confused with some speculative philosophy of mind in the sense of an amateurish theory of cognition and not as a meta-level proposal of organ-

izing our knowledge about the diverse conditions of human sapience. Instead, it comprises the theoretical disciplines that articulate the generic forms of human institutions and of practices in their historical development. In the English language, the influence of the superstition that real science must be "mathematically exact" is so great that one speaks of "humanities", not of the science of human affairs, as if these things were not of central importance and our knowledge about them did not deserve the sacred name of a "science". I avoid the systematically misleading notion "humanities". It is a title for mere histories in the sense of mere narratives about the past, which, as such, are mere recollections of data. Histories belong to the genre of proto-scientific empirical collection of annals. Dramatized narratives, in turn, belong at least in part to the genre of historical novels. For example, all stories about Troy are historical novels, especially those of Heinrich Schliemann or other archaeologists, if they speculate about Homer's city and war.

Hegel brings philosophy in the modern and narrow sense of a specialized enterprise to reflect on all forms of knowledge and their fulfilment conditions, also on nature and the world, on being and truth, under the (Kantian) word "speculation". Later critics have misread this as dogmatic armchair philosophizing. The result is that the label "speculative" turns into an insult under the wrong assumption that speculative philosophy wants to compete with the empirical sciences. Philosophy's task is rather to articulate the logical geography of language use, develop reflective commentaries on the real practice and success of scientific development, not least in critique of wrong beliefs in common sense as well as in scientific myths. Speculative philosophy thus turns into a kind of general logical analysis and reflection on the place of the sciences and their limited topics in our life and in the world. Ortega's concept of philosophy obviously stands in this tradition, just as philosophical phenomenology after Husserl. The central insight after Kant and Hegel is that doing science is part of our life. As a result, real science is never as exact as the utopian ideal of a real science is. Utopian ideals are our linguistic, conceptual constructions. This is obvious if we only think about it – just as it became obvious that the sun and the moon must be very large after Heraclitus or Thales started to think about it.

The "truth" of ideal constructions consists in their role of making conceptual forms explicit, including the direction of possible developments and improvements of our conceptual systems or explanatory theories. Moreover, in any knowledge and any scientific claim we presuppose performative forms of life performances and some well-working understanding of linguistic acts. This even includes all forms of reflection on the world of our knowledge, and on philosophy itself. This is the reason why philosophy contains in an interesting sense all meta-philosophical discourse. The meta-scientific debates usually *transcend*

the limited disciplines of the sciences, just as meta-mathematics, properly understood, is no merely mathematical theory. It is already part of a philosophical reflection on the constitution of some limited mathematical theories, as, for example, arithmetic, Euclid's geometry, and Cartesian Algebra together with the real and abstract analysis of higher arithmetic, embedded in mathematical set theory. No "working mathematician" was ever interested (or has ever really understood) the *linguistic* constitution of the ideal points, lines and planes of geometry, not even of set theory. This is the reason why Frege counts as a philosopher rather than as a mathematician and Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections on the very constitution of mathematical domains of discourse are still underestimated. This is not so much a claim as a mere observation. For further details I refer to Vojtěch Kolman's book on *Zahlen* (Kolman 2016) or my *Formen der Anschauung* (Stekeler-Weithofer 2008), which gives a systematic introduction into the constitution of mathematics in a really Wittgensteinian flavor, in such a way that it credits Frege with his insights into the role of syntax and truth value semantics in such a constitution.

Be this as it may, my critical picture of the naturalist, formalist, and ontologically atomist metaphysics in the second part of the 20$^{th}$ century is a necessary starting point in order to overcome the current misunderstandings of so-called continental philosophy. The split between continental and analytical philosophy dates back to the first part of the last century. It is a result of an underestimation of the thought of figures like Heidegger and Ortega, of Husserl and Wittgenstein.

Another thing to notice here is this. It was and still is misleading to accuse these thinkers of "subjectivism". On the contrary, their deepest insight is that in the whole world there is no more "objective" truth than this: every claim and statement in everyday life as well as in science and philosophy is, by its very form, at first a subjective and perspectival *performance*. Performing practices, actions, behavior, including all kinds of speech acts, as writers like Searle will say, is more basic than the truth or fulfilment of any determinate condition or content. In other words, if we think critically enough, as any philosophical reflection should do if it does not collapse into some sort of metaphysical dogmatism, we always must keep in mind that *any* statements about the world, more precisely, about things or events *in* the world, are, at first and foremost, *assertions*. They are *claims*, *contentions*, *propositions* in the sense of *proposals*, i. e. *Versicherungen*, *assurances* as Hegel had already clearly seen. We call a *content* of such an assurance "true" not because it expresses a "picture of the world" in the sense of Richard Rorty's "mirror of nature", but if we judge the general (*prima facie*, default) orientation expressed *as sufficiently reliable* for further use. This insight into the pragmatic finitude of every truth connects critical meta-physics

of Hegel with American pragmatism on one side, existential pragmatism or the performative perspectivism of Heidegger and Ortega on the other side.

In other words, we cannot define the "content" of statements by a theory of representation and truth (*Abbildtheorie der Wahrheit*), as pre-pragmatic (in fact, pre-Kantian, metaphysical) ontology and epistemology believe.

## 2 Finite rationality and infinite reason

The differentiation between *rationality* (*Verstand*) as the mere competence to follow externally pre-given rules of conduct and *reason* as the competence of using principles in free evaluations of rule-followings goes back to Kant. Hegel makes the distinction more precise by showing that explicative (re-)constructions of (pre-)given norms and rules have a unique and peculiar logical form. In them, we comment on the practice to fulfil certain normative conditions or forms, to comply to rules and norms in *free action*. We do not just explain some regular behavior as we do in the case of natural occurrence (*Widerfahrnis*). For even when present animal appetites play some decisive roles for my behavior, I might have made free choices. This holds for all cases in which I could have decided against my "desire" in favor of some "higher" goal or intention of free will.

We cannot "experience" the dispositions as such by mere perceptions. This is so not because our eyes are not sharp enough, but because the very notion of a "force", "efficient cause", or "disposition" in the sense of a potential cause are categorically of a different kind: They are categories of our understanding (*Verstandeskategorien*), constituted by learned "rules". Knowledge about dispositions presupposes the competence to make use of generic rules of default inference. Even a sentence like "cats have four legs" says something like this: *if* something is a cat, it normally has four legs. Therefore, on the ground of this rule, one is entitled in normal cases to infer or expect that the particular animal in question has four legs. If speakers know that some relevant default inferences or dispositions do not hold, they must warn the hearer. This leads to the non-monotonic dialectical reasoning in real dialogues, in which further information – often marked by a word like "but" – can prevent us from using certain default expectations.

I cannot go deeper here into the question of *how* science develops the *concepts* in the sense of "fitting" appropriate generic rules of inferences to usable criteria of differentiation and measurement, mediated by a corresponding "*logos*" or expression for the whole concept. I only remark that we should not identify concepts merely with classificatory differentiations. Any real concept is inferentially *thick*. The word goes back to Bernard Williams, but he and Eliz-

abeth Anscombe have used it at first only for ethical inferences and evaluations – like the morally thick notions of stealing or buying. We must generalize the case to the very notion of conceptual content. Such content consists in a system of dispositions. We combine, so to speak, in all world-related words some criteria of making distinctions with default expectations. When we say, for example, that water is a fire-extinguisher, we make some such default rules explicit; but even the identity of water and $H_2O$ already expresses a rule of inference, namely with respect to chemical processes of burning hydrogen or setting oxygen free.

Science is a joint enterprise to develop our concepts by explicating implicit norms of default expectations or inferences in the form of explicit theories. In some such theories, we articulate generic knowledge about "nature", i. e. about what happens without our technical interventions. In other theories, we develop concepts in order to articulate schemes of actions or generic actions, which we can perform, in appropriate situations, more or less at will.

We can call a subject who is able to make a proper use of such "technical" knowledge "rational". A person who is able to evaluate the proper use and develop its form already needs, however, "free reason": Such a person takes part in our joint enterprise to develop and apply the sciences. This enterprise is only a local part of developing and deploying forms of leading a good life in the world, together with (all) other persons in the world. Unfortunately, some writers criticize Ortega today for this obviously trivial but utterly important insight by attaching to him labels like *Lebensphilosophie* (life philosophy). However, it would be ridiculous, a category mistake, to expect from the sciences answers to the question how to *organize* our *social* life. Therefore, the form we do sciences is not the topic of the sciences. It is the topic of philosophical reflection – and political cooperation.

Nevertheless, people in all disciplines tend to forget immediately the only limited scope of our knowledge expressed in the theories of the natural sciences. This happens, for example, when people overestimate the determining roles of our genes for our actual behavior (and not just as a limiting precondition for what we can learn) or of our electric processes in the brain (as necessary conditions but not sufficient causes) of our thinking and acting. In some of his (popular) statements, even Ortega himself seems to overestimate the brave new world of physiological knowledge, even before neurophysiological cognition theory has turned to some wild speculations about our intelligent competence. Such theories usually neglect any critical topography or logical geography of what we *can* explain with them, for example in physiology, and what we *must* explain by reference to cultural development and practical human education. If we do so, the genes and brains, physics, chemistry and biology, only play the role of articulating some necessary preconditions of usually normal faculties and competences.

Reason is "infinite" only insofar as it reflects on the logical geographic of larger parts of the world. Cognition theory, for example, articulates only some object-level generic knowledge about some limited domains of natural preconditions of human actions including linguistic and communicative acts, embedded in the corresponding cooperative practices. Such practices are the result of a long history of human culture. These actions and practices have social *forms*. We *cannot* investigate these forms by the usual methods of physiology, just because these forms only *exist* in the ways in which we freely *reproduce* and *recognize* the forms more or less successfully. Success is not only success of interaction with nature. It is success in cooperation.

## 3 Knowledge and wisdom, theory and speculation

Human knowledge comes in two flavors, empirical knowledge about what has happened and is happening, and general knowledge about what will or would happen if something else shall be the case – or would have happened most probably, if something were the case. Animal cognition consists, in contrast, only of immediate reactions. Empirical knowledge is mainly historical knowledge. If it is prognostic, when we want to foresee something in the future or when we describe non-present possibilities, we already make use of generic knowledge – which plays the role of some relatively a priori conceptual knowledge about what things in a whole genus usually do or, what amounts roughly to the same, what we can expect them to do. Generic knowledge is dispositional knowledge. It is law-like, under general conditions.

In the sciences, we develop generic law-like knowledge about nature and about what we technically can do. Theories are to be viewed here as systems of conceptual rules. In the reflective knowledge about our human social practices and institutions we develop generic knowledge about our cooperative life. In empirical knowledge, we *apply* the generic-conceptual knowledge of the Sciences and *Geisteswissenschaften* to particular and singular cases.

A different form of knowledge – and language – traditionally stands under the label "wisdom", in German: "*Weisheit*", in Latin: "*sapientia*". We use such knowledge in a distinct way. We separate it from *scientia* or *theoria* as well as from *empiria* or mere *historia*.

The standard forms of articulating wisdom are gnomic oracles, aphorism, and principles. In fact, the public seems to love philosophers most when they present their wisdom in such a poetic and, at the same time, short mnemonic

way. This explains part of the success of philosophical writers (as Heidegger ironically says) like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Despite his rather classical rhetoric, Ortega has also coined a fair list of such sayings of wisdom. I only cite a few: *To define something means to exclude and negate*. This is, in fact, joint wisdom of Spinoza and Hegel.

*Phantasy is man's faculty of freedom*. We first have to be able to depict the future we want to work for before we can work for it.

*Freedom consists in the necessity to make decisions*. This catachrestic gnomon, with inbuilt contradiction, says that it is nonsense to claim that there is no freedom of acting (under some plans). Even when I am lazy and let my inner impulse or outer seduction drive my behavior, more often than not it was I myself who decided not to decide, not to plan, or not to stick to my plans. In other words, many human non-actions, omissions, quietisms are free actions. The word "free" is just a marker for the categorical difference between natural events and actions. We can perform or actualize actions freely or at will after some general training and particular planning. Kant is, at least in some sense, right to say that any person who knows what she should do acts freely when she decides to comply; but we must add with Hegel that in such a case a person acts freely also when she decides not to do what she knows that she should do. This is independent from the many meanings of the "should", which can express a moral norm as well as an instrumental rule or a technical advice. However, we must presuppose that the person knows it possible to act this way (as we can perform all parts of the actions requested at will).

The advantage of such *laconic* sentences consists in their role as a kind of iron rations for occasional orientation. Some of them make implicit conceptual connections explicit. Some of them name the logical place of a practice like giving or looking for causal explanations or definitions.

Even though Wittgenstein belongs to the movement of 20$^{th}$-century analytic philosophy, the style of his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (in the translation of Wittgenstein 1922 by D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuiness) stands in the tradition of gnomic aphorisms, as the following core sentences show:

1 The world is all that is the case.

We should not view the world as a set of particles moving around in space like in a bucket without walls but as everything we can *meaningfully* talk about and what would correspond to *true* propositions.

5.1361 We *cannot* infer the events of the future from those of the present. Superstition is nothing but belief in the causal nexus.

Any prognosis uses generic inferences that are only more or less reliable. Believing in causal pre-determination of any and every future event is the most dangerous and wide-spread superstition, from the times of believing in some god's predestination to modern scientism.

5.6 The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

My world is what I can refer to consciously, and consciousness in the strong sense of taking part in a practice of co-knowing (*con-scientia*) is limited by what I can say – or, for that matter, *show as repeating forms* to others and myself.

5.621 The world and life are one.

This sentence fits to all things dear to Ortega. It expresses in a gnomic way the relatively a priori position of the living human with respect to any claim or proposal of "true" statements "about the world" – *in which* we live.

5.63 I am my world (the microcosm).

Fichte and Hegel have already seen that the use of the word "I" can be as wide as the use of the word "my". As a result, you can insult me if you insult my daughter; and I can say that what belongs to me does not end at the skin of my living body. In a sense, the expressions "*am*" or "*bin*" are logically no copulae as the "is" in "5 is a prime number", but express a performative attitude. If I say that *I am my world*, then I say that any attitude I have to the world is an attitude to myself and vice versa. The same insight can be found in Hegel, Heidegger, and Ortega.

5.632 The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.

This is a version of the logical insight (which we also find in Fichte and Hegel) that when I talk *about me*, the performative subject who talks (namely I) is *not* identical with the formal subject in the sentence expressed, but the two moments are somehow identified. The logical object I talk about is a generic possibility. I can never know everything about myself, for this would mean to know everything about the world. I am no object in the world, but my life limits my world, i.e. what the world is *for me* or *in relation to me*.

6.13 Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. – Logic is transcendental.

The sentences we produce in our logical reflections on the logical forms of thinking and speaking do not describe empirical facts and do no prescribe what to do but *show* what we do when we think and speak and what we should do if we want

to do this reasonably or with good understanding. Showing something means to presuppose that the other is able to follow, i.e. to reproduce the performative forms shown (well enough). Therefore, the truth, or rather: utility, of any logical analysis refers to some knowing how to do and not by some mystical correspondence to the world. Ortega and Heidegger express the same insights in other words.

6.32 The law of causality is not a law but the form of a law.

When we say that every event has a cause in some other events, we articulate an oracle, not a claim about the world. The oracle can be read as saying that all events hang together. As such, it only reminds us that individuation of events is cutting moments out of a continuous process. The world itself is such a process. In the case of an event that has happened we are always entitled to ask if there are general laws that can help us to express and understand the singular event as an instance of a generic form that is or can be realized repeatedly. This form of looking for form is a form of our hopefully intelligent life, not a mystical fact of a transcendent world "*an sich*" behind the screen of our experience of life and our talking about the world.

6.432 *How* things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world.

The oracle expresses an attitude to the contingencies of the *empirical* world. When something happens *by chance*, not as a result of our responsibilities, we just have to accept it without letting it affect our overall "attitude" to the world. Such an attitude is "good" if it is "optimistic" in the sense of Leibniz and Hegel and their "theodicy", which accepts the factual world all in all as beautiful, just as the dying Wittgenstein will do with his whole life. Pessimism is a "bad" attitude: Here Wittgenstein departs with Nietzsche from Schopenhauer as educator. The attitude to God consists in a *spirit of trust* (as R. B. Brandom will name his book on Hegel's *Phenomenology*). No fact in the world can prove or disprove God: the religious attitudes of belief, hope, and love, are attitudes to the whole world, not to particular events in the world; and they are attitudes to oneself. God, the world and I are, in a sense, the same.

6.44 It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.

If we want to understand religious mysticism, we must understand it as an attitude to the fact of the world and our life in it.

6.45 To view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole – a limited whole.

Religion is a practice to express attitudes to the whole world, i.e. to God. The whole is limited in such an attitude just because what we talk about or how we represent it is different from what it is, just as I *am* different from any picture I make of myself and any attribution of properties to myself.

6.521 The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.

It is unclear what the problem of life should be. Any problem disappears, however, if we see that even all our knowledge and all our reasonable doubts, any wanting to know and any believing to know are just moments or "parts" in our being-in-the-world (as Heidegger will say).

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understanding me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them.

All sentences of the *Tractatus* are gnomic oracles, not statements about some or many empirical facts in the world. They are "nonsensical" in the literal meaning that they do not talk about what can be perceived by the senses. What they say cannot be seen or felt or heard or proved as true by looking around or touching things. They are not "meaningful" if we restrict this expression to empirical cases for which the truth or falsity is already determined on the ground of basic empirical propositions of the form "this thing over there is such and so". Nor do they express logical or conceptual rules of inference. They express performative forms of life.

7 What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

Obviously, the *Tractatus* ends in a deliberate catachrestic oracle. One can say that one is silent about something. But one cannot say in German that one should "*über etwas schweigen*". The phrase is as ungrammatical as Heidegger's sentence "*das Nichts nichtet*", which cannot be translated because "the nothing annihilates" and all other versions sound stupid. This is so because in the English language the usage of nominalizations is always under suspicion of reifications of things and they are not just read, as in Ancient Greek and German, as harmless abbreviations of comments on generic cases. Of course, in these languages we also rely on the education of the speakers and readers, which in fact is declining, not least by copying blindly attitudes of other linguistic traditions. Heidegger's mnemonic gnomon thus expresses a comment to the *most general use* of the words "*nicht*" and "*nichts*". The words "not" and "nothing" just cancel somehow what was said. If I say, for example, that Caesar is no prime number, I just cancel the sentence "Caesar is a prime number". If I

made a joke and identified a favored number like 9 with Caesar, I could have concluded that Caesar can be divided by a smaller number. If we talk about things in the categorically correct domain, the natural numbers, we can draw such a conclusion, if not, then not. This is so because by using the "not" in the categorically correct case we not only annihilate the proposition but *assert* the negated sentence. Similarly, if we say that there is nothing in this room, we cancel only the statement that there is a thing of a certain sort, a medium sized dry thing, in the room. We do not say that there is absolutely nothing, no atom or no electromagnetic wave, in the room. It is the problem of Carnap and his followers, not of Heidegger, if they are not able or willing to read the sentence in this obviously non-mysterious way.

In Wittgenstein's case, his last sentence just appeals to make not too many words about things that can be understood only by doing, in practice. This holds, firstly, for all kinds of logical comments. Think, for example, of Frege's elucidations of open propositions A(x) as unsaturated functions; or consider the introduction of the generalized quantifier by already using the word "all". Another paradigm is the explanation of what counts as a number term t in a *finite* series of number terms that lead from the position or number 0 to t in finitely many steps of adding 1. In order to refute sophistic criticisms of circularity here, we have to (learn to) understand the crucial words "unsaturated", "all" and "finite" *empractically*, as I would like to say, making use of Karl Bühler's helpful expression "empraktisch" (from his *Sprachtheorie* of 1934, cf. Bühler 1999). The same holds for the appeals to distinguish different attitudes like love and hate of the world or myself, or trust and distrust of God, i. e. of the world, of mankind, hence of myself.

Wisdom now appears as a kind of general attitude. It is general knowing to find one's way around. It may need some calm "overview" together with self-standing judgments of an adult person. As persons, we take part in using and controlling all kinds of language levels, not only the level of discursive essays or so-called argumentations, but also of gnomic principles and their free application – which in some sense resembles the applications of a Christian catechism or penitential. We use it by looking around if the sentence or formula makes good sense in our experience. If I do not find some, I should not bother to *deny the sentence*, claim that it is wrong or unclear. I can just remain content by saying that it is not useful *for me*, just as most books are not, but they may be useful for others. This is the way we use gnomic or laconic aphorisms – and how we should understand what we are doing when we use them.

It may sound strange now, but philosophy is the *art of using laconic sentence in sketches of logical geographies*. As such, philosophy cannot be a "theory" in the sense of a mathematical or scientific system of "conceptual sentences".

This is the deep reason why Wittgenstein is right to reject and exclude *theory-construction* in philosophy. But when we compare the appellative style of, say, Ortega's lecture on what philosophy is, Heidegger's reflection on what thinking means or on *Being and Time*, and Wittgenstein's later dialogical comments on paradigmatic problems, the question might arise which of these forms are the best for genuine philosophical reflections.

My presumption is that the style of philosophical thinking is and must be free to include *all* possible styles – in contradistinction to the argumentative style in proposing and controlling new generic theories, as it fits to the sciences. The encyclopedic style of monographic textbooks is also of a different sort. A special way to express theories or conceptual default knowledge consists in the use of mathematical toy models and formal considerations. Philosophy, in contrast, does not exclude any other scientific or every day prose or even literary style. Philosophy becomes provincial if any such form is excluded – just as the literary form of *prose* is defined by allowing *all* forms, including dramatic dialogues, lyrics and songs, if they fit or seem helpful. Ironically, the style or form of the nature sciences and of the social and cultural sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) is limited, just as the style of lyrical poetry is limited; but the forms of philosophical comments and reflections cannot and should not be limited. As a result, we do not have to analyze now the style of scientific essay-writing and producing results on power-point panels in further detail. It suffices to see that the philosophical forms must be more liberal and transgress the limits of these forms of articulation just because of the different levels and heights of reflective and speculative overviews and structural comments.

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# Rationality, Philosophy, and Common Sense

**Abstract:** In this paper I explore the relations between rationality, common sense and philosophy. I begin by characterizing what I call the "checking problem" (the task of determining if something is "irrational", especially in the context of intercultural dialogue) and distinguishing two strategies for solving it: forward checking (producing a new framework or new concepts to test the suspicious items) and backward checking (stepping back to former situations and familiar concepts, and trying to relate them to the suspicious items). After presenting arguments to discredit forward checking, I argue that backward checking leads us to common sense, which can be seen as the core of our familiar notion of rationality. Considering that dealing with the checking problem is one of the main tasks of the philosopher, and that frequently philosophical theories are also themselves subject to the checking problem, I conclude that the backbone of the intelligibility of philosophy is precisely common sense.

## 1 Introduction[1]

This paper deals with the relations between the three notions named in the title: philosophy, rationality and common sense. As the reader will discover by the end of the paper, I defend the idea that there is a very close, essential connection between all three of them. However, I will not dive straight in with that thesis. Instead, I begin by examining one of the many philosophical issues involving rationality; one which, from a theoretical point of view, is no more important than many others, but one which I firmly believe can play an important practical role. In short, this issue is the problem of finding an answer to the question: "How do we check that something is rational?" and therefore I will call it "the checking problem". I will explore the main lines of a strategy that can be adopted to tackle

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the checking problem and which emerges from the work of some distinguished philosophers in the last century. Although I think that the same kind of strategy can be traced back to the work of thinkers belonging to other traditions (as in the cases of Peirce, Heidegger or Ortega y Gasset), I will focus on those philosophers who in the history of analytical philosophy are usually considered as the main proponents of what is called "Informal", "Common" or "Ordinary Language Philosophy": Austin, Wittgenstein and, to a lesser extent, Moore. Later I will explain why, more than half a century after their deaths, it is still worthwhile exploring their thought in order to attend to contemporary demands; but first I wish to explain the importance of the checking problem by taking a look at four contexts in which the problem appears.

To begin with, the question of rationality arises when there is a suspicion of irrationality. And that suspicion may indeed be well founded as irrationality does appear at least once in a while in our practices. First, there are plain and patent irrational acts (which we could refer to as examples of *manifest irrationality*). For example, the explicit purpose of a Dadaist is to shock us with nonsense. Dadaist discourse lacks the rational features of standard discourse, and one who read or tried to understand it as being logical would be derided and possibly laughed down. Not only shame, but also rancor, may well be felt by someone who failed to recognize the irrationality of the second kind of irrational items I wish to consider: those whose irrationality their producer is well aware of, but which are presented to us as rational (*hoax irrationality*). This is the case of the famous Sokal affair, for instance, and other similar shams; but there are also more serious examples, where the hoax costs the victim money and causes considerable suffering. This is what happens to some members of certain sects or cults; looking at it from the outside, the discourse, the acts and even the way of life all look completely insane, but the sect members are unable to perceive this. I consider this more damaging kind of pretense as a third type of irrationality; which brings us finally to those actions that are not deliberately irrational, but, on the contrary, are instances on which an agent, one could say, "falls into irrationality" when driven by obsession or excessive ambition (*unintended irrationality*). Typically we associate this kind of irrationality with people who are considered mentally disturbed. Here the "irrationality" is linked to a more personal disorder (maybe we could say that it is a symptom of a psychological problem). However, there are also other instances of unintended irrationality, such that the agent is considered well balanced; they are not the result of insanity, but merely of incompetence. When someone tries something well beyond their capabilities, it is very possible that the attempt ends in inanities or stupidities, and sometimes people go as far as to surpass the limits of rea-

son (any editor of a specialized journal is surely familiar with amateur masterpieces of unintended nonsense).

Second, the checking problem arises in the context of interaction across different conceptual frameworks; both in intercultural dialogue and in the comparison of epistemic systems, ideologies or languages. Many times, when we are confronted with things that are alien to us (justifications, values, rules, concepts), our usual procedures are no longer useful and special tools are required to evaluate the novel item. In intercultural dialogue, many times "rational" means almost the same as "reasonable", and the issue is not always simple (is consulting the oracle reasonable?) but complex and relational (is going to the shaman instead of to a conventional doctor reasonable?). Similar questions arise when one compares different logics, different epistemic systems or simply different scientific paradigms. Once again, the issue cannot be answered through mechanical application of one's own rules, because of the risk of begging the question (if a move is made in accordance with a certain rule, it is natural that it looks illicit when judged according to another rule). So, how do we check rationality?

Third, the checking problem is also related to the issue of the source (or sources) of rationality. Indeed, sooner or later the issue of what is rational leads us to the question of where our rational schemes and features come from. This may seem a purely theoretical question (it is certainly more "philosophical"); but I think it also has a practical side. This is because knowing the source of rationality is of the utmost importance when we ask ourselves *why* we ought to be rational, or simply (and more dramatically) *if* we ought to be rational. Unless we want to make rationality a religious requirement (a move which, I would say, does not work; at least, not since Nietzsche's hammering), a minimum justification is needed; and that justification can also be found by identifying the elements from which we acquire our rational products and by measuring their importance for our lives.

Fourth, the problem also arises in relation to philosophical activity. Philosophers introduce considerations that affect the very core of our standards of rationality; they move through the margins of everyday life, ordinary language and common sense. So, and as was the case in the previous cases of unintended irrationality, they run the risk of producing nonsense (not an uncommon accusation between philosophers, and that is no mere coincidence). So, the checking problem is not only of philosophical interest by itself (especially, as I said above, due to its connection with the question of the source of rationality), but it is also especially important both for the practice of philosophy and for the status of its results. It is, we could say, not only a philosophical problem but also a metaphilosophical one.

## 2 Forward and backward rationality

Now that I have explained why I think the checking problem is important, I will clarify how I examine the problem in this paper. I want to understand the question "How do we check if something is rational?" in the most general terms. So, the scope of this "something" should include anything that can be attributed to humans: acts, thoughts, beliefs, behavior, speech acts and even feelings. Although I focus on discourse for the sake of the simplicity of the argument, I think that the rationality of action is no less important (and perhaps it is more so), and that it is mostly in the interaction between speech and action that the evaluation is finally completed. Because I want to examine the question in the broadest terms, my purpose is not to give a specific answer to it. I think that the question only makes sense when we change the "something" for a specific "this" and provide a situation in which the question qualifies as playing a role; and the philosopher only speculates about the nature of such a context. That is why I do not want to understand the question as one asking about the criteria of rationality. Quite simply, I do not believe that either a single criterion or a whole set of criteria could be provided *a priori* and afterwards applied to any context. That was a very popular philosophical enterprise once upon a time, when philosophers such as Carnap and the young Wittgenstein aimed to provide the sufficient and necessary conditions for rational discourse; and there are still supporters of such a project (akin to what I am going to call "forward checking"). But I want to understand the checking question in even broader terms; and so, including the enterprise of Carnap "et al." within its scope, I can ask: How do we manage to look for criteria (universal or specific) for rationality; and is it rational to look for universal criteria?

Therefore, I want to take a close look at the moves one makes after asking oneself the question; or, metaphorically, at the direction of the dialectical processes the question triggers. Where does the asker's gaze turn? Although it may be considered an oversimplification, and although different options could well be conceived, I will take into consideration two very basic strategies that I will call (once again, metaphorically) "backward" and "forward" checking. One rationally checks forward when one tries to produce a new context in which to examine and evaluate the present situation. This is why I call it "forward": the aim is to create something new, to produce a new perspective that will allow us to observe ourselves and our present circumstances from a certain distance. As every student of philosophy knows, the figure who is identified with this manoeuver for the first time in the history of philosophy is René Descartes. Although Descartes focused on the epistemological problem (How can I check whether I

am justified in believing?), he begins the bold approach that culminates with Kant and his *Critiques*, in which he creates a completely novel kind of discourse and even a new kind of thinking (with its own concepts and rules): transcendental or critical thinking. In the 20th century, as every student of philosophy also knows, the focus shifts to language. The question regarding rationality takes the shape of a question about intelligibility, and "irrational" here means "senseless". The forward strategy reaches its peak, and philosophers dare to create *ex nihilo* a complete new language (with its own logic, grammar and even semantics) and only that which can be translated into the new language has meaning and deserves to be called "rational".

The Cartesian, the Kantian and the "Tractatian" versions of forward checking all still have followers (cf. Apel's and Habermas's new twist in critical thinking); but at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, another version became more popular, at least among analytical philosophers. The new version meets Quine's demand of submitting the checking problem to science. Naturalism in its scientistic version is just one modality of the forward checking strategy I am describing here. Now the philosopher does not produce the new context anymore, but delegates this task to the scientist. Since it is the case that the current state of scientific knowledge cannot fulfill this task for many items, the philosopher encourages and sometimes helps the advance of the specific science required (depending on the item and the philosopher; physics, linguistics, neurophysiology, etc.).

It is not my purpose to engage in polemics and, I must say, I do not see *prima facie* anything wrong in the forward checking strategy. There are even some positive points that the backward strategy (which I endorse) lacks: it is progressive; it encourages creativity and innovation; and it maximizes the autonomy of the subject. However, as every student of philosophy *should* know, at least in the strong versions I have just described ("strong" because the aim of the philosopher or scientist is to produce a new frame that takes priority and ever "rules" over the standard frame), the forward checking strategy has lost much of its past credibility. There are many reasons for this (perhaps the principal one is that even centuries after Descartes, no consensus has been reached regarding the criteria of rationality), with some of the objections coming from Wittgenstein and the other authors I discuss below; in short, they claim that by removing oneself from the preexisting conceptual framework, intelligibility is lost. This leads many philosophers to claim that there is no escape from our situation or our framework (there is, pace Putnam, no such thing as "eye of God's" perspective) and consequently there is no humanly possible means of checking our own rationality. I will not pursue (or refute) that line of argumentation here; instead, I will explore an alternative that avoids the dilemma (in short: we either create a

"suspicious" new frame or we cannot check the rationality of our own frame) by introducing a third option.

The backward checking strategy is just the opposite of the former. Instead of moving forward, attempting to produce something new, it steps back to former situations and tries to relate them to our present situation. The motivation is clear: faced with an unusual thing, we look for more familiar, more basic and clearer situations where we can place our feet on firm ground; and from there, we observe what the unusual thing is like and consider how we can return to our current position while remaining oriented. Take as an example the way in which Austin addresses the issue of the knowledge of other minds and especially of the thesis of the incorrigibility of first-person beliefs defended by Wisdom in the symposium *Other Minds*. Instead of embarking on psychological studies or speculation and producing new technical notions for the analysis, Austin proceeds by "going back", examining how we answer a very basic question in everyday situations: "How do we know something is a goldfinch?" and how we decide whether someone is mistaken as to a certain thing being a goldfinch (Austin 1961, 45). He continues by introducing more complex, intermediate cases such as: "How do you know that IG Farben worked for war?"; "How do you know the election is today?"; "How do you know the Persians were defeated at Marathon?"; "How do you know it's a real stick?"; and "How do you know it's really bent?". Austin then goes on to compare the cases with each other, noting similarities and differences, until he finally arrives at the cases under discussion ("Are you sure he's really angry?" and "Why do you believe he was lying?"), which are now much clearer and more intelligible to us. This procedure allows him to establish not only that it is rational to claim that we know that someone is angry, but also to establish the irrationality of some of Wisdom's predicaments; such as, that we only know someone else's mind by symptoms (it only makes sense to talk about symptoms by way of implied contrast with inspection regarding the item itself) and that one cannot be mistaken about one's own mind (one can doubt that one is feeling love; or the doctor can convince me that my pain is imaginary). It is important to notice that at no moment does Austin depart from real, shared human experience. He does not "build" new things, but recalls old ones. His examples are not thought experiments, counterfactual scenarios or idealized positions; he takes them from everyday life, from the real practice of professionals who are "experts" on the matter (judges, doctors, psychiatrists and so forth) or from anomalous but nevertheless plausible situations. All his examples, the common and the rare, the ordinary and the special, the quotidian and the exceptional ("Professional actors may reach a state where they never really know what their genuine feelings are"; Austin 1961, 80), are ex-

amples of circumstances in which we recognize and understand the use of the expressions involved straightaway.

An analogous strategy (and, not surprisingly, one that leads to almost the same conclusion) is adopted by Wittgenstein in a section of *Philosophical Investigations* that runs intermittently between paragraphs § 243 and § 350. There, Wittgenstein introduces all kinds of familiar examples (toothache or a baby's smile; § 249), other unusual ones (Siamese twins; § 253) and others that he seems to have made up (turning to stone; § 283 or invisible painful patches; § 312), and he asks the reader: "What would you say in this situation?" Step by step, Wittgenstein advances towards philosophical theses, pointing to similarities and differences, till we can perceive, for example, the similarity between a philosophical thesis and plain nonsense ("The proposition 'Sensations are private' is comparable to: 'One plays patience by oneself'." § 248).

In short, the backward strategy for tackling the checking problem consists of looking for familiar items or situations that are similar to the case in hand and asking what ordinary people using ordinary language would say about them. The strategy works by finding matches and mismatches between the given examples and the case in hand. The more cases and the more varied, the better. It is also important to take into consideration not only standard, simple and unproblematic examples, but also complex and unusual examples; situations where "something goes wrong" (Austin 1962, 14), where rules have somehow been shown to be conflictive, where there has been an unexpected violation of the rules, or where the rules are applied to an intricate or novel case. This is important not only because it is in these cases that the implicit, unnoticed rules became salient, but also because it is through the confrontation between different family resemblances that one can gain the "holistic" view that is required to understand the case in question.[2]

Precisely this, incidentally, is the reason why Austin and particularly Wittgenstein use some imaginary, sometimes highly fantastic, examples (for example, the beetle in a box or humanity with blue/red switched). The recourse to imaginary cases is justified as a means of examining intermediate cases between the familiar and the completely unfamiliar, in order to appreciate similarities and differences. The purpose, however, is always to see what common sense

**2** "A main source of our failure to understand is that we do *not command a clear view* of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate cases." (Wittgenstein 1953, § 122)

says about them; not to deduce any philosophical theses (as is the case with Descartes's demon, Putnam's Twin Earth and other thought experiments).[3]

## 3 Common sense old and new (or "psychological" versus "communitarian")

Although nowadays the term has some connotations that can lead to misunderstandings, and some important qualifications are in order, I will call the basic and shared ground on which Austin and Wittgenstein stand "common sense". Common sense is, therefore, where we go when we move backward. I will not try to define common sense (what is and what is not common sense is itself a matter of common sense) although I think that Rescher's expression (not cited here as a definition) could do a lot of the work: "the commonplaces of everyday-life experience of ordinary people in the ordinary course of things" (Rescher 2005, 11).[4]

In the philosophical domain the recourse to common sense is not a novel idea. For example, Aristotle adopts such a strategy when faced with skeptical doubts in *Metaphysics*. Shortly after Descartes forward strategy, Claude Buffier replied that it is common sense, and not the achievements of scholastic philosophy, that provides the principal rule for judging central issues. Soon thereafter, Thomas Reid replied to Hume's attacks on scientific and philosophical knowledge also by referring to

**3** I would like to generalize what Kaplan says about Austin's method when doing epistemology to a claim about global philosophical methodology: "Austin's requirement that epistemology be faithful to what we ordinarily say and do is thus more subtle than one might have thought. It does not demand that epistemology bend slavishly to the contours of ordinary practice. What it requires, rather, is that our ordinary assessment of our epistemic condition coincides with our ordinary assessment of that condition." (Kaplan 2011, 75)

**4** A restricted definition is given by Moore: "What is meant by saying that so-and-so is a feature or item in 'the Common Sense view of the world'? Something like this: 'that it is a thing which every or nearly every sane adult who has the use of all his senses believes or knows'." (Moore 2002, 280) The reader can find two good philosophical accounts of the notion in Rescher 2005 and Stroll 1987. Herman Parrett 1987 gives a list of four properties of common-sense beliefs that, I think, applies to all its philosophical descriptions: (i) held universally, (ii) inescapable, (iii) it is beyond confirmation or disconfirmation, (iv) it is the ground for all human action and interaction. Stroll (1987, 47) adds to Parrett's list five properties that, I believe, apply mostly to contemporary linguistic conceptions of common sense: (v) vagueness, (vi) publicity, (vii) negational absurdity, (viii) absorption, (ix) stand fast. As I say, Moore never explains what common sense is, but White 1958 gives a list of the criteria used by Moore: (1) universal acceptance, (2) compulsive acceptance, (3) inconsistency, (4) special kind of inconsistency (it would be inconsistent denying it after admitting it is common sense), (5) self-evidence.

common sense, thereby initiating a minor philosophical trend whose continuity to the 21st century was enabled by the works of philosophers such as James Beattie, James Oswald, Dugald Stewart, Sir William Hamilton, Cook Wilson, and recently Noah Lemos and Lynd Forguson.[5] From my point of view, it is natural and even fair that the "old" common-sense school (I will call "old" or "psychological" everything previous to Moore 1925) occupies a very marginal place in the history of philosophy. The reason is that the old common-sense philosophers lack both a satisfactory notion of common sense and a clear idea of how to use it in philosophical practice. They usually talk of common sense almost as they would talk of an oracle: a fountain of universal and certain truths that one consults by closing one's eyes and concentrating on the question. This psychological (subject-centered) and theoretical (comprised of thoughts) conception of common sense sometimes makes them indistinguishable from the philosophers they oppose (Descartes or Kant). Common sense becomes something that is transcendent or even transcendental to our human practices; so it is not uncommon that a theological or "humanist" explanation is operating in the background:

> Here accordingly, I understand by the common sense, that disposition which nature has placed in all humankind, or manifestly in the majority of them, in order to bring them, once they have attained the use of reason, a common and uniform judgment concerning many different objects of the sentiment intime of their own perception. (Buffier 1893, I.v.33, 15, quoted by Lemos 2004, p. 122)

"Nature has placed in all humankind" sounds here too similar to "infused in the human soul by God" (in the theological version) or "innately printed in the human mind" (in the secular version). In my opinion, what those philosophers lacked, and what philosophy did not possess until the 20th century, was an understanding of the role language plays in human life. The problem with the old common-sense philosophers was their failure to recognize: (i) the relation of common sense to language (common sense belongs to language and specifically to grammar) and (ii) the pragmatic nature of language (it is not the "vehicle of thought" but an activity performed collectively and socially regulated).

As for the former failure, (i), it is in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* that this indirect relation of common sense to the human condition is finally exposed. Although it can take the form of empirical propositions or mathematical truths, common

**5** See Forguson 1989, Lemos 2004 and Boulter 2007, who explicitly tie their work to the classic paradigm and skip or ignore Wittgenstein's and Austin's contributions. Although there is some divergence between their approaches and the old one (especially the introduction of theories and results from Biology or Psychology that take the place of the old theological explanations, as I explain in a later footnote), the notion of common sense is essentially not linguistic.

sense is not comprised of discoveries or inventions that I arrive at after explicit consideration. On the contrary, common sense is used to perform the consideration that allows me to make new discoveries, to carry out further investigation or to devise novel artefacts. Thus common sense contributes to shaping the activity of consideration; it is not in itself an act that is the exercise of that practice. In Wittgensteinian terms, common sense constitutes rules, not moves in the game. That is why it belongs to the background, to the framework, and one rarely makes it explicit. Now, when talk about human practices (or, in Wittgensteinian terms "games"), we talk primarily of language games. This is the main discovery, not of Wittgenstein, but of the 20th century: the acknowledgement that the principal human practices (art, politics, religion, economics, science, sport, etc.) can only be understood by attending to their symbolic, linguistic nature. One exercises common sense in the use of language or, as I would like to say, one "plays" common sense in linguistic practices. That is why Wittgenstein and Austin prefer to talk of "everyday language" instead of "common sense".

As for the latter failure, (ii), I do not want to reproduce here ideas that the reader surely knows perfectly well, so I will not describe the main features of the pragmatic conception of language proposed and initially developed by Austin and Wittgenstein. Instead, I will summarize the main features of the notion of common sense that emerges when we apply the contemporary "linguistic turn" in philosophy and the "pragmatic conception of language" of Austin and Wittgenstein to the old vision of common sense (I call this contemporary notion of common sense "new" or "linguistic"):

- It is practical (not theoretical): this is the main point, and essential to the non-philosophical uses of the expression ("common sense" is used as a synonym for prudential behavior). "Having common sense" does not mean knowing a theory or a collection of theories, it means knowing how to find the best course of action, how to deal with problems and how to arrive at a good solution in the different situations one encounters in life. Even if common sense is also essentially related to "understanding", one uses common sense to understand not sentences but situations, actions, events or speech acts. This means that a backward strategy provides a more complete approach to the checking problem (as I said above, not limited to discourse) (Wittgenstein 1969, § 27, § 204; Wittgenstein 1953, § § 491–492; or Austin 1962, chapter 1).
- It is historical: this feature is a key point in the departure from the old "almost transcendent" notion of common sense. Common sense is not a gift for mankind, it is a product of mankind. It is the product of communities, of societies, of individuals. One immediate consequence of this is that common-sense knowledge is not *a priori* in the classical sense; it has been created through phylogenesis. In ontogenesis, it is fundamentally learnt but partly

discovered by the individual (Austin 1961, 181, 274; Wittgenstein 1953, § 25, § 415, XII of part 2).

- It is vague: there is no fixed point of common-sense rationality; what makes sense in one situation does not in another; what is valid now may seem insane tomorrow. Furthermore, the limits of common sense are not well defined: some things clearly pertain to it (eating when you are hungry), some others clearly do not (the speed of light is 300,000 km/s) but many others are in an intermediate zone. As a result of the global vagueness of language, common-sense beliefs and concepts are also vague in the sense that they cannot be properly defined or described by propositions (Austin 1961, 181, 274; Wittgenstein 1969, § 454, § 473, § 511, § 673).
- It is collective: one of the main points of the pragmatic conception of language is the emphasis on the collective, social nature of language. This makes common sense not only shared, but also public, and consequently this undermines any psychological, ego-centered analysis of common sense. See Wittgenstein 1969, § 502, § 503 and especially § 298: "'We are quite sure of it' does not mean just that every single person is certain of it, but that we belong to a community which is bound together by science and education".
- It is temporally and spatially heterogeneous: the vagueness of common sense partly comes from its mutability; some things have simply stopped being it, while others are in the process of becoming it (note that to stop being common sense does not imply to become nonsense, but just to stop being "common"). The heterogeneity is well explained by the historical origin of common sense, and it also undermines the skeptical argument that uses counterexamples to common-sense claims in exceptional communities or former historical periods. Even if there may be universal or atemporal common-sense features, universality is not a necessary condition. It is simply enough that at a given time the majority of a community recognizes its validity as a matter of fact (Wittgenstein 1969, § 336).
- It is neither always simple nor always immediately obvious: as opposed to the traditional image of everyday language and folk knowledge as naive, the new common-sense philosophers discover a sophistication and a capacity for subtle distinctions equal or even superior to that in the scientific or philosophical domains. See for example Wittgenstein's comparison of the depth of a joke with philosophical depth (Wittgenstein 1953, § 110) or the comment regarding the technical use of "I know" in daily practice (Wittgenstein 1969, § 11). Alternatively, consider Austin's ironic refutation of Ayer's accusation against ordinary people as being "naive" by giving extremely fine everyday distinctions between illusions that philosophers lack (Austin

1960, 9 ff.). Consequently, the common-sense answer to a question is not always straightforward, and a certain amount of thinking and carefully consideration might be required, which partly explains why some people have more common sense than others. It also explains why it is that one can become confused in the application of the rules, and that some clarification – of the type the philosopher provides – might be required.

– It is fallible: as another consequence of its historical origin, common sense cannot be seen as an oracle anymore. Being common sense does not always imply being true, or being right. Sometimes common sense may be wrong, and many more times other solutions may be better than those provided by common sense (that is precisely the point in going to the expert). Common-sense tools can also become obsolete as society evolves, where new interest, new problems and new situations change the context of application (Moore 1925, 45; Wittgenstein 1969, § 425; Austin 1961, 185).

When we mix all these ingredients together, we arrive at a notion of common sense as a set of pragmatic rules of the system of language that is transversal to all language games, to all tools and concepts, and to all contexts (a scientific hypothesis or an engineering solution can be guided by common sense). This is so not only because it belongs to the grammar of all specific linguistic practices, but also because it is the sedimentation of the results of the different specific practices. Therefore, it is vague not only because it has no game of its own and consequently it is never made explicit, but also because language practices and tools are continuously changing in interaction with the medium and with each other, producing minor and sometimes major alterations in the framework. According to Wittgenstein's colorful metaphor:

> It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid (Wittgenstein 1969, § 96).

I will conclude this section by making a remark regarding my use of "common sense" as a general term referring to the approaches of Moore, Austin and Wittgenstein. Only Moore is usually included in the tradition of "Common-Sense Philosophy", and he is the only one that explicitly refers to common sense in the title of one of his opera magna (*A Defence of Common Sense*). Austin prefers to talk of "ordinary language" (Austin 1961, 185), "ordinary usage" (ibid., 48, 69) or "ordinary speech" (ibid., 69), but he also refers to "ordinary life" (ibid., 57, 189) and to the "ordinary" (ibid., 203) or "plain" (ibid., 59) "man" (Austin

1960, 6 ff.), sometimes referring to him via a proper name ("Old Father William", Austin 1961, 54). Wittgenstein, like Austin, uses the expressions "ordinary language (or forms of language)" (Wittgenstein 1953, § 132, § 402, § 494) and the analogous "everyday use" or "practice" (ibid., § 106, § 116, § 120, § 197), although he also likes to use the expressions "actual language" (ibid., § 107, § 124) and "normal language" (ibid., § 288) for emphasizing that logical and "philosophical" languages are not. Like Austin, he frequently talks about ordinary life (ibid., § 108, § 156) and the "reasonable man" (Wittgenstein 1969, § 323, § 334) sometimes substituted by rhetorical use of the first person ("I", as an example of the common man). I think that the terminological differences are well explained by the fact I mentioned above that Austin and Wittgenstein (more clearly than Moore) have an understanding of human practices as essentially linguistic and consequently they include common sense within ordinary language (common sense is the core of ordinary language).[6] Some analytical work will be useful to clarify the concept. It is obvious that not every rule of language (nor every global rule of language) belongs to common sense; at least phonetic, strictly syntactic and some semantic rules are out. It is not easy, however, to distinguish what Austin (who never raised the question) or Wittgenstein (who seems to

**6** There are other interpretations of these philosophers that are akin to my "linguistic common sense" reading. As for Moore (who indistinctly refers to common sense and to ordinary language), my view is close to the classic Malcolm 1952 reading of Moore as a defender of ordinary language: "Moore's philosophizing has consisted mostly in his refuting the repudiators of ordinary language" (Malcolm 1952, 365). Meanwhile, Parrett 1987 and Stroll 1987 both agree on reading Wittgenstein, and especially *On Certainty*, as a vindication of common sense akin to Moore's: "Wittgenstein still has something in common with Moore. Both of them are committed to the idea that each of us has a certain picture or view of the world that we inherit, that is not the product of inquiry of investigation, that is beyond justification and doubt, and that is the basis for all the other knowledge we possess and for most human actions and interactions that require the use of knowledge [...] We have seen that Moore calls this outlook 'The Common Sense View of the World', while Wittgenstein calls it 'My picture of the world'." (Stroll 1987, 46–47) The interpretation provided by Martin Gustafsson 2011 of Austin's defence of ordinary language as inscribed in ordinary life is very close to my common-sense reading: "According to Austin, established linguistic practices do not just give us a well-structured but empty game of philosophical argumentation and counter-argumentation. Rather, the way ordinary language is anchored in our real-life circumstances and needs – the way it has developed from and become shaped by those circumstances and needs – ensures that there is something of substantial significance here that we can 'really understand an operate with'. He believes that it is precisely by contrasting such organically developed practices with the frameworks invoked by philosophers that we can reveal the latter's artificiality and arbitrariness." (Gustafsson 2011, 14) This new interpretation of Austin as close to the later Wittgenstein (which I endorse) might have its roots in the classic and very "Wittgensteinian" reading of Austin by Cavell as a crusade against academic philosophers: "He [Austin] conveys the impression that the philosophers he is attacking are not really serious, that, one may say, they have written inauthentically." (Cavell 1969, 109)

raise the point in *On Certainty*) would include, because they refuse to distinguish between syntactic, semantic and pragmatic rules. Possibly they would prefer not to answer the question, given their emphasis on the vagueness of the rules.

## 4 The argument for common sense

In the next section I will examine the details of the strategy adopted to solve the checking problem based on common sense; but first I would now like to take a look at the reasons for adopting it; this, I believe, is a crucial point. Why should we step back to common-sense ground? Two different questions, that require different arguments, come together here. A relatively minor one, that I will examine later, concerns the advantages of philosophical methodology: What is the point of recalling common, previously known data? The other more dramatic question concerns the credibility of general opinion as a source of justified belief: Why do we have to trust common sense? How can we know that common sense is reliable?

It is not easy to find an answer to this latter question in the works of the authors we are considering here. They seem to tend to think that it is by no means necessary to provide such an answer. Having a reason to trust common sense is not a prerequisite for trusting it: we do not need a reason, any justification or even a motive. The reason, as stated by Moore commenting on Hume, is that "*we can't help believing*" (Moore 1922, 164). In both the *Investigations* and *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein describes and explains the nature of this compulsion, not as an impossibility of the individual to imagine, conceive or even act against it, but as a consequence of the central role common sense plays in the web of language games. As I said above, common sense belongs to language, and because it belongs to the rules of language, one cannot help committing oneself to common sense when one uses language.[7] Since language is a (or the) key ingredient of the human form of life, one "cannot avoid" using language. So the answer to the question: "Why do we have to trust common sense?" is: "Because we cannot avoid it".

On the other hand, just because these philosophers do not think it necessary to provide an argument for why we should trust common sense, that does not mean that they do not have reasons for doing so. Indeed, in their work we can find some clues that allow us not only to track their reasons, but also to build such an argument (considering that no such argument is owed or due, it

**7** Parrett, who as I said before agrees to read Wittgenstein's notion of common sense in a pragma-linguistic way, also states perfectly this opinion: "Common sense is the common ground we actively accept; to accept the ground is not to *see* propositional contents, but simply to (inter)act among ourselves in a communal and realistic way." (Parrett 1987, 25)

is provided "for free"). Of course, the argument is not intended to prove that the beliefs arrived at via common sense are true; likewise, no independent justification of the contents of common sense is required. With common sense we have reached "bedrock": the most basic beliefs that we use to produce and justify others, so we cannot use other beliefs to justify them (unless we adopt a forward strategy, but we are not playing "that" game). On the contrary, I am just asking if there is some "common sense" consideration about the rightness of common sense. Can we find one? Well, I think that we can identify such a consideration in the following passage by Austin (the core of the argument appears in the third point, but it is important to take the whole context into account):

> First, words are our tools, and, as a minimum, we should use clean tools: we should know what we mean and what we do not, and we must forearm ourselves against the traps that language sets us. Secondly, words are not (except in their own little corner) facts or things: we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realize their inadequacies and arbitrariness, and can re-look at the world without blinkers. Thirdly, and more hopefully, our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth making, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon – the most favoured alternative method. (Austin 1961, 181–182).[8]

Some remarks will help to clarify the argument. First of all, note that Austin's argument rests on the two main features of common sense (or everyday language) I describe in the previous section: it is historical (it has been derived and tested "*in the lifetimes of many generations*") and practical (they are tools fitted to "*ordinary and reasonably practical matters*"). People have built up and used common sense (or everyday language) for many purposes over a long time. Second, note that Austin's argument also appeals to the modesty of the philosopher. One must humbly recognize that most probably, many people over a long time do a better job than a single person in a short time. This is almost the opposite of Descartes, who at the stroke of a pen dismissed a whole tradition, and also very different from the arrogance of so many philosophers who consider themselves empowered to achieve what all former generations could not. This point is not as secondary as it seems. It is not just a declaration of hu-

**8** The argument is repeated in *Three ways of spilling ink*, one of his last works: "These concepts will have evolved over a long time: that is, they will have faced the test of practical use, of continual hard cases better than their vanished rivals." (Austin 1961, 274)

mility, but acknowledgement of the collective, social nature of knowledge. Even if there is space for personal achievement, the first word (and the last) belongs to the collective. Note also, third, what kind of argument Austin makes: neither a theoretical deduction from physics, biology or anthropology nor an *a priori* transcendental argument, but a prudential consideration of who is more probable to be right; or even better, who it is better for me to trust.[9] The argument itself is a piece of common sense.[10] We are not, strictly speaking, moving an inch from our initial standpoint (we are not going forward).

Finally, notice who gives the final verdict as to the rightness of common sense: reality itself. The distinctions and connections have survived the confrontation with the world (please do not interpret this assertion in a *neo-Darwinian* way).[11] This means: it is not our intuition, our reason or our preference that pro-

**9** The argument is, in this sense, radically different from a line of argumentation that appeals to scientific results and which can be found in recent literature on common sense (please do not let the resemblance confused you). Stephen Boulter (2007, chapter 2) puts forward what he calls the "evolutionary argument", based on current work in evolutionary biology and cognitive psychology: "the key claim being that beliefs are adaptions" (2007, XIV). Lynd Forguson 1989 uses a vast number of results from Psychology to arrive at a similar conclusion: "By applying the same criterion of successful action uniformly both to ourselves and to children 3 years old and younger (the criterion of accomplishing what one sets out to accomplish, which, after all, is the only criterion of successful action we know how to apply to them), our actions in certain circumstances are seen to be systematically successful, and theirs are not, because we have certain true beliefs that they do not have. But since these beliefs are precisely those which are embedded in the common-sense view of the world, and since what differentiates us from them in the relevant aspects is that we share the common-sense view and they do not, I am inclined to conclude that the common view of the world is correct." (1987, 164) The problem with these arguments, in my opinion, is not only that their authors work with a naturalistic, biological notion of common sense (neglecting the cultural aspects), but that in using results from empirical sciences they commit what in rhetoric is called a *hysteron proteron*, or, in my own not very technical terms, they try to go forward and backward at the same time. A different case is Rescher 2005, 60 – 61, who proposes a satisfactory argument which resembles Austin's and is based on almost the same two key features I indicate: purpose (practical) and experience (historical).

**10** Parrett 1987 describes three types of justifications for common sense: naturalist (common sense is grounded in human nature), cultural (common sense consists of items of a cultural system), and transcendental (common sense is a pre-condition, in the Kantian sense, of our practices). Although I am more sympathetic with the cultural justification (at least, I think common sense is a product of culture), I believe that we are not doomed to this trilemma: we can produce a common-sense justification.

**11** That is how Graham (1977, 36) calls it when inferring a conservatism thesis: "What emerges, therefore, from this aspect of Austin's method is his ingrained conservatism. The tendency is always to preserve from change those descriptions of the world which happen to be the current ones, in the belief that they would not be current if they were not worth preserving." (Graham 1977, 37) What Graham fails to perceive is that the key point of Austin's argument is not that

vides the required check, but the crude reality of facts as confronted in the collective practice of language. Moreover, the test does not take the form of the verification of a proposition, whether inferred from other verified propositions or directly verified by observation. The check is achieved through the use of the everyday – or common sense – tools in many different situations; some domains where they work very well and others where they do not work so well. This means that verification is gradual, indefinite and that it never comes to an end (which explains why nothing is guaranteed to be common sense forever or for everyone).

In short, the argument for common sense is that it works, and we see that it works because we ourselves (or others like ourselves) have put it to work many times. Can we identify the same argument in Wittgenstein? As we know, Wittgenstein more than anyone insisted that grammar does not require a justification (and common sense, remember, is part of grammar) at least in the ordinary sense of "justification", and much of his effort (especially in *On Certainty*) is aimed at attacking philosophers who try to provide one. But it is possible to find moments when Wittgenstein, in his typically elusive way, alludes to the considerations that have driven ordinary people (not philosophers) to be certain about common-sense beliefs. Such a line of argumentation may be found in the middle section of *On Certainty*, beginning at § 240:

240 What is the belief that all human beings have parents based on? On experience. And how can I base this sure belief on my experience? Well, I base it not only on the fact that I have known the parents of certain people but on everything that I have learnt about the sexual life of human beings and their anatomy and physiology: also on what I have heard and seen of animals. But then is that really a proof?

241 Isn't this an hypothesis, which, as I believe, is again and again completely confirmed?

Later, Wittgenstein describes the same "repeated confirmation" of sentences such as "the earth is round" and "water boils at 100° C" not as a proof but as conferring on us a right to assume them. At the end of the passage Wittgenstein makes the social character of the "right to be sure" clear:

296 This is what we *call* an "empirical foundation" for our assumptions.

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ordinary language tools have been "tested" in real situations, but that they are produced, adapted and refined in real situations. Given that "reality" is continuously changing, our language tools are also in continuous evolution, therefore new distinctions and concepts are sometimes better than older ones.

297 For we learn, not just that such and such experiments had those and those results, but also the conclusion which is drawn. And of course there is nothing wrong in our doing so. For this inferred proposition is an instrument for a definite use.

This also explains the holism of the justification. As with the holism of meaning, it does not imply that there is no difference between logical and empirical propositions (even if as a consequence of the vagueness and mutability of language, the boundary between them is fuzzy), or between propositions we use to justify and propositions we justify; it means that in the same way as empirical propositions depend on logical ones, so logical propositions depend on empirical ones as well: "I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions. And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house." (Wittgenstein 1969, § 248)

So, it is through the confrontation of the rules with the world via the practice of the game that some practices are abandoned and others survive and are improved (§ 617: "Certain events would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the sureness of the game. Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts?") and this is also how some common-sense propositions have been cemented at the very base of our practices (§ 211: "Now it gives our way of looking at things, and our researches, their form. Perhaps it was once disputed. But perhaps, for unthinkable ages, it has belonged to the scaffolding of our thought. (Every human being has parents.)").[12]

## 5 Common sense and philosophy

Let us now recap. Even if it can take the form of propositions (and sometimes empirical propositions), common sense is the fuzzy core of the linguistic rules that constitute our collective practices (at least our symbolically guided practices). It is common to all speakers and to all games; to all domains and to all situations of use. It has been produced and refined through the evolution of ever-changing linguistic practices as a set of tools that is continuously tested and has been shown to be extraordinarily apt; and it is itself continuously evolving. Ordinary people in the street do not have a justification for abiding by common sense; they just accept it as part of their way of life (usually almost hidden in

**12** A similar line of thought can be traced (although very vaguely) to *Philosophical Investigations*. See Wittgenstein 1953, § § 491, 492, 569 and XII.

the background). Such justification is neither needed nor even possible in the ordinary sense of justification; but if we asked people to provide a reason, they would probably offer the common-sense consideration of the verisimilitude gained through continuous testing by many people. Trust in common sense is, ultimately, trust in humankind (more specifically: trust in the ability of humans to deal with nature and with their own problems). Meanwhile, the backward strategy for tackling the checking problem consists of looking for familiar cases that are similar in different aspects to the case in hand and asking what common sense says about them, reiteratively till we gain a perspective from which we clearly perceive the rules and the types of applications of these rules involved: a perspective that enables us to make our own judgment about the problematic case.

It is easy to see how the backward checking strategy works when dealing with the sub-problems I describe above, in the first section of this paper. First, one can discover whether one is facing irrationality (manifest, hoax or unintended) by comparing the case with reasonable, common sense cases. It is important here to bear in mind the vagueness of common sense and of language in general, to prevent us from slipping into intolerance or conservatism. Not all apparent violations of common usage – not all deviations from the usual ways – count as irrational or unreasonable. Sometimes, such deviation can be a mechanism for dealing with issues that are difficult to explain or cannot be explained at all through adopting canonical approaches. Many instances of manifest irrationality belong to this group; such as those proposed by authors of literary or artistic works, by thinkers of many varied kinds (ranging from mystics such as San Juan de la Cruz to philosophers such as the Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*) or by many humorists (think for example of social satire). On other occasions, the deviation can be a response to an unusual demand or simply a new way of using old tools that after all does "make sense" in the specific situation. Once again, one has to attend to the situation, to the specific circumstances and purposes of the agents, and look for intermediate cases that resemble those circumstances and purposes.

Second, in intercultural or simply intergroup dialogue, one has to look for situations, concepts or tools of one's own that "resemble" those of the other group that are being considered. More than ever, here it is important to pay attention not only to the similarities but also to the differences between the situations (especially the differences in the purposes or interests of the agents) and to look for unusual applications of one's own rules that can be used as the intermediate cases that are so vital in the comparison procedure. A crucial point

here is that the methodology is "particularist", in Chisholm's sense.[13] We do not proceed, as the methodist does, by giving general, universal principles of rationality and then determining what does and what does not align with them. In fact, we do not need universal features at all. Even if there are universal features, and they could be useful if they exist, they are not indispensable; we just need to identify particular, specific coincidences between our respective practices. Whenever we find an analogy of a specific application of the foreign rule in some applications of our rules in a given context, we get a clue as to how to understand and evaluate the foreign items and the rules they instantiate.[14] Looking at the results of the action in that situation, and the purposes of the agents, it is also possible to establish that "their" rules work, and also that their rules "work better (or worse) in that situation".

Third, we obtain a very clear answer to the question regarding the source of rationality. It does not issue from a mysterious or transcendent realm; but from something familiar, very intimate and comfortable: ourselves or, more precisely, our way of life. As I indicate above, common sense was invented (or discovered; it is of no matter here) as an essential piece of the way we organize our existence and our relation both to nature and to others. This also offers us a hint as to how to decide if and why it is important to be rational: our shared views and modes of thought are a foundation for our existence "as humans" (or as one of the historic specifications of "human"). Deciding to adopt them is part of the decision to live life as we live it, because: "My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things." (Wittgenstein 1969, § 344)

Fourth, we have a method for checking the reasonability of philosophical discourse, by contrasting it with the common usage of language. That is one of the tasks (if not the only one) that particularly Moore, Austin and Wittgenstein undertake, and one of the most recognizable traits of their critique of other philosophers (and even of each other: recall Wittgenstein's criticism of Moore in *On Certainty*). With "philosophical checking" we have now arrived at the thorny issue I postponed

**13** Chisholm 1982. Although Chisholm applies the distinction exclusively to epistemology (and explains it from a semantic instead of a pragmatic vision of language), it is possible to generalize it to all domains of rationality. According to Chisholm, the methodist goes from the question "How do we know?" to the question "What do we know?" while the particularist goes the other way. In the general domain of rationality, I would say that methodism first gives general criteria of rationality and then determines what fulfils them and what does not, while particularism offers tokens of rationality and then tries to discover similarities between them.

**14** For the use of analogies as a way of understanding of a "foreign tribe", see Wittgenstein 1966, § 6: "We don't start from certain words, but from certain occasions and activities." That is the kind of methodology Peter Winch famously proposed for the social sciences.

in previous sections. I believe so far we have seen very good reasons to defend the recourse to common sense *on the part of ordinary people*, and I have described (very briefly, it is true) how it can be used to resolve the checking problem *by ordinary people*. I still have not, however, given any strong reason for defending the recourse to common sense *on the part of the philosopher*. After all, most of the non-common-sense philosophers agree that in everyday life, one is licensed to follow common sense. Moreover, they certainly consider that in normal, daily routines ordinary people are right to abide by common sense. But they think that the philosophical domain is a different matter: it is not daily routine, but a highly exceptional practice and consequently, what applies in everyday life does not apply here. As in Hume's celebrated statement, nobody is a skeptic in everyday life, but we are naive not to be when doing philosophy.

The main contribution of Moore, I think, is to undermine such a position; and this is something that both Austin and Wittgenstein take as a starting point. The argument is both simple and robust, and it can be seen as a definitive turning of the page with regard to the status of the philosopher in previous centuries; because the philosopher is (besides being a philosopher) an ordinary person:

> The fact is, of course, that all philosophers have belonged to the class of human beings which exists only if (2) be true: that is to say, to the class of human beings who have frequently known propositions corresponding to each of the propositions in (1).[15] In holding views incompatible with the proposition that propositions of all these classes are true, they have, therefore, been holding views inconsistent with propositions which they themselves knew to be true; and it was, therefore, only to be expected that they should sometimes betray their knowledge of such propositions. The strange thing is that philosophers should have been able to hold sincerely, as part of their philosophical creed, propositions inconsistent with what they themselves knew to be true; and yet, so far as I can make out, this has really frequently happened. (Moore 1959, 41)

That is, perhaps, the final and most important moral of this story. Philosophers are not merely impartial observers who have just arrived from somewhere else; they are neither aliens nor foreigners. Philosophers belong to a community and, in the long run, their problems and goals are those of their community. I would add that there are even areas where the philosopher is a specialist: problems that philosophers are more apt to solve than others. One example of this is the checking problem itself, as posed in the first three situations I related it to.

**15** It must be recalled that (1) is a conjunction of common-sense propositions about oneself (or in this case, about Moore) and (2) is the generalization of (1) to the collective of all humans. The collective character of common sense, which is marked by the transition from (1) to (2) and is indispensable for Moore's argument, is the main novelty introduced here by Moore.

They are real problems for the speakers and the societies they belong to, and problems connected with language, produced by the vagueness and holism of its rules. As we have seen, these problems are solved by considering the grammar, looking for connections between applications of the rules. But the solution has to be a real solution: a solution that can be understood and applied by the speakers and the society; it must be a solution *inside* the game. When philosophers depart from the common ground, they do not only lose intelligibility but something more basic: interest. I would dare to say that this is truer now in the 21st century, when philosophy has definitely "academized" itself, than in the times when Moore, Austin and Wittgenstein lived and wrote. I firmly believe that the only way to make philosophical activity valuable, the only way in which doing philosophy makes sense, is to link it to real issues and real interests (of society or, in this globalized world, of an era). If philosophers want to speak to members of their society (and if they don't speak to them, who will they speak to?), they have to integrate their activity into the web of practices that constitutes our daily life. This means not only relating their speech to everyday language, and their reasoning and arguments to common-sense considerations, but also relating "theoretical" conceptual problems to real problems of actual people (the kind of problems that arise from conceptual confusion, from conflict between rules, or from the appearance of new situations not clearly covered by the old rules). Finally, we have seen here (as Wittgenstein and Austin found) a pattern by which to fit together the three elements of the title of this paper. The backbone of philosophy is rationality, and the backbone of rationality is common sense; so the backbone of philosophy is common sense.[16]

**16** Not a minor question, but one that unfortunately I cannot properly explain here, is the question of the scope of the freedom of action of the philosopher. There are differences between the philosophers discussed here. Wittgenstein proposes the most restrictive program, where producing new concepts or modifying the pre-existing rules in any way is forbidden. The philosopher is restricted to recalling common-sense features and presenting examples for clarifying purposes; although sometimes it looks as if Wittgenstein allows the philosopher to find some hidden or unnoticed potential in the rules. Austin is considerably more liberal, allowing philosophers not only to make their own distinctions (but always related to and explained by ordinary or common-sense ones), but even to improve and sometimes refute specific aspects of the rules. Moore's position is more ambiguous (in part because it changed throughout his life), claiming in places that the philosopher can never go against common sense, but allowing himself a great amount of scope in the exercise of the "analysis". Even if, as I say, it is an important question, I will not deal with it here, for the main point (and this is something shared by all three authors) is plainly that the methodology of the philosopher must be related to common sense.

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# Part 2: **Rationality, Pluralism, and Relativism**

Ángeles J. Perona

# Pluralism and Soft Rationality in the Philosophy of Ortega and Wittgenstein

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the problem of rationality in the light of the different approaches developed by Wittgenstein and Ortega focusing on astonishing parallels within some of their reflections. I consider that their legacy may be productive particularly with regard to some problems of rationality raised by the postmodern movement in philosophy. My thesis is that, in spite of their differences, their movements in thought intended to distance themselves from certain extreme positions leads both philosophers to devise a third position that could be defined as a soft version of human rationality.

## 1

In this paper I am going to discuss the problem of rationality in the light of some reflections left to us by Wittgenstein and Ortega. I consider that using their legacy may be productive in relation to this problem, which became particularly acute after the postmodern movement in philosophy. This was because the refocusing which has taken place in contemporary philosophy has led to the need to accept that all human knowledge, experience and activity is to a considerable extent necessarily conditioned by world images and forms of life which may be plural (to use Wittgenstein's terminology).

Note that this implies a clear rejection of scientism (although not an anti-scientific position), as it recognizes the relevance of interests that are not strictly theoretical even in the process of gaining scientific knowledge. Thus, there has been an emphatic resurgence of the problem of the criteria for rationality and even of its unique and universal character.[1]

This means that if rationality turns out to be not only plural, but also fragmentary, such fragmentation could be considered as inevitably entailing the dissolution of normativity in the strict sense. In this case the rational would only express the approval a cultural community accords to a style of action or to a type of narrative. Indeed, this seems to lead inevitably to a radical relativism. This is why the debate has resurfaced and focused again on the logical consis-

**1** Cf. for example Cavell 1979, Bloor 1983, Bernstein 1983, Boghossian/Peacocke 2000, Boghossian 2007, Coliva 2010.

tency of radical relativism and its assimilation into a new scepticism or even a new irrationalism.

Some authors, certainly, have questioned this,[2] defending the need both to set down strict limits to the scope of relativism and also to devise a notion of rationality which although it cannot aspire to the unconditional authority granted to it by classical philosophy, can at least be strong enough to guarantee the possibility of a reasonable choice between alternative theories and practice and, in fact, between alternative forms of life.[3]

Perhaps I should explain briefly here what I mean by rationality. Although there are many analyses available that offer different classifications, I think it will be enough here to use a simple, classic distinction: that is, the difference between an epistemic (or theoretical or belief-based) profile of rationality and a practical one. To put it another way, I mean the well-known distinction between *know that* and *know how*.

Thus, we might say that the theoretical aspect of rationality can be taken to be the capacity of human beings to know their natural and social environments. This implies a symbolic interaction with these environments, or in other words, it implies the skill to learn and use a conceptual language, to infer, to engage in dialogue, to request and give reasons. It advocates first and foremost propositional beliefs and includes being able to decide which beliefs are acceptable.

The practical aspect of rationality differs from the above in that it does not give priority to beliefs, but rather to actions and decisions. So then, as I said at the outset, the thought of both Wittgenstein and of Ortega may prove useful to deal with the difficult current problem of rationality. There are several reasons why this is the case.

First, these are both authors whose style was unusual at the time, as their thought is not systematic. In both cases, their thought is fragmentary (each in its own way) and both made important changes to it over the years. What is interesting here is that this fragmentary philosophy is coherent with the image of the fragmentary, non-rigid human rationality, which both philosophers offer us in the end. On the other hand, they both display a pragmatic turn in thought that leads them to break away from the old idea that the theoretical takes priority over the practical.

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**2** Cf. Davidson 1984, 2001. For a defense of the logical consistency of relativism cf. Hales 1997, 2006.

**3** This problem has been approached from very different philosophical perspectives and through a critical exchange with the work of Wittgenstein. Cf. for example Habermas 1984, Rorty 1989, Gellner 1998, Putnam 2000.

In relation to these general traits, their thoughts already enjoy a connection to the present problem of rationality, since they are already present in recent analyses.[4] Nevertheless, as other studies of the parallelism between these two authors have pointed out,[5] there are important differences in their conceptual networks and the philosophical traditions each one takes as a starting point.

In fact, the so-called second Wittgenstein confronts critically (among others) the linguistic idealism of the new logic of Frege and Russell and of Viennese neopositivism, which he was so close to in his first stage. Therefore we could say that in his later philosophy he discards the model of logicist, scientistic and positivist rationality linked to this idealism; and he does so through what has been considered a pragmatic turn. In this context Wittgenstein proposes important conceptual innovations such as *language game*, *form of life*, w*orld image* (or *world picture)*, *family resemblances*, etc. We could also point out here that the later Wittgenstein confronts the ineffective response by G.E. Moore with his philosophy of common sense against skepticism.

Ortega, in turn, falls back at first on neo-Kantian philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology in his critical confrontation with both materialism and scientistic positivism. Later on, however, he was to abandon these positions, considering them charged with a rigid idealism resulting from losing sight of the vitality and spontaneity of human rationality. This change of position has also been considered as a pragmatic turn[6] brought about by new concepts such as *perspective*, *vital reason*, *historical reason*, etc. As his philosophy evolved, Ortega also took great care to avoid skepticism.

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**4** A current interesting question regarding this issue is whether, despite the priority of practical rationality that has followed the pragmatic turn of philosophy, we can maintain the difference between "know how" and "know that". In my opinion the difference is still valid, even though it does not refer to two spheres that are as separated as by an abyss. Indeed, the difference is valid because not all activities have the same immediate result. Thus, knowledge is certainly a set of activities ("know how") and its immediate and specific fruit is a "know that". And, briefly, this "know that" could be characterized more by explanatory and interpretive terms than by representational terms. But, later on, this "know that" nourishes other areas of the rational, those whose immediate fruit is to carry out what one knows how to do (e. g., techniques or technologies of activities as diverse as agriculture, medicine, aerospace industry or the economic sector). Thus, there is a close connection, a feedback, between the various activities that can be described as rational: to know is a "know how" that provides a "know that" which, in turn, nourishes the "know how", which again has an impact on the "know that". But these close relationships do not reduce the rational activities to a unified or undifferentiated whole.

**5** Cf. Ariso 2011, Defez 2014.

**6** Wittgenstein and Ortega are not the only philosophers of the time who evidence this characteristic pragmatic turn in contemporary philosophy. Heidegger and Dewey are also well known for this.

Taking all this into account, and in spite of their differences, my thesis is that the movement in thought of both philosophers to distance themselves from these respective extremes leads them to devise a third position, which we could define as soft versions of human rationality.

What I mean by this expression is an image of rationality which is dynamic in epistemological and ontological terms; qualitatively plastic, open and flexible; plural and contingent in terms of its outcome, but with limits to its plurality; an image, then, distanced from certainties in the classical sense and from scientism, but also from an unrestricted relativism; a heterogeneous image of rationality, which is not merely descriptive but also minimally normative.

In my opinion, the philosophies of Ortega and Wittgenstein lead to this type of rationality, with each obviously following his own path and when they are interpreted in a specific way. In the core of the version of soft rationality that can be derived from Wittgenstein's thought we find the distinction between certainty and belief established in each *language game*. And I will use Ortega's distinction between beliefs and ideas to derive another version of soft rationality.

## 2

With reference to the Wittgensteinian distinction, we recall that in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein criticizes the route Moore takes against skepticism, but also acknowledges that Moore had provided an accurate insight by considering that certain beliefs are undoubtable, since being able to doubt presupposes something which in practice is not doubted, i.e. certainty (cf. OC 114 f.).

However, in contrast to Moore, he considers that strictly speaking these special beliefs, or certainties, are not knowledge, as 'knowledge' and 'certainty' belong to different categories. In fact, he suggests that in spite of their appearance these special beliefs are not empirical (cf. OC 308).

However, both categories are related so that in any language game beliefs depend on certainties, given that these certainties are like hinges on which the rest of our language propositions turn, including those of scientific research (cf. OC 341 f.). This means that we cannot doubt them without completely eliminating the distinction between true and false empirical beliefs or propositions. Thus certainties act as rules controlling the practices of language games, although they do not act as a ground for them (cf. OC 94 – 98, 196 – 206).

This brief outline already shows the innovations which Wittgenstein introduces into the area of knowledge and therefore of what we have called theoretical rationality. In fact, although his reflections are compatible with the usual concept of knowledge in analytical philosophy, i.e. the concept of knowledge as

true, justified belief, he considers nevertheless that knowledge, certainty and doubt, far from being mutually exclusive, are actually interlinked. This is so to such an extent that Wittgenstein does not even think that the certainties are immutable (cf. OC 97).

The result is that the rational practices referred to (the uses of knowledge, belief, truth, justification) are carried out in accordance with the implicit rules of the language games, and these are multiple. This means that the pluralism of knowledge and its norms, i.e. the pluralism of theoretical rationality, is inevitable.

In addition, given that neither doubt nor error can be ignored, even the norms of knowledge become less necessary, less permanent and rigid and become more changeable, modifiable and flexible.

To the above we must add that the practices mentioned are relevant here not only for research, but also they are related to all the uses speakers make of language. Here we may recall that the notion of language game is associated by Wittgenstein with a *form of life* and a w*orld image* (cf. PI 19, OC 93 f.). This is decisive to understand the pragmatic turn imprinted on his thought and to extract from his reflections a rationality model giving absolute priority to interaction rather than to representation.

I am not going to take time here to point out the differences between the three notions mentioned,[7] instead I would just like to highlight the connection between them. The uses of the terms within a language game follow a set of rules that the speakers don't need to know explicitly. They only need to learn how to use them in practical and social contexts of interpretation and action. As Wittgenstein affirms, "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form" (PI 23). Therefore, a form of life (or life-form) is a set of practices for social and intellectual interaction. Practices that are *de facto* intersubjectively accepted and that we share and (even) live together with others.

To this we should add that a form of life is the pragmatic basis of a world image (or world picture). And a world image is an interwoven condition of the ways of speaking, thinking and acting. With reference to each human being, their world image is also an inherited background, i.e. a given (OC 94). We could even add that it is the foundation of a culture and its criteria of rationality, in both the theoretical and the practical aspects, which are in fact in continuity.[8]

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**7** There is an extensive bibliography available on this question and it is generally centered on the analysis of the notion of Form of life. Recent studies can be found in Marques/Venturinha 2010.

**8** A. Wagner points out in a concise and enlightening way the delimitation between the notions of "world image", "Weltanschauung" and "cosmogony". However, she links the notion of

I suppose no one will be surprised at the semantic connection I have just made with "culture"; Wittgenstein's criticism of J.G. Frazer (the representative of classical anthropology) is well known, and also how it was all received in anthropology beginning with P. Winch.[9]

What is disturbing here is that precisely because of this connection between life form, world image and culture, an intense and still ongoing dispute was unleashed as to whether Wittgenstein's thought is relativist (and anti-realist) or not. I myself sincerely believe that support can be found in the work of this philosopher for all sides in the debate.

However, leaving aside any attempt to reconstruct the 'authentic' Wittgenstein, if what interests us here is to rethink the problem of rationality, as put forward at the start of this paper, to take account of the possibility of rational choice between better and worse options, then we have good reason to accept the legacy from Wittgenstein which enables interpretations far removed from a radical relativism which turns out to be skeptical in terms of rational choice.

In my view this path leads to the possible use of some normative limits on the factual plurality; limits which can be extracted from the later Wittgenstein when interpreted in naturalist terms. In any case, all that has been said until now provides enough features to compose a Wittgensteinian version of the above-mentioned notion of soft rationality: the epistemological and ontological dynamism; the plurality and contingency of outcomes; the final distancing of all rigidity, beginning with scientism. The only remaining issue is the possible use of normative limits on the factual plurality. But I will come back to this point later. First let us move on now to Ortega.

## 3

As I have already pointed out, the version of soft rationality that can be derived from Ortega's thought has at its core the distinction between beliefs and ideas. The basic difference between the two notions is stated by Ortega himself in the first section of his 1940 text *Ideas y creencias:* we have ideas, we live beliefs.[10] In other words, ideas

"world image" with the notion of "Lebenswelt", whose origins are traceable to Husserl (Wagner 2011).

**9** Wittgenstein connects on several occasions the use of language with culture and life form. Cf., for example, Wittgenstein 2014, MS 115, 237 [4] et 238[1] and MS 115, 239 [1].

**10** IC 661. The sentence in its original version is: "Las ideas se tienen; en las creencias se está". It is important to note that the verb that accompanies "beliefs" is not "to live" but one that does

are the outcome of human intellectual activity (cf. IC 663) and we have them because they occur to us or because we adopt the ideas of others.

Ideas may be true or false and range from less to more rigorous, like scientific theories (cf. IC 661). Certainly, Ortega recognizes that the supreme truth is that of the evident, but "the value of evidence itself is, in turn, mere theory, idea and intellectual combination" and the truth of any idea is "sustained by how far it can be questioned" (IC 666 f.).[11] In other words we could say that truth as empirical evidence is an idea and that the verity of all ideas is contingent. In fact, there is clearly a certain similarity between these ideas and Wittgenstein's propositional beliefs.

Does the same happen with Ortega's 'beliefs' and Wittgenstein's 'certainties'? Yes, if we pay more attention to the structure of both thoughts rather than to the details. In fact, according to Ortega, beliefs are not the result of the action of thinking but instead are already operating in the background when we start to think (cf. IC 663), they are "what we come up against" (cf. IC 666), just like Wittgenstein's certainties. Ortega also notes that unlike ideas, beliefs do not even need to be formulated to operate, we simply count on them (cf. IC 663). Therefore, it is apart from our will that we meet beliefs; and beliefs constitute our reality because "in them we live, we move and we are" (IC 665). Thus, Ortega's beliefs have the same pragmatic connotation as is expressed by the notion of the form of life in Wittgenstein's thought.

Along with the above I would like to emphasize that for Ortega beliefs are not immutable *a priori* for human beings. This is because they are both the legacy and opus of our ancestors (cf. IC 676) and also they are not exempt from doubt.

With reference to the former, Ortega insists that, unlike animals, human beings interact with their environment interpreting what they find as they live. This is why their reality is made up of beliefs, i. e. interpretative interactions that provide them with tranquility, with knowledge to cling to (cf. IC 676), with dry land.[12] Note here that these latter characteristics in the original Spanish also accompany the notion of certainty.

On the other hand, these tranquillizing beliefs are not free from doubt. In fact the real doubt (which is neither methodical nor intellectual) "is a mode of

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not have an English equivalent ("estar"). This Spanish verb connotes that a person or thing is in a particular situation, condition, position, place, etc., always open to a possible change.

**11** All translations from IC are by me.

**12** Ortega y Gasset 2006, 669. Ortega points out that without this type of belief (such as the belief that the earth is real) "our relationship with the earth and with everything else around us would be like that of the first man, i. e. terrified" (676).

belief" (cf. IC 669) consisting of a gap in our beliefs which also asserts itself as reality beyond our will.

At the same time, as it is part of our beliefs, doubt imposes instability on our reality. However, in spite of the insecurity this implies, it is also positive in that we move to escape from it. How? By activating rational capacities such as intellect and imagination, and thanks to these capacities, humans imagine new ideas and "invent new worlds" (cf. IC 671). This assertion that human beings sometimes invent new worlds suggests that Ortega put forward ideas that were developed much later by certain American pragmatists (e. g. N. Goodman, in his 1978 *Ways of Worldmaking*).

However, the comparison with Wittgenstein's thought can be made more clear if we link inventing new worlds with Ortega's reflections on cultures and society. Ortega always had in mind the unavoidable collective level of human life and therefore of ideas and beliefs. This can be seen in his writings *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (1923) or *Las Atlántidas* (1924), where he reflects on ethnology and the notion of culture but also in *El hombre y la gente* (1949 – 1950, published in 1957), where he focuses on the notion of society.

In any case, whether he is talking about culture or about society, both are seen as creations and functions of human rationality understood as vital reason. Therefore, cultures or societies are the way human life happens; a way governed by different laws, customs and norms. It is precisely from here that Ortega (like Wittgenstein) also criticizes classical anthropology (he talks of ethnology). He criticizes it for its "lack of historical sense" when dismissing as savage any culture that is simply different (cf. LA 769). He then defends the need to avoid "replacing the rest of the worlds with 'our world'" (LA 753).

So is the conclusion here that Ortega is a representative of strict relativism? No, because he establishes clear limits. But just before we move on to these, allow me to mention that with this brief presentation perhaps we can already defend the thesis that there is a model of soft rationality hidden in the work of Ortega.

In fact, rational human activity produces a plurality of ideas and beliefs. Doubt is a part of rationality, understood pragmatically as interaction, not as representation. In addition, rational norms (including truth) are flexible and can be modified. And now we must return to the question of the limits of extreme relativism.

## 4

In terms of the two versions of soft rationality outlined above, I said that neither leads to an extreme relativism, as in both cases the plurality, flexibility and contingency of the rationality has its limits.

Here I would add that how these limits can be extracted is different for each writer. This is because in Ortega the question depends on his distinction between nature and history, while for Wittgenstein we can extract the limits from his references to the activities themselves of "our natural history" (cf. PI 25) and to "something animal" or instinctive in the human being (cf. OC 359, 475).

In fact, Ortega understands the natural to be charged with determinism and so, far from any naturalism, he points out that unlike animals, human beings have history not nature. And from this their rationality (or 'reason' as he calls it) is a function not just of life, but of a cultural, social and definitively historical life.

However, in spite of the plurality of cultural lives deriving from this, on the one hand Ortega, in contrast to Frobenius and Spengler (cf. LA 762), considers that cultures are not independent of each other. He considers that they are all interlinked and that they become meaningful in history, leading to a set of cultural achievements that together make up a human heritage as a whole.

On the other hand, from his reflections we could deduce that behind his ideas there is a thesis that some beliefs and activities are universal to some extent. It is difficult to find examples, but he does seem to consider certain things to be universal human traits, such as the disposition to believe, to reason, to imagine (cf. IC 671), or to live with a taken for granted belief in the existence of the earth (cf. IC 676).

Such interpretation gets support from some experts who raised the question whether or not and in how far Ortega had involuntary fallen back into western ethnocentrism (cf. Gómez Pellón 2007, 26). Here I will repeat something similar to what I said in relation to the supposed relativism of Wittgenstein. My approach to Ortega does not lead me to reconstruct the 'authentic' Ortega, but instead to consider his thought and this allows me to reflect here on the existing problem of rationality.

From this point of view, I consider of great interest the basic thesis that in my opinion Ortega defends when he talks about the activities or beliefs mentioned as common to human beings. I would rephrase this thesis by saying that he presents them as universal in form but different in their specific content, or in their cultural specificity. This thesis seems to me to be especially useful for the question of the limits of plasticity and rational plurality. Briefly, applying this thesis it would be beyond what is humanly rational to, for example, live in a world (or

culture) that does not suppose a belief in the existence of Earth. Quite different are the ideas about the earth which each culture holds. I insist here that independently of what we consider as universal (and I acknowledge that this is debatable and difficult to define) it is very useful to conceive of the universal at the same time as the particular, but on another level.

Something similar can be found in the later Wittgenstein whenever we follow the route of naturalist interpretations. These include notably those of D. Moyal-Sharrock (2007)[13] in relation to what Wittgenstein calls "the animal", "the natural" for the human being, "the instinctive".

In the interpretation of D. Moyal-Sharrock (2007, 104 ff. and 174), by "animal" Wittgenstein refers to the type of certainties that are not rationalized or reflective. These are a non-conceptual grasp, expressed in propositions such as "The world exists" or "I have a body". However, these propositions are only heuristic for grammatical elucidation, i. e. what is expressed are really attitudes, not cognitive beliefs. But the most interesting (and daring) aspect of this interpretation is found in the idea that this type of hinges or basic beliefs constitutes a universal grammar, although with the important nuance that "a universal grammar [...] is not a de-contextualized grammar" (Moyal-Sharrock 2007, 150).

Here we might add that along with these certainties, also forming part of this particular universal grammar are the activities/uses of language which Wittgenstein considers "part of our natural history" (IC 25): commanding, questioning, chatting, walking, eating, drinking, playing. In my opinion, we should add some other basic beliefs or other uses of language to this list. In fact I believe there are good reasons for including others such as 'human beings necessarily interact with each other' or 'human beings sometimes undergo unwelcome suffering as the result of interaction'.[14]

On the other hand, others may also argue that naturalisms always imply determinism. In my opinion this is not the case here, as the elements of the universal grammar are semantically underdetermined. This means that their semantic load is determined in a different, plural way depending on the different language games being played, the different forms of life and world images. Thus, they represent limits to the rational, since they condition the language games, but do not determine them.

So now we have arrived at a position analogous to that highlighted in relation to Ortega. And here I would like to end my reflection on the two examples that we can use as inspiration to regain the notion of rationality as soft rationality.

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**13** On this question see Medina 2003, Muñoz Sánchez 2013 and Perona 2010 and 2014.

**14** I have dealt with this issue in Perona 2015.

If I had to choose one of the options, I would prefer the naturalist proposal as it seems to me to be more coherent than the separation between nature and culture. Apart from that, I admit that this type of proposal is fraught with difficulties, above all because once extreme relativism has been rejected, we have to realize how to make a reasonable choice between theories, practices and finally alternative forms of life. This is an open problem in current philosophy, and although there is no time here to expand on this, I would like to conclude simply by responding in general terms to what I consider to be the fundamental question: Why not simply accept the unlimited plurality of rationality, which can be derived by simply applying to their full extent the plasticity, openness and contingencies mentioned earlier?

My short answer is that, even accepting that the absolute norms of rationality are a false myth, human animals seem to need the opportunity to choose between better and worse options along a route far removed from arbitrariness or the law of the strongest. And if I mention that it is because, from my point of view, the difficulty with extremely relativistic conceptions of rationality does not come from the question of whether relativism is contradictory or not. Even if we accept that extreme relativism (without limits) is not contradictory, the main problem lies in the effects that would result if we lived in accordance with it. One of these effects is boundless skepticism, which David Hume already considered unsustainable because of its incompatibility with everyday life. The other effect of relativism without limits has to do with the often-mentioned issue of the inability to distinguish between the factual and the valid.[15]

And in my opinion this is only possible if there are limits to the rational, limits which, although perhaps contingent when spelled out, allow an evaluation of the de facto effects that emanate from the forms of life.

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**15** This was the core of discussions between Rorty and Putnam (Rorty 1994, Putnam 2000), on one hand, and Rorty and Habermas on the other (Brandom 2000).

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Stefan Majetschak

# Moore and the King

## Wittgenstein on the Groundlessness of World-Pictures

**Abstract.** In *On Certainty* No 92, Wittgenstein discusses the question whether it is possible for somebody to be convinced of something with *good reason* that is quite contrary to the fundamental convictions that most of us hold. By means of a thought experiment he introduces the figure of a fictional king who has never been told anything but that the world began to exist with his birth and who is correspondingly convinced of something that we believe to be apparently absurd. But are we able to demonstrate the correctness or suitability of our different conviction? This paper will examine Wittgenstein's epistemologically radical and at the same time astonishing discussion of this question. Is there, as Wittgenstein seems to suggest in OC 92, really no possibility to demonstrate the correctness of the fundamental beliefs of one's own world-picture? Is there positively no way to prove one's own fundamental convictions as correct, true or appropriate to the facts? After suggesting answers to these questions, this article will offer an interpretation that might be described as "cultural relativism". Some scholars explicitly reject such a reading of *On Certainty*. The article will therefore conclude with two comments on the problem of "cultural" or "world-picture relativism".

## 1 A thought experiment

In a sequence of remarks written in the last two years of his life, which are known under the title *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein took a series of propositions used by George Edward Moore as examples of unquestionable true knowledge as an opportunity to fundamentally think through the internal epistemic constitution of human knowledge.[1] Independently of Moore's own deliberations he developed the view that these propositions – e. g. "I know that here is one hand" (cf. OC 1) or "The earth has existed for many years past before my body was

**1** The exact wording of these sentences in Moore's writings *A Defence of the Common Sense* (1925) and *Proof of the External World* (1939, both in Moore 1959) and his way of justifying their epistemic status are irrelevant for us because, in his deliberations, Wittgenstein does not examine Moore's reasons at all, indeed he takes over from Moore merely the examples, as Michael Kober 1993, 15 ff. shows.

born" (cf. OC 84) – appear to us as indisputable precisely because they have a particular status in our knowledge: they put convictions constitutive of our world-picture into words; – convictions, from which we *cannot* deviate without entailing numerous other judgments that we consider to be true (cf. OC 419). From someone who doubted them or maintained something quite different, e. g. the world began to exist only with his birth, "we should feel ourselves intellectually very distant" (OC 108), as Wittgenstein writes. If he insisted on the truth of this claim, we would probably soon declare him to be certifiably insane.

But isn't it possible for somebody – not for reasons of insanity, but with *good reason* – to be convinced of something that is quite contrary to the fundamental convictions that most of us undoubtedly share with Moore? Wittgenstein considers this case in remark No. 92 of *On Certainty,* where he says:

> However, we can ask: May someone have telling grounds for believing that the earth has only existed for a short time, say since his birth? – Suppose he had always been told that, – would he have any good reason to doubt it? Men have believed that they could make rain; why should not a king be brought up in the belief that the world began with him? And if Moore and this king were to meet and discuss, could Moore really prove his belief to be the right one? I do not say that Moore could not convert the king to his view, but it would be a conversion of a special kind; the king would be brought to look at the world in a different way. (OC 92)

By means of a thought experiment Wittgenstein demonstrates in this passage that it is in fact conceivable that somebody holds a view with good reason which fundamentally diverges from our own. The thought experiment introduces the figure of a fictional king who has never been told anything but that the world began to exist with his birth and who is correspondingly convinced of something that we and Moore believe to be absurd. What reason would he have to doubt the correctness of his convictions? He was brought up in this belief and so has little reason to doubt it. He grew up with a certain world-picture that, at least partially, differs from ours and, from this internal perspective, has every reason to consider his conviction to be correct for he was never told anything else. It is of course clear that we and Moore see things differently. But are we and Moore – this is Wittgenstein's implicit question here – able to demonstrate the correctness or suitability of our different convictions? As he suggests in the passage quoted, Moore too, in a discussion with the king, might not be able to demonstrate that our belief that the earth existed long before our birth is the correct one. He might certainly be able to convert the king to our view of things, but this would be, as he says, "a conversion of a special kind". As he seemingly wishes to say: Not a quasi-catholic conversion to the "true belief", but a conversion to a different way of looking at the world.

In what follows, I will examine Wittgenstein's, in my opinion, epistemologically radical and at the same time astonishing claim in a little more detail. Is there, as Wittgenstein seems to suggest, really no possibility to demonstrate the correctness of the fundamental beliefs of one's own world-picture? Is there positively no way to prove one's own fundamental convictions as correct, true or appropriate to the facts? And what is meant by that "conversion of a special kind" with which Moore, according to Wittgenstein, might succeed in winning the king over to our view of the world? An examination of these questions is my primary concern in what follows. After suggesting answers, I will offer an interpretation that might be described as "cultural relativism". Some scholars, e. g. Hilary Putnam, explicitly reject such a reading of *On Certainty*. I will therefore conclude my remarks with two comments on the problem of "cultural" or "world-picture relativism". I will begin by briefly recalling the main features of Wittgenstein's notion of "world-picture".

## 2 The concept of "world-picture" ("Weltbild")

Like many concepts that occupy a central position in Wittgenstein's thought, e. g. the concept of "Übersicht/surveyability", the intuitive German concept of "Weltbild" does not easily find an English equivalent.[2] In the English version of *On Certainty* Denis Paul and Elizabeth Anscombe opted for the translations "picture of the world" (OC 94) and "world-picture" (OC 95), and this is why the latter is used in this paper.

What does Wittgenstein understand by a "world-picture"? According to him, it is "a system, a structure" (OC 102), or as it were "a nest of propositions" (OC 225), which embraces the "convictions" (Überzeugungen) (OC 102) that the members of a culture[3] share with each other as "fundamental attitudes" (Grundanschauungen) to the world that are considered to be true in a supra-subjective sense of the word (OC 238). Using a traditional philosophical expression one might also describe it as the "categorial framework" of all our theoretical and practical references to reality. However, this framework is determined not only by a priori transcendental principles in a Kantian sense, which express the

**2** Cf. Hacker 1972, 113 f., fn. 3.

**3** Cf. on the concept of "world-picture" also the clarifying exposition of Kober 1993, 150 ff. and Schulte 1990, 113, who are, however, both inclined to anchor world-pictures in Wittgenstein's sense in life-forms, whereas I always speak of "cultures". For the meaning and role attached to the concept of "life-forms" in Wittgenstein's late philosophy seem to me to be at least partially misunderstood in many interpretations. Cf. Majetschak 2010.

basic structures of our world orientation and which we presuppose in all our judgments as true. Also the "*truth* of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference" (OC 83), as Wittgenstein emphasizes in *On Certainty*. Indeed, the framework consists of propositions of quite different sorts, which articulate basic concepts and fundamental attitudes of a culture. Propositions that resemble empirical judgments like "The earth has existed for millions of years" or "No one has ever been on Jupiter" belong to it. Although they look like empirical judgments, we do not confront them with any kind of empirical falsification but use them as norms, from which we do not deviate, whatever experience may show. Furthermore, propositions such as "Everything that happens has a physical cause" or "Physical realities can be apprehended by mathematical equations" can serve as examples of statements which we us as norms presupposed to be valid, since they structure our world orientation before all experience. Finally, grammatical propositions that articulate the rules of our language games – such as the proposition "Sensations are private" (PI 248), inasmuch as it determines our thought about human subjectivity – can be adduced as examples of propositions belonging to our world-picture. All together they make up the presupposed system of background convictions of a culture, which determines its view of reality.

"The propositions describing this world-picture" might be considered as belonging to "a kind of mythology" (OC 95), as Wittgenstein wrote to clarify their status. Just as mythologies record in images or tales without grounds or proofs what the members of a certain culture consider to be possible, true or desirable, the background convictions in a world-picture delimit the scope of that which counts – without need of any epistemic justification – as possible or impossible, conceivable or inconceivable, plausible or implausible within this culture. The "role" of single propositions that, like the ones cited above, characterize the world-picture is thus "like that of rules of a game" (OC 95). They establish what we conceive as "rational", "well-founded" or merely "permissible" moves in our language games. As differently as various world-pictures may be structured, they are all systems of basic convictions, of which can be said: "All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within" such a kind of

> [...] system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life. (OC 105)

Only "within this system has a particular bit the value we give it" (OC 410).

Of course, a world-picture is not a static, once-and-for-all fixed system of basic convictions, but in itself dynamically changing. Propositions that have had the status of norms for a period of time can revert to empirical ones, while empirical propositions can make a transition to norms. "It might be imagined", Wittgenstein writes, "that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid", but also "that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid" (OC 96). Thus, he was able to consider the proposition "No one has ever been on the moon" as one veiled in the form of experience, but one that has become petrified into a norm. It is not that we expose it, as he rightly thought in his own day, to serious testing, but rather would not even understand somebody who doubted it. "If we are thinking within our system", he was able to note at the end of the 1940s:

> then it is certain that no one has ever been on the moon. Not merely is nothing of the sort ever seriously reported to us by reasonable people, but our whole system of physics forbids us to believe it. For this demands answers to the questions "How did he overcome the force of gravity?", "How could he live without an atmosphere?" and a thousand others which could not be answered. (OC 108)

In the wake of the technological development after Wittgenstein's death this proposition, which seemed to unleash an entire maelstrom of questions threatening the foundations of our world-picture, has sunk back to the status of an ordinary empirical judgment. Thus, Wittgenstein's own example demonstrates the dynamic of the world-picture: the fact that "mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift" (OC 97), within which we consider propositions and questions to be intelligible or unintelligible.

The dynamics of shift within a world-picture describable in a diachronic perspective does, of course, not always concern the switch from norm to empiricism or from empiricism to norm as in the example provided. More often it can be stated that propositions migrate from their position as central nodal points in the net of the world-picture, on which their truth seems to us to be unshakeable, to the margin and vice versa. Moreover, there is a close-knit bundle of convictions at central points of the world-picture, which – as it were petrified in the system of our logic – are hardly or not at all subject to change. If one remains with the metaphor of the "riverbed" to describe the net-like epistemic structure of a world-picture, it might be said that "the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited" (OC 99).

As Wittgenstein emphasizes, it is impossible to fully describe the net of background convictions that constitute a "world-picture" (cf. OC 102) or even have

only an overview of it, since nobody ever acquired and tested these convictions consciously "by following a particular line of thought" (OC 103). "I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me" (OC 152), I normally learn them incidentally and unexplicitly in the course of the upbringing that introduces us to the main techniques of acting and speaking of our culture together with the related epistemic background. In the course of upbringing "we are taught *judgments* and their connexion with other judgments. *A totality* of judgments is made plausible to us." (OC 140) This does not happen by learning to believe isolated propositions or taking them to be true. "Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed [System von Geglaubtem]" (OC 144), in the light of which internalized convictions and progressively acquired experiences "give one another *mutual* support" (OC 142). When asked why one is, for example, convinced that the world existed long before we were born, one might as non-physicist or non-geologist refer simply to the adoption of this conviction in the upbringing process and perhaps to acknowledged textbooks, authorities or comparable instances regarded in our culture as definitive. And perhaps one might add: "All these facts have been confirmed a hundred times over." (OC 162) In answer to the obvious questions: "But how do I know that? What is my evidence" (OC 162) that I can trust such instances, one can merely reply that one normally has no reason *not* to trust them.

In this way a world-picture forms the "inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false" (OC 94). Scientific research, too, does not canvass or test the assumptions constitutive of this background, but always presupposes them. "Think of chemical investigations", he recommended his reader: "Lavoisier makes experiments with substances in his laboratory and now he concludes that this and that takes place when there is burning. He does not say that it might happen otherwise another time" (OC 167), but presupposes, as an undoubted basis of his research, the "justification of inductive arguments", because he assumes a priori the idea of "uniformity of nature" (OC 315). He *might* not even justify his presupposition (cf. OC 499). "He has got hold of a definite world-picture – not of course one that he invented: he learnt it as a child. [...] [I]t is the matter-of-course foundation for his research and as such also goes unmentioned." (OC 167)

## 3 The groundlessness of the world-picture

If one describes a world-picture with an expression used once by Wittgenstein as a "system of what is believed [System von Geglaubtem]", then the "difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing" (OC 166), that is, to see that the be-

lieved that is anchored in its center cannot be proved to be in agreement with reality – unlike that which in other world-pictures is perhaps held to be true. For it is not based on reality, but constitutes "*what we mean by reality*",[4] as Henry Leroy Finch pointed out. It is really a difficulty to realize this, since one is inclined to ask: "But is there then no objective truth?" (OC 108) "Everything that we regard as evidence indicates that the earth already existed long before my birth. The contrary hypothesis has *nothing* to confirm it at all." (OC 203) What Moore and we, for example, believe about the period of existence of the earth is therefore, one is tempted to say, really true; the conviction of the king on the other hand is objective nonsense. However, can the agreement with reality that we ascribe to our conviction be derived from the fact that *all* that *we* are prepared to accept as proofs or justifications speaks for *our* conviction? Does it qualify the proposition "The earth has existed for many years past before my body was born" as objectively certain? "If everything speaks *for* an hypothesis", Wittgenstein asks, "and nothing against it, is it objectively *certain?* One can *call* it that. But does it *necessarily* agree with the world of facts? At the very best it shows us what 'agreement' means." (OC 203)[5] For we *designate* as "agreeing with the facts" *that* which we hold to be certain *because* everything speaks for it that we are willing to accept as evidence.

But isn't it experience, frequent and repeated "experience that teaches us to judge like *this*, that is to say, that it is correct to judge like this" (OC 130), that is to say, in the way *we* do in *our* world-picture? Is it not crystal clear that Moore's and ours is the correct conviction and not that of the king? "One wants to say '*All* my experiences shew that it is so'." (OC 145) What the king holds to be true is on the other hand quite absurd. Wittgenstein's considerations in *On Certainty* take these questions very seriously, but come to the result that the reference to experience cannot serve to prove the agreement with reality of the basic assumptions constitutive for our world-picture. It is certainly indisputable that experience teaches us much within the framework of our world orientation, especially in the case of genuine empirical judgments that we are prepared to really suspend in a confirmation or refutation. "But how does experience *teach* us, then?" (OC 130) Does it

**4** Finch 1975, 384.

**5** The editors (OC 1974, 28/e) point out that OC 203 in Wittgenstein's manuscript has been crossed out. The reasons for this are unclear. One could imagine that the author was not satisfied that the proposition "The earth existed long before I was born" in this formulation appears as a hypothesis, although it – in categorical opposition to hypotheses – was in no way exposed to testing, but rather in the sense of a basic conviction of our world-picture determines which statements we are prepared to accept as agreeing with reality or not agreeing with it. Cf. OC 167, where Wittgenstein points to this important distinction.

prescribe to us what we have to take from it? Or does it even prescribe to us that we have to acknowledge it as an instance of decision with respect to the truth or falsity of our judgments?

In Wittgenstein's opinion neither is the case. With regard to the question of whether experience requires us to take something particular from it, he writes: "*We* may derive" something "from experience, but experience does not direct us to derive anything" (OC 130) special from it. *What* we take from experience, on the other hand, depends on *how* we interpret it against the background of our world-picture, that is, what we generally believe to be possible, real or conceivable within its framework. So we are not forced by any experience to interpret it in this way *or* that. For this reason we can adhere to a judgment or conviction, *whatever* experience may show, by interpreting the so-called "facts of experience" appropriately or by arguing that experience *in this case* has nothing to decide. One who says: *all* "my experiences shew that it is so", is overlooking the fact that, according to Wittgenstein, "that proposition to which they point itself belongs to a particular interpretation of them" (OC 145). One can therefore say that the fact that "I regard this proposition as certainly true also characterizes my interpretation of experience" (OC 145). My acceptance of the proposition shows what interpretation of experience I am willing to accept as agreeing with the facts.

Of course, it is – to emphasize it once again – right that *we* commonly regard a reference to experience within *our* world-picture as a so-called "good reason" for considering a sentence to be true or false. Nevertheless, does this *have to be* so always and everywhere? As Wittgenstein remarks with pointed brevity: If experience "is the *ground* of our judging like this, [...] still we do not have a ground for seeing this in turn as a ground" (OC 130). It is true that experience often serves as a reason for what we accept, but of course it is not as such the reason for our accepting experience in many cases *as* reason. What is regarded as a "good reason" and whether experience counts *as such* is rather anchored in the basic assumptions of our world-picture. But to accept them as such we do not in turn have reasons. If this is the case, it makes no sense for us also to continue to wish to justify the supposed "truth" of our "good and final reasons". For if the "true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false" (OC 205). There are of course justifications for accepted propositions *within* our world-picture, "but justification comes to an end" (OC 192 et passim), and that at the latest when we come up against the so-called "final reasons" in the center of our world-picture.

Should Wittgenstein be right, all attempts to prove the basic principles of our knowledge come up at a certain point against reasons which themselves elude further substantiation. And so it is impossible to prove any reasons, standards or norms that are definitive within a certain world-picture to be true, right or

binding in *every* world-picture. This is why Wittgenstein held that Moore in a discussion with the king cannot prove *our* belief that the earth existed long before our birth, to be the right one with irrefutable reasons, i. e. reasons from which the king could not shut himself off. There is no reason, no norm, no standard that the king would have to acknowledge as binding even for him. Rather, everything that can count as true or undoubted knowledge is finally "based on acknowledgement" (OC 378); an acknowledgement which both on Moore's side and on that of the king can come about always only within the particular limitations of one's own world-picture.

Wittgenstein thought that the groundlessness of all final reasons would become clear especially in intercultural comparison, i. e. when such differing world-pictures as those of Moore and the king come into contact with each other. "Supposing", he wrote, "we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason" (OC 609), which we ourselves understand as such. "Instead of the physicist" whom we will certainly ask within the framework of our scientific world, "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?" (OC 609) To speak here of falsehood there would have to be an independent criterion accepted as encompassing world-pictures, according to which truth and falsehood can be measured objectively. But neither experience nor one's own criteria of truth and falsehood can be considered because the latter, in their particularity and ultimate groundlessness, of course are not binding for the other world-picture. For this reason it is so problematic to designate criteria of others that are different in nature as "primitive". If we describe the basic convictions of another world-picture as "primitive" or even as "false" from the point of view of our own, we are using "our language-game", our way of making judgments about the world, "as a base from which to *combat* theirs" (OC 609).

"And are we right or wrong to combat it?" (OC 610), asks Wittgenstein. Thus, he raises a question that is not easy to answer. Trying to convince him of his basic convictions, Moore would probably not combat the king immediately, but first try to give him "*reasons*" (OC 612). "Certainly", Wittgenstein writes, "but how far do they go?" (OC 612) He will soon run out of reasons – at least, those which seem acceptable *also to the king*. And then only "*persuasion*" (OC 612), by means of various strategies, will be left. If by chance the object of intercultural exchange in the light of *our* convictions seems important, perhaps even ethically relevant, we will surely progress to different forms of combating the strange view. Perhaps we then use means of verbal denunciation or even the threat of physical violence as Socrates

once did in a conversation with Hippias.[6] Whether the debate leads to anything is not certain at all. For there is no doubt, as Wittgenstein writes: "Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic." (OC 611)

To clarify the situation in which Moore finds himself, Wittgenstein notes: "Think what happens when missionaries convert natives" (OC 612), since Moore is in quite a similar position. Missionaries who take pains to convert natives to Christianity do not try to demonstrate to them the existence of their God according to universally valid reasons, by for example submitting to them Anselm's ontological argument for testing. Instead, they take pains using all imaginable means to move the natives to take over a new way of looking at the world *as such* and *as a whole*. They do not try to make clear the indisputable correctness of individual judgments, for example, that "something greater than which nothing can be thought" ("aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest"[7]), must necessarily exist. Instead, they try to bring the natives to see the world against a new horizon – e. g. as creation, as salvation history – and thus to contextualize each of their judgments anew and differently from before. Moore finds himself in a comparable situation, as Wittgenstein suggested in OC 92. What he tries to achieve, when he attempts to persuade the king to accept his view of things, is a "conversion of a special kind", a secular conversion in fact, which is meant to move the king to accept not only a single judgment, such as "The earth has existed for many years past before my body was born" as true, but to look at the world as a whole quite differently – in the light of other basic premises. He wants him to get "hold of a definite world-picture", a world-picture that Moore, Lavoisier and we did not invent, but learned from childhood.

The range of means that can be employed in the course of a conversion of this sort is considerable. In addition to verbal denunciation or threatened physical violence as mentioned above, another means often used is addressed by Wittgenstein when he claims that, in the course of combating another world-picture, "all sorts of slogans [Schlagworte] [...] will be used to support our proceedings" (OC 610). Those who do this then make use, for example, of the concept of "reason" for their own world-view and, by means of slogans such as "Every reasonable person *has to* admit that ...", try to exclude those from the community of the reasonable who do not share their judgment and, like the king, insist on other convictions. But this widespread strategy overlooks the fact that what con-

**6** In the dialogue *Hippias Major* Socrates suggests to Hippias the possible use of violence as a consequence if he continues to maintain positions that seem inadequate to Socrates. Cf. Plato 1957, 292a.

**7** Anselm of Canterbury 1966, 204.

stitutes "rationality" as such can itself be determined only in the light of a definite world-picture.[8]

## 4 World-picture relativism

What "men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice versa." (OC 336) The standards of what we consider as "reasonable" change. And therefore many will ask: "But is there no objective character here?" (OC 336) In his latest remarks Wittgenstein wanted, in my opinion, to answer this question in the negative. What we call "reason" and "reasonable" is really in no instance definable other than by reference to convictions shared by members of a culture, that is, by reference to propositions supra-subjectively held to be true within the relevant world-picture. The totality of propositions commonly accepted as true hereby establish the standards of "rationality", not does "reason" on its own decide, as one is traditionally inclined to think, what is to be considered rationally as true. For example, we would "not call anybody reasonable who believed something in spite of scientific evidence" (OC 324) and, like our king, assumed that the world began when he was born. We would consider this opinion as untrue as well as unreasonable – usually *without* being scientific experts in this question – and "say that we *know* that such and such", by which we "mean that any reasonable person in our position would also know it, that it would be a piece of unreason to doubt it" (OC 325). With regard to our culture, our world-picture it

> [...] might be said: "The reasonable man believes: that the earth has been there since long before his birth, that his life has been spent on the surface of the earth, or near it, that he has never, for example, been on the moon, that he has a nervous system and various innards like all other people, etc., etc. (OC 327)

**8** Elsewhere I have tried to explain in more detail that the philosophical progress of the late remarks in *On Certainty* consists in the fact that Wittgenstein has here definitively parted company from the universalist paradigm of European philosophy and discussed so-called fundamental concepts such as "reason" and "truth", "doubt" and "certainty" as concepts, which make sense only relatively to the conviction systems manifested in world-pictures. In the present context only a brief allusion can be made to this using the example of the concept of "reason". For a more detailed discussion cf. Majetschak 2000, 355 ff.

This means: And countless other things that he has never seriously and consciously tested, but from childhood has learned to believe. *That* he has these convictions is the reason why we, in the light of our world-picture, describe him *as* "*reasonable*". Any attempt to define, in a sense that encompasses world-pictures and language games, what "reason" in and of itself might be, would then be what Wittgenstein denounced as the "dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy" (PI 131).

But if that is the case, doesn't one have to say that what can appear in one world-picture as "reasonable" might be regarded in the light of another as "unreasonable"? Do we have to accept that at another time and in another place it can be considered "reasonable" to orient oneself according to oracles or believe that the world began to exist only with one's own birth? It seems to me that these questions, within the framework of the considerations developed by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*, are to be answered in the affirmative. But then doesn't Wittgenstein appear "as an out-and-out cultural relativist"[9]? For it is clear that particular "rationalities" (in the plural) appear conceivable with regard to differing world-pictures, of which not one can be proved to be more suitable than another. For Putnam, among other things, didn't want to philosophically draw such conclusions, he did not consider a cultural relativistic interpretation of *On Certainty* to be convincing. Those who, like Putnam and others, reject it are usually afraid of the philosophical subversion of all valid (semantic, logical, ethical etc.) obligations in favor of a mere arbitrariness of the views that obtain in any culture; an arbitrariness that is purchased by giving up the concept of a universal rationality that encompasses world-pictures. And is such relativism not philosophically untenable, since "as one tries to state relativism as a *position* it collapses into inconsistency",[10] as Putnam writes? Thus, the relativist is found guilty of self-contradiction and finally defeated with the argument that he has to maintain non-relative validity at least for his own thesis about the relativity of all validity and truth claims.

From the viewpoint of the interpretation presented here the following may be said, however briefly, about the anxiety expressed by Putnam and others over the specter of cultural relativism:

First: Wittgenstein's cultural relativism, as I understand it, says that the propositional content of concepts such as "reason" or "truth" can be meaningfully explained only relative to the world-picture on which they are based and which is shared by the members of a culture. But such relativity of course

**9** Putnam 1992, 170.

**10** Putnam 1992, 177.

does not mean that *within* a culture all logical and ethical obligations would be invalid only because the validity in other world-pictures may be different. That *our* standards are not universally valid in all world-pictures does not mean that they are arbitrary within *our* culture. For the content that, according to Wittgenstein, marks out a world-picture, plays within a culture the role of norms, standards and rules that organize how we live. Within a culture they are associated, as Wittgenstein emphasizes repeatedly, with supra-subjective obligation. For this reason, within our world-picture, we simply *cannot* orient ourselves according to oracles instead of physics or, like the king, believe *with good reason* that the earth began to exist only when we were born. In the world-picture into which we have grown we have no reason for this.

Second, one has to realize that the attempt to finish off relativistic positions in philosophy by proving their self-contradiction basically overestimates the persuasiveness of the argument presented. Wittgenstein too sees clearly that some statements, applied to themselves, create a contradiction, for example when I say: "I am lying." If I am really lying, I am telling the truth. And if I am telling the truth, then I am lying. Every statement contradicts itself directly. But, Wittgenstein asks, is "there harm in the contradiction that arises when someone says: 'I am lying'. – So I am not lying. – So I am lying. – etc." (RFM 120) In the case of statements such as "I am lying" or "What qualifies as reasonable depends on the world-picture", this is not the case at all. That they – applied to themselves – contradict themselves does no damage to them because in language games *outside logic and mathematics* implicit self-contradiction does not necessarily imply that a proposition is useless. Outside logic and mathematics freedom of contradiction is not the only, not even the main criterion for acceptability or non-acceptability of statements. What is thus proved philosophically by convicting such propositions of self-contradiction? The language game of self-application of a proposition to itself, that is, the inference of a proposition to a performative contradiction contained in it, is – one has to emphasize it with Wittgenstein – "a profitless performance! – It is a language game with some similarity to the game of thumb-catching" (RFM 120). It is – to repeat it emphatically – outside the area of mathematics and logic an idling wheel of our language that performs no useful work. In no way it deals with what the thesis of world-picture relativity of all universal truth claims wants to say philosophically. Furthermore, it is unable to prove a single proposition as valid in a sense that encompasses world-pictures. For this reason one should, in my opinion, make a note of the comparison of the self-application language game with thumb-catching for all those who still argue in this way philosophically.

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Astrid Wagner

# Dynamics of Basic Beliefs in the Philosophical Approaches of Ortega and Wittgenstein

**Abstract:** This paper deals with the question whether we are able to coherently give sense to the pluralistic idea of the relativity of rationality standards to cultural frameworks avoiding extreme forms of relativism. How can a critical judgment of substantially different basic beliefs be justified if rationality, and with it the power of arguments and reasons, are bound to world-pictures? Do such criticisms make sense, i. e. can they be understood and assumed in such a way that changes in the normative structure of a life-world are provoked? Can basic beliefs be deliberately changed? History shows that whole sets of basic beliefs may change, but what are the mechanisms of these changes and the dynamics that produce them? The approaches of Ortega and Wittgenstein are used to work out the epistemological background of the problem and to outline the role and the possible dynamics of basic beliefs provoked by the opposite requirements of steadiness and adjustment of belief-networks.

## 1 Pluralism, relativism, and intercultural critique

The dynamics of basic beliefs are among the key issues in the philosophical debates on epistemological as well as normative relativism, especially with regard to the problem of sense and legitimacy of intercultural critique. The philosophical reorientations during the last century, from the linguistic and iconic turn to the pragmatic and cultural turn, have revealed that human experience and thus the experienced reality are necessarily conditioned by symbolic and cultural practices, by world-pictures and forms of life that generate different forms of rationality. In consequence, we have been forced to admit a constitutive plurality of different conceptions, forms, and standards of rationality. Such dependence of rationality structures on cultural factors has turned out to be a serious problem for the globally connected multi-cultural societies of our days. What may count as valid argument in one culture, can be perceived as inacceptable, incomprehensive or just not persuasive in another, because arguments owe its normative force to the life-world, to a horizon of beliefs and convictions, as well as to the practices maintained by human communities.

From such epistemic and axiological pluralism that comes along with cultural diversity, defenders of a strong normative relativism deduce that it is erroneous, unjustified and even illegitimate to criticize the behavior of people belonging to cultures in which substantially different norms and values are hold, and, thus, that it would be unacceptable to pass any kind of critical judgments on them, either moral or epistemic ones.[1] Concretely, this would mean that practices that in Western cultures are not only morally questionable, but even constitute a criminal offense, like for example the Female Genital Mutilation, could not be reasonably criticized by people who don't belong to the African and Indonesian cultures in which these rituals are traditional and commonly used. And the same kind of relativistic argumentation can be found in the ideologically charged debates about different conceptions and understandings of human rights in Occidental and Oriental communities.[2]

Examples like these may illustrate the relevance of the question whether pluralism, in its epistemic as well as normative dimension, does necessarily entail strong relativistic consequences. In order to give a pertinent answer to this question it is important to understand the role and dynamics of basic beliefs, of those common beliefs that guide the behavior of people within a cultural community. Thus, the aim of this paper is to investigate if we are able to coherently give sense to the pluralistic idea of relativity to cultural frameworks avoiding extreme forms of relativism. To cope with this task we have to answer some basic questions. Some of them are relevant not only with regard to the intercultural perspective, but also for the internal perspective on our own sets of beliefs. These questions are: How can a critical judgment of substantially different basic beliefs be justified if there is no meta-frame of reference? Does such criticism make sense, i. e. can it really be understood and assumed in such a way that changes in the normative structure of a life-world can be provoked? Can basic beliefs be deliberately changed? History shows that whole sets of basic beliefs may change, but what are the mechanisms of these changes and the dynamics that produce them?

It is these kinds of questions on which contrasting and combining the philosophical approaches of Ortega and Wittgenstein sheds some light and where

**1** A typology of the different more or less radical forms of moral relativism and their main features can be found in Wong 1984 and Wong 2006.

**2** Compare, e. g., the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI) with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). I also want to remind you of the still ongoing debate on Western versus Asiatic values (on individual versus community-oriented rights) that had become an important subject of political philosophy during the 1990s since the Singapore White Paper on Shared Values (1991) and the Bangkok Declaration on Human Rights (1993).

such comparison produces synergetic effects.[3] In the following, I will first describe the problem on the basis of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, then substantiate it with recourse to Ortega's reflections of *Ideas and Beliefs*, *History as a System* and *Man and People*, in order to finally search for a helpful perspective inspired by both authors. My aim is to show how Ortega gives an existential and phenomenological foundation to our issue, while Wittgenstein, on his turn, lays the ground for a detailed analysis of the semantic aspects involved. Together they may help to clarify the normative function of basic beliefs and to identify some main elements and features of the rationality structures embedded in our forms of life. As to that, it is necessary to analyze the conditions of validity of arguments, interpretations and explanations, which involves, in a Wittgensteinian perspective, above all, an investigation of the normative and epistemological functions of world-pictures and their pragmatic foundations: the different forms of life.

## 2 World-pictures and forms of life

Let us start with some reflections of *On Certainty* that are pivotal for an understanding of the epistemic role of world-pictures and the dynamics of basic beliefs.

> But I did not get my picture of the world 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.
>
> The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules.
>
> It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.
>
> The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But 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.
>
> [...] Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing. (OC 94–98)

The relevance of these paragraphs for our question is evident. The first one emphasizes the dependence of rationality standards on world-pictures. The second

**3** For further studies on the parallels and differences of Ortega and Wittgenstein, especially with regard to the central role of beliefs, see Ariso 2011 and Defez 2014.

one underlines that even those world-pictures that, from our perspective, are branded as irrational, such as the mythological ones, possess their own logic and standards of rationality, their own practically proven language-games. The third paragraph refers to the possibility of transformation and changes of world-pictures. This ultimate point is where the dynamics of fundamental beliefs come into play.

The world-picture, in the way Wittgenstein used the term, is a network of beliefs and convictions shared with others and valid within a social community. Let us have in mind that such communities and their distinctive features can be of quite different shape (cultural, scientific, religious, etc.), and that is it not at all clear where to trace the limits between different world-pictures unless we get confronted with a conflictive situation that seems to have no reasonable solution. However, it is the shared world-picture, where the normative and semantic structure of the dominant practices and beliefs becomes manifest.

A prominent feature of such world-pictures, of these "inherited backgrounds", is their holistic character. On the basis of Wittgenstein's reflections there can be distinguished at least two different levels on which holism becomes important for the issue we are treating. On the first level, we can state a kind of *relational* or *structural holism*. Wittgenstein shows that our beliefs form a whole complex that, as to its theoretical part, can be described as a system in which premises and conclusions are based on each other, while for its much larger and less systematic part that includes our common sense beliefs he uses metaphors like building, nest, network or gearing, i. e. structures whose components are functionally related (cf. OC 140 f., 144, 248).[4] These beliefs are no isolated items, but strongly interconnected. They are operative within whole networks. This holism, related to the cohesion of beliefs, is rooted in a *semantic holism* deployed in detail in the *Philosophical Investigations* where we can learn how the meaning of our symbolic expressions depends on other components of the language-game, especially on the situations in which they are used, on the actions and reactions of other speakers and, thus, on the practices that fix the forms and circumstances of their use.

The holistic character of our beliefs is also revealed by the limits of reasonable and meaningful doubt as to certain convictions, judgments, and postures that are taken for granted and that function as a "scaffold" or "rotational axis" within the whole complex of beliefs. These central beliefs, that include all the common

4 We can find the same kind of structural holism emphasized by Ortega, especially in *History as a System* (cf. HS 47 f.).

sense propositions Moore tried to defend against skepticism,[5] entrench whole sets of beliefs. But neither the metaphor of the anchor nor of a foundation aptly describes the function of such undoubted and unquestionable beliefs within the moving holistic structure of a belief network, so that Wittgenstein states: "I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions. And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house." (OC 248)

In epistemological respect, world-pictures provide security and certainty with respect to certain convictions and beliefs. In practical terms, they play an important normative role in so far as they guide our actions and generate the criteria for their evaluation. Combining these two aspects – epistemological and normative – world-pictures are to be considered as the basis of the forms, standards, and principles of rationality operative within a community. To act, think and speak in accordance with the dense network of convictions that form a world-picture is precisely what we call rational (or reasonable). Thus rationality reveals to be bound to world-pictures, and the standards of rationality determine what is hold to be right or wrong, correct or false *within* a given community. But what about the world-pictures themselves? Can't we distinguish between correct or wrong world-pictures, or at least between better or worse ones? Can't we correct our world-pictures? As Majetschak underlines in his chapter on "Moore and the King", the king who has grown up with the firm belief that the world had begun to exist with his birth cannot be *convinced by reasons* that his world-picture is false, because the network of beliefs of which it is build up would be of such a kind that there is no evidence our reasons and arguments could stick to (cf. 89 – 102 of this volume). Trying to change his world-picture would require "a kind of *persuasion*" (OC 262) together with insistent and thorough instruction into communication and interpretation practices. It would be a task comparable to the work of conversion done by missionaries (OC 612). But are all world-pictures so hermetic to one another? In her chapter on "Pluralism and Soft Rationality" Perona alludes to a slightly naturalist interpretation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy that would permit to count with some at least contingent "limits to the rational [...] that allow an evaluation of the de facto effects that emanate from the forms of life" (cf. 75 – 87 of this volume).

World-pictures are anchored in cultural, scientific, and religious practices that have been established in social communities. The beliefs and attitudes implied in these practices or generated by them are proven by the smooth functioning of language-games and co-actions and by their capacity to successfully guide

**5** Such common sense propositions are, e. g.: "There exists at present a living human body, which is *my* body [...]", or: "The earth has existed for many years past." See Moore 1993.

our conducts. Beliefs are action-guiding and orienting. Accordingly, the actions reveal the underlying beliefs. If we search for the basis of these beliefs, of what seems self-evident to us, we sooner or later come to a point where we can only refer to a practice, a common *modus operandi*. "Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; [...] it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game." (OC 204) The incorporation of such practices and traditions permeates the experience of the life-world up (or down) to the perceptual and emotional level. They have a normative impact, so that they shape for example moral intuitions. This is not surprising in the case of religious practices or rituals. However, religious faith only represents a special type of belief among many others. Beliefs, in the broad sense marked by Wittgenstein and Ortega, are practical certainties that guide our behavior. It would be wrong to disqualify them as subjective psychological states. They are rather self-evident attitudes and their implications, which are never questioned and which in most cases are neither explicitly learned nor even have been formulated. The most basic and indubitable beliefs function as implicit rules of the practices on which the world-picture is based. With respect to the beliefs underlying the world-picture, we have to admit a certain kind of impotence on our side to the extent that they, without consciously taking note of them, operate and produce effects and are not entirely subjected to our will and decision (cf. OC 173).

For Wittgenstein, rationality is ultimately based on the logic of language-games (he speaks of the "grammar" of language-games), embedded in practices that constitute a way of life. With the term "language-game" he refers to all forms of symbolic expression immersed in systems of practices, from gestures, countenance, speech, or writing to mathematics and symbolic logic. It is the practical use that creates the meaning of words and other symbols, and that determines their semantic and pragmatic properties (as there are meaning, reference, truth conditions, situation, context, etc.). In order to learn the use of a word it is not necessary to explicitly know the rule governing this practice. In most cases, we follow blindly the rules involved in a practice of interpretation. It is the set of these practices, customs, established ways of social and intellectual interaction that constitutes the "form of life"; being itself nothing individual, but a network of proven, inter-subjectively accepted and commonly lived practices. Therefore, it is somehow absurd to criticize the undoubted convictions well established in forms of life. This would be like saying that "a game has always been played wrong" (OC 496). The form of life plays a quasi-transcendental role for our judgments and our orientation in the world, remaining itself somehow untouchable, an unquestionable factuality and as such neither reasonable nor irrational.

## 3 Beliefs, ideas, and the role of doubts

Let us shift to Ortega. Up to this point he would, by and large, agree with Wittgenstein's outline of the issue. He does not speak of undoubted certainties that form a world-picture, but of "*creencias*": firm convictions and beliefs that

> [...] constitute the continent of our life, and thus don't have the character of particular contents within it. Indeed, we can say that they are not ideas that we have, but ideas that we are. Even more: precisely because they are radical beliefs they are confounded for us with reality itself – they are our world and our being –, and, hence, lose the character of ideas, of thoughts that could not have occurred to us as well (IC 660 f.; my translation).[6]

Bringing together the two approaches, we can say that the world-picture constitutes our lived reality in a radical sense. But it is the difference that produces synergetic effects, not the accordance. So let us see on which points the two thinkers differ or even disagree. We are now able to reformulate our questions with regard to the dynamics of basic beliefs in the following way: How can basic beliefs that are embedded in forms of life and are constitutively integrated in a holistic network of convictions be changed? How can changes of the pattern of world-pictures take place? And in Ortega's terms: How can the process of a change in the basic belief setting of a culture proceed? How can ideas become operative beliefs?

In a first approach we could say that Ortega's answer would be: The change of basic beliefs requires the possible integration of new beliefs in other already existing sets of basic beliefs, as well as a social process in which ideas develop normative, structuring and orienting power by means of their implementation in cultural practices. But this is too imprecise. Thus, let us have a closer look on what he says.

> One doubts because he is in two conflicting (antagonistic) beliefs that collide and throw us to each other, leaving no ground under the feet. (IC 670; my translation)[7]

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**6** "Todo lo contrario: esas ideas que son, de verdad, 'creencias' constituyen el continente de nuestra vida y, por ello, no tienen el carácter de contenidos particulares dentro de ésta. Cabe decir que no son ideas que tenemos, sino ideas que somos. Más aún: precisamente porque son creencias radicalísimas, se confunden para nosotros con la realidad misma – son nuestro mundo y nuestro ser –, pierden, por tanto, el carácter de ideas, de pensamientos nuestros que podían muy bien no habérsenos ocurrido." (IC 660 f.)

**7** "Se duda porque se está en dos creencias antagónicas, que entrechocan y nos lanzan la una a la otra, dejándonos sin suelo bajo la planta." (IC 670)

> The gaps of our beliefs are thus the vital place where the ideas intervene. They are always trying to replace the unstable, ambiguous, doubtful world for a world in which the ambiguity disappears. How is this accomplished? By imagining, by inventing worlds. The idea is imagination. (IC 671; my translation)[8]

What Ortega outlines is a certain dynamic between ideas and basic beliefs (*creencias*). He conceives the ideas as products of an intellectual effort to solve problems, i. e. to show possible ways of reaction to given situations, for instance by reinterpreting them. On first glance, the main part of our explicit theoretical knowledge and reflection would belong to this realm of ideas. However, when we use this knowledge in practical contexts or just try to explicitly describe the performance of one of our daily actions, we note that all explicit ideas carry with them a lot of implications and presuppositions that are never directly addressed, because they are usually taken for granted. Moreover, we detect that our actions are enabled and guided by a multitude of implicit components that together form structured sets of beliefs, an inventory that we use without noticing it. Ortega refers to them as latent implications of our conscious activities, beliefs that are normally not consciously perceived as such, but which are extremely efficient (cf. IC 665). We don't think of them, but we rely on them (ibid.). Ortega qualifies them as primary, given by living, while the ideas are secondary, given by thinking.

It is important that this field of primary beliefs is not at all homogeneous, but coherently organized within functional contexts. What is more, the examples he gives for such basic beliefs show that even in the realm of the implicit a structural interpenetration of concrete contents and abstract principles occurs. Therefore he does not restrict abstractness to the intellectual realm of ideas. For example, on going downstairs in order to buy bread at the bakery, I take it for granted (believe) that there is a street, and that it is the same street I walked along so many times, and that such physical things like streets are persistent and relatively steady, and that the street as object of our experience follows the laws of nature, and that the laws of nature that are relevant in this case are the following ... etc.

**8** "Los huecos de nuestras creencias son, pues, el lugar vital donde insertan su intervención las ideas. En ellas se trata siempre de sustituir el mundo inestable, ambiguo, de la duda por un mundo en que la ambigüedad desaparece. ¿Cómo se logra esto? Fantaseando, inventando mundos. La idea es imaginación." (IC 671)

> The maximum impact on our behavior resides in the latent implications of our intellectual activity, in all what we count on and which, purely relying on it, we don't think of. (IC 664; my translation)[9]

In contrast to Wittgenstein, Ortega locates the doubt on the same primary level as the basic, authentic beliefs and, what is more, he gives it a key role just within the dynamic of basic beliefs and ideas. This does not refer to a methodic, purely theoretical doubt which does not entail practical consequences, but to what William James calls the "vivid doubt". It is a kind of doubt that a person does not *have*, but *is in*. And it shares even more features with the "*creencias*". We cannot decide to *be in doubt*. It is a kind of doubt in which one loses the ground under one's feet, a doubt that is felt as unsteadiness and instability, which breaks up the coherent functioning of our inventory of basic beliefs, confronting us with uncomfortable ambiguity and ambivalence. But just this uncomfortable situation, the felt loss of orientation, serves to us as the most intensive stimulation to intellectual and conceptual efforts. According to Ortega, it is the impulse we need for a really creative use of our imagination, for new interpretations, symbolizations, and conceptions. Those imaginative efforts are always intended to rebuild the basis of certainties we need to live our practical lives and to reorganize our attitudes and behavior in such a way that the internal conflict is eliminated and the doubt disappears. By this act, says Ortega, we create new circumstances. We change our world.

What Ortega describes is the mechanism of a reflective equilibrium, a mutual adjustment between implicit and explicit features, latent and patent convictions, between what is directly understood and what is explicitly interpreted, between new theories, conceptualizations, explications and descriptions on the one hand, and whole sets of inherited basic beliefs, of implicit presuppositions of our actions on the other hand. For Ortega, the vivid doubt has a productive and constructive function in so far as it stimulates our imagination and intellectual capacity. And although he describes the ambiguity and ambivalence on the level of basic beliefs as uncomfortable and even terrible, he gives the ambiguity also a positive meaning in a double way: 1. It is positive in so far as the ambiguous is open and leaves margin for interpretation, for new applications, and even for "mak[ing] up the rules as we go along" (OC 83). Here he connects with Wittgenstein's considerations on rule following in PI 198 – 242 and on the necessarily "blurred edges" of concepts (PI 71). 2. In the phenomenological description of

**9** "La máxima eficacia sobre nuestro comportamiento reside en las implicaciones latentes de nuestra actividad intelectual, en todo aquello con que contamos y en que, de puro contar con ello, no pensamos." (IC 664)

how we build what he calls our "pragmatic fields", Ortega refers to a special kind of ambiguity that does neither entail instability nor diffusion. On this primordial level the individuation and stability is generated by a horizon structure, i. e. by a dense web of retentions and protentions, and not by any kind of definition or conceptual determination.

With regard to the question of doubt, Wittgenstein would not agree with Ortega. For him, an authentic doubt on the level of basic beliefs is either logically impossible or unreasonable. "There are cases where doubt is unreasonable, but others where it seems logically impossible. And there seems to be no clear boundary between them." (OC 454) This is due to the extremely important, but often overlooked point that the logic of the doubted beliefs depends on the content of the belief and on the language-games that refer to it. "[...] Well – the grammar of 'believe' just does hang together with the grammar of the believed proposition." (OC 313) According to Wittgenstein, a doubt on the level of basic beliefs can only be coherently formulated under very limited conditions. He gives several reasons for this:

1. The words and sentences, in which the doubt is articulated, owe their meanings to certain practices, to language-games that define their propositional content. Such language-games can be widened by new applications, by creating new uses of the words, but using the expressions we cannot coherently formulate general doubts about their meaning and reference. There are no language-games that could give sense to such kind of doubt. In this sense, certainty belongs to the nature of the language-game.

> [...] The fact that I use the word "hand" and all the other words in my sentence without a second thought, indeed that I should stand before the abyss if I wanted so much as to try doubting their meanings – shows that the absence of doubt belongs to the essence of the language-game, that the question "How do I know ..." drags out the language-game, or else does away with it. (OC 370)

2. On the level of the basic beliefs and presuppositions we quickly reach the limit of the possibility to give further reasons, proofs, and verifications. As they themselves determine what can be evident for us, a doubt on this level has no logical place, because meaningful doubt must be justified and can only refer to areas in which verification is, in principle, possible.

3. The doubt must bear practical consequences. Otherwise it is insignificant. However, a practically lived doubt with regard to the set of basic beliefs implicitly presupposed in our utterances and practices would be ultimately dangerous and insane. It would produce psycho-pathological effects, like in the case of the hysteric child described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception:* a child who turns around again and again in order to verify that the world behind has not disappeared.

4. The doubt cannot be holistic, because otherwise it undermines its own fundaments. But the basic beliefs form such a dense holistic network that questioning one conviction may entrain all the others. Therefore, meaningful doubt has to be partial and limited. "If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty." (OC 115)

With regard to this last point, it is important to see that Ortega talks about a doubt between two conflicting beliefs, i.e. between two options excluding each other, but not of a doubt that gives no alternative. He describes, in fact, a situation of indecisiveness where the criteria for the decision fail because they are themselves in question. Thus, in *Ideas and Beliefs* we find the confrontation of irreconcilable principles of persons with different sets of basic beliefs described by Wittgenstein in OC 611[10] transferred to the internal perspective of one single individual.

However, we still have to explain what the logic of an authentic doubt with regard to basic beliefs could be, because the doubt itself, in order to be felt and understood, needs a normative and semantic foundation. And given that any meaningful doubt needs reasons, it is very helpful to take into account Wittgenstein's reflections on the normative power of arguments. Let us see what the conditions for the functioning of an argument are. And here we seem to spin in a circle, because what can be accepted as a valid argument depends on an accepted practice of argumentation, justification, confirmation, and of proof, as well as on the system of unquestioned beliefs that form the background of these practices.

> All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life. (OC 105)

However, I assert that this is no vicious circle, but the epistemic situation in which mechanisms of reciprocal adjustment come into operation.[11] Arguments can only function within a belief network to which they owe their power, but new aspects may partially be introduced to the network. In order to be convincing, an argument needs a background. So, if we introduce new arguments, we

**10** "Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic." (OC 611)

**11** Cf. also the related circle Wittgenstein describes in OC 191: "Well, if everything speaks for an hypothesis and nothing against it – is it then certainly true? One may designate it as such. – But does it certainly agree with reality, with the facts? – With this question you are already going round in a circle."

have to connect to an existing practice of argumentation. As Wittgenstein repeatedly points out in his *Philosophical Investigations*, language is constitutively flexible and dynamic, and language-games, i. e. symbolic and life practices and the rules they install, do necessarily let a margin to variations, to new connections, and new applications. Moreover, Wittgenstein does not at all convey the idea of a certain number of clearly delimited world-pictures that divide the different human cultures from one another. World-pictures are dynamic, although some seem to be more static and hermetic than others. And considering the wide range of examples, topics, and fields Wittgenstein addresses in his reflections on certainty, the picture of a multitude of overlapping sets of basic beliefs seems to be much more appropriate than that of clearly separated entities. And just as dense is the range of possible distinctions. The strangeness and alterity can become manifest in many different forms: e. g. as misunderstanding, incomprehension, implausibleness, disgust, incoherence, untranslatability, or perhaps even as incommensurability.

## 4 Conclusions

Ortega and Wittgenstein illuminate the problem of the change of basic beliefs from different perspectives. For both of them, such changes imply a change of the life-world: for Ortega a transformation of what he calls "radical reality", of the circumstances that form part of the reality of one's life, and of the "pragmatic field", that determines the objects of one's experience; for Wittgenstein a modification of the grammar of fundamental language-games that determine the normative structure and semantic contents of one's world-picture.

Both authors investigate the structures and limits of rationality, and both criticize the restriction of rationality concepts to the intellectual, mental sphere. "Forget this transcendent certainty, which is connected with your concept of mind", says Wittgenstein (OC 47). Ortega, on his part, substitutes the narrow concept of rationality by a dynamic concept of "vital reason" that serves to connect rationality with the human life and its biological, historical and cultural circumstances. "The reason", says Ortega, "cannot replace life and should not aspire to do so. But the contrast between reason and life, so much talked about nowadays by those who are too lazy to think, seems to me very suspicious. As if reason were not just such a spontaneous and vital function as seeing and feeling." (MQ 784)

The description and analysis of this vital function given by Ortega reveals that the deepest layer of human life in epistemic terms is made up of basic beliefs. We don't come to them by an act of thought, but they rather already act in the background when we think about something and acquire explicit knowledge.

They mingle with the reality, penetrate, form and shape it. They thus have a fundamental epistemic and normative function. However, their main function is the maintenance of life. And life, understood as a human being's dealing with his circumstances, requires on the one hand stability and orientation, on the other hand flexibility, adaption, and evaluation. These inverse requirements induce the dynamics of basic beliefs Ortega described in *Ideas and Beliefs* and *History as a System*.

Wittgenstein's answer of how this double requirement of steadiness and adjustment can be met points to the dynamics of world-pictures:

1. The 'hardening of empirical propositions' by which they get part of the 'riverbed' and are no longer treated as fallible or submitted to empirical tests, but convert themselves into 'rules of testing'. This is how world-pictures evolve or become enriched.
2. The inverse process by which 'hardened propositions', i.e. basic beliefs, become fluid again. This is how world-pictures change, and the implied procedures are more complicated and need more incentive when the rules of testing themselves, i.e. the rationality standards are called into question, and together with them the grammar of the involved language-games.

Rationality is always bound to language-games. There can't be any intelligible rationality "outside". But language-games and thus the rationality standards themselves are dynamic and evolving relative to the practical success of the world-picture and the smooth functioning of the language-games in use.

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# Part 3: **Belief and Knowledge**

Thomas Gil

# Are There Background Beliefs?

**Abstract:** Not all human practices and activities are belief-based, belief-supported, or belief-guided as some epistemologists tend to assume. Such an assumption leads to an intellectualistic misrepresentation of human behavior. What John R. Searle calls "the Background" is not a set of "central beliefs". "Background" components are not doxastic. They constitute a set of practical abilities, capacities, tendencies, dispositions, skills and stances that may or may not be belief-accompanied. There are certainly "central beliefs" whose function has been analyzed by Wittgenstein und Ortega y Gasset among many others. But what Searle calls "the Background" is not a set of "central beliefs".

Neil Postman writes in his popular book *Technopoly. The Surrender of Culture to Technology*:

> To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. To a man with a pencil, everything looks like a list. To a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. To a man with a computer, everything looks like data. And to a man with a grade sheet, everything looks like a number. (Postman 1993, 14)

It would be easy to add a sentence to the quoted text that brings us into our subject matter: and to an epistemologist, everything looks like a belief. Indeed, epistemologists tend to assume that there are beliefs everywhere, either explicitly or implicitly. Beliefs are assertions and propositions. In declarative sentences, they are explicitly present. More precisely, explicit beliefs are declarative sentences. But beliefs accompany, support or guide, for many epistemologists, all doings and activities of intelligent human beings, epistemology's task being the task of making explicit what is implied in human practices and performances.

I do not believe that all human practices and activities are belief-based, belief-supported, or belief-guided. Many human doings and actions are performed without any beliefs being involved, or being present in the minds of the acting agents. They may be routine doings or actions like driving back home after a long office day. Such doings and actions are things we do nearly every day or have done for years after having become sufficiently familiar with our environment. Or they may be more skilled practices we have internalized so that our performing them does not require any conscious thinking. Observing such doings from the outside, we can legitimately ask the question whether certain beliefs are not necessarily implied in them without which they would not be possible

at all. In certain specific cases we may even naturally arrive at some presupposed beliefs, whereby our task as epistemologists would then consist in making them explicit. But frequently epistemologists misrepresent intellectualistically what they intend to accurately describe.

Two philosophical developments have contributed to such an "intellectualization" of human doings and actions. The first development, which I would like to call the "animal faith" assumption, operates with the idea of an "animal faith" (a set of beliefs and epistemic attitudes) human beings share with other living animals such as the belief in substances. Such beliefs, according to George Santayana, are the beliefs we have in common with other animals: beliefs and "natural opinions" we have as living animals, beliefs "we live by from day to day" that allow us to do what we do, for instance, to move around in space coexisting and interacting thereby with other beings. Santayana sees in such common beliefs "the facts before everyman's eyes".

It is, however, not evident at all that what Santayana calls "animal faith"-beliefs are beliefs in a strict sense. And it is not evident either that non-human animals, beings that are not able to use natural languages, should be capable of having beliefs with propositional contents. As Donald Davidson rightly stresses, propositional beliefs always presuppose the use of concepts in natural languages. Assuming the existence of "natural faith", we are encouraged to discover beliefs behind every human activity and performance.

The behavioristic turn in the philosophy of mind is the second development that encourages us to interpret every sort of action in epistemic terms. For Gilbert Ryle among many other authors mental states are not happenings in our mind that have duplicating correspondences in the external empirical world. Mental acts are according to Ryle material behavings of human agents accessible and manifest as opposed to hidden or latent inner states. As a consequence of that, to analyze a mental act is to analyze the bodily movement or the physical event that same mental act is. Mental attitudes become consequently behavioral patterns. Nevertheless, not every behavioral pattern is a belief or can be translated into the belief idiom.

Beliefs are beliefs, however accessible or manifested. And behavior is behavior that is not always or necessarily belief-guided or belief-based. Acting is not entertaining a belief, even if frequently beliefs accompany our actions or are simply manifested in them. It would be a category mistake to confuse a doing or performance with an epistemic act, even if some epistemic acts are specifically qualified performances.

Good philosophical thought has always been characterized by a fine-grained practice of distinctions, not by rough and coarse conceptual strategies of unification and simplification. Plato's argument in his dialogue *The Sophist* is an ex-

cellent example of such a practice of establishing and justifying single distinctions in order to reach a clarification of concepts. With the aim of conceptually defining what a "sophist" is as opposed to a "philosopher", Plato applies his "diaeresis"-method of definition based on partitions and divisions. The method consists in continually dividing a large whole into parts until an appropriate definition is obtained. Scholastic philosophers in medieval times and analytic philosophers today proceed in a similar way, point at aspects, specific traits or features of things that actually make a difference. Not by unifying or simplifying, but by marking subtle and fine distinctions, and specifying and differentiating, the conceptual clarification aimed at is finally obtained.

Returning to my topic, epistemologists should avoid being confused by their all-embracing ambition of seeing in every existing phenomenon a case for their knowledge research. Digesting food, opening doors, and walking through large corridors are certainly not adequate objects for any serious epistemological investigation.

## 1 Central beliefs

Human beings are cognitively connected to the world through their beliefs. In belief sentences that have always a propositional content they are able to affirm or to deny that something is the case. Belief sentences can, therefore, be true or false depending on whether what they assert is the case or not. For believing human beings it is not possible to entertain just one single belief. Beliefs presuppose always other beliefs, and they find their justification inside belief systems in which beliefs interanimate each other or are variously related to each other.

In a belief system, there are beliefs that are more fundamental than others, being more functional for the whole system, or playing more basic roles. I call such beliefs "central beliefs". Central beliefs are the beliefs we would not give up easily even if possible evidential observations seem to contradict them. "Normal beliefs" as opposed to "central beliefs" are beliefs we could give up without our system or web of beliefs being convulsively transformed, as they have not the prominent place in our belief networks central beliefs do hold.

Reading José Ortega y Gasset and Ludwig Wittgenstein we learn which functions basic beliefs realize, and how they do it. In his essay *Ideas y creencias* Ortega distinguishes beliefs we accidentally acquire when experiencing things (beliefs he calls "opinions") and beliefs that are fundamental for us, for the persons we are (the so-called "creencias"). The terminology Ortega uses reserves the verb "to have" or "to hold" for the first sort of beliefs, the opinions. We "have" or "hold" opinions, always being able to overhaul or revise them. The verb ade-

quate to use to refer to the way we are related with our "creencias" (our fundamental beliefs) is, in Ortega's terminology, the verb "to be". We do not have or entertain "creencias", we are our "creencias".

The vocabulary Ortega chooses to refer to our "creencias" expresses their existential importance in our lives. He speaks about the "ideas we are ourselves" ("ideas que somos"), and he affirms that "we live out of them" ("vivimos de ellas"), that "we are in them" ("vivimos en ellas", "estamos en ellas", "nos tienen y nos sostienen a nosotros"). "In them we live, we move, and we are" ("en ellas vivimos, nos movemos y somos"). After having determined that human beings are essentially "believers", "believing creatures" ("crédulos") Ortega goes on to assert that "creencias" are what we are, that they make up our reality.

The question could be asked whether such an existentialist vocabulary is not largely metaphorical. We, certainly, are not beliefs. We are biological organisms capable of forming concepts and beliefs, and capable of epistemically relating to our environment, to the world. Ortega's assertions, literally taken, cannot be true. They are the product of literary imagination and literary creation. What, in Ortega's text, in the end really counts can only be the distinction made between different kinds of beliefs and ideas.

Ludwig Wittgenstein operates with a similar distinction. He speaks in *On Certainty* about certain beliefs or propositions we know for sure. It would not make sense, Wittgenstein holds, to doubt them. Ground to doubt them is simply lacking. They are for us "matter of course". It would therefore not be intelligible if we doubted them, as everything speaks in their favor, and nothing against them. All our experiences show that it is as they say. That is the reason why they have a peculiar logical role in our belief system. We do not arrive at any of such propositions we know for sure as a result of investigation. The examples Wittgenstein gives of such central propositions are similar to the ones given by G.E. Moore: "I know that this mountain existed long before my birth"; "I was never on the moon"; "My name is Ludwig Wittgenstein". Such central and other similar propositions like Ortega y Gasset's "creencias" we know for certain. They are to be distinguished from other beliefs and propositions we do not know for sure, and that we critically examine when we try to verify them. The question to be treated now is whether the "Background" is a set of central beliefs or propositions.

## 2 The Background

In his books *Intentionality. An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* and *The Construction of Social Reality*, John R. Searle uses the concept of the Background to refer to a set of enabling and facilitating conditions that make it possible for particular

forms of intentionality or intentional states to function. Such conditions are themselves neither representational nor intentional. The functioning of all intentional and representational states presupposes them. The Background is for Searle a set of abilities, capacities, dispositions, tendencies, practices, skills and stances without which all the intentional activity characterizing human beings when they speak, think, talk, desire and act would not be possible.

In his book *The Construction of Social Reality*, Searle becomes more specific when in the section "What Is the Background and How Does It Work?" he mentions seven "manifestations of the Background" (also called "Background functions"). The background enables us to use properly words and sentences of our natural languages. It enables us to perceive things and sorts of things. It structures consciousness. It makes possible for sequences of experience to get a narrative or dramatic shape. It functions further as a set of "motivational dispositions" that condition the structure of our experiences. It facilitates certain kinds of readiness. And, last but not least, it disposes us to certain sorts of behavior.

Two verbs that Searle himself uses as examples, illustrate paradigmatically how the Background works, the verbs "to cut" and "to grow". Due to Background abilities and skills natural speakers of the English language have, they are able to use properly "cut"-sentences knowing which specific tool to use in order to cut either cakes, hair, or the lawn. They too understand the verb "to grow" differently, knowing what it exactly means depending on whether human beings, the grass or hair are the entities to which the verb is applied.

The concept of the Background is not precise enough. As a "colligation" concept, it brings together many and different phenomena it tries thereby to comprehend. The single phenomena are nevertheless quite heterogeneous and not to be unified in an easy way. Something, however, seems to be quite evident, namely, that beliefs are not essential components of the Background, even if some of its essential elements may be belief-accompanied or belief-supported occasionally.

The central beliefs, whose nature and characteristics attracted Ortega's and Wittgenstein's attention, do not belong to Searle's Background. Strictly speaking, Searle's Background does not contain any beliefs, although now and then, inappropriately and misleadingly, we tend to present the Background abilities Searle analyzes as epistemic assumptions and presuppositions. Were Searle's Background components beliefs, "assenting" would be our appropriate reaction towards them. We could then inquire how exactly we assent to the single components. Newman's "Grammar of Assent" would, for instance, help us classifying and differentiating ways of being cognitively related to them. Searle's Background components not being beliefs but abilities, competences, capabilities, causal and physiological structures, a "grammar of assent" must remain a futile method to examine our connectedness to them. This, if I may say so, is the best

indirect proof of the non-doxastic character of what Searle calls "the Background". It does not make sense at all to ask how we "assent" to the Background components, whether we do it blindly, inferring, surmising, complying, doubting, lightly, fully, firmly, or with indefectible certitude. As they are not beliefs, we simply do not assent to them. Background components, when acting and deciding, we presuppose them, we profit from them, we use and activate them.

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Jaime de Salas

# Belief and Perspective after Ortega and Wittgenstein

**Abstract:** The concept of belief is important both in Ortega's and Wittgenstein's thought, though they tend to develop the concept in different ways. In Ortega it is central to a vision of a society intent on its modernization, while in Wittgenstein it should be understood in the context of a vision of philosophy as attempting to avoid the "bewitchment of language". The most important difference lies in Ortega's understanding of the role of the self in social intercourse, which can conflict with Wittgenstein's views of the publicity of language.

Ortega and Wittgenstein agree in several important theses to which they arrive coming from different theoretical contexts and methods. Both, in their late works, radicalize Hume's skeptical position. Not only philosophy but also science is secondary to common experience. There is no definite term in the history of ideas which nature can justify, there are just inherited beliefs. Language games, world-picture or hinge propositions in *On Certainty* in Wittgenstein and "Mundos interiores" (Inner Worlds) (Ortega 2004, V: 677) in Ortega are based on beliefs [1] that allow them to exist. Truth and error would then be secondary to them. These make the former possible. In Wittgenstein's case they are part of the underlying grammar of thought and consequently acquire precedence over science and a world view derived from science, which wasn't the case in Hume. Both, Ortega and Wittgenstein, would agree that "[a]t the foundation of a well founded belief lies belief that is not well founded" (Wittgenstein 1969, 253) and this concerns not only the fact that the individual tends to accept a great deal of what is passed over to him with his acquisition of culture, but in a more general way that there is no ultimate epistemological criterion for these positions. For both, culture is present in the day-to-day activities of the subject and that presence means the acceptance not only of language but ultimately a degree of common thought.

However when one wants to work with both of them, one has to start by admitting that the comparison is, at the best, limited and with not more than a heuristical value. As José María Ariso (2011) has pointed out, there was very probably

**1** In this paper, I'm referring to hinge propositions or Moorean propositions (Hamilton 1914, 80 ff.) as expressive of beliefs.

no direct knowledge of either thinker of the other. But on the other hand, the importance that the concept of belief has in the thoughts of both of them, particularly in *On Certainty*, makes the comparison of some use. This paper has been conceived very much from the point of view of someone who has worked on Ortega and it is developed on the understanding that a confrontation could be useful to confer on the latter's thought a more precise formulation in the crucial areas of belief and perspective.

In different ways the works of both authors stand out as unconventional in their form, taking into account the standards set by academic philosophy of their times: the works of Bergson, Husserl or Heidegger are developed as academic treatises or series of lectures. In the case of Wittgenstein his thought has arrived to us in the form of aphorisms. In the case of Ortega his work appears as a product of a specifically Spanish tradition of lay intellectuals, parallel to that of France and which on the whole does not attempt to develop a dialogue inside academic circles. Public lectures, essays and articles in the daily press were his foremost activity for a large part of his career and he excelled as an essay writer whereas his position inside the history of philosophy has been object of debate. As we will see, this was more a personal intellectual project than a contribution to an academic discipline. Both, however, were attentive to academic philosophy,[2] followed the contemporary scene[3] and, above all in the case of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, made an important contribution to it during their lifetime. Wittgenstein's knowledge of science and mathematics was more developed whereas Ortega's scholarship in humanities was very wide. The prevalence of a personal style and unconventionality in the forms that they choose to present their work, points towards a personalization of philosophical activity. The urge to speculate was, foremost, implicit in their respective personalities. The development of philosophical reasoning implies a personal effort which can come into the fore when one approaches their work.[4]

In Ortega's case, with that style comes an abiding sense of belonging to a certain society. "I am myself and my circumstance and if I do not save it, I

**2** However one must add that Ortega also gave lecture cycles on the development of phenomenology.

**3** Ortega followed the debates between neo-Kantians and phenomenologists. He read the successive issues of the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* as they appeared. His theory of belief which is what is most interesting from our perspective, is certainly developed in a period when he was reading Heidegger, Dilthey and Hegel as well as Husserl, and the distinction between beliefs and ideas has to be placed in this larger framework of attention to the political crisis of the 30s of the last century.

**4** Conant 2001, 24.

will not save myself." (Ortega 2004, I: 757; my translation) By the expression "save" the reader is meant to understand the disposition and capacity to give value to the possibilities of social setting, in which one is personally involved. "My approach to the universe is through the mountain passes of Guadarrama or the pastures of Ontigola. This surrounding reality is the other part of my person. Only through it can I find myself and become myself in the strongest sense." (Ortega 2004, I: 756; my translation) This injunction pertains ostensibly to one's private life but has clear social and even political implications. Ortega writes these phrases early on in his career, in *Mediations on Don Quixotte*, but he will be attentive to political and cultural events all through out. In his thought there is also a wish to take into account the limitation of one's surroundings as a condition to contributing to them in a positive form. Therefore one has to be able to find oneself in a certain social setting which one has to take into account. The disposition to communicate and contribute to the current political and cultural discussion is, in that sense, a priority in his early work and an important and abiding feature in all of his thought.

In Wittgenstein's case his personal psychological profile appears to be much more complex.[5] The ethical urge behind his work points towards an ideal of personal purity that does not have to come to terms with a specific social setting and in that sense, despite the possible political implications, the personal drive is more ethical and possibly religious than political.[6] The issue is not so much public acknowledgement, readership, and social reform, but personal integrity.

This contrast suggests that Ortega's intellectual project was basically political. The central concept of belief is addressed by our authors from two different points of view as well as from two different methodological standpoints. For Wittgenstein the will to avoid or overcome the bewitchment of language leads him in *On Certainty* to the distinction between certainty and knowledge that belong to different and irreducible epistemological categories (Wittgenstein 1969, 308). So, I may not know –in the technical sense of the term knowledge –, that I have two hands, but I don't need to know it since knowledge is reserved to a specific language game. On the contrary, in Ortega's case, in his mature work – that is *En torno a Galileo* and *Ideas y Creencias* of 1933 and 1936 – it turns out that the same representation can be at different moments an unconscious belief or an explicit idea. An idea proposed and discussed at some point can become a belief for a society that consciously or implicitly accepts it

**5** Sass 2001, 101.

**6** Monk 2001, 11: "Everything in his life was subordinated to the twin search – the single search, as I would claim – for philosophical clarity and ethical Anständigkeit [decency]."

and then passes to become part of what we could term its "web of beliefs" and conversely the accepted belief can, in turn, become a residual idea exposed to criticism when it ceases to be functional.[7]

On the other hand, the purpose of the present article is not to bring up the vexed question of the correct interpretation of Ortega's work. But I should try to qualify what I have termed the political bent of Ortega's project. One can recognize three major visions of politics behind his work:

1. In the earlier period, Ortega proposes a project of enlightenment of individuals taking into account the presence or absence of intellectual and moral values in their representation of their reality. From this point of view one should value the fact that he belongs to a certain historical moment with its possibilities and limitations. The role of thought is to address the *Tema de nuestro tiempo*, which we can very loosely translate as the *Mission of our time*[8] (Ortega 2004, III: 566 and 571).
2. In the *Revolt of the Masses* Ortega recognizes that minorities, in other terms, elites should be able to introduce the innovations and changes that a society needs to make progress (Ortega 2004, IV: 403).
3. In his last years, particularly with *Man and People*, Ortega will defend the individual in the face of the pressure of society. This pressure amounts to a form of alienation which is counteracted by inter-individual relations (Ortega 2004, X: 257).

Parallel to these abiding political worries, Ortega attempts to specify the meaning of the terms he uses, taking into account especially the contemporary phenomenological scene. Life, historical rationality, perspective, ideas, usages, belief are some of the concepts that are technically worked on by Ortega. But this elaboration is done in the application of these concepts to a specific intellectual project that is intended to be "a la altura de los tiempos" and is conceived as taking into account the current situation.

One begins to reason philosophically from a state of acknowledged ignorance. In Wittgenstein's case, this would be to ascertain whether we can say that we know that we have a hand or two hands (Wittgenstein 1969, 1 and 23),

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**7** Hinges – beliefs – for Wittgenstein do not have to be immutable. And it is even true to say that the same sentence can in one context act as hinge and in another be converted into a verifiable proposition. Cf. Moyal-Sharrock 2007, 145. Nonetheless there is in Wittgenstein no sense of the loss of validity of beliefs because certain aspects of a culture have become dated.

**8** An English translation is titled more literally *The modern theme*, but it is a work directed to fellow intellectuals who should take up the mission of finding the formula that can place the reader in his historical moment.

whereas for Ortega, rather than epistemological ignorance, the starting point would be the general underdevelopment of Spanish society at the beginning of the 20th century, a debatable issue in itself, which in turn involves standards which are also open to question. The difference is not just one of degree but of the amount that one has to take for granted to be able to articulate an intellectual position or theory. At the root of all philosophical thought there is a consciousness of ignorance, but the way this is integrated into the process of thought differs widely. Whereas the analyses of *On Certainty* are centered on the analysis of propositions, Ortega implicitly works with a much larger framework of assumptions and, I would say, of intellectual needs: The problem is stated in a more general way, taking into account more concepts, and at the same time these are applied to a specific historical situation: the spiritual situation of his time, to cite Jaspers title, the revolt of the masses, the regeneration of Spanish society seen through its history, etc. In this sense, what Ortega is looking for, is not just "there" as the use of ordinary language implies. In some way that is difficult to specify exactly, he is looking for something that in turn should be vouchsafed by prior research (the Spanish social situation by comparison to the situations of other societies; and ways that it could be improved, for instance). Even if Spanish public opinion tended to concur with Ortega's reading of his situation, academically it is important to give substance to the diagnosis before presenting possible solutions.

Underlying his work one can observe that it followed a criterion about what a society can and should achieve. In his position favorable to the modernization of his country and later in the defense of the project of a European community, it is important to try to convey what Ortega had in mind as an ideal, i.e. the fact that a society enact values so as to be able to justify itself and its members. Thinking of Leibniz, it would be a rational society, where debate and legislation would permit "faire fleurir l'empire de la raison".[9] In Ortega's terms it would be the values that a society holds for good and that should be achieved in the quality of social intercourse. He guides himself by a sense of normalcy. In *The Revolt of the Masses* Ortega maintains:

> Whoever wishes to have ideas must first prepare himself to desire truth and to accept the rules of the game imposed by it. It is no use speaking of ideas when there is no acceptance of a higher authority to regulate them, a series of standards which it is possible to appeal to in discussion. These principles are the principles on which culture rests. ... There is no culture where there are no standards to which our fellow men can have recourse. There is no

**9** Leibniz 1887, 3 – 277. Leibniz is referring to the best form of government, but his formula can be applied to politics in general.

> culture where there are no principles of legality to which to appeal. There is no culture where there is no acceptance of certain final positions to which a dispute may be referred. There is no culture where economic relations are not subject to a regulating principle to protect interests involved. There is no culture where aesthetic controversy does not recognize the necessity of justifying the work of art. (Ortega 2004, IV: 417)[10]

This would be possible in certain cultural situations and not in others whereas Wittgenstein's thoughts on rules tend to highlight a necessary condition for any meaningful thought. There is no more or less in believing whereas for Ortega the quality of one's life depends on the strength of one's beliefs. This is not only a personal matter but has a sociological dimension in so far as values are learnt and shared.

Ortega's position takes into account the degree according to which certain values are enacted and applied in a society. The results, the facts themselves would be secondary. We find what we could term a vision of social reality, according to which a society can and should be sensitive to certain principles which regulate its activities. A consensus on what those principles should be and how they should be applied can be in each case more or less effective. We can use the expression "modal view" in so far as the degree in which this consensus is applied, is variable. Intent on the reform of modern Spain, particularly his early work is focused on the introduction of an enlightened attitude towards Spanish politics and society while his later production is faced more generically by the difficulties of cultural modernization. Leaving aside his metaphysics, Ortega's most valuable contribution probably was to find a conceptual framework to describe the cultural situation of the West in his times.

In this situation the term that is most expressive of his thought is "vigencia", "Gültigkeit" or validity. I prefer the Spanish term because it suggests a quality which transcends mere legality and highlights the more or less effective intercourse that takes place in a society: It is the life of individuals which the possession of beliefs permits and even enhances. In Spanish we also have "validez", but it is to my ears less suggestive and more constricting. This leads Ortega to pay attention to public and academic opinion, to the general state of beliefs and to see himself as a member of his generation with which he felt that it was important for him to work overhauling the inherited culture with a view of rendering more "vital", that is more in keeping with the real needs and possibilities of society.

In Wittgenstein's case, the main issue of his later work appears to be the description of the use of language and the corresponding achievement of conceptual

**10** I cite the anonymous translation of Norton of *The Revolt of the Masses* (1932) into English.

clarity.[11] "The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head against the limits of language." (Wittgenstein 1968, 119) The main thrust appears to avoid positions that are due to confusion on the meanings of terms. "One is often bewitched by a word." (Wittgenstein 1969, 431) Or: "The propositions which one comes back again and again as if bewitched – these I should like to expunge from philosophical language." (Wittgenstein 1969, 31) This leads to Wittgenstein's therapeutic approach: "The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness." (Wittgenstein 1968, 255) One has to add that we can find in Wittgenstein negative judgments on his times, for instance in the prologue of *Philosophische Bemerkungen* included in von Wright's collection *Culture and Value* (Wittgenstein 1980, 6 – 8) which gainsay the more factual orientation which predominates in his work. But his theory of belief is related very much to the general thrust to achieve clarity in respect of the use of ordinary language.

For Ortega, philosophy is at the service of a politics of cultural modernization, and this implies, as we have seen, a generic belief in the use of reason. However there is an internal struggle to maintain himself in this position. His pessimism, though nuanced, increased as he grew older. His personal experience of the advent of totalitarianism, of the failure of the Spanish Second Republic, and the experience of his situation as an exile obviously weighed. His work, particularly the distinction between ideas and beliefs, makes a case against the exaggerations of an enlightened world view which doesn't take into account the difficulties of arriving at cultural modernity and because of this, can even produce a regression to earlier stages of culture. At the same time he would be far from the pessimism one can find in Schopenhauer, for instance, and which is also present in the younger Wittgenstein. In fact, his underlying vision of modernity is positive not only as to the possibility of introducing new ideas, but to the development of institutions. *The Revolt of the Masses* considers the possibility of a reversion to new forms of barbarism but also that of new progress (Ortega 2004, IV: 386). In his underlying optimism there is room for a very positive view of Julius Caesar (Ortega 2004, IV: 220 and 315) and Ferdinand, the husband of Isabel, (Ortega 2004, III: 450) since both had a sense of what they should and could achieve. Mirabeau is also considered an accomplished politician who found the right path in revolutionary France. In general, Ortega took solace in the historical achievements of our culture and thought that the possibility of a

**11** Despite the differences, *On Certainty* is in this respect consistent with the early Wittgenstein. See, for example, the *Tractatus:* 4.112. "Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts" (Hamilton 2014, 11).

European union proposed in the second part of *The Revolt of the Masses* could produce new achievements. Even in his last years, namely in 1949, he came to Berlin to continue to canvass in favor of a European union.

On the whole, Ortega's thought is directed principally to the "personalization" of culture. By personalization I mean that his readers, and Spanish and European societies as a whole, should be empowered to lead a meaningful life, and by meaningful one should understand a life which is developed taking into account certain values. He belongs to an enlightened tradition that understands that this can – and should – be achieved with the use of philosophy. To a great extent, this effort implies the existence of a subject which can be identified with the individual perspective. Though the latter concept of perspective appears in *Man and People* it is more prominent in his early work. Nonetheless the general sense of Ortega's perspectivism is maintained. Not only are Wittgenstein's efforts different, but in many aspects they are contrary to some of the presuppositions of Ortega's project.

I shall briefly analyze four important concepts that Ortega develops in his work and contrast them to Wittgenstein's later philosophy:

1. Perspective
2. Self-absorption (*ensimismamiento*)
3. Intentional speech (*decir*) versus talk
4. The self as futurization (*el yo como futurización*)

1. The importance of the concept of perspective in the first period of Ortega's mature writings is considerable. Ortega's vision of politics is based on the reality of the individual's perspective. This is apparent in the *Meditations on Quixotte*. The book should be understood as contributing to the standards that Ortega maintained that a modern society should keep up. One of the guiding ideas is that lay "salvation" in this world lies in the quality of the reader's perspective of his own culture. "Perspective" should entail "command", meaning knowledge and values applied to everyday life. In some passages Ortega also speaks of "security", that is the capacity to act as opposed to the feeling of perplexity that modern day discussions can give rise to. The reader can maintain himself on the surface of his impressions or, on the contrary, he can see his reality and act according to "concepts" that give meaning to his representations and justify his actions. These concepts can be related to Kantian ideas or categories, or the essences of Husserl's *Ideas I*, among other possible sources.

Society will benefit from the renewal of culture if this takes place in the particular perspectives of the citizens who are urged to pay explicit attention to their representation of reality. In fact, one can recognize in the *Meditations on Quixotte*

an ethics of perspective by which the reader as citizen can make a greater contribution to the common good as long as he is consistent with his point of view and ready to accept its inevitable limitations. One of Ortega's points is that the deficiencies of democratic politics in a society in the process of modernization is but just one symptom of a general weakness. The said society cannot make proper use of the democratic institutions. Against this, individuals should look for grounds for commitment in the world of ideas and integrate these into their everyday activity. And so, Ortega's proposals for Spanish society involve an ad hoc use of philosophy that harkens to neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and even certain tenets of Nietzsche. This rather general orientation was certainly intelligible for his small reading public. In fact, *Meditations on Quixotte* became a classic in Spanish 20th-century essay writing. Ortega is not defending any philosophical synthesis in an academic setting though he made good use of his knowledge of some of the main streams of the philosophy of his times. In the course of his career he would often develop his philosophical thought in view of the positions of other contemporary authors, but the concept of perspective here is used as a part of a more political, enlightened message. In his later work, he will also, occasionally, pose some of the issues that perspectivism involves, and on the whole his work follows the conviction that thought should address the historical situation the author and the reader find themselves in. But as time goes on, he no longer works explicitly with the concept of perspective though it remains implicitly present in his writings.

To my knowledge, Wittgenstein does not use the term perspective but he does write on a system of convictions (Wittgenstein 1969, 102), system of evidence (Wittgenstein 1969, 185), system of beliefs (Wittgenstein 1969, 144) and especially world-picture (Wittgenstein 1969, 95 and 162). He is not interested in the constitution of a personal perspective, but more in the validity of knowledge and belief. There is certainly a difference of degree and accent in the conceptualization**s** of perspective in these systems. Ortega is interested in what one could term the personalization of radical beliefs related to political and ethical ideals, and the way a society is organized, whereas Wittgenstein is attentive principally to everyday factual beliefs, though he also includes observations related to scientific activity. In the examples both thinkers give, I think that they coincide in just one case: the belief of the world as a global sphere (Wittgenstein 1969, 291 and 293 in contrast to Ortega 2004, V: 675). The result is that Wittgenstein is indifferent to the way a person comes to acquiring his personal view of the world,[12] which is completely at odds with the approach that Ortega takes.

**12** Hamilton 2014, 139.

There are other important differences. Behind Ortega's practice and use of the concept of perspective there is a model of the philosopher nearer to the experience of active writing and art appreciation. In his early writings he sees himself as an essayist. Addressing a readership of cultivated Spanish middle class, the *Mediations on Quixotte* offers an extremely personal presentation of Spanish society and its limitations that no doubt was responsible for its large public success. As time goes on, he writes more as a philosopher and even a social scientist. Wittgenstein practices the same genre all through his career.

2. The concept of "self-absorption" (*ensimismamiento*) plays an important role in Ortega's later social philosophy. Basically the individual has the possibility of retiring from normal social intercourse to reflect and create new forms of understanding. Ortega contrasted one's real existence with the state of "alteración" which literally should be understood as a form of alienation in which the individual follows the current of everyday talk and action, and does not come to himself. Self-absorption is a conscious state in which the individual brings to bear his intellectual capacities and imagination to come up with his personal interpretation of reality.

The main objection is that the figure of a self-absorbed individual needs to be, at least, reinterpreted. The distance that self-absorption implies does not in Ortega's mind, and cannot, include a new language. And so Wittgenstein's view of the impossibility of private language should not be applied. For Ortega, the passage to action which self-absorption leads to, means that the self will be expressing itself in the same language and presumably in the same culture and even in view of the same situation as the self originally threatened by alienation. It is certainly acceptable to make a case for the self requiring to keep a certain distance from events and social intercourse but this will inevitable be a relative and temporal distance. In fact, Ortega himself, in other passages, will consider the importance of positively taking into account the limitations of one's historical and social context. One's action has to be, in that sense, pertinent to these. The self-absorbed individual talks to himself as if he was another and so the sense of intimacy that he finds is only relative.

3. Ortega also maintains that the individual can pass from a state of self-absorption to action. In that case he does not repeat received topics but elaborates a personal vision of reality. This leads him to value reflective speech, in comparison with everyday talk. This distinction can be considered as being parallel to the already mentioned distinction of interpersonal relations and social relations. Wittgenstein's vision of language does not include this distinction because it isn't pertinent in the context of the issues he is examining.

However, one must add that Ortega himself introduces the axiom that all intentional speech is at the same time insufficient and exuberant, which points towards

the complexity of any interpretation (Ortega 2004, IX: 729).[13] One can agree with the paradox that we seldom manage to express completely what we wanted to say but at the same time our words are significant for an observer in ways that we cannot suspect. But these difficulties in communication imply that it is hard to find cases in which one is completely indifferent to what one is saying. The very choice of topics can be revealing. On the other hand, it is also very true that however precise one wants to be, there is always the possibility of being misinterpreted. Taking into account the general trend towards personalization, one can appreciate the value that Ortega puts on reflective speech though he for one admits that the meaning of a proposition isn't always intentional.[14]

4. Wittgenstein's work does not include the diachronic and narrative vision of one's personal intellectual quest, which is so very present in Ortega's later work and which he implicitly draws on in his earlier contributions on perspective. After reading *Being and Time*, Ortega introduces a temporal vision to his general understanding. In his last writings, Ortega stresses the reality of the self, emphasizing the fact that the individual is responsible for his activities. To live is to be constantly deciding what one is to do in the immediate future (Ortega 2004, VIII: 358). This leads to the formulation of the self as literally a project for the future (Ortega 2004, IX: 806). The idea of a perspective is not lost, and one can understand that the future project of the self will be consistent with one's past though the will to maintain a certain project also has to be present. The close reading of the examples Wittgenstein uses can provide clarification but will probably not take into account that Ortega's perspectivism is strengthened by the acknowledgement of a narrative context in which the elucidation of the meaning is related to the project that the self is carrying out.

In all these cases there is an underlying sense of the importance of taking one's own personal stance. Authentic life is presented as a personal objective versus a state of unknowing and conventionality. The political bent of Ortega's thought leads to the vision of individuals empowered by the practice and knowledge of philosophy. This is in keeping with the idea of perspective in so far as it is the result of a personal effort to apply concepts available to the context of one's actions. The adversary would be conventionality that could stifle initiative and creativity.

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**13** I allow myself to translate "deficiente" as insufficient.

**14** Moyal-Sharrock 2007, 44ff., analyzes the dichotomy "saying" versus "speaking". "Saying" is what takes place inside a language game whereas beliefs point towards what makes the language game possible and are not properly speaking said but spoken. Certainty can only be shown but not properly speaking said. There is a hierarchy between the two but of a different nature.

It is clear that a great deal of Ortega's positions would be unacceptable to Wittgenstein. I think that the main objections would be consistent with the private language argument, Wittgenstein's resistance to accept the inner/outer distinction, the idea of a *Lebensform* and the difficulties involved in the distinction between intentional speech and talking. Partly these objections are interesting because they highlight difficulties present in Ortega's thought and cannot just be attributed to the differences of objectives of each of the thinkers. On the other hand, those difficulties also arise from the fact that Ortega did not develop a systematic philosophy and therefore is open to correction without necessarily discarding the main tenets of his thought.

To my mind, Ortega is on firm ground when he distinguishes between interindividual relations and what for him are social relations (Ortega 2004, X: 255). In this case, it is not a self-sufficient personality versus the world, but a complex self open to multiple social relations where activities belong to the different levels of social intercourse in which one is involved. The need for personalization of culture means that one's more valuable relations are those in which oneself and the other recognize each other, mutually acknowledging their respective peculiarities. It is inevitable that in a modern society our family and personal ties coexist with other relations where the other remains completely anonymous. Between the close intimate ties and the anonymity of social intercourse, there is room for a continuum that allows for all sorts of personal relations. One's sense of having a personality develops thanks to the more personal relations and it makes sense to maintain, as Ortega did, that modern society could destroy this sensitive and important area of the self-creating alienated individuals. On the other hand, a certain degree of functional anonymity is inevitable, but it can be offset by personal relations where the necessary degree of personal recognition is received and given. Therefore, Ortega's distinction between interpersonal and social relationships is valuable, in this context, though there remains the considerable difficulty of finding the right characterization of the self, and of the perspective that underlies our more personal activities.

On the other hand, Ortega's phenomenology of social existence does have a certain relation with Wittgenstein's forms of life. The issue here is that in different contexts Ortega employs the terms usages (*usos*) and beliefs (*creencias*). Ortega does not attempt to confront the two but it is clear that they to his mind are different. Whereas the latter are viewed positively as the ultimate intellectual basis for our life, the former reflect the tyranny of social existence. Beliefs have an intellectual role and appear as an element of one's representation of reality prior to one's activity; usages automatically and unconsciously impose themselves on the activities of the members of a society. This implies a form of alienation.

Ortega uses his theory of belief to interpret historical change. Beliefs are functional in certain historical settings but cannot act as such in others. For instance, the theocentric world image was functional in the middle ages but loses it power with modernity (Ortega 2004, VI: 421 and 443). However this difference between beliefs and usages, between the world representation and the blind acceptance of ways of acting, would, I think, prove unacceptable from the point of view of Wittgenstein's "Lebensformen" where activity, thought and language reinforce each other, without a clear frontier between them. Despite the fact that there are degrees in consciousness and therefore there are grounds for a certain distinction between beliefs and ideas, ultimately all ideas have a practical effect, understanding by practice, not only transitive action in external reality but also the very representation of things.

Ortega and Wittgenstein share a sense of the limits of reason and this stands out particularly, as we have already written, in their writings on belief. One could say that for both the existence of beliefs provides a rational framework for the agent though the belief itself is not object of knowledge. The framework, though, differs somewhat in each case. In Wittgenstein's presentation there is simultaneously the perception that one's beliefs tend to form a whole so that each belief contributes to what I would call, a general view of the world, a perspective or to use his metaphor, the river bed above which the water flows (Wittgenstein 1969, 97). This does not mean that a belief cannot be disproved and substituted by another, but rather that the certainty implicit most of the time in our daily actions, implies that we are typically acting inside a world of which we have sufficient familiarity.[15] Also, there's an abiding acknowledgement on Wittgenstein's part of a general precedence in one's acting on the part of one's system of beliefs. In Ortega's case, the self-absorption implies a process of refinement of language and its adaptation to the peculiarities of individual perspectives. Finally, the connection with others takes place thanks to this common grammar which, on the other hand, excludes the possibility of a private language. It is not only that I am supported by my beliefs but also I am guided in my speech and thoughts by language.

In Ortega's case, though exterior reality comes to be equated with belief, and beliefs are handed down with culture, there is no sense of the radical involvement in the world through the use of a common grammar and rationality. At times, Ortega – outside interpersonal relations – reduces social intercourse to the naked pressure of society on the individual. The very important implication of the linguistic turn in Wittgenstein does not take place in Ortega's social thought. The certainty of the believed is attributed only to the fact that it is

**15** Moyal-Sharrock 2007, 145.

there, playing an important role in the constitution of one's world view but not to the fact that language is accepted by the individual, implicitly, along with its normativity. The use of language would be the condition for most of our thoughts, but what Ortega values most is a subjective spontaneity that belongs to the more personal level of relationship.[16]

On the other hand, Ortega's vision of beliefs is adjusted to the fact that there are different levels of belief between absolute certainty and the acknowledgement of invalidity. In fact, in his vision of belief there is a functional rationality at work which presents belief as valid, "vigente" in a certain setting. The different levels of certainty are consistent with the replacement or redefinition of beliefs through historical change. There would have been a constant process of historical adaptation, of which *On Certainty* would be oblivious, because Wittgenstein focused on the apparent paradox that there are beliefs of which we are certain but which do not imply knowledge in the strict sense of the word. The ethical, historical and social implications of believing are outside the range of Wittgenstein's worries and the inevitable historical changes of important beliefs were not something that he directly or implicitly addressed.

The limits of reason stand out especially when we pay attention to the role that practice plays in the two authors. For Wittgenstein, "Am Anfang war die Tat" means that the production of culture is the result of man's work with nature and with other men. Action is invoked like "Lebensformen" as a concept that makes intelligible the whole of man's social existence, but the brunt of Wittgenstein's attention is given over to the task of defining the grammar of believing.

On the other hand, Ortega sees the concept of action from a metaphysical point of view. It is necessary to stress that belief and perspective have the role to allow action with its sophisticated meanings to take place in a modern society. There's much more to philosophy than avoiding certain grammatical mistakes. It should help the citizen and the free man to make good use of his liberty. The most important difference is that Ortega distinguishes, in a rather classical way, thought and action. There would be a moment for truth and conviction prior to action, which in turn enables the agent to act. The fact that belief plays a prominent role means that intellectual clarity is only relative. We do tend to take certain beliefs as reality itself, but thought for Ortega shouldn't be understood pragmatically, that is as hypothesis that only future events could falsify. On the contrary, one of the main efforts of Ortega is to manage

**16** The existence of interpersonal relations does mean for Ortega a form of dialogue between equals, but the nature of this dialogue and its linguistic statute is not developed (Ortega 2004, X: 210 ff.). On the other hand, Wittgenstein is ready to accept the semantic evolution of language.

to bring his readers to act rationally, that is on the strength of their rational convictions overcoming the moral aimlessness of modernity and so that the moment of truth would be prior to action. Prior deliberation accordingly plays an important role in Ortega's thought.

Ortega and Wittgenstein meet at the concept of belief. But they travel using different methods, with different priorities and, ultimately, in different directions. In Ortega's case, belief empowers the individual. The creation of selves who can find their personality, and to a certain extent choose themselves amid the possibilities that a modern society offers, is clearly a character of modern society.[17] Choice, even conscious choice, takes place on the backdrop of a thick individual perspective where character, idiosyncrasy, and past personal experience play a role. And so one's actions are a result of these factors, and culture only becomes real when applied by individuals in their day-to-day contexts.

On the other hand, Wittgenstein's most important perception is that, with the acquisition of language, the individual acquires also the grammar and normativity which makes thought and communication possible and that inevitably has to be followed despite the variations language undergoes in time.

Having drawn such a stark image of the differences of each of the itineraries that Ortega and Wittgenstein follow, I would like to conclude with some further remarks that, I hope, will allow a better evaluation of the counterposition.

A. The difference of intentions and methods in no way implies that the conclusions are completely incompatible.
B. Ortega's presentation of the self requires accepting the reality of the dialectical process of its historical and personal constitution. Through its process of one's own constitution the self acquires autonomy and independent intelligibility. Furthermore it can then engage in a life experience. It can see reality from itself, to an important extent choose its own social personality, exercise a limited freedom and ultimately become its own judge. On the other hand, Wittgenstein's personality suggests that one can also reduce this self-experience to a minimum and leave aside the complexity of the modern scene to concentrate on some specific issues as a scientist does.
C. In this confrontation, Wittgenstein gains points in a more effective and successful manner, because he manages to simplify the issues he poses, whereas Ortega's self-taught scholarship and political starting point tends to weigh on his academic performance despite his very valuable insights.

**17** Baumeister 1986, especially 121.

D. Ortega's valuation of personal and social history is pertinent in so far as, despite the contingency of events and the difficulty of narrating them objectively, it is they, individuals and events, that really take place.

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# The Life and Logic of Our Beliefs

**Abstract:** Ortega famously distinguished between "ideas" as explicitly entertained intellectual convictions and "beliefs" as lived convictions, rarely expressed and possibly inexpressible, that actually guide our conduct. He also notes in *History as a System* that while our convictions might fail to cohere as ideas, they must cohere as beliefs; they must cohere in their vital articulation, he writes, while they might fail to cohere in their logical articulation. This paper attempts to concretize the notion that our convictions might surface under two different aspects, ideas and beliefs, and that they must cohere under the latter aspect. I begin by turning to a similar idea often read into Wittgenstein's *On Certainty:* that there are hinge beliefs that guide us in action yet cannot be propositionally articulated. I argue that this reading fails both exegetically and substantially, revealing that we cannot distinguish between vital articulation and logical articulation, if we read logical articulation as *propositional* articulation; the way we live by our beliefs *is* their propositional articulation, and this is in fact simply the Wittgensteinian dictum that meaning is use. I then rehabilitate the Ortegian distinction as one between vital articulation and *intellectual* articulation of our beliefs, and elaborate this in terms of Wittgenstein's discussions of religious belief.

## 1 Introduction. Ortega on beliefs logically and vitally articulated

In this paper I will be talking about beliefs, specifically about the more fundamental beliefs we live by; I will be discussing Ortega's distinction between beliefs and ideas, and between the vital articulation of these beliefs and their logical articulation, relying mostly on his *History as a System*; and I will be comparing these distinctions with Wittgenstein's discussion of certain seemingly fundamental beliefs in *On Certainty* and his discussion of religious beliefs. But it will be helpful to begin by sketching the role of fundamental beliefs within Ortega's larger philosophical project.

Ortega described his philosophy as a "Cartesianism of life" (Ortega 1961, 230): what is fundamentally given, the most "basic reality", is neither the Cartesian intellect, nor physical reality, but "human life". Now the phrase "human life" is at first glance rather unclear; Ortega obviously does not mean "human

life" in anything like a biological sense, for example. Ortega gives various glosses on this most basic reality throughout his writings. In the opening pages of *History as a System*, he describes this life as "a task": "we find ourselves always under compulsion to do something, but never, strictly speaking, under compulsion to do something in particular" (Ortega 1961, 165 f.).[1] Hence the basic reality is that we must decide how to live; but "strictly speaking", Ortega writes, the decision is entirely open (Ortega 1961, 166).

This is by now a familiar picture in existentialist writing, which Charles Taylor has described as "radical choice", and the problems with the idea should also be familiar by now. As Taylor argues, we cannot understand a choice made under no constraints, with no considerations compelling us any particular way, as a choice at all.[2] If the choice is entirely open – if there are no reasons for choosing one option, or if the reasons are themselves simply the products of my unfettered choice – then either I will be paralyzed, or, if I do anything, it will be the product of random impulse rather than decision. True decisions can only be made in a space of specific possibilities and guided by reasons.

Ortega is aware of this; his emphasis on the radical openness of our lives alternates with an emphasis on the constraints we live under. "I do not say that at any moment he may make of himself anything whatsoever. At each moment there open before him limited possibilities." (Ortega 1961, 204) In the opening pages of *History as a System* he writes:

> Each individual before doing anything must decide for himself and at his own risk what he is going to do. But this decision is impossible unless one possesses certain convictions concerning the nature of things around one, the nature of other men, of oneself. Only in the light of such convictions can one prefer one act to another, can one, in short, live. (Ortega 1961, 166)

Therefore human life, the basic reality, is only possible given a body of convictions that makes decision possible, and our understanding of any human life must "begin by establishing the repertory of its convictions" (Ortega 1961, 166). And these convictions are not invented out of whole cloth by the individual, but rather are the prod-

**1** In *What Is Knowledge?*, he defines "life" as "encountering oneself in the midst of facilities and difficulties"; see Ortega 2002, 97. I am ignoring here other formulations of the "basic reality" that seem less relevant to the issue of practical beliefs; see for example Ortega 1960, 200, 219, 232.

**2** See Taylor 1985, 32: "A choice made without regard to anything, without the agent feeling any solicitation to one alternative or the other, or in complete disregard of any such solicitation: is this still choice?"

uct of history: "The past is man's moment of identity, his only element of the thing: nothing besides is inexorable and fatal." (Ortega 1961, 213)[3]

In fact, *History as a System* announces the program of studying the order and structure of this historical reality as it constrains the individual and thus makes decision and living possible. What Ortega calls a repertory of convictions is a precondition of our ability to live, to move in the basic reality of human life.

Now Ortega writes that this repertory of convictions "never possesses a completely logical articulation, that is to say, does not form a system of ideas such as, for example, a philosophy constitutes or aims at constituting" (Ortega 1961, 166 f.). Hence the repertory of convictions that enables human life differs from a philosophical system. Yet this does not mean that this repertory of convictions is unsystematic: "The beliefs that coexist in any human life, sustaining, impelling, and directing it, are on occasion incongruous, contradictory, at the least confused. Be it noted that all these qualifications attach to beliefs in so far as they partake of ideas." Ortega distinguishes here between two sorts of conviction, beliefs and ideas. Ideas are the product of intellectual thought and arise "without producing any effect whatever on our behavior". Beliefs are "not an operation of the intellectual mechanism, but a function of the living being as such, the function of guiding his conduct, his performance of his task" (Ortega 1961, 167).[4] They are almost never thought about; we count on them.[5] Hence it seems that a system of ideas, such as a philosophy, aims at coherence, but can also fail to cohere; whereas the repertory of lived beliefs cannot fail to cohere. "Beliefs, a mere incoherent repertory in so far as they are merely ideas, always constitute a system in so far as they are effective beliefs." Insofar as they are effective, they do not have a logical articulation but

> a vital articulation, they *function* as beliefs resting one on another, combining with one another to form a whole: in short, that they always present themselves as members of an organism, of a structure. This causes them among other things always to possess their own architecture and to function as a hierarchy. (Ortega 1961, 166 f.)

**3** He also writes: "there stands out only one fixed, pre-established, and given line by which he may chart his course, only one limit: the past. The experiments already made with life narrow man's future." (Ortega 1961, 217)

**4** See also Ortega 2002, 179: "We do not arrive at them after an effort to understand; on the contrary, they already are at work in our depths when we set out to think about something."

**5** In "Ideas and Beliefs" he writes: "our relationship with them [our beliefs] amounts to something much more efficacious, [for] it consists in counting on them, always, without interruption." (Ortega 2002, 179).

We can read Ortega as distinguishing two different kinds of systems of convictions: philosophical systems of ideas, which aim at coherence but fail to guide action, and lived repertories of beliefs, which essentially guide action and necessarily cohere. We can also read him as distinguishing two different *aspects* of belief-systems: that our basic beliefs *seen logically, as intellectual products*, might fail to cohere, but *seen vitally, as functions of the living being*, they necessarily cohere. To repeat the quotation from above: "Beliefs, a mere incoherent repertory in so far as they are merely ideas, always constitute a system in so far as they are effective beliefs." In what follows I will be relying on this two-aspect reading of Ortega.[6]

Why must our beliefs necessarily cohere under their vital aspect? Ortega seems to offer three versions of a *modus tollens* argument for their necessary coherence. The first I have already discussed: given that we must do something but nothing in particular, it would impossible to act or decide – to live at all – if we did not have a structure of beliefs constraining and guiding us. Since we do live, we must then have such a structure after all, and it must really guide us. A second argument proceeds from the possibility of understanding others – "should the beliefs by which one lives lack structure, since their number in each individual life is legion there must result a mere pullulation hostile to all idea of order and incomprehensible in consequence" (Ortega 1961, 168). And a third argument is that without a structure of beliefs there would be no self at all – there could be no meaningful distinction between who I am and who I imagine myself to be (Ortega 1961, 228).

This explains well enough why our beliefs must more or less cohere so long as we live. But it does not explain what it means to say that they might fail to cohere in their *logical* articulation, though they cohere necessarily in their *vital* articulation. This is the question my paper focuses on. It is very natural to suppose that Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* can help us here. After all, it is often understood as offering a list of lived but unsayable beliefs; it is often thought that the so-called hinge beliefs in *On Certainty* cannot take propositional form, and that

**6** In a seminal article on Ortega and Wittgenstein José María Ariso seems to endorse this two-aspect reading, though not in reference to this specific passage; we writes that "wir unsere Glaubensgewissheiten nicht *qua* Glaubensgewissheiten, sondern nur *qua* Ideen verbalisieren können. [...] denn die Gewissheiten sind für Wittgenstein unsagbar *qua* Gewissheiten, während die Glaubensgewissheiten für Ortega unsagbar *qua* Glaubensgewissheiten sind." (Ariso 2011, 237) ([...] we can only verbalize our beliefs not *qua* beliefs but rather *qua* ideas. [...] for certainties are for Wittgenstein unsayable *qua* certainties, whereas beliefs are for Ortega unsayable *qua* beliefs.) In other words, while by and large the set of beliefs and the set of ideas might not be entirely coextensional, nonetheless it is possible for the same conviction to be expressed in two different aspects or forms, *as* belief and *as* idea.

trying to express them propositionally leads to nonsense. Hence if we understand "logical articulation" as "propositional articulation", we might find an explanation in Wittgenstein of Ortega's idea. In this paper I begin by pursuing this idea, and conclude that in fact Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* undermines this very distinction between vital and logical articulation. In a second section I will argue that Ortega's distinction can be salvaged if we turn instead to Wittgenstein's writings on religious belief and see it as a distinction between the *vital* articulation of our beliefs and our *intellectual* understanding of them.

## 2 Fundamental beliefs in propositions and in practice

There are a number of parallels to Ortega's thought in *On Certainty*, for example when Wittgenstein writes: "my convictions do form a system, a structure" (Wittgenstein 1969, 16, § 102).[7] This system could also be said to have a kind of hierarchy: Wittgenstein is interested in certain beliefs that have a kind of unshakeable certainty, that have been withdrawn from review. As Wittgenstein frequently insists, these beliefs are not the product of intellection (Wittgenstein 1969, § § 94, 152, 538); instead they are in some sense anchored in our actions, in our practices, part of our form of life. "My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things." (Wittgenstein 1969, 44, § 344)

However, we should not assume that all the 'certainties' discussed in *On Certainty* form a unified class. Some of these 'certainties' are: this is a hand, I am a human, I am a man, I have never been on the moon, the earth existed long before my birth, etc. These situational certainties, as I will call them, form a potentially infinite list; we could go on endlessly formulating further examples. As Michael Williams argues, these certainties are given in specific contexts of action, and moreover, in any context, the certainties held fast in that context cannot be specified, either as a finite list or by any rule.[8] In writing this paper, I do not investigate whether this is a computer, whether these words are English, whether I have eyes, etc., and there is no limit to the circumstances we can mention that are not subject to review in that context. In his essay "Ideas and Beliefs" Ortega also takes note of these situational certainties – when we decide to go out into the street, he writes, we are counting on the existence of the street; this is not an idea we entertain, but rather a silently operative belief (Ortega 2002, 180).

**7** He also speaks of a "nest of propositions" (Wittgenstein 1969, 30, § 225).

**8** Cf. Williams 2007, 51 – 4.

Here we have beliefs that are vitally articulated in the sense that they are anchored in our lives, and they do not *get* propositionally articulated. And this is all that Ortega claims in "Ideas and Beliefs":[9] We do not arrive at them by an intellectual process and never have reason to utter them. Yet that we have no occasion to say them, does not mean that their propositional articulation is somehow problematic, never mind incoherent. Wittgenstein seems to think that it is suspect to adduce these situational certainties as knowledge claims. But we are trying to understand Ortega's claim in *History as a System* that the beliefs that necessarily cohere as we live them might fail to cohere in their logical articulation. So far it is hard to see how these situational certainties should fail to cohere logically, even though they rarely get said and might, moreover, be non-epistemic claims.

However, these situational certainties are not at all the sorts of belief that interest Ortega in *History as a System*. In this work Ortega claims that our repertory of convictions must rest on *one* fundamental belief; in trying to understand history and to understand ourselves we must "establish before all else which belief is fundamental, decisive, sustaining and breathing life into all the others" (Ortega 1961, 168).[10] Hence I will speak hereafter of our fundamental certainties in contrast to situational certainties. Ortega provides two examples of these fundamental certainties: faith in reason, and faith in God. Faith in God was the fundamental conviction of the Western world until the 16th century, when it was replaced by faith in reason – more precisely, faith in physico-mathematical reason; which today, Ortega argues, must and will be replaced by a new fundamental conviction, faith in historical reason. Ortega describes faith in physico-mathematical reason as follows: "Western man believes, then, that the world possesses a rational structure, that is to say, that reality possesses an organization coinci-

**9** See for example Ortega 2002, 179.

**10** Ortega himself does not seem sufficiently clear on this distinction between situational certainties and fundamental certainties. In "Ideas and Beliefs" he says of the belief in the existence of the street, which is "latently operative" when I cross the street, that "strictly speaking" it "is the most significant thing of all, the presupposition of everything else" (Ortega 2002, 180). This seems simply erroneous: why should my belief in the existence of the street by any more significant in this situation than my belief in the existence of the earth, of myself, of the galaxy, of the surface of the street, of a certain time-slice of the street, a certain slightly smaller time-slice, etc.? Whereas in contrast "belief in God" seems more properly foundational for a theistic culture; we cannot go on endlessly iterating similar beliefs that are foundational in that sense. In the second section of this paper I will suggest that this is due to the fact that the latter belief is practical while the former is theoretical; that is, the belief in God has evaluative and normative elements, and we do not merely presuppose it but are guided by it.

dent with the organization of the human intellect, taking this, of course, in its purest form, that of mathematical reason." (Ortega 1961, 171)

Faith in reason might be called a world-picture – it is a picture of ourselves and the universe, and it grounds the culture of an epoch. Of course Wittgenstein spoke of "world-pictures" in *On Certainty*, which he says are "the substratum of all my investigation and assertion". Unfortunately he does not really give us an example of a world-picture. However, we can find sentences in *On Certainty* that are more fundamental. Here I will look at two such examples: that there are physical objects,[11] and the law of induction. These seem to differ importantly from situational certainties in that, insofar as they are true, they seem to be operative in *any* context of action. Moreover, Wittgenstein calls the statement that physical objects exist nonsensical; and in this too it differs from situational certainties. That is, Wittgenstein does not merely say that it is hard to make sense of someone saying, apropos of nothing, "I know that there are physical objects"; rather he simply calls the statement "there are physical objects" nonsense (Wittgenstein 1969, 6, § 34). Hence this kind of fundamental certainty might give us the comparison we are looking for: it has a vital articulation (it is anchored in all actions) and cannot be propositionally articulated. If we can understand why it cannot be propositionally articulated, we may have understood Ortega's idea that our beliefs necessarily cohere in their vital articulation but might fail to cohere in their logical articulation.

Now, the first thing to note is that like situational certainties, this fundamental certainty is not arrived at by any intellectual process, nor does it ever get said; if we are certain of it, then we are certain of it in counting on it, turning our backs on it. Children are never taught the proposition that there are physical objects: "Children do not learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc. etc., – they learn to fetch books, sit in armchairs, etc. etc." (Wittgenstein 1969, 62, § 476) When Wittgenstein asks in *On Certainty:* "Are we to say that the knowledge

**11** Moyal-Sharrock classifies this as a "universal hinge" (Moyal-Sharrock 2004, 102), classing it together with other "universal hinges" such as "Trees do not gradually change into men and men into trees". Here I will be defending Michael Williams' claim that "there are physical objects" is *not* a hinge-belief like "Trees to not gradually change into men and men into trees" or "This is a hand", and differs from them in being strictly nonsensical. (See Williams 2004). What I am calling "situational certainties" includes a great deal that would be further subdivided by Moyal-Sharrock's much more fine-grained classification system (Moyal-Sharrock 2004, 102 – 116). Here I am only interested in singling out "there are physical objects" as an example of an alleged certainty that is 1) thought to be *especially* fundamental in being presupposed by all and all possible actions, and that, as I argue below, 2) turns out to be *fundamentally* nonsensical, in the simple sense that it says nothing at all (though it of course has a rather haunting *aura* of meaningfulness); thus it is not a non-epistemic certainty but simply no certainty at all.

that there are physical objects comes very early or very late?" (Wittgenstein 1969, 63, § 479) we might want to answer: in its vital articulation it is among the earliest things we learn, but in its logical, i.e. propositional articulation, we learn this very late, if ever.

There is a longer passage on this statement in Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology:*

> 338. One man is a convinced realist, another a convinced idealist and teaches his children accordingly. In such an important matter as the existence or non-existence of the external world they don't want to teach their children anything wrong.
> What will the children be taught? To include in what they say: "There are physical objects" or the opposite?
> If someone does not believe in fairies, he does not need to teach his children "There are no fairies"; he can omit to teach them the word "fairy". On what occasion are they to say: "There are ..." or "There are no ..."? Only when they meet people of the contrary belief.
> 339. But the idealist will teach his children the word "chair" after all, for of course he wants to teach them to do this and that, e.g. to fetch a chair. Then where will be the difference between what the idealist-educated children say and the realist ones? Won't the difference only be one of the slogans? (Wittgenstein 1980, 64)

The child learns to do things with words because it learns to do things with things;[12] and it is tempting to think that the belief that there are physical objects is thus silently operative in our practices, that it is part of the transcendental framework of our actions, or, relatedly, part of the grammar of our form of life. If this is the case, then the belief that there are physical objects is operative in everything we do, and thus beyond doubt; and yet the propositional form is not at all operative; we are never taught the proposition that there are physical objects.

Yet it is hard to understand what is supposed to be *nonsensical* about this. It is something that doesn't ever get said, and outside of philosophy there would be no point in saying it, but can't we nonetheless say it? Haven't I been saying it the whole time? On one reading of Wittgenstein, the nonsensicality of the claim just *is* its pointlessness. Because our faith in the existence of physical objects is operative in every context and not susceptible to doubt, there is never any occasion to say it; if we did say it, no-one would know what we were getting at.[13] I will argue that, while this might be an adequate understanding of Wittgenstein's scruples concerning situational certainties, it does not explain the nonsensicality of "there are physical objects". But first I will put the question aside.

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**12** "I want to say: it is characteristic of our language that the foundation on which it grows consists in steady ways of living, regular ways of acting." (Wittgenstein 1993, 397)

**13** Ariso 2011, 235 – 238; Moyal-Sharrock 2004, 66, 215.

For now I would like to mention a minor flaw in the comparison with Ortega. Ortega writes that these fundamental beliefs have the function of guiding our conduct, and uphold and sustain the other beliefs. (Ortega 1961, 167 f.) Wittgenstein turns the relation around, writing: "one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house." (Wittgenstein 1969, 33, § 248) Likewise he supplements the image of the hinge with that of a rotational axis, and writes: "This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility." (Wittgenstein 1969, 22, § 152)

Hence for Wittgenstein these beliefs do not *have* any function within our practices but rather at best *are* a function of our practices. They do not guide us and in fact do no work at all. In the passage quoted earlier about the idealist and realist fathers, it is clear that their philosophical convictions regarding the existence of physical objects make no difference whatsoever in their lives.

We can make this clearer by looking at another seemingly fundamental belief discussed in *On Certainty*, the law of induction – that the future will resemble the past, and that the generalities we have observed in the past, for example that all swans have been white, can safely be projected onto the future. We might think that this is a belief that is not only foundational in all contexts of action, but also truly *guides* our actions; we act in expectation of a future that resembles past experience. Paragraph 500 of *On Certainty* reads:

> But it would also strike me as nonsense to say "I know that the law of induction is true". Imagine such a statement made in a court of law! It would be more correct to say "I believe in the law of ..." where 'believe' has nothing to do with *surmising*. (Wittgenstein 1969, 66, § 500)

Here Wittgenstein seems to suggest that we have a kind of living faith in the law of induction, as a person might live their faith in the laws of the state or in moral or religious law. However, in fact Wittgenstein also consistently denied that the law of induction could play any role in our lives, and he certainly did not think it could guide us in any way:

> The squirrel does not infer by induction that it is going to need stores next winter as well. And no more do we need a law of induction to justify our actions or our predictions. (Wittgenstein 1969, 37, § 287)[14]

Wittgenstein provides no argument here, but I will briefly sketch a possible Wittgensteinian argument. If the law of induction licenses us to expect the future to

**14** See also § 133.

be the same as the past, then the question is what "the same" means. The occurrence of a white swan could be described in several different ways, for example:

1) This swan is white
2) This bird is not black
3) This swan is *whack* ("whack" applies to all things examined before today just in case they are white, but to all things examined after tomorrow just in case they are black.) (Goodman 1993, 74)

These three descriptions offer three different ways that the future might be the same, or fail to be the same, as the past. On 1), the future is the same when all the swans we see in the future are white. On 2), the future is the same so long as no birds are black; and on 3) the future is the same when we start seeing black swans. Since anything can count as the same as anything else under some description, the law of induction simply excludes nothing. My presentation of this point is obviously indebted to Nelson Goodman's discussion of induction and his invention of the *grue* predicate, but we can also see the point as a Wittgensteinian one. The so-called rule-following paradox turns on the insight that anything *could* count as "going on the same way" under a certain interpretation; and what we actually count as the same is a function of our practices and our form of life. "For only through a technique can we *grasp* a regularity." (Wittgenstein 1983, 303, Part VI § 2)[15] In other words, the law of induction means nothing until our practices give it meaning; hence it could hardly be said to guide our practices.[16] "Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loop-holes open, and the practice has to speak for itself." (Wittgenstein 1983, 21, § 139)

Now here one might object: I have only shown that the propositional form of the belief fails to guide us, as it takes its content from our practices, i. e. from its vital articulation, but in its vital articulation it might guide us. I think this objection is misguided; for if the vital articulation of the belief just is the ways we act, this amounts to claiming that the ways we act guide the ways we act. Of course individual practices can influence one another. But these convictions – that there are physical objects, that the past is a guide to the future – were supposed to be at the bottom of all actions, guiding all actions; thus insofar as we can understand the belief in physical objects or the law of induction as vitally articulated in all our ways of acting, we cannot at the same time understand them as one particular practice that guides all the others.

**15** See also Part IV § 28.

**16** See also Wittgenstein 1969, § § 124, 133.

I want to look more seriously into the charge of nonsensicality now. I will argue that Wittgenstein's charge of nonsense in this case is related to the failure to locate anything that could be said to guide us; that we should understand the charge of nonsensicality to mean, not that the statement is pointless or superfluous, but that the philosopher who wishes to assure us that *there are physical objects* or that *the future will resemble the past* has simply failed to mean anything with their words; and moreover that this insight undermines the entire distinction between the logical and the vital as I have been describing it.

I have argued that the general statement "the future resembles the past" is a form of description that could equally well be applied to any series of events. Likewise, the statement "there are physical objects" could not be refuted by any possible experience. The parable of the realist and idealist fathers shows that there is never any point in their lives or their children's lives where the difference comes out. Thus we cannot say that these statements truthfully describe our experience, since they do not depict one way the world could be rather than another (Wittgenstein 1983, § 23). In this way, again, these statements differ from a statement like "this is a hand". But then it is not merely superfluous to say "there are physical objects", because it always applies; rather, it *never* applies. We have not mentioned something irrelevant; we have simply not described any state of affairs. The reason this utterance cannot guide us is the same reason it is nonsense: quite simply that the philosopher saying it has failed to mean anything by it. In saying that the future will resemble the past, we haven't said anything about how the future will be. We have not said something contentful but pragmatically inappropriate; we have specified no content.

But this undermines the notion that we have located an unsayable belief at all. If the words "there are physical objects" fail to specify any way the world could be, in that case there is also no particular way of living that would count as "belief in the existence of physical objects", for any way of living could equally well be described that way. Similarly, no matter how you live, we could describe it as believing in the law of induction. But this just means that the alleged belief does not have a "vital articulation". We cannot pick out any way of living that would, in contrast to some other way of living, be the vital articulation of that alleged belief. But then we have not found a belief that is somehow missing a propositional articulation; for the alleged belief is also missing a vital articulation; and this means we simply have not found any belief at all. It is true that our actions and practices are such that the question "are there physical objects" never arises, but this does not mean that we have located anything we could call a belief in the existence of physical objects.

I will try to restate this argument. The picture we found in Ortega, and that we had thought we'd found in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, was that of fundamen-

tal beliefs that had two aspects – the logical and the vital – whereby there was something nonsensical or at least problematic about the logical aspect. We wanted to say that the belief that there are physical objects fails to cohere in the propositional form, but is expressed in action. To this we should ask: which belief is expressed in action? "The belief that there are physical objects"? But if the words "there are physical objects" fail to make sense, then the words "the belief that there are physical objects" fail to describe any particular belief. If the words "there are physical objects" can be used to describe a belief with a vital articulation, then that belief will also have a propositional articulation, namely: "there are physical objects" – even if it rarely *gets* propositionally articulated outside of philosophy. If philosophical discussion provides a context in which we can meaningfully speak of the belief that there are physical objects, it will also provide a context in which we can say *that there are physical objects*. If, conversely, we cannot say that "there are physical objects", then we will not be able to use those words to point to a belief and talk about its vital articulation. It does not matter whether this alleged belief is a different kind of belief, as some have suggested[17] – not a belief-that but a belief-in or a primitive trust-in; so long as we have to use words to describe this belief, the words we use to describe it must make sense, or else we have not described any belief.

Seen in this way, *On Certainty* continues the line of thought begun in the *Tractatus*, that meaning is use, i. e. that vital articulation is logical articulation. The reason why Wittgenstein cannot make any sense of the claim "there are physical objects" is because he cannot find any belief that would be expressed by those words that could make a difference in our lives; and a belief that makes no difference is simply not a belief. *On Certainty* champions a vitalistic understanding of beliefs and thus a vitalistic understanding of logic. For example, in paragraph 89 he writes:

> ... What would the practical effects of this belief be? – Perhaps someone says: "That's not the point. A belief is what it is whether it has any practical effects or not." One thinks: It's all the same setting of the human mind. (Wittgenstein 1969, 13, § 89; translation modified)

This brings out the view he opposes: that we can first locate a belief, for example as a certain mental state, and then ask, secondarily, what practical consequences this belief might have. Against this he argues that the practical implications, i. e. the vital articulation, define the belief. Now, the vital articulations of our beliefs in general are such that the question "are there physical objects" can never arise; but just for this reason it means nothing to say that we have a belief in the ex-

**17** See Moyal-Sharrock 2004, 181 – 201, for a thorough discussion of the various possibilities here.

istence of physical objects. *That* alleged belief has no vital articulation, and it is for precisely that reason that the alleged proposition "there are physical objects" lacks any logical articulation.

## 3 Living and understanding religious belief[18]

I have argued that we cannot locate anything that fits the following category: it is a belief that is necessarily operative in all our actions, yet it cannot be meaningfully expressed in language. I will now be looking for something slightly more modest: something that guides us in life, without necessarily determining all our actions, and that is hard to express, or rather is such that it can be hard for us to understand its expression properly. The place to look for this is not in *On Certainty* but rather in Wittgenstein's discussion of religious belief, for example the "Lectures on Religious Belief" and the remarks collected in *Culture and Value*. Ortega is, after all, interested in practical foundations. Our task as humans is that we must decide how to live, and no theoretical understanding of the world can settle that; we need to know what matters to us. The fundamental beliefs Ortega discusses in *History as a System*, belief in God and belief in reason, are essentially practical beliefs, what we might call ethical world-pictures. Ortega writes that we are losing our faith in physico-mathematical reason because this faith is practically inert: "when this received the urgent call to propound its truth on the most human problems, it did not know what to say" (Ortega 1961, 182).

The belief in God might look like a metaphysical belief, and hence primarily a theoretical belief in a very peculiar kind of fact, that is, that a being known as God exists. Wittgenstein writes, however: "There can be a description of what it would be like if there were gods on Olympus – but not: 'what it would be like if there were God'." (Wittgenstein 1994, 94) There is nothing it is like for God to exist, or for Him not to exist; in other words, the belief in God looks at first glance like the law of induction, a pseudo-statement that pretends to describe how the world is but in fact asserts nothing. Wittgenstein's view is that, if we took the belief in God as a metaphysical belief, it would mean nothing and certainly would offer no practical guidance. If people are in fact guided by their religious beliefs, then they must have some sense and we must look for their sense elsewhere. I will argue here that the belief in God, on Wittgenstein's understanding of it, changes none of the facts in the world, but it changes how they matter

**18** This chapter is closely based on a forthcoming paper, Schoellner 2016.

for the believer, and it does so by guiding our practices; and in this regard it can serve as the model for practical beliefs generally.

In fact, in the only text Wittgenstein wrote specifically and explicitly devoted to ethics, his 1929 "Lecture on Ethics", he uses belief in God as the model of ethical beliefs. His paradigm example of an ethical judgment is not along the lines of "murder is wrong" or "you should reduce suffering", as in most discussions in moral philosophy, but rather: "how extraordinary that the world should exist"; and he writes that this is in fact what people have always meant by saying that God created the world, and could be called the experience of seeing the world as a miracle (Wittgenstein 1993, 41f.). For him ethics is primarily a way of seeing the world as a whole; and the correct ethical stance is that of accepting whatever comes. In a second step – and here we see that the lecture is an early text, quite close in spirit to the *Tractatus* – Wittgenstein writes that all ethical statements are nonsense; that is, he cannot make any sense out of the words he is tempted to come out with, such as when he says, "how extraordinary that the world should exist!" After all, he is trying to describe an attitude, not to the way this world happens to be, but to any world, to whatever might happen; as he writes in the *Tractatus*, "Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is." (Wittgenstein 1996, 186, 6.44) Hence he would like to say that everything possible is extraordinary; but if nothing could ever count as not extraordinary, then it seems that we have said nothing in saying that everything is extraordinary.

Now here again a traditional reader of Wittgenstein might wish to suggest: though we can't say "everything is a miracle", surely this is the failed attempt to express something that cannot be said, but that shows itself in our seeing the world in a certain way, i.e. seeing the world as a miracle. But if the words "everything is a miracle" fail to describe any way the world might be, then why should we feel that we have picked out any way of seeing or responding to anything with the words "seeing the world as a miracle"?

And here one might object: surely one could have the feeling of astonishment, and have this feeling all the time, and thus be astonished at everything? And one might express this by saying: everything is extraordinary? If you imagine that you can isolate astonishment as a certain mental state, and then inquire secondarily into the circumstances in which it arises, then there is no logical obstacle to a person feeling continuous and unconditional astonishment. But in fact this is not how our concept of astonishment works: no mental state would count as astonishment in all circumstances. Similarly, no typical expression of astonishment would count as such regardless of circumstances. If a person spent their whole life walking around with eyes wide open and jaw hanging, we wouldn't say they were continuously astonished; we would suppose it to be some kind of disorder.

There are parallel problems with the statement "God created the world". One might say: surely I can imagine that a powerful supernatural being created the world? We can imagine this, yes. But we might not be imagining what we wanted to mean. For the term "world" cannot then be used to mean "everything", or, as in the *Tractatus*, the totality of facts, or everything that is the case; for we are asserting it to be the case that God created the world, and then it cannot be the case that God made everything that is the case. At most we could mean that God created *everything else*. And while we might then have a certain stable metaphysical picture, it is at least ethically superfluous. For this does not seem to give us any reason to respond in any particular way to anything within this world. It can only begin to take on ethical meaning when we suppose that God is good, and the world He made as well, and we are meant to respond to this with gratitude and acceptance. And here again the word "good" just seems to lose any traction. For when we start to use the word this way, nothing we could ever possibly experience could ever count as other than good.

So if these statements fail to describe any way the world could be, then there seems also to be nothing like seeing the world that way, and no particular way of living that would count as living in accordance with the vision of the world as a miracle. In uttering these statements we seem to be doing no more than running against the limits of language – which are the limits of sense.

I have run through this very quickly, but in this limited space I have tried to make this as plausible as possible. Now however I want to suggest that it is ultimately implausible and that it puts Wittgensteinians in a bad bind. On the one hand, the way that these ethical statements turn out to be nonsensical nicely mirrors Wittgenstein's critique of the nonsensicality of philosophical statements: we find that the words we are tempted to come out with fall apart on us, that we have not given them any particular meaning; we have been equivocating in meaning, for example, in trying to attach two different meanings to the term "world", or in trying to rely on the ordinary sense of "good", which requires a contrast to things that are not good, while at the same time rejecting any such contrast. On the other hand, if these statements are nonsense, they cannot guide us. Of course Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy often brings out precisely how philosophical statements are nonsense in that they fail to guide us, to do any real work in our lives. But if ethical statements are nonsensical and cannot guide us, then there's no reason to think of them as ethical in the first place. If a statement can be classified as ethical then it must in some way be able to guide my conduct. Hence there is uncomfortable tension in the idea that ethical statements – statements that Wittgenstein recognizes as ethical – are essentially nonsensical. Moreover ethical and religious statements are a broad class with a very established role in our lives; people actually use them on specific occasions, re-

spond to them in specific ways, etc. Hence in light of the connection between meaning and use, and in light of late Wittgenstein's insight into how very many different uses language can have, we should be skeptical that ethical statements as a class could be simply nonsensical.

In fact, after 1930 Wittgenstein never repeated the assertion that ethical or religious statements are essentially nonsensical, and as early as his 1931 "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough" we see him taking a different approach. I want to begin by focusing on a very late remark from the collection *Culture and Value*, written in 1950:

> If the believer in God looks around & asks "Where does everything I see come from?" "Where does all that come from", he is *not* demanding a (causal) explanation; and the point of his question is that it expresses this demand. He is expressing, then, a stance towards all explanations. – But how is this manifested in his life? (Wittgenstein 1994, 96 f.)

This recalls the paradigm ethical expressions of the "Lecture on Ethics": a wonder at the world and "God created the world". The question "Where does all this come from?" is not meant such that anything would count as an answer to it. We have not answered the question if we say "The Big Bang". Moreover we would also have missed the point of the question if we answered "God", if we understand this as an explanation competing with other possible explanations, as the hypothesis of a causally efficacious being. The question expresses a sense of wonder and, relatedly, a sense of the futility or irrelevance of all explanations, which could, I think, equally well be expressed by saying that God created the world. And here Wittgenstein asks the question that he had neglected in his early "Lecture on Ethics": how does this manifest itself in his life? And he goes on:

> It is the attitude of taking a certain matter seriously, but then *at a certain point* not taking it seriously after all, & declaring that something else is still more serious.
>
> Someone may for instance say that it is a very grave matter that such & such a person has sided before he could complete a certain piece of work; & in another sense that is not what matters. At this point he uses the words "in a deeper sense." (Wittgenstein 1994, 96 f.)

Here we find another crucial insight that is missing from the "Lecture on Ethics": that this sort of thing gets said on specific occasions, for example, when someone dies. Moreover this occasion helps us to understand what the "attitude to all explanations" might be. When someone dies, we often seek to assign blame – we blame the deceased, we blame ourselves – or we might seek explanations – why did it have to happen? The question "where does all this come from?" stills our demand for explanation and justification. I think there are a couple of things we can say here to clarify this remark, and I will sketch them very briefly: The ques-

tion provokes an aesthetic mode of attention – and causal explanations are generally irrelevant to an aesthetic appreciation of an object, as are justifications – but this aesthetic attention is not directed to any particular object but rather offered as a way of seeing one's general circumstances, whatever they may be. One comes to see "all this" with a sense of wonder; and in framing this very open-ended notion of a larger whole, of "all this", in which any particular event could be subsumed and relativized, it offers us a way of distancing ourselves from particular events, taking them seriously up to a point.[19] We could almost say: the twin notions of the world as a whole and of a higher power are subtle conceptual devices that can be used to direct our attitudes on certain occasions.

A similar remark from 1947 is also helpful here:

> The use of the word "fate". Our attitude to the future & the past. To what extent do we hold ourselves responsible for the future? How much do we speculate about the future? How do we think about past & future? If something unwelcome happens: – do we ask "Who's to blame?", do we say "Someone must be to blame for it"?, – or do we say "It was God's will", "It was fate"?
>
> In the way in which asking a question, insisting on an answer, or not asking it, expresses a different attitude, a different way of living, so too, in this sense, an utterance like "It is God's will" or "We are not masters of our fate". What this sentence does, or at least something similar, a commandment too could do. Including one that you give to yourself. And conversely a commandment, e. g. "Do not grumble!" can be uttered like the affirmation of a truth. (Wittgenstein 1994, 69 f.)

Here Wittgenstein quickly lists a variety of basic conceptual practices: questioning, insisting, apportioning blame, taking responsibility, speculating about future events. In living we must decide which of these practices are appropriate when. Wittgenstein says that the way we go on in these basic conceptual practices – whether in a certain situation we seek explanations or not, whether we assign blame or not – expresses what he calls a "way of living"; and that the statement "it is God's will" similarly expresses a "way of living" in this sense. Our idea of God is

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**19** Brenner explains similar remarks of Wittgenstein in a manner that nicely complements my explanation here when he writes: "monotheistic systems open up a 'logical space' for challenging false absolutes – whether they be the individual ego, a human collectivity, or the elemental powers of nature." (Brenner 2001, 53) Similarly, he writes "the sentence 'We're safe in the hands of God,' as he understands it, is the expression of a particular attitude towards the normal human preoccupation with keeping safe and secure" (52). I am perfectly happy with Brenner's explanations and do not wish to offer any competing explanations, nor to offer anything like a complete explication of *the* meaning of a phrase like "God created the world" or "Where does all this come from?" – rather I just wish to show the general direction one should look for an explanation of these mystical statements.

of a powerful and loving agent behind events. Now, when a person with authority gives an order, typically we do not ask for justification but just do it. And when someone who loves us does something we feel wronged by, typically we just forgive and put it behind us. Hence to say "It is God's will" on certain occasions is to express a "way of living", that is, a way of responding to events, for example by forgoing explanation and blame here, and quelling ambition or resentment.

Hence these sorts of statements, despite appearances, do not seek to apply a predicate to everything. We say these things on specific occasions as a way of bringing specific things into a different perspective, for example a person's death; by prompting different responses. But the statement is framed as a perspective that applies to anything. We do not want to say that *this person's death* is only serious up to a point; that would be crude and disrespectful. The statement that life is a mystery or a gift or a surprise could not be applied to everything (there'd be no such thing as continually being surprised and grateful at everything) but it is framed such that it *could* be applied to *anything*, and it *gets* applied on specific occasions; applied to an event as part of a vague larger whole.

Now this is just one way of understanding some of these statements. I do not want to give a definitive account of what these statements might mean on different occasions, only to suggest the direction one should look in. However, some people will feel that this direction is pernicious. Some might say: when I say that God exists, I'm not just telling people to act in certain ways – I also think that God actually exists. In fact, in his "Lectures on Religious Belief" one of his students says something like this (Wittgenstein 1967, 71), and Wittgenstein responds that this is a misunderstanding – for it is simply not at all clear what it means to claim that God exists, and his "Lectures" aim to suss out exactly how religious claims differ in how they mean, rather than denying them or replacing them with other claims. This is why he feels that he as a nonbeliever cannot deny religious claims:

> If you ask me whether or not I believe in a Judgement Day, in the sense in which religious people have belief in it, I wouldn't say: "No. I don't believe there will be such a thing." ... And then I give an explanation: "I don't believe in ...", but then the religious person never believes what I describe. (Wittgenstein 1967, 55)

When atheists describe what they deny – for example, that a very powerful man lives up in the sky – sophisticated believers immediately feel that this simply isn't what they mean and is not denying anything they believe in. But then it is extremely difficult for anyone to say what they do believe – "The difference might not show up at all in any explanation of the meaning." (Wittgenstein 1967, 53) They may not say anything different than what the atheist says, but the difference will show up in the connections they draw, "what he makes follow

from it" (ibid., 62), "what conclusions are you going to draw ... Are eyebrows going to be talked about, in connection with the Eye of God?" (Ibid., 71)[20]

In religious discourse, he writes, disagreement looks different than we might expect (Wittgenstein 1967, 53), grounds for belief look different (ibid., 54), reasons look entirely different (ibid., 56, 58), and belief functions much differently – the belief "will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for in all his life" (ibid., 54). About the belief in the Last Judgment, for example, he writes: "a certain picture might play the role of constantly admonishing me" (ibid., 56). The surrounding "connections" that give us the meaning of religious claims can be explained in terms of conceptual practices, that is, what implications we draw (ibid., 69) and what lines of questioning we accept or dismiss; but they can also be explained in terms of behaviors, that is, what we do, how we live in accordance with these claims (ibid., 62).

This could all be called the vital articulation of religious claims; and again this vital articulation *is* the logical articulation. The vital articulation tells us what it might be for the claims to be true and what would follow from that. The meaning of the claims is given by our practices. However – unlike the alleged beliefs we were trying to find in the context of *On Certainty* – these claims are not simply read off of our practices retroactively. The claims play a role in guiding and correcting our practices; people live in light of this language and also fail to live in light of it, and admonish themselves and others with it. So while the meaning of "God created the world" can only be given in terms of practices, the claim itself plays an active role in our practices. Nor would just any way a person lived count as seeing the world as a miracle.

Now it is not unique to religious claims that their logical articulation is their vital articulation, i. e., that their meaning is their use; this is simply the general Wittgensteinian view of language elaborated most famously in the opening sections of the *Investigations*. But religious claims seem particularly prone to misunderstanding, due to the difficulty of getting an overview of their vital articulation and the ease of being misled by their superficial resemblance to more ordinary empirical sentences. But this temptation to misunderstanding is also not entirely unique to religious claims; it plays a crucial role in Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy in the *Investigations*. Philosophical problems arise when we misunderstand our own forms of expression. "A main source of our failure to understand

**20** See also: "people might dispute about how many arms God had, and someone might enter the dispute by denying that one could talk about arms of God. This would throw light on the use of the word. What is ridiculous or blasphemous also shows the grammar of the word." (Wittgenstein 2001, 32)

is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity." (Wittgenstein 1958, 49, § 122)[21] For example: the countless expressions that involve thoughts being "in" a person's mind or head can lead us to philosophical problems about how these thoughts could ever be communicated to others, or how they could even be about an external reality at all; if we stop focusing on the superficial presence of a spatial model and look at how we use these expressions, that is, our actual criteria for attributing thoughts to others, the philosophical problems should disappear. But though we are fluent in the use of these expressions and fluent in these criteria, we do not have this whole use present to our minds when we look at one of these expressions, and we could easily be misled by the form of words and its analogies to other expressions.

Wittgenstein never extends this critique of philosophy to theology, but I think it is easy to see the application. He critiques Frazer for misunderstanding the claims of primitive religions, for example, taking the claim that the ruler of a tribe has the power to bring the rain to be a mistaken causal hypothesis. Frazer is misled by the surface of the claim, failing to see how it is actually used, how it actually hooks up with experience:

> It is, of course, not so that the people believe that the ruler has these powers, and the ruler knows very well that he doesn't have them, or can only fail to know it if he is an imbecile or a fool. Rather the notion of his power is, of course, set up such that it can harmonize with experience – the people's as well as his own. (Wittgenstein 1993, 138; translation modified)

And there is nothing stopping us from supposing that religious believers might similarly misunderstand their *own* religious expressions; indeed, if philosophy is a perennial confusion, it would be strange if this were not the case. Wittgenstein's views of religious doctrine seem to imply this. For example, he writes in a 1949 remark: "God's essence is said to guarantee his existence – what this really means is that here what is at issue is not the existence of something." (Wittgenstein 1994, 94) This presumably would imply that the proofs of God's existence offered by believers, for example Augustine or Descartes, are misunderstandings of their own expressions of faith in God. It is standard for these authors to note than of course one must be led to faith by the heart rather than by the head, and that the proof is in a sense secondary; but they miss the possibility that the proposition standing at the end of their proof might not even be the same proposition they have faith in, although they may share the same form of words – that the meaning of their words is such that they only *can* come from

**21** See also § 345, as well as 4.002 – 4.0031 of the *Tractatus*.

the heart. Moreover, the classic problems of theology, such as the theodic paradox, might be evidence of a similar misunderstanding. The theodic paradox is the seeming contradiction between three things that Christians believe: that God is good, that God is all-powerful, and that there is evil in the world. Now, on the face of it, this looks like an irresolvable contradiction. But until we look at what we actually mean by speaking of "good" when we say that God is good, and what we actually mean by "evil" when we say of occurrences in the world that they are evil, it is simply not clear that there is any clash here. And we might say: theologians might find it impossible to get these three claims to cohere with each other, as they lack an overview of the vital articulation of these claims; but insofar as people actually live by these claims, they *must* cohere in people's way of life.

So with this I have finally arrived at the Ortegian distinction in Wittgenstein. It is still misleading to speak of a distinction between a belief's vital articulation and its logical articulation, for vital and logical articulation are the same. But we can speak of a distinction between the logico-vital articulation of our beliefs, and the false understanding of these beliefs within intellectual discourse. It might be that on the rare occasions when I explicitly formulate the beliefs I live by, I am intellectually misled by that formulation. We might even build an entire intellectual edifice that fails to cohere. And we can also suppose that, while we might never get these beliefs to cohere intellectually, if they shape our lives then they must ultimately cohere vitally, as we live them, for of course we can make sense of our lives.[22]

**22** It is possible to read a passage in "Ideas and Beliefs" in accordance with this interpretation, where Ortega is discussing our belief in reason: "But please have the presence of mind [necessary] to note that it is one thing to have faith in the intellect and another to believe in certain ideas fashioned by the intellect. None of these ideas is believed straightforwardly. Our belief is a belief in the thing called the intellect, just in general, but a faith like that is not an idea about the intellect. Compare the precise nature of that faith in the intellect with the imprecise character of the idea almost everybody has about the intellect. [...] Our faith in reason has borne undisturbed the most scandalous changes about the theories it has produced, including the profound changes about its theoretical account of what reason itself is." (Ortega 2002, 184) Here we might suppose Ortega to be saying that our vital belief in reason survives any number of changes in our explicit intellectual interpretation of that belief.

## 4 Prospects for explaining changes in world-picture

I would like to conclude that, if we are satisfied with the preceding arguments, they point us towards a problem shared by Ortega and Wittgenstein, a problem that could suggest a research agenda for our work on these two figures. The problem is simply Ortega's problem, in *History of a System*, of how ethical world-pictures or practical beliefs change throughout history, how exactly one follows upon another. If my preceding arguments are valid, it might seem that we have painted ourselves into a corner where we can no longer expect change in fundamental belief to be possible. After all, if our fundamental beliefs must harmonize perfectly insofar as they structure our lives and guide our conduct, why would they ever change? And Wittgenstein seems to have a similar problem when he writes, for example, about the power of the tribal leader: "the notion of his power is, of course, set up such that it can harmonize with experience – the people's as well as his own" – or when he writes that "There can be a description of what it would be like if there were gods on Olympus – but not: 'what it would be like if there were God'." These beliefs are not responsible to experience the way empirical beliefs are, and cannot be empirically refuted; so it is not at all clear how we could ever change these beliefs in response to experience. To put it briefly: if a world-picture cannot be refuted by experience, how can it change at all in response to experience? I have argued that these practical beliefs can guide our lives, but surely we want to believe that our lives can also in some way guide our practical beliefs?

Though Ortega devotes quite a bit of text to this problem, and Wittgenstein almost none, I will argue that they both leave us with the same desideratum. To begin with Ortega: he believed himself to be writing on the cusp of a shift in world-picture, from faith in physico-mathematical reason to faith in historical reason. Physico-mathematical reason was failing us practically in that it failed to guide our conduct; not only did it fail to justify specific courses of action, but more generally it failed to give us any sense of self from which we could act, it did not shed light on ourselves or our feelings or "illumine for him the problems of humanity". Ortega writes that "all the naturalist studies on man's body and soul put together have not been of the slightest use in throwing light on any of our most strictly human feelings, on what each individual calls his own life" (Ortega 2002, 184 f.). But this seems to contradict the opening idea that our beliefs necessarily have a vital articulation, that they have a function in our lives and guide our conduct. Ortega maintained that the faith in physico-mathematical reason took hold of the West collectively around 1700, and *History as a System* came out in 1934. So for over 200 years this faith in physico-

mathematical reasoning was the fundamental belief of the Western world. If we assume that we can only live in light of some fundamental belief that guides our conduct, and if for 200 years our fundamental belief was faith in physico-mathematical reason, then this faith cannot simply fail to guide our conduct – for that would make the past 200 years entirely inexplicable. On the other hand, it is true that the natural sciences cannot tell us how we should live. But this just means that if what we call "faith in reason" did guide us for 200 years then "faith in reason" cannot be identified with the natural sciences; it must represent some more substantial ethical conception. If the people living their lives in light of this faith would have said about themselves that they simply believed in the natural sciences, this can only mean that they are confused about the underlying vital articulation of their beliefs; since, as we have seen, the underlying vital articulation is not readily accessible. For example, what Ortega calls "belief in reason" might have been the idea that the right way to live is pursue to pleasure using the means of the natural sciences, within a liberalistic framework whereby we also respect the rights of others to pursue their own happiness; and we might have thought that only pleasure could be a moral value, and that anything else was superstitious and irrational. In other words, obviously science does not inform us that only pleasure has value, simply because science does not inform us about any moral values; but people might have a hedonistic moral ideal that they think of as "scientific". But again, if this ideal of "scientific reason" did guide the West for so long, and only failed in Ortega's day, we still have no explanation of how it could fail, or how any fundamental belief can fail.[23]

**23** It might be that Ortega saw this problem and tried to get around it by distinguishing between living faith and dead, sluggish faith: "we believe in something with a live faith when that belief is sufficient for us to live by, and we believe in something with a dead, a sluggish faith when, without having abandoned it, being still grounded on it, it no longer acts efficaciously in our lives." (Ortega 1961, 172) This does not seem capable of overcoming the problem. If we must live by some belief that guides us, and if we lived by our faith in physico-mathematical reason, and if a "sluggish" belief is one that doesn't guide us, then either our faith in physico-mathematical reason was obviously not sluggish, or it wasn't actually our fundamental belief, and we believed in something else instead. If, on the other hand, a sluggish belief can actually guide us, then I don't know what it means to say that sluggish beliefs no longer act efficaciously; but whatever that does mean, it doesn't seem pertinent to our problem. I can put the dilemma differently: either the distinction between live faith and sluggish faith is just a reiteration of the distinction between beliefs and mere ideas – and in this case, if our faith in physico-mathematical reason was sluggish, then it wasn't actually our belief at all, and we must have had some other belief, and if it was our belief, then it couldn't have been sluggish; or if Ortega means to be making some other distinction, it is not clear what that distinction is exactly or how it helps us out of this problem.

We need to revisit the argument for the necessary coherence and effectiveness of our beliefs. The lesson from Wittgenstein was a very moderate coherence requirement: practical belief must have a vital function, that is, it must make a difference in my life; and if I can be said to hold various beliefs, there must be some way of these various beliefs making a difference in my life together. In fact, this more modest coherence requirement is more suited to Ortega's argumentation.[24] I listed three variations of the *modus tollens* argument above: 1) it would impossible to act or decide – to live at all, rather than producing random behavior – if we did not have a structure of beliefs constraining and guiding us. 2) It would be impossible to understand others unless they had structured beliefs – "should the beliefs by which one lives lack structure, since their number in each individual life is legion there must result a mere pullulation hostile to all idea of order and incomprehensible in consequence." (Ortega 1961, 168) And 3) without a structure of beliefs there would be no self at all – there could be no meaningful distinction between who I am and who I imagine myself to be (Ortega 1961, 228). None of these arguments seem to require anything like perfect coherence or harmony. We can understand someone as holding beliefs that sit poorly with one another and still not as acting randomly. We can understand someone as having a conflicted self, as coming into a crisis, as acting on beliefs that guide her more and more poorly, as being torn between different conceptions of life. That these beliefs must have some function in how we live our lives does not mean that they must function well or to our satisfaction.

So there seems to be room for change, if we understand the argument for the necessary coherence of our beliefs more modestly than Ortega seems to have done. But we are still left with the question of how this change occurs, which is the primary question occupying Ortega in *History as a System:* "what is this series, what are its stages, and of what nature is the link between one and the next" (Ortega 1961, 216). Given the results of the last sections, we can expect that modes of argument that might look like they address themselves to our world-pictures could simply fail to justify them; and that modes of true justification of our world-pictures will have to work practically rather than intellectually. However, this is still rather unhelpful, since at this point we do not know what a practical ar-

**24** It seems that Ortega simply overrates the amount of coherence we should expect in action: every action we take is that which "is most in accordance with the general program he has mapped out for his life, and hence with the man of determination he has resolved to be" (Ortega 1961, 202). This is simply an unrealistic picture of how people live, nor is it at all philosophically motivated by the argument for the necessity of coherence: there is a wide space of possibility between random action and every action being determined by a single general program for one's whole life.

gument is; we have seen examples of how vital beliefs, such as "life is a miracle", might guide our practices, but we do not yet know what would justify the adoption or rejection of such a belief; though we should be able at this point to rule out certain modes of argument as misguided, we lack a positive characterization.

*History as a System* seems to offer two different explanations of the series of changes. On the one hand Ortega seems to suppose that we swap one belief for another simply because beliefs get old; we turn to new beliefs because once we have lived and experienced a belief we see its flaws: "what we have been acts negatively on what we can be" (Ortega 1961, 208). Thus if we were once pagans, we must become something else, e. g. Christians; if we were once Christians, we must become something else again. It is in this context that he describes historical reason or vital reason as "narrative reason". This involves some problematic assumptions, for example that we really continuously accumulate and respond to our entire past,[25] and that nothing ever satisfies us for long. However, the larger problem is simply that the narrative he imagines here is very thin – essentially a list of past beliefs – and also seems to have little explanatory power: for the list of things past only tells us what our next step cannot be, and does not establish any links between beliefs in the series beyond novelty. And in fact he seems to be aware of this inadequacy, as he concludes this discussion by announcing the program of discovering "of what nature is the link between one and the next".

Ortega then tells the story of an almost inevitable dialectical progression from faith in God, to faith in physico-mathematical reason, to the faith in historical reason that he thought must emerge in his own day. When our faith in God fails in the 16th century – for reasons that, he says, "lie outside my present inquiry", except that it in some way "did not suffice to illumine [our] relations to the world" (Ortega 1961, 173) – we are necessarily thrown back upon the reality of ourselves. "So the loss of faith in God leaves man alone with his nature, with what he has. Of this nature the intellect forms a part, and man, obliged to have recourse to it, forges for himself his faith in physico-mathematical reason." When this likewise fails to illuminate, "man finds himself compelled to take his stand on the only thing still left to him, his disillusioned life" (Ortega 1961, 229 f.). That is, we finally confront the reality of life: that we must do something and yet nothing in particular. But this also moves us to ask how we came to this situation, to review the failures of our previous faiths, and to confront "the discovery of man's trajectory, of the dialectical series of his experiences". Hence in finding ourselves at a loss we also discover our past, our history, as a transcendent reality: "Man set outside himself is brought up against himself as re-

**25** "Every historic term whatsoever, to have exactness, must be determined as a function of all history." (Ortega 1961, 221)

ality, as history." It is here that Ortega speaks of the "Cartesianism of life" (Ortega 1961, 230).

On this picture, history is not a series of novelties but a dialectical trajectory; we find substantial argumentative links between the world-pictures. Moreover, it seems like, as far as the logic of the trajectory is concerned, faith in historical reason must be the final step in the series, where we have reached the only absolute reality and cannot move any further. Yet while this seems to posit a stronger kind of link between steps in the series, in fact it strikes me as equally underdetermining the series. Firstly, as I have argued, since faith in physico-mathematical reason apparently guided us for 200 years, it remains unclear why we would abandon it in the twentieth century. If it worked for so long, why did it fail *then?* Though I have tried to loosen the coherence requirement enough to allow for change, this does not *explain* any specific change. Secondly, it is unclear how faith in historical reason is supposed to become our operative, fundamental belief and guide us. Ortega seems to accord historical reason a double-role of explaining the series *and* serving as the final item in the series. Historical reason might explain how our faith in physico-mathematical reason failed, but what sort of content is it to offer us instead? How is the story of how we lost our direction supposed to give us direction? In fact, as a proponent of historical reason Ortega seems to be doing what he criticizes Descartes for as the proponent of physico-mathematical reason: offering a promissory note that this conception will be able to guide; whereas in ethics at least "truth is what is true now" (Ortega 1961, 182).[26]

It is best, I think, to read Ortega on balance as just announcing the program of historical reason as the study into the links between world-pictures and their historical progression, rather than giving us any real answer. Can Wittgenstein tell us more about how world-pictures change throughout history?

Of course Wittgenstein says next to nothing about historical change. But he speaks about moments of personal conversion and about conflicts between alien world-views; and both of these situations present us with the same problem: how can claims that are empirically irrefutable be responsive at all to our experience? If there's nothing it could be like for God to exist, then what could give us reason to start or stop believing? And if world-pictures cannot be refuted by experience, does this mean that we have nothing to say in the face of alien world-pictures?

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**26** This aspect of Ortega's work also has a close parallel in Wittgenstein's work in his recurrent remarks to the effect that "In Wahrheit haben wir schon alles, und zwar gegenwärtig, wir brauchen auf nichts zu warten." (Wittgenstein 1984, 183) (In truth we already have everything, it is all present, we don't need to wait for anything.)

I will begin with his views on personal conversion. In *Culture and Value* he writes:

> Life can teach you to "believe in God". Moreover it is *experiences* that do this; not visions, or other sensory experiences that show us 'the existence of this being', but e. g. sufferings of various sorts. And they do not show us God as a sense experience does an object, not do they give rise to *conjectures* about him. Experience, thoughts, – life can force this concept on us. (Wittgenstein 1994, 97; translation modified)

Our experience can teach us to believe in God; the way it works is that certain kinds of suffering compel us to adopt the concept of God – which, again is not a concept for an empirical entity, but rather a concept that structures our thought and experience practically in some way. Similarly he had written a few years earlier:

> It seems to me as though a religious belief could only be (something like) a passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates. Hence although it's a belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life. Passionately taking up *this* interpretation. And the instruction in a religious system would have to be a portraying, describing of that system of reference & at the same time an urging it upon them. (Wittgenstein 1994, 73; translation modified)

On the topic of conflicts between alien world-views he is famous for saying that reasons run out, and while conversion to another world-view might be possible, "it would be a conversion of a special kind" – one "would be brought to look at the world in a different way" (Wittgenstein 1969, 14, § 92). At other points he writes that we can only "combat" the alien world-view, adding: "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 reason comes *persuasion*. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)" (Wittgenstein 1969, 81, § 612)

These remarks have often been the occasion for accusing Wittgenstein of an unhinged cultural relativism; it is supposed that the conversion can only be some psychologically explicable causal process rather than a truly rational route to an improved understanding of the world, or merely emotional reaction, the product of emotional manipulation. But we do not have to hear the talk of "conversion of a special kind", or of bringing someone to see the world differently, or of the describing and urging of a system of reference, etc. as arational processes. We are only pushed towards this reading by a dichotomy that Wittgenstein is concerned to undermine: either a proposition can be firmly demonstrated, as in empirical questions, or our adhering to it can only be arbitrary whim or emotional posture. Wittgenstein was very interested in the phenomenon of aesthetic critique, where we can legitimately change someone's way of seeing something

through a different sort of reasoning. In Moore's notes on Wittgenstein's lectures we find the following:

> Reasons, he said, in Aesthetics, are "of the nature of further descriptions": e.g. you can make a person see what Brahms was driving at by showing him lots of different pieces by Brahms, or by comparing him with a contemporary author; and all that Aesthetics does is "to draw your attention to a thing", to "place things side by side. [...] And he said that the same sort of "reasons" were given, not only in Ethics, but also in Philosophy. (Wittgenstein 1993, 106)

What Moore describes here is essentially the method of "perspicuous presentation", i.e. Wittgenstein's own philosophical method.[27] The notion of ways of seeing, ways of framing empirical matter, and notion of modes of reasoning about our ways of seeing through perspicuous presentation, through presentational ways of directing and refining our attention, are central not only to Wittgenstein's characterization of aesthetic thought but also, as we have seen, to ethical thought, i.e. practical beliefs, and also to his notion of philosophy. His own philosophical methods fall into the space between empirical demonstration and mere emotional manipulation, and these methods certainly represent a very robust kind of *thought*. Moreover, while it might be said that we quickly run out of reasons here, when we meet with someone who is not similarly "attuned" – and Wittgenstein was almost obsessively drawn to contemplating such situations – this still does not mean that at this point we are wrong or that there is no such thing as right and wrong. Where we run short of justification, we are not for that reason necessarily wrong.[28] He often faced the objection that for him a way of seeing could not be true or false, and always rejected this as a misunderstanding: that he was instead asking what truth would consist in here, what it would mean to claim this sort of thing as true.[29] This can be seen as the central question of Wittgenstein's work, early and late, and yet it is hard to locate an answer.

In summary then, we can turn back upon the *modus tollens* arguments I provided above. I wrote that "if they [our practical beliefs] shape our lives then they must ultimately cohere vitally, as we live them, for of course we can make sense of our lives". As a *modus tollens* argument it only supports the conclusion that our practical beliefs necessarily cohere vitally insofar as it is true that we really can make sense of our lives. The same holds for the *modus tollens* "if our beliefs

**27** Wittgenstein 1993, 133; Wittgenstein 1958, 49, § 122.

**28** "To use a word without justification does not man to use it without right." (Wittgenstein 1958, 99, § 289)

**29** See Wittgenstein 1969, 27, § § 199 – 200; Wittgenstein 1976, 68 f.; Wittgenstein 1983 part I § 5; Wittgenstein 2001, 106.

didn't cohere, we couldn't ever act or make any decisions"; this only argues for the coherence of our beliefs insofar as we believe that we do really act and decide rather than evincing random behavior – "random" of course not in terms of underlying causal laws but in terms of the practical sense we can construe. I have argued that the Wittgensteinian considerations suggest that both premise and conclusion are somewhat true; that is, that the truth is in some middle ground between what we might call Ortegian optimism – that one most fundamental belief determines our every action – and a Becketian skepticism holding that we only act senselessly. If we can only make a partial sense of our lives, if we are continually tinkering with this sense, resolving one aspect only to come up short elsewhere, or the sense we can make never catches up to material circumstances that change for reasons of their own, this still leaves us philosophically with the question of how we reason in this endeavor, i.e. of what validity in practical beliefs consists in; which can be seen as the central question left us by the work of both Ortega and Wittgenstein.

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Stefan Tolksdorf

# Knowledge and the "Favor of Nature"

**Abstract:** The starting point of my investigation consists of three passages from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, namely: OC 243, 505, 230. In these sections, Wittgenstein addresses three important topics of contemporary epistemology that I would like to paraphrase as follows: Is knowledge a mental state? Is it always by favor of nature that one knows something? How strong must justification for knowledge be? I will consider the question of how the epistemological topics relate to each other and in what way they can be combined with each other. In this regard, two positions are distinguished. The first one is the fallibilistic standard view within analytic epistemology. I will criticize this view. Alternatively, I will suggest another possibility to interpret the three topics, which is inspired by John McDowell. According to the unorthodox alternative, knowledge is a compelling reasons requiring mental state.

## 1

The starting point of the following investigation consists of three passages from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty:*

OC 243: One says "I know" when one is ready to give *compelling grounds*. "I know" relates to a possibility of *demonstrating the truth*.[1]

OC 505: It is always by *favor of Nature* that one knows something.[2]

OC 230: We are asking ourselves: what do we do with a statement "I *know* ..."? For it is not a question of mental processes or *mental states*.[3]

All three text passages contain assertions regarding knowledge (or "to know"). Wittgenstein addresses three important topics of contemporary epistemology that I would like to paraphrase as follows:

1. Knowledge requires justification. However, of what epistemic strength are those grounds that turn a true belief into knowledge? Or asked differently: How are we supposed to understand epistemic, i.e. knowledge-enabling, justification? (Wittgenstein's answer is: The grounds must be *compelling*.)

**1** Emphasis mine. Cf. also OC 504.

**2** Emphasis mine.

**3** First emphasis L.W., all following emphasis mine. Cf. also OC 42, 179.

2. In what way does the fact that a subject knows something depend on the subject's epistemic abilities and achievements, and what role, on the other hand, do so-called external factors play, for example coincidence, epistemic luck, the influence of the world, or the favor of nature? (According to OC 505, the favor of nature is an essential component of empirical knowledge.)
3. Is knowledge, like belief, a mental state? (Wittgenstein seems to negate this question.)

At first glance, the first two of Wittgenstein's statements seem to create a tension. If knowledge is based on compelling grounds, then in what way is knowledge always by favor of nature? In what follows, I will consider the question of how the epistemological topics raised by Wittgenstein's remarks relate to each other and in what way they can be combined with each other. Here I am at the same time asking whether the aforementioned tension is real or not. In this regard, two positions are distinguished. The first position corresponds to the standard view within analytic epistemology (passages 2–4). I will criticize this view. In my opinion, the way the standard view interprets and combines the three topics cannot be satisfactory. My main objection is: if we take the standard view as a basis, we ultimately lose the phenomenon we were trying to explain, namely *knowledge* (passage 5). Alternatively, I would like to suggest another approach in order to interpret the three topics and to bring them into accordance (passage 6). As a result, Wittgenstein's remarks will appear in a different light and the mentioned tension will disappear. Compared to the epistemological doctrine, this alternative is unorthodox. In its development, I am influenced by John McDowell.

I close this introduction with a limitation. In order to not raise false expectations and disappoint the reader, I am pointing out that this investigation is not primarily concerned with the question of how Wittgenstein is to be read in *On Certainty*, i.e. whether he, as his remarks might suggest, follows the standard view, or whether he would rather follow my alternative or even a third position. The text passages quoted at the beginning only represent the starting point of my epistemological reflections. Only in the conclusion (passage 7) I will once again get back to Wittgenstein.

## 2

According to epistemological orthodoxy, knowledge is a *hybrid state*, and accordingly the term "to know" is a *hybrid concept*.[4] What does this mean? I will illustrate the standard hybrid conception of knowledge by answering the question of how it interprets the three epistemological topics addressed by Wittgenstein's remarks, starting with the third topic.

Is knowledge a mental state? If your answer to this question is 'no', you are referring to a commonplace. Despite the controversy over which conditions taken together are sufficient for knowledge, epistemologists agree that belief as well as truth are *necessary* for knowledge. Knowledge is true belief plus x. Necessarily: If S knows that p, then S also beliefs that p, and p is the case. Believing or accepting a propositional content to be true is without a doubt a mental state, truth, however, is not. Whether S knows this or that essentially depends on whether the world is as the subject believes it to be. However, so it seems, the fact that the world is so and so is, with regard to the subject, an *external factor*, whereas mental states are commonly viewed as *internal* states of a subject. The combination of internal and external factors suggests the following picture: knowledge is a compositional state consisting of at least one mental aspect (belief) and a non-mental because external factor (truth) that is logically independent of it. As a composition of mental and non-mental factors, knowledge itself cannot be a (purely) mental state. I quote John Greco as a representative of this commonplace:

> [...] some sorts of epistemic evaluation are obviously externalist. [...] Most importantly, and perhaps most obviously, whether a belief counts as *knowledge* is an external matter, if only because a belief counts as knowledge only if true, and whether a belief is true is typically an external matter. (Greco 2014, 326)[5]

All this is more or less uncontroversial. It is my hope that this will change throughout this investigation.

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**4** To my knowledge, John McDowell was the first to use the term 'hybrid conception' to describe a family of knowledge conceptions. Cf. McDowell 1995.

**5** Emphasis mine.

## 3

In order to understand in what sense knowledge is always by favor of nature for representatives of the standard conception, we will now examine the concept of *epistemic justification*. The discussion of the first topic then naturally leads us to the second topic.

If we exclude from our considerations radically externalistic and naturalistic theories of knowledge that in most cases do not use the concept of justification at all, yet another commonplace in analytic epistemology is that justification is necessary for knowledge.[6] It would be a mistake to believe the Gettier problem has unsettled this consensus. That is not the case. If anything, Gettier cases only show that justification is not sufficient for knowledge. In what follows, I will not pay attention to this problem. The difference between knowledge on the one hand and (mere) true belief on the other is tantamount to, at least in most cases, the distinction between having and lacking *good grounds* for one's believing. Epistemologist's talk of "good grounds" raises the following question: *How good* do good grounds have to be to turn true belief into knowledge? 'Justification' is a genus-concept that includes many species, among them epistemic as well as non-epistemic sorts. *Genuine* epistemic justification is *truth-conducive*. The intrinsic truth-conducivity, i. e. the fact that justification for knowledge is a certain sort of truth indicator is what distinguishes it from non-epistemic (moral, religious, practical) sorts of justification. Truth-conducivity means that the epistemic grounds must speak *for the truth* of the justified belief. Taken by itself, the reference to truth indication does not answer the presented question of 'how good', as can be seen when we rephrase our question as follows: How truth-conducive do knowledge-enabling grounds have to be? The orthodoxy referred to as the hybrid conception of knowledge gives a *fallibilistic* answer to this question.

Fallibilism confronts us with a second dogma of contemporary epistemology. The first passage led us to a first dogma. As mentioned, the assumption that knowledge is not a mental state is viewed as an epistemological truism. The same goes for fallibilism. If this needs proof, I would like to quote Michael Williams and Stewart Cohen:

> We are all fallibilists nowadays. (Williams 2001, 5)
>
> The acceptance of fallibilism in epistemology is virtually universal. (Cohen 1988, 91)

**6** Is radical Externalism (or naturalism) wrong? Is knowledge without justification possible? I do not want to rule out this possibility, however I do not think it is an adequate approach of *human* knowledge.

Trying to exactly define epistemological fallibilism is not an easy task. It represents itself in different varieties. If we abstract from the differences, its theoretical core consists, in my opinion, in the following: even at its best, epistemic justification is only *weak* truth-conducive. It is weak truth-conducive because grounds that enable knowledge are logically compatible with the falsehood of the justified belief. In this sense, good grounds are only *evidences* or *indications* of truth. Hence, justification does not guarantee truth. Non-entailing grounds are grounds that make the truth of a belief (very) probable but do not guarantee it and hence do not rule out that the belief is false. Cohen is my source for the doctrine of fallibilism: "[...] a fallibilist theory allows that S can know q on the basis of r where r only makes q probable." (Cohen 1988, 91)

For my purposes, this sketch of fallibilism will suffice. As is known there are two main motivating forces behind the doctrine of fallibilism. On the one hand, fallibilism is supposed to correspond better to our ordinary attributions of "to know" than non-fallibilistic theories; on the other hand, fallibilism is connected to the promise of disarming the skeptical challenge.

This too is more or less uncontroversial. Again, I hope that this will change throughout this investigation.

## 4

The first two aspects of the standard conception of propositional knowledge point the way to *one possible* interpretation of Wittgenstein's third remark. Knowledge is always by favor of nature. What does that mean? Let us recapitulate what has been said until now. Knowledge is not a (purely) mental, but a compositional hybrid state consisting of mental and logically independent non-mental factors. We can locate having fallible grounds as well as believing something to be true as the grounds indicate on the mental side of the subject. In this description, the role of nature in the presented picture of human knowledge should be obvious. After the subject has done everything that is, according to the orthodox view, epistemically required for knowledge, i. e. the subject *believes* what it is supposed to believe based on *good grounds*, it still must *hope* for the contribution of the world in order to turn the true belief into knowledge. Why does it have to be this way? First: The subject's epistemic position does not guarantee the truth of the belief. The grounds make the belief very probable but at the same time leave room for the subject to be wrong (dogma of fallibilism). Knowledge however requires truth, not just probability of truth. Second: The fact that the world is as the grounds suggest is an external factor (dogma of knowledge as a hybrid state). As an external factor it goes beyond the subject's realm of responsibility. What the subject cannot

rationally control is nothing else than something it can only hope for. This way knowledge becomes a combination of epistemic performance *and hope*. If the grounds are there, but the world, contrary to expectations, does not contribute, the subject does not know what it believes to know. McDowell appropriately describes nature's role within the orthodoxy as follows:

> [...] knowledge is a status one possesses by virtue of an appropriate standing in the space of reasons when [...] the world does one the favor of being so arranged that what one takes to be so is so. (McDowell 1998, 400)

So the world must do the subject a favor.

Following McDowell, I would like to describe the favor of nature required for knowledge in yet another way. In the standard view there is a gap between the mental factors and the non-mental because external condition. Fallible grounds for the belief that p are logically compatible with two possible kinds of worlds: p and non-p worlds. Knowing that p requires the existence of a p world, which is not guaranteed due to the subject's undetermined epistemic position. The gap exists between the fact that the grounds make p only probable and the fact that p is the case. The favor of nature serves the bridging of the gap between epistemic *truth probability* and *truth*.

Let us illustrate the presented standard view with an example. S knows that the object in her hand is red. S believes that this is the case because it visually appears to the subject that the object in her hand is red. Visual appearances are epistemically significant mental states. They justify perceptual beliefs. As non-factive states their power of justification is, however, fallible because the world can appear to the subject to be so and so, even when it is not. In order for S to know, the visually supported perceptual belief must be true. At this point the subject depends on the favor of nature, for itself is not able to bridge the epistemic gap between something *being* true and *thinking* something to be true. The subject must hope the world does her a favor by being how it visually appears.

## 5

The following passage will be critical. A look into contemporary epistemological literature shows that theories of knowledge are in most cases committed to the three illustrated features. Against the philosophical consensus, I find hybrid conceptions highly problematic. The problems are of two kinds. On the one hand, they concern the two main motives behind fallibilism, and on the other hand,

they are of internal nature. I will start with the first kind of problems but will direct my focus on a problem of the second kind.

In my opinion, fallibilistic theories of knowledge are subject to at least *one* skeptical challenge in the same way as their non-fallibilistic opponents.[7] The argument most frequently discussed in contemporary skepticism is based on the principle of closure of knowledge under known logical entailment (*Epistemic Closure*). However, this principal is neutral in terms of the dichotomy 'fallibilism vs. infallibilism', and skeptics could use this to attack both conceptions of knowledge.

The satisfaction of the second main motive is also questionable. Does the hybrid conception really better fit our ordinary attributions of "to know"? Even if that were the case, this fact alone would certainly not settle the philosophical debate. Whatever methodological role ordinary speech and linguistic facts may play, my doubts already start at the antecedent. It is less crucial that in everyday life we often label knowledge as a mental state. This could admittedly just be the expression of a conceptual confusion or inaccuracy. Such inaccuracies often occur in everyday conversations. More serious are those indications of ordinary attributions of "to know" that speak *against* a fallibilistic conception of knowledge and epistemic justification. In classical (pre-analytical) epistemology, e. g. in the works of Plato, Descartes, or even an empiricist like Hume, *knowledge* and *probability* were viewed as different categories. We can also witness this differentiation in everyday life. For instance, we can rather easily make a competent speaker that claims to have knowledge based on fallible grounds withdraw the knowledge claim in question by asking: "Do you r*eally* know this and that?" If we keep asking insistently, our speaker will probably make the following limitation: "Well, I actually do not know it even though my belief is well justified and most probably true." This withdrawal to an epistemically less demanding position, e. g. the one of *rationalized* belief instead of knowing, strengthens the intuition that knowledge and epistemic truth-probability are different categories. The following case from everyday language use also seems to indicate a rather non-fallibilistic intuition. It does not take extraordinary linguistic competence to find something contradictory in the statement "I (S) know(s) based on reasons R that p, but I (S) could also be wrong regarding p, i. e. p could, based on R, also be wrong." An obvious explanation for this impression of contradiction seems to be that the second part of the statement overrides the first part precisely because

**7** In the *same* way? The situation is even worse for fallibilists; the skeptical problem affects fallibilism even more simply because *fallible knowledge* (knowledge based on fallible grounds) itself is nothing else than a disguised form of skepticism.

we tend to say that knowledge rules out the possibility of error. However, in any case does our everyday knowledge practice show signs of fallibilistic *and* non-fallibilistic features. Does the hybrid conception better fit our ordinary attributions of "to know"? Certainly not completely; and whether it does so better than non-fallibilistic conceptions is far from decided.[8]

One of the biggest *internal* problems of the fallibilistic standard view of knowledge is the so-called *threshold problem*. Let us recall the following question: When are good grounds good (truth-conducive) enough for knowledge? The threshold problem consists in answering a similar question: Where does the mysterious point lie at which a belief that is not known but rationalized through fallible grounds turns into grounds of a fundamentally different epistemic kind, i.e. grounds that are still fallible but do now generate knowledge? The threshold problem asks 'where', but at the same time asks for an explanation of the fundamental epistemic change connected to this point. I do not see how this question could be answered non-arbitrarily and at the same time epistemologically satisfying.[9]

I do not want to further discuss these difficulties here but instead turn to my main objection. In the introduction I implied that hybrid conceptions lose their actual object of investigation (knowledge). Why do I believe that? Here is my answer. There is at least one condition of adequacy that every theory of knowledge should fulfill. In one version, this condition results in the following: Knowledge and (mere) true belief cannot be identified with each other because in the second case the belief could be true by coincidence; knowledge and epistemic luck however rule each other out. In short: knowledge is *non-accidental* true belief, or more precisely: measured against the subject's epistemic position, the truth of the belief cannot be a product of epistemic luck. We could call this the *anti-luck condition* of knowledge. I claim that hybrid conceptions do not meet this condition, and I would now like to explain why.

Fallible grounds are compatible with the falsehood of the belief. As long as truth is viewed as external and separate from justification, it does not enter the constitution of the subject's epistemic position. If good reasons however increase truth probability, the epistemic success of the rationalized belief (truth), compared to the fallible position of justification, is not *entirely* accidental. This distinguishes rationalized beliefs from mere guessing. This circumstance however

**8** In this context it should be mentioned that hybrid conceptions of knowledge cannot interpret OC 243 literally. Fallible grounds are not *compelling* grounds, which means in Wittgenstein's terms that they do not enable us to *demonstrate the truth*. My alternative presented in passage 6 takes OC 243 literally.

**9** On the threshold problem cf. Tolksdorf 2015, 106 f.

does not mean that the justified and thus rationalized belief is also *non-accidentally* true. Since it could have been wrong based on the grounds, the epistemic success (measured against the subject's epistemic position) stays dependent on epistemic luck. McDowell puts it as follows:

> Given a defeasible entitlement, it is at least likely that things are as the putative knower takes them to be. [...] But it is accidental, in relation to the subject's entitlement conceived on these lines, that the case we are considering is not one of the cases in which the supposedly open possibility of falsehood is actual. How does this add up to a picture of knowing that things are thus and so, as opposed to having good but not conclusive reason to suppose that things are thus and so, in a situation in which, *as it happens*, things *are* thus and so? (McDowell 2009, 285)

McDowell compares two scenarios. In the first scenario a subject believes based on compelling grounds that the world is so and so. In the second scenario the subject possesses non-compelling grounds and the world coincidentally is as the grounds suggest. All that hybrid conceptions can give us are cases of the second type. In those however epistemic luck is an essential component, because the fact that world is as the grounds suggest is, measured against the grounds themselves, nothing else than a fortunate circumstance, a kind of *coincidence*, something the subject can only *hope for*. But having to hope for the truth of the belief goes against our understanding of knowledge. Under these conditions our subject might at best know that the world is *probably* so and so but not that it *is* so and so. The latter requires: "[...] that justification adequate to reveal a state as one of knowing must be incompatible with falsehood [...]" (McDowell 2009, 280). Only then does the subject's epistemic position guarantee success, and the belief is *non-accidentally* true and not just not a *mere product of epistemic luck*. The following passage is supposed to show that we actually have such grounds.

Let me summarize. In a picture in which 'knowledge' is based on non-compelling grounds, epistemic luck in form of the principle of hope (or the favor of nature) cannot be eliminated. This is precisely the problem, since we this way obliterate the fundamental difference between knowledge on the one side and luckily true belief on the other. Hybrid conceptions operate on the second side. That means they have lost their object of investigation.

## 6

I will now introduce my unorthodox alternative. The focus of this alternative should already be evident: Knowledge is a mental state based on truth-guaranteeing (compelling) grounds. As such, it remains dependent on the favor of na-

ture, however in a different way than we thought until now. This passage pursues a moderate goal. I do not claim that the orthodoxy is wrong and the alternative is true. Such an endeavor cannot be realized in the given frame of the investigation. Less demanding but not less important is the proof that the alternative conception of knowledge (a) is (conceptually) possible and (b) has epistemological advantages over the standard view. I will discuss some advantages in passage 7.

I start with a diagnostic assumption. The fallibilistic as well as the anti mentalistic doctrine regarding knowledge are based on a certain conception of *mental states*. This conception is sometimes called *Cartesian*. It essentially says that mental states are *inner events* of a subject. Technically speaking, a mental state is internal when its individuation or constitution is independent of external circumstances (e. g. the external world). I assume that a picture of the mental realm as an *inner* world prevents the alternative conception of knowledge. However, this picture is by no means compelling. Let us confront this picture with an entirely natural understanding of certain experiences. It contains three aspects that are uncontroversial in my opinion. Firstly, seeing and remembering, for instance, are experiences. Secondly, as experiences, they all generally belong to the category 'mental state'. Thirdly, according to a natural interpretation of experience, seeing is a state of success, and 'to see' accordingly is a factive verb. If p is *not* the case, then a subject cannot see that p. A natural understanding of seeing as a state of success contains the idea that the visual experience in the case of seeing does not come to a stop in front of the world, i. e. in front of the experiencing fact, but that the subject, by seeing, experiences the world directly and immediately as it is. What I see when I am seeing this or that is identical to what makes my respective perceptual judgment true.[10]

In spite of possible objections, I would like to ask the reader to take this idea seriously, at least for the sake of argument. Based on this, in my opinion, natural conception of successful visual experiences we can now bring up the objection against the standard view that there apparently are mental states that are by their nature essentially dependent on the world. In order to illustrate the contrast to the conception of the mental realm as an inner world, I will phrase our idea in an even more radical way: The dualism of internal and external world collapses at the point at which the perceived fact becomes a real component of the mental perceptual state, e. g. of seeing. How can the world be part of the experience? Seeing is a sensory relation between subject and fact. If the fact is not there, the relation must remain unrealized. The visual grasping of an aspect of the world cannot be separated from the grasped aspect.

**10** Cf. on this i.a. PI 95; McDowell 1996, 27 f.

Let us now recall a thought from passage 5. Knowledge is *non-accidentally* true belief. We in the strict sense only then take into account the requirement of non-accidentality when the subject's epistemic position required for knowledge rules out the possibility of falsehood. In this sense, I interpret Wittgenstein's remarks on compelling grounds, in virtue of which we *demonstrate* the *truth* of a belief. Mental states like seeing that need to be individuated externally are of epistemic significance precisely because they meet this requirement. Unlike the fallibilistic doctrine claims, the subject in the best case, i.e. when it knows that p because it sees that p, has *truth-guaranteeing* grounds. If you believe that p because you see p, then you cannot be wrong. If you are wrong, then you do not see that p.

The key objection to the conception that knowledge itself is a mental state is based on the view that knowledge implies truth and that truth is a non-mental because external circumstance. Justification may be an (internal) performance of the subject; truth is not. Hence, knowledge is hybrid. In our alternative conception however, justification and truth no longer occur as two logically independent factors, one of them viewed as internal, the other one as external. This is the crucial point. Truth-guaranteeing grounds unite the condition of justification and the truth condition required for knowledge. Grounds that enable knowledge cannot be separated from the truth of what is justified. The ground captures an aspect of the world.

Now that we have removed some contestable internalistic constraints from our conception of mental states, what keeps us from viewing knowledge as a mental state? Timothy Williamson recently argued *that* knowledge is a mental state.[11] John McDowell shares this view, even though partly for different reasons. I will refer to the latter. A main principle of McDowell's epistemological effort is the idea, originally by Sellars, that knowledge is a position in the logical space of reasons.[12] If we take Sellars up on his word, then knowledge is not *also* a position in the space of reasons plus further conditions that go beyond the space of reasons because they are non-mental. The state of knowing is rather realized in an epistemically satisfying position of justification. Seeing that p is such a mentally and epistemically significant position. If the subject can take at face value the epistemic power of the visual state, then it knows what is visually present. The state of seeing does not entail knowledge because one can see that p without knowing that p. However, if you see that p, this puts you in the *position to know* that p. What is further necessary for knowledge and not only for being in a position to know does not go

**11** Cf. Williamson 2000.

**12** Cf. Sellars 1956, § 36.

beyond the space of reasons and hence the mental realm. I do not see any reason why we should not view knowledge as a position in the space of reasons and therefore a mental state. More precisely: Perceptual knowledge is accepting a propositional content as true that is identical with what the subject visually experiences when it sees that this or that is the case.

What is behind the concession that knowledge is always by favor of nature? In two respects, the impact of the world is indispensable also in the presented alternative conception. Let us, for the sake of convenience, keep our focus on perceptual knowledge. A knowledge-enabling position in the space of reasons needs to include that S *sees* this and that. Seeing is a sensory mode. If we see something, the world *appears* to be in a certain visual way. The favor of nature consists on the one hand in the fact that the world has to provide us with visual appearances. Perceptual knowledge is based on perception. Perception is, according to McDowell, passive receptivity. Hence, we depend on the world to give us the possibility to experience it. In that case, it does us a favor. This fundamental contribution of the world is accompanied by a second interpretation of the favor of nature. Visual appearances can be cases of real perception but also deceptions. Deceptions are epistemically opaque. When we are being deceived, we do not know it in the moment of the experience because we believe to see that this and that is the case. Deceptions are subjectively indistinguishable from real perceptions, but only the latter enable perceptual knowledge. If our subject is supposed to know that p is the case, it thus remains dependent on the contribution of the world because it is by favor of nature whether an appearance is real or not. The realness of the appearance does not lie in the subject's realm of responsibility.

Let us summarize. The opposed conceptions of knowledge are in accordance with Wittgenstein regarding OC 505. The acceptance of OC 505 however leads to different results in both cases. If we follow the standard view, the favor of nature moderates between the subject's grounds on the one side and with the truth of what is justified on the other side. If the favor of nature interferes at this point of the knowledge relation, it destroys knowledge (cf. passage 5). The alternative however locates the contribution of the world at an earlier point that is not dangerous for knowledge. Knowledge is always by favor of nature because nature is indispensable when it comes to the constitution of an epistemically satisfying position in the space of reasons. Once the knowledge-enabling position is reached, no further favors of the world are required.

# 7

I tried to show that the three topics raised by Wittgenstein can be epistemically interpreted and combined in a rather unorthodox way. The illustrated conception of propositional knowledge is not conceptually impossible. Why should we further pursue it? I see at least one answer in the fact that it, compared to the standard view, possesses epistemological advantages. What advantages do I have in mind? I will content with a sketchy and incomplete list of three advantages. Firstly, knowledge based on truth-guaranteeing grounds meets our non-fallibilistic knowledge intuitions. Secondly, the factor responsible for this at the same time immunizes this conception against Gettier and lottery problems. Both problems originate from the fallibilistic dogma, i.e. the assumption that fallible grounds enable knowledge. Thirdly, the threshold problem also loses its problematic character. We have to differentiate between justification for knowledge and rationalizing grounds. Grounds for knowledge are compelling. Guarantee of truth as an answer to the question regarding the point at which rationalized grounds turn into grounds for knowledge is substantially motivated by ruling out the possibility of falsehood and is itself not gradable. These and further advantages should make a reorientation of analytical epistemology at least interesting.

Is Wittgenstein a good referee for this reorientation? A definite 'no' to me seems just as questionable as a definite 'yes'. The textual basis in "On Certainty" does not allow a final judgment. Wittgenstein on the one hand speaks of *compelling grounds*, but on the other hand also uses the weaker concept of 'evidence'.[13] His apparent refusal to view knowledge, like belief, as a mental state could speak for the standard view. The text is however not clear in this regard. I believe we are dealing with *two* topics here. The certainly correct observation that it does not follow from "I know ..." *that I know* does on the other hand not entail that knowledge is *not* a mental state. Wittgenstein seems primarily concerned with the former topic.[14] Further exegetical investigation is needed to decide where Wittgenstein has to be located in the presented field of analytical epistemology.

**13** Cf. i.a. OC 196, 197.

**14** Cf. on this McGinn 2012.

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# Part 4: **Limits of Rationality**

José Medina

# On Refusing to Believe: Insensitivity and Self-Ignorance

**Abstract:** Developing some insights from Ortega and Wittgenstein, this paper provides an analysis of the cognitive comfort and cognitive discomfort that can be associated with different kinds of ignorance. Focusing on the kind of pernicious, *active* ignorance that is constitutive of *insensitivity*, I examine the defense mechanisms and resistances that block learning and epistemic growth, constituting "the will not to believe" or "the will to ignorance". Drawing on the recent literature in the epistemology of ignorance, my paper develops arguments for valuing the role of *cognitive discomfort* in our epistemic life and for an *ethics and an epistemology of discomfort* that propose micro-practices of resistance to fight insensitivity. Consistent with some insights that can be found in the philosophies of Wittgenstein and Ortega, this paper contends that insensitivity and self-ignorance have to be resisted by cultivating experiences of perplexity or *self-estrangement* which allow us to see our own perspective in a new and unfamiliar way, from *elsewhere* or from the perspectives of those who are very different from us.

> Man is living insufficiency, he needs to know, he experiences his ignorance with despair. This is what needs to be analyzed: Why does man find his ignorance painful, as if one could feel the pain of a phantom limb one never had? (Ortega 1982, Lesson III; my translation)[1]

It is tremendously important that we can feel our ignorance in this way, as something painful that needs to be repaired. But human ignorance is not always of this kind and does not always function in this way in our lives. I am going to focus on this paper in a different kind of ignorance, an ignorance or insensitivity that is unconscious, invisible, and all too comfortable – an ignorance that has an entire battery of defense mechanisms that protect it. Ortega's question is indeed an important one: we should be able to explain how and why our ignorance is sometimes painful and triggers an impulse to learn. But I want to focus on exactly the opposite question that Ortega formulates: how is it that sometimes igno-

**1** "El hombre es la insuficiencia viviente, el hombre necesita saber, percibe desesperadamente que ignora. Esto es lo que conviene analizar. ¿Por qué al hombre le duele su ignorancia, como podía dolerle un miembro que nunca hubiera tenido?" (Ortega 1982, Lección III)

rance does not hurt, that we inhabit it comfortably, that we are no longer capable of being bothered by it, that we are not interested in repairing it and learning anything new or different? An even more pressing question than the one Ortega formulates is how and why there can be forms of ignorance that are not felt as painful, but are inhabited comfortably without even being registered as a lack or deficiency. In other words: What happens when our ignorance no longer hurts, when we lose our capacity to recognize our cognitive limitations, when we become insensitive to them?

In agreement with Ortega, I want to emphasize the crucial significance of feeling the *discomfort of not knowing*. But I also want to call attention to the other side of this: to the dangers of *cognitive comfort*. In this paper I will focus on the kind of ignorance or insensitivity that is typically associated with cognitive comfort and I will develop arguments for valuing the role of *cognitive discomfort* in our epistemic life. As Ortega suggests, the *painful ignorance* ("la ignorancia que duele") is the king of ignorance that recognizes itself as a deficiency or lack; and this self-conscious and critical form of ignorance is an impulse for learning and improving our cognitive life. But, by contrast, the comfortable and self-protecting ignorance I will be discussing blocks the impulse to learn and discover and is supported by a motivation to hide and impede the acquisition of new knowledge or new forms of understanding. The critical question will be: how can this pernicious form of ignorance be unmasked and dismantled?

In section 1 I will offer an analysis of pernicious ignorance and of the dangers and problems of the cognitive comfort associated with it. In section 2 I will focus on the affective and self-reflexive elements of pernicious ignorance, developing an understanding of it as a form of insensitivity that involves self-ignorance. Finally, in section 3, I will argue that insensitivity and self-ignorance have to be resisted through processes of self-estrangement in which we de-familiarize our own perspective and look at it from *elsewhere* or from the perspectives of those who are very different from us. I will conclude with a plea for an *ethics and an epistemology of discomfort* that propose micro-practices of resistance to fight insensitivity.

## 1 Active ignorance and the price of comfort

> One might say: "'I know' expresses comfortable certainty, not the certainty that is still struggling". (OC 357)

Wittgenstein distinguishes between two kinds of certainty: the certainties that are already established in our life and make us comfortable, and the certainties that are still unstable and open to critical scrutiny. In both cases, he wants to distinguish the purely subjective concept of certainty from the concept of knowledge (which involves objective dimensions such as those relating to justification and truth). Being certain and knowing are two different things, even though they are related in interesting ways. The first kind of certainty, "*comfortable* certainty", is the kind of certainty that accompanies the sense of *familiarity* and *obviousness* in our daily life. What is important to emphasize about this kind of comfortable certainty is not only (or even primarily) its relationship with knowledge, but also (and more importantly) its relationship with *ignorance*. How does the space of our "*comfortable* certainties" come to define the space for knowledge and ignorance in our lives? Other than in the context of skepticism, traditional analytic epistemology has not paid much attention to the role of ignorance in our lives, and until recently the relationship between certainty/knowledge and ignorance has been disregarded. Agnotology – the study of culturally induced ignorance or doubt – is indeed not new and reflections on ignorance can be traced back to Ancient philosophy. And of course some influential thinkers have called attention to the crucial role of ignorance in our epistemic lives. In particular, Nietzsche called attention to the key significance of the *will to ignorance* – the *active* forgetting, neglecting, and ignoring that shape our epistemic characters and lives. But it has not been until recently that entire schools of thought in analytic epistemology have systematically studied different kinds of ignorance and the roles they play in our epistemic economies. New approaches in epistemology, in particular, *standpoint theory*[2] and *epistemologies of ignorance*[3], have brought to the fore the crucial significance of the interrelations between what we know (or simply claim to know) and what we ignore, casting issues of certainty and uncertainty in a different light. In this section I will briefly talk about points of convergence between Wittgenstein and these new trends in epistemology, which constitute a break with traditional epistemology that con-

**2** See Harding 1991, Hill Collins 1990/2000, and Wylie 2003.

**3** See Sullivan/Tuana 2007.

ceptualizes the believer and knower as a detached, disembodied, and generic subject. By re-conceptualizing knowing subjects and communities, the issue of the limits of knowledge/understanding and its relationship to ignorance/misunderstanding/insensitivity appears in a new light.

I want to highlight three points of convergence between Wittgenstein and standpoint theory. Both Wittgenstein and standpoint theory emphasize that our cognitive life is (a) *contextual*, that is, situated and embodied; (b) *normative*, that is, subject to norms of intelligibility and reasonableness; and (c) *affective*, that is, containing emotional, volitional and visceral elements.

In the first place, both Wittgenstein and standpoint theorists propose contextualist perspectives that demand *attentiveness to embodied and situated experience:* we have to start and end with the experiences of actual people in actual contexts. On their view, epistemology is not about abstract (disembodied and decontextualized) subjects and their purely hypothetical cognitive activities; it is about actual people and their actual lives. On this situated and pragmatic perspective, epistemological analyses have a practical point: they are action-based and action-oriented; they are aimed at the melioration of people's lives, at the enrichment of people's experiences and practices.

In the second place, both Wittgenstein and standpoint theorists underscore the *normative* dimension of our cognitive life, arguing for a robust notion of *epistemic responsibility.*[4] In their views, responsibility is to be understood both as *accountability* and as *responsivity:* subjects have to be held accountable for their beliefs and the impact that they have in their own lives and the lives of others; but subjects also have to be responsive to the perspectives of others, being consequent *in their actions* with the positionality of their perspectives and the relationality that binds them to the perspectives of others. Epistemic responsibility is not only or primarily about giving reasons, but also about acting according to our beliefs. As Wittgenstein puts it, "my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons." (PI 211)

In the third place, both Wittgenstein and standpoint theorists see a deep connection between our cognitive life and our affective and "volitional" life. They have emphasized the role of affect in our epistemic interactions and negotiations. In this respect, we need to pay attention to the importance of empathy in cognitive activities, the importance of speaking and listening "with the heart", as Patricia Hill Collins puts it (1990/2000, 262–264). Wittgenstein emphasizes that cognitive activities such as seeing-aspects and imagining engage our will and affective reactions (see esp. PI II xi); and he calls attention to our embodied

**4** See Code 1987 and 2014.

affects and to the visceral and instinctual aspects of our doxastic attitudes when he emphasizes the "animal" elements of our cognitive life in his later writings. In particular, in *On Certainty* (cf. 358 f.), Wittgenstein talks about the kind of certainty that is grounded in our form of life as a certainty that has to be conceived as "something animal".

This situated, normative, embodied and affective approach to our cognitive life calls attention to the cognitive limitations that circumscribe our *comfortable* certainties, our sense of familiarity and obviousness. These limitations involve a kind of *invisible ignorance*, an ignorance that includes resistances to be recognized and defense mechanisms that protect it. This kind of recalcitrant, or *active ignorance* – as it has been called in the recent literature in epistemology of ignorance[5] – has to be distinguished from the regular and innocuous kind of ignorance that involves nothing more than the absence of true belief or the presence of false belief. The latter is a merely passive kind of ignorance that doesn't involve the active involvement of the subject and is not supported and protected by his psychological resistance and defense mechanisms. When our ignorance is nothing more than the absence of true belief and/or the presence of false belief, learning should be easy (we just unmask false beliefs and inculcate true ones) and education will not encounter obstacles and resistances. However, in the case of active ignorance, learning is resisted, blocked and impeded in a number of different ways: because of a lack of interest in knowing or understanding better, because of a vested interest in not knowing or understanding, because of distortions and preconceptions that get in the way of seeing things in a different way, etc. Here is a schematic contrast between the key features of *passive versus active ignorance:*

Passive ignorance:

(1) absence of true belief
(2) presence of false belief

Active ignorance:

(3) cognitive resistances (e. g. prejudices, conceptual lacunas, etc.)
(4) affective resistances (e. g. apathy, interest in not knowing – "the will *not* to believe", etc.)
(5) bodily resistances (e. g. feeling anxious, agitated, red in the face, etc.)
(6) defense mechanisms and strategies (deflecting challenges, shifting burden of proof, etc.)

**5** See Mills 2007 and Medina 2012, and Forthcoming a, b, and c.

The active ignorance that surrounds our comfortable certainties is a form of *insensitivity* that filters out experiences that can challenge our beliefs and create troubles for our cognitive perspective. This insensitivity includes a whole battery of defense mechanisms that operate as resistances to learn certain things and to be attuned to experiences and viewpoints that can question our own. This insensitivity constitutes the very limits of our experiential capacities, of our horizon of understanding, and of our reasoning abilities; it operates by limiting – or desensitizing – our ability to see certain things, to interpret them, to understand them and articulate them (linguistically, for example), to process them cognitively and inferentially, to argue about them without obstacles, etc. In the next section, following Wittgenstein, William James, and recent epistemologies of ignorance in American philosophy, I will elucidate some crucial features of the *insensitivity* or *active ignorance* that protects our cognitive comfort and precludes certain forms of learning and epistemic and ethical growth.

## 2 Insensitivity and self-ignorance

> Is my understanding only *blindness* to my own lack of understanding? (OC 418; my italics)
>
> How would a person act who *doesn't 'believe' that someone else feels pain?* We can imagine how. He would *treat him as something lifeless*, or as many treat animals that least resemble humans. (Jellyfish, for instance.) (LWPP I 238)
>
> Do we encounter this doubt in everyday life? No. But maybe something [that is] [which is remotely] related: *indifference toward other people's expressions of pain.* (LWPP I 240; my italics)

Let me start by comparing and contrasting the *blindness* to the limits of our understanding that Wittgenstein talks about with the *blindness* or insensitivity that William James famously analyzed. In "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" James offers insights into the affective limitations of human sensibility, which he describes as "the blindness with which we are all afflicted in regard to feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves" (James 1899/1912, 1). James deserves credit for trying to identify this blind spot in our ability to understand the experiential life of others. But he did not go far enough in his exploration of human insensitivity, for he restricted our "blindness" to what is *simply alien* to us, that is, to what lies entirely outside our experiential life, to experiences we do not have and cannot appreciate. But what if this "blindness" or insensitivity were to extend even to our most intimate and familiar experiences? What if there were elements in the experiences of those we share our life with, and even in our own experiences, which we have become blind to? What, moreover, if this insensitivity were constitutive of our experiential enjoy-

ment, so that the very possibility of such enjoyment required our ignoring how our experiences are entangled with the experiential frustration and suffering of others (and even frustration and suffering of our own selves, in some cases)?

James does not consider how one's "blindness" to the experiential lives of others handicaps not only our ability to understand *them* but also our ability to understand *ourselves*. And this is precisely what Wittgenstein calls attention to: the "blindness" he talks about reverts back to the experiential subject herself and functions as a form of *self-blindness:* "*blindness* to my own lack of understanding" (OC 418). This kind of self-ignorance is precisely what recent epistemologies of ignorance have described as a form of blind spot or blindness that accompanies our understanding and marks its limits.

There are two key aspects of this kind of blindness or insensitivity that have been highlighted by standpoint theory and recent epistemologies of ignorance. In the first place, this "blindness" or insensitivity is not something purely negative and devoid of content, a gap or emptiness that affects only what is outside our experiential lives. Rather, such insensitivity is also *positive and full of content:* it operates by projecting our own truths and meanings on others, by distorting the significance of their experiences. We are dealing with a much more insidious and recalcitrant kind of insensitivity when this does not consist simply in seeing nothing but emptiness and lack of meaning, but it involves seeing distortions that hide people's lives, erasing their voices and suppressing their concerns, interests, and aspirations. And in the second place, our insensitivity or "blindness" has crucial *reflexive and relational aspects:* such "blindness" reverts to oneself and shapes one's sensibility, so that it is not just an insensitivity with respect to others, but also with respect to key aspects of oneself and one's own perspective and position.

Wittgenstein talks about the epistemic limitations in our relations with others concerning experiential possibilities that seem alien to us. But he seems to suggest that this blindness also functions *inside* ourselves and with respect to experiences we share with others. This "blindness" concerns not only experiences one does not have and cannot appreciate, but also experiences one does have but appreciates differently, that is, in a way that conflicts with the experiential appreciations of others. It is imperative that we interrogate our "blindness" with respect to aspects of the familiar experiences of our neighbors, of our friends, of our partners, and even of ourselves! This is what has been termed the *alienated familiar.*

In recent epistemologies of ignorance in feminist theory and race theory we can find two different notions of what is experientially alien: the *simply alien* and the *alienated familiar.* As Charles Mills explains and illustrates this distinction in "Alternative Epistemologies", the *simply alien* comprises "experiences that are

outside the hegemonic framework in the sense of involving an external geography" (Mills 1998, 28). It is an exhibition of "the simply alien", for example, when "a muckraking Frederick Engels brings details of British slum conditions to the shocked attention of a middle-class audience" (Ibid.). Another illustration can be found in Nancy Tuana's account (2004 and 2006) of how women's genitals and sexualities were rendered "simply alien" to a male-dominated medical science and body culture until very recently. But even more interesting for the critical purpose of recognizing the limitations of our perspective is the *alienated familiar*, which comprises "experiences that are outside because they redraw the map of what was thought to be already explored territory" (Mills 1998, 28). As Mills remarks, the alienated familiar is well illustrated by the feminist "claim that most 'seductions' have a coercive element that makes them more like rapes" (Ibid.). Confronting experiences that make you radically rethink your own is not easy. It can be quite shocking to hear that something you thought you knew well what it was (courting or seducing, for example) can be experienced by the other subjectivities involved quite differently (as sexual violence, for example). Indeed, confronting the alienated familiar is more disruptive than being exposed to the simply alien; and more resistances are mobilized to block that confrontation or to stage it so that the alienated familiar appears as pathological or unintelligible experience that can simply be dismissed. A sexist insensitivity often takes a very active and contentful form, functioning not as an inability to interpret or make sense (as a mere interpretative gap or semantic lacuna), but rather, as the tendency to (mis)interpret the experiences of others all too quickly, that is, as the tendency to arrogantly assume that one knows what things mean for the other and what the true significance of their experiences is. This can be illustrated by the clueless seducer/harasser who will not take "no" for an answer. Interestingly, this very problematic sexist phenomenon is precisely the case that James uses to illustrate the advantages of "the will to believe":

> How many women's hearts are vanquished by the mere sanguine insistence of some man that they must love him! He will not consent to the hypothesis that they cannot. The desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence; and so it is in innumerable cases of other sorts. (James 1896/2011, 104)

As I have argued elsewhere (Forthcoming a), *pace* James, the so-called "will to believe" of the obstinate truth-making seducer in this passage should not be praised, but shaken up. This tenacious "will to believe" has to be criticized by unmasking the unacknowledged *will not to believe* on which it relies: the will not to believe that the women obsessively chased might not be interested, the insensitivity to their alternative meanings and experiential perspectives. The se-

ducer depicted by James who refuses to take "no" for an answer to his advances is the stereotypical sexual harasser who is unable to see his actions as inflicting any harm because he refuses to recognize and properly interpret the consequences of his actions as expressions of suffering. Although presented as a seducer by James, this character is really a sexual harasser who is unequipped to acknowledge his sexual blind-spots and come to terms with his insensitivity, with what I have called his "will not to believe": his will not to believe that the women he obsessively pursues might not be interested, that they have a will of their own that can conflict with his, that when they say "No!" they really mean "No!". As I have put it elsewhere:

> Insensitivity is formed and maintained as a result of excessive self-trust and what is needed is not to energize the already overinflated will to believe, but rather, to redirect the will *not* to believe, so that it does not function outwards to eliminate or neutralize conflicting perspectives, but inwards to interrogate one's own perspective and to exercise critical self-distrust. (Medina Forthcoming a)

In the next section I examine ways in which we can exercise this critical self-distrust so that we learn to acknowledge our own blind-spots and to come to terms with different forms of insensitivity so that we strive toward becoming more open-minded.

## 3 Self-estrangement and the ethics and epistemology of discomfort

As the insensitivity rooted in the alienated familiar shows perspicuously, our inability to relate properly to the experiences, meanings and truths of others is intimately related to how we relate to our own experiences, meanings and truths. Undoing our insensitivity and the cognitive-affective disconnect between our perspective and those of others involves more than simply reconsidering facts about these others; it involves a deep interrogation of how our life experiences relate (or fail to relate) to theirs, a critical inspection of our own perspective – as it relates (or fails to relate) to that of others – and its habits and defense mechanisms. And this brings us to the reflexive and relational point about insensitivity: our "blindness" concerns not only the shortcomings of our other-regarding attitudes and habits, but also those of our *self-regarding* attitudes and habits. Addressing the latter aspect of our blindness requires disrupting what appears to us as obvious and familiar, which is disrupting our own selves, that is, making our-

selves and our familiar spaces strange and unfamiliar – even *uncanny.*[6] This is a process of *self-estrangement* that makes us feel *perplexed and uncomfortable*. But, as I said at the opening of this essay following Ortega, we need to vindicate and valorize the crucial significance of cognitive discomfort in our life.

The critical process of self-estrangement I am gesturing toward has been discussed by feminist and queer Wittgensteinians. Linda Zerilli (1998, 2005) has described it as the process of "*defamiliarization*", and Naomi Scheman (1997, 2011) as a process of "queering the center by centering the queer". As these Wittgensteinians (and Wittgentein himself, in my reading) seem to suggest, a key requirement for epistemic maturity and epistemic responsibility is that subjects take critical distance with respect to themselves and that they develop critical awareness with respect to their own perspective. This requires that subjects undergo a process of *self-estrangement* in which, to borrow Scheman's words, they can *queer the very center* of their sensibility. As Scheman puts it, we should all be required "to complicate our own locations" and "to explore the costs of our comfort" (Scheman 1997, 133). This critical process of self-estrangement, this way of queering the core of who we are, is what we need to come to terms with in order to overcome the different forms of "blindness" or insensitivity that constitute the limits of our perspective.

Following Jane Addams, my *Epistemology of Resistance* (2012) has tried to vindicate the crucial role of *perplexity* and *discomfort* in the expansion of one's sensitivity: cognitive-affective growth and the expansion of one's capacity for understanding require that we are put in uncomfortable positions, that we are taken out of our comfort zones, and that we feel perplexed about challenges that call into question the things that are taken for granted in our daily lives and ordinary practices. As I have argued elsewhere (Medina Forthcoming a, b, and c), experiences of discomfort where the familiar becomes unfamiliar or perplexing are critical educational experiences that offer the possibility of ethical growth and can therefore be the learning opportunities for a social ethics that strives toward inclusion and open-mindedness.

According to the *ethics and epistemology of discomfort* that I have defended, in order to be able to expand and meliorate our social sensibilities, we need to start by exposing ourselves and making ourselves vulnerable, by opening up our perspective to processes of critical scrutiny and critical resistance. As I have argued elsewhere (Medina 2012), epistemically responsible practices and communities require "*epistemic friction and resistance*", but critical resistance begins *at*

**6** Here I am intentionally echoing Cavell's reflections on this matter, which bring together Freud and Wittgenstein on the topic of "the uncanny". See especially Cavell 1988.

*home*, that is, in the most intimate aspects of our cognitive-affective functioning. Critical resistance has to begin within ourselves and in the activities in which we feel at home. This is why I contend that epistemically responsible sensibilities that are truly open and responsive to differences must be *self-questioning*, rather than being defensive and self-protecting. Such sensibilities can only be established when subjects make themselves vulnerable to challenges and become exposed (either by choice or by social design) to processes of self-questioning or *self-estrangement*, that is, processes of deep self-interrogation in which we become strangers to ourselves. Becoming *perplexed* about who we are – i. e. becoming strangers to ourselves in particular areas of our life and looking at ourselves with fresh eyes – affords us opportunities to interrogate what we find in the most intimate corners of our perspective, and to recognize its limitations and the possibilities of correction and improvement. In very different ways, Queer Theory, Feminist Standpoint Theory, and Critical Race Theory teach us the importance of unmasking and undoing the process of social construction of our perspective, of interrupting the flow of familiarity and obviousness, making the familiar unfamiliar and the obvious bizarre. And this critical exercise should not be thought of simply as the quaint activity of some peculiar activists and intellectuals, but rather, as a crucial part of the growth and development of critical subjects of knowledge, of subjects who learn how to resist their cognitive-affective limitations and to improve their sensibilities and capacities. We all have a prima facie obligation to undergo a process of *self-estrangement*, to cultivate openness to *perplexity* and to interrogate received attitudes and habits. If we fail this obligation, the failure of other epistemic responsibilities will ensue and possibilities of critique and resistance will be thwarted.

In conclusion, elaborating further some of the critical insights to be found in Wittgenstein and Ortega, the ethics and epistemology of *discomfort* that I propose targets our complacency and complicity with received attitudes and demands that we confront our limitations through sustained practices of self-estrangement that disrupt people's lives and their presuppositions. Sometimes people need to be made *uncomfortable* so that they wake up from their numbness, sometimes their familiar spaces and comfortable activities need to be interrupted so that they become aware of their complicity and their motivational obstacles to pay attention to certain experiences. Part of what needs to happen to counter the protective mechanisms of ignorance is to make painfully visible the *price of epistemic comfort*, so that people cannot avoid the realization that the comfort of some comes at the cost of the discomfort of others. We need to find ways of showing people (especially those who are disproportionately sheltered and privileged) that making our lives more uncomfortable is worth pursuing because of the critical and transformative benefits that the discomfort can produce.

For, as Ortega suggested, feeling the *discomfort* of our ignorance is a very productive epistemic and ethical *achievement* that motivates learning, ethical growth, and the expansion of our sensibilities. We need practices that teach us to appreciate that enduring discomfort for the sake of improving our own lives and (more importantly) the lives of those around us is well worth it. We need to cultivate the habit of paying attention to the cognitive-affective limitations of our sensibilities and to how we can improve at connecting with the sensibilities of others and achieving greater degrees of open-mindedness. We need social arrangements and pedagogical interventions that force people to leave their comfort zones and to revisit their lives critically, exploring new possibilities for social interaction and community formation. This is what an ethics and epistemology of discomfort, following Wittgenstein and Ortega, advocates.

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José María Ariso

# Counterwill and Logical Priority Over Ideas: Two Constituents of Our Basic Convictions

**Abstract:** Ortega was very ambiguous in regard to the clarification of whether ideas are logical and even chronological prior to beliefs or vice versa. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, showed clearly that ideas cannot be elaborated without taking account of prior beliefs or certainties that allow us to take part in those language-games in which ideas are developed. Moreover, in this paper I will also reveal that Ortega's work is of great help in resolving an issue that Wittgenstein tackled superficially, that is, the possibility of adopting certainties or beliefs at will. Related to this, Ortega explains why beliefs constitute our very reality, which he characterizes as counterwill, i.e. something which is already there, so that we neither put it nor make it. Once these mutual contributions have been exposed, it is shown how they can be incorporated into both authors' works without distorting them.

## 1 Introduction

Even though the similarities between Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of 'certainty' and José Ortega y Gasset's notion of 'belief' are striking (cf. van den Hoven 1990, Ariso 2011), it is particularly shocking to find in the works of both authors ideas that can be considered as mutually enriching contributions. Of course, this seeming complementarity becomes even more remarkable if we bear in mind that there is no evidence that one of these authors was acquainted with the work of the other; in addition, Wittgenstein has often been regarded as one of the founding fathers of analytical philosophy, while Ortega was a realistic phenomenologist of neo-Kantian origin. The aim of this paper is just to show how some aspects of Ortega's and Wittgenstein's late works can be considered as mutual contributions. Firstly, I will explain that, although Ortega is ambiguous as to whether ideas are preceded by beliefs or vice versa, Wittgenstein clearly shows the logical and chronological priority of beliefs – say 'certainties' – by putting forward a number of reasons that may be easily extrapolated to Ortega's work. Secondly, I will describe how Wittgenstein referred tepidly to the impossibility of beginning to have a certainty on one's own volition, while Ortega brilliantly reveals this impossibility in such a way that there is no discrepancy with Wittgenstein's remarks. This seeming complementarity becomes particularly impor-

tant if we keep in mind that the issues addressed are of great philosophical interest and, moreover, are closely interrelated. On the one hand, then, I will analyze if our beliefs either come from ideas consciously created by our ancestors, or if they constitute the condition of possibility of ideas; on the other hand, I will try to clarify whether each one of us can change or modify at will his certainties or basic beliefs and, by extension, his own picture of the world. It goes without saying that it is not my intention here to assign to Wittgenstein and Ortega ideas that they did not clearly materialize on paper: far from it, my purpose is to bring up a series of their arguments and remarks in order to shed light on fundamental issues that these renowned philosophers tackled without, however, dwelling on them in accordance with the importance they merit.

## 2 The logical priority of beliefs over ideas: Wittgenstein's contribution to Ortega

As can be seen from Ortega's references to ideas and beliefs, he conceives them as two antagonistic but at the same time closely related concepts. Indeed, Ortega describes beliefs as anything we take for granted in our current way of acting without our even thinking about it, while he considers ideas as thoughts we consciously build at a particular point in time precisely because we *do not believe in them* (IC 42). However, as soon as we begin to read Ortega's scattered remarks about the relationship between ideas and beliefs, we find two different versions of the genesis of ideas. In a first series of remarks, Ortega points out that a man without beliefs is inconceivable (ETG 90), for living always entails holding some belief about the world and oneself. According to Ortega, beliefs *already* exist when we start to think about something (IC 26): in fact, he adds that even the most recalcitrant skeptic must assume some beliefs (ETG 30). As regards ideas, they are drawn up in response to the doubt experienced by an individual who *already* held beliefs, so that ideas are intended to cover the hole that a doubt has opened in the layer of beliefs (IC 35 – 36, 43, 54). Conversely, a second series of remarks revolves around the alteration-absorption-action cycle which, according to Ortega, has been recurrent throughout history in an increasingly complex way. In the first stage of the alteration-absorption-action cycle, the individual feels unsafe, lost and shipwrecked among the things of his environment. Subsequently, the individual becomes completely absorbed within himself with great effort in order to form his own ideas about the things and the way of dominating them. Lastly, the individual goes out of himself and is ready to *act* in his environment by following his preconceived plan (HG 30). From Ortega's point

of view, ideas are created by the primeval man who felt at the mercy of the environment and its contingencies, thereby withdrawing into himself in a desperate attempt to orient himself (HG 29 – 30). Yet it is very important to remember that Ortega goes so far as to explicitly point out that *all* current beliefs were once ideas created by an individual who absorbed within himself (IC 45, 48). Since the primal reality does not discover its own secret, man has to invent the world or at least a piece of it (IC 51). In this vein, Ortega goes on to assert that nothing substantive has been delivered to the primeval man, so that he must *make* everything he has (HG 27): even the belief system, understood as the world itself or anything we count with, is described by Ortega not only as a house, which man has *built* to keep himself warm (ETG 40), but also as a raft *made* in response to the initial shipwreck of our living (HG 33). Summarizing, Álvarez (2003, 181) claims that ideas consolidate as beliefs thanks to their effectiveness in solving different problems of life. But if we accept that any belief has its origin in an idea, then objective knowledge turns out to be impossible, the major scientific theories become fantasies, and the most venerable beliefs are transformed into mere imaginations (Sánchez 2006, 103 – 104).

In view of the above, it is quite evident that Ortega contradicts himself when he says that ideas can only come from beliefs and vice versa. To address this confusion, I intend now to show why I find it inappropriate to claim that *all* beliefs come from ideas. To begin with, if it is accepted that ideas are created in the individual's inner world and only later start transforming into beliefs, then it is presupposed that there once existed a man without beliefs and even without ideas. But if we remember that Ortega claimed we *only* begin to think when we need an idea to cover a hole in the layer of beliefs, it is not clear which expectations, hopes or presuppositions would have been frustrated in a man who held neither ideas nor beliefs. Implicit in Ortega's argument is the assumption that mankind appeared when a 'primeval man' without ideas or beliefs suddenly emerged on the face of the Earth. He therefore seems to defend, albeit implicitly, a type of anthropological evolutionism according to which man suddenly appears in the middle of nowhere as a wonderful beast which began the enormous task of making his own thought (Sánchez 2006, 97). Indeed, Ortega does not make any reference to the slow human evolution in which a set of primates share instincts and natural reactions out of which language in its most rudimentary form arises. Instead, Ortega alludes to an adult and isolated human being, for we know nothing about his childhood and the rest of humanity; moreover, this human being appears to have been thrown into a hostile and unknown world. But leaving aside Ortega's philosophical interests, there is nothing to indicate that we should necessarily adhere to this scenario instead of considering others as well, such as a place full of tasty wild fruits and without predators. It is also noteworthy that Ortega does not consider alternative attitudes or reactions to

such a hostile world, for example trying to flee from danger and feed oneself with what one has at hand. Instead of referring to these simple alternatives, Ortega uses his elegant prose to lead the reader to regard only and exclusively the possibility that Ortega himself qualifies as the most unnatural (HG 29) and zoologically incomprehensible (HG 25), that is, to withdraw into oneself until generating an inner world. Put simply, Ortega presents a dangerous, hostile and entirely unpredictable environment that seemingly compels man to absorb within himself, thus allowing Ortega to idealize his view of a safe and homely interiority in which the individual can find himself with no trace of moral conflicts or identity crises.

In addition, Ortega cannot describe the primeval man as a being completely devoid of ideas and beliefs. From his point of view, the only things that this man has are survival instinct, a perpetual fear of the world, and a voracious appetite for those things he wishes (HG 25). But if we take this rudimentary picture of the primeval man, we can find many beliefs implicit in it. Here are six of them:

1. The primeval man *believes* he can suffer serious injury or death, so he must do everything possible to avoid harm and, above all, to save his life.
2. He *believes* that other beings have the intention of killing him.
3. He *believes* he cannot free himself of those potential dangers that threaten him everywhere by keeping his mind off them. For it is more than evident that, if he believed such a thing, he would dissipate all dangers just by drawing his attention to other more encouraging issues.
4. He *believes* that he cannot go through physical objects and that these– among them predators– cannot pass through him. Obviously, if the primeval man were convinced that the attack of a beast would not go beyond a mere mirage, he would have nothing to fear from it.
5. He *believes* that his strength or fighting ability is lower than that of potential predators, or at the very least he *believes* he loses out in this game of forces.
6. He is *sure*, not only of how he could obtain enjoyment from those things that he so earnestly desires, but also, and above all, that enjoying them will satisfy his desire.

In short, a man without ideas or beliefs would be completely disorientated, to the extent that it is impossible even to discern how he could generate an idea without starting from some beliefs. In view of the above, a man without beliefs turns out to be inconceivable unless we think of an individual in a vegetative state: the most we can do is to imagine a man who has lost one or several certainties. In fact, there are cases of this type. Examples are people who suffer from Cotard's syndrome, so that they have lost the certainty of being alive. In such a case, the mere fact that someone with Cotard's syndrome walks some steps would at least reveal his belief that there is not any abyss right in front

of him. But although this individual might act and speak like any one of us, we could not understand him, because we "would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not" (OC 231). To clarify this point, I would now like to bring up Wittgenstein's late work. To begin with, Wittgenstein warns that if we started doubting about a certainty, there would be no judgment we could be certain of (cf. OC 419, 490, 494). This does not mean, of course, that if we reached the point of doubting under normal circumstances whether we are alive, our mind would automatically go blank. In this case, our mind would go on functioning properly inasmuch as we might develop hypotheses regarding the possible cause of such a doubt. According to Ortega, that is exactly the case with the genuine doubt, that is, the doubt felt and not merely thought: this genuine doubt arises only when a hole is opened in the layer of our beliefs. In his opinion, our mind does not go blank when such a genuine doubt arises, but it is precisely then that man begins to think driven by this very doubt which in turn is as real as any other reality. Ortega does not even wonder whether the resulting thought makes sense under this circumstance. Wittgenstein, however, points out that the loss of a certainty involves calling into question the whole system of reference which, in turn, is made up of all our certainties: for certainties are not intrinsically convincing, but are "rather held fast by what lies around" them (OC 144). Hence, if a certainty were called into doubt, all other certainties would be toppled with it (cf. OC 234, 274), so that we could not be certain of the meaning of our words either (cf. OC 114, 158, 456, 506). From this follows that the ideas elaborated in such a situation will lack the "inherited background" against which we distinguish between true and false (OC 514 – 515); therefore, those ideas would go unheeded.

Incidentally, there is another important aspect in which Ortega shows a significant ambiguity which Wittgenstein's work can help to clarify. When Ortega explains the origin of genuine doubt, he refers to a belief whose loss would open a hole in the layer of beliefs (IC 35); but when Ortega describes the historical crises which lead entire generations to dissimulation by adorning themselves with insincere artistic styles and political movements, he adds that those people who live in that unconscious and unstable *vita minima* do not believe in anything at all, because their belief system – and with it the world itself – has broken down (ETG 89 – 90). However, Ortega's interpretation is of a *psychological* nature, for he explains the above-mentioned historical crisis by describing the feeling that its characteristic lack of convictions evokes in him. In this case the system would not have broken down, but would have lost one or some beliefs, in which case, as Ortega himself remarked, the thinking process should be intensively exercised in order to cover the hole in the layer of beliefs. Hence, Ortega's argument could be reformulated as follows: when a historical

crisis takes place, the most brilliant minds of the time remain blocked to the extent that their belief system would seem to have broken down although it is not the case. Meanwhile, Wittgenstein's interpretation of the collapse of the system of reference is not of a psychological nature, but of a *logical* or *grammatical* one, for he states that the collapse occurs when a certainty is lost, because then it is not even clear how to distinguish between true and false.

## 3 Our certainties are unwillingly adopted: Ortega's contribution to Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein considers the logical exclusion of error as the distinctive feature of certainty.[1] Hence, certainty can be described as a conviction;[2] curiously enough, however, it is not a mental state (OC 42, 308). This apparent contradiction is resolved taking into account that in the context of Wittgenstein's late work certainty constitutes a presupposition shown day by day in our way of acting and speaking. Wittgenstein used many synonyms for 'certainty' due to the great difficulty of finding a term which clearly reflects the nature of this kind of ineffable presuppositions. As said above, this ineffability is precisely due to the fact that the presupposition is *shown* in the way we act and speak (OC 7, 395, 431, 464, 466), for propositions like "There are physical objects" constitute presuppositions so assumed and unquestionable that they have no use in our current language-games; therefore, they are nonsense too (cf. OC 35–37). Let us draw our attention to this remark:

> And now if I were to say "It is my unshakeable conviction that etc.", this means in the present case too that I have not consciously arrived at the conviction by following a particular line of thought, but that it is anchored in all my questions and answers, so anchored that I cannot touch it. (OC 103)

In this paragraph Wittgenstein suggests that conviction – say 'certainty' – cannot be touched or reached through a conscious process such as thinking. After all, we do not get our picture of the world – and, by extension, our system of reference and our very certainties – by satisfying ourselves of its correctness: far from it, our picture of the world is our "inherited background" (OC 94). In other

**1** In Wittgenstein's late work, the term "logic" is used synonymously with "grammar" (cf. OC 628; Z 590).

**2** Wittgenstein often uses the terms "conviction" (OC 86, 91, 102–103, 210, 238, 248, 668) and "convinced" (OC 91, 104, 208, 243, 246, 289, 294) as synonyms for "certainty" and "to be certain of".

words, certainty is not the result of a thought, but an "attitude" (OC 404). Yet this attitude has an important feature:

> I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can discover them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility. (OC 152)

By way of example, children do not explicitly learn that books or chairs exist, but assimilate these certainties by fetching books and sitting in armchairs (OC 476).[3] No one says explicitly to a child, "Books exist" for the purpose that the child acquires such certainty. If we tried that children assimilate every certainty only after having heard from us the corresponding grammatical proposition, it would be an endless task. Moreover, such sentence would not be enough for the child to distinguish if it is a certainty or a mere truth. Hence, certainties are acquired by acting spontaneously, not by merely thinking about them. In fact, it is possible that a certainty has never been expressed or thought even though it began to be shared many decades ago (cf. OC 159).

Let us now concentrate on an aspect which Wittgenstein seems to have addressed only tangentially in the paragraphs mentioned above. If certainty is not a mental state and cannot be controlled through thought either, it seems to follow, then, that it is not subject to will. Even though it depends on the philosophical skeptic's will to call a current certainty into doubt, to which Wittgenstein recommends admonishing him as if he were a child who still does not master our language-games (cf. OC 495), neither acquiring nor losing a certainty would depend on anybody's will. As we have already seen, Wittgenstein tackles this question only tangentially; however, he clearly seems to exclude the possibility of voluntarily reaching our certainties, and thus also rules out the possibility of modifying them at will. It can be concluded from this that, although certainties are attitudes shared by a linguistic community, such attitudes cannot be adopted or abandoned at will. The only thing we can say is that the adoption or abandonment of this type of attitudes is something that simply *happens to us*. It goes without saying that Wittgenstein did not expressly state this opinion; therefore, it would be out of place to attribute it to him. We must not forget, however, what he remarked about this question. Firstly, he presents certainties as inaccessible through thought (OC 103) and independent of mental states (OC 42, 308). Sec-

**3** It should be noted that, according to Wittgenstein, the system of reference – and, by extension, our very certainties – is not learned but acquired (OC 279). Hence, he uses the verb 'to learn' to refer to the conscious process of assimilation of contents, while the verb 'to acquire' makes reference to the unconscious adoption of a certainty or attitude.

ondly, he claims we realize only *a posteriori* that we have begun to share a given certainty (cf. OC 152). In my opinion, it can be stated that a certainty has been adopted only *once* it has been proved that such certainty was spontaneously shown in our way of acting and speaking for a considerable time. Thirdly, Wittgenstein conceives persuasion as the mere offering of a world-picture to someone who does not share it (cf. OC 262), and the way I see it, it is one thing to want to believe what the persuader says, but it is quite another to end up believing it. Furthermore, in order to dismantle the objection that a certainty might be grounded on some "basic principle" (OC 172), Wittgenstein replies:

> Is it maybe in my power what I believe? Or what I unshakeably believe? (OC 173)

The question Wittgenstein leaves hanging in the air – even with the intention of being answered in the negative by the reader – could be reformulated as follows: 'Does it depend on my will to have the certainties I have?' Given the philosophical importance of this question, and bearing in mind that Wittgenstein does not unequivocally answer it, it now seems appropriate to me to bring up Ortega's late work, where he explicitly tackled this issue in a brilliant and categorical manner. According to Ortega, beliefs do not arise at a particular time on a particular day, for they do not emerge due to our thinking of them. In fact, beliefs are not contents of our life, but its very container. In other words, we are our beliefs because for us, they are mixed with reality itself (IC 24). From Ortega's point of view, every adhesion to any given thought already entails the intention of thinking about something. Since this adhesion depends on our will, it automatically ceases to be reality for us, for reality is *counterwill* ("*contravoluntad*"): namely what we encounter, but not what we furnish or make (IC 31). In our beliefs we are, live and move. That is why we are not usually aware of them: they are latent in all we expressly do and/or think. In Ortega's opinion, when we really believe in something, we do not have the 'idea' of such thing, but simply take it for granted. And all those things we take for granted in our life constitute our reality (IC 29). Regarding Wittgenstein's work, we can say about certainties, as Le Roy Finch already did, that "they constitute *what we mean by reality*" (1977, 222). Hence, we continuously and independently of our will take our certainties, and the world-picture they make up, for granted. Our taking these certainties for granted is not due to a thinking process, for they are ungrounded and constitute the very container of our life and our thoughts. Ortega's conception of reality as counterwill is clearly reflected in what Wittgenstein says about *tradition:*

> Tradition is not something that anyone can pick up, it's not a thread, that someone can pick up, if & when he pleases; any more than you can choose your own ancestors. (CV 86)

Although Wittgenstein does not explicitly use the term "tradition" to make reference to the whole of our certainties, he uses it in a way so similar to the concept "system of reference", that there are reasons to extrapolate many things he says about tradition to his very conception of system of reference. According to Lurie (2012, 105–106), Wittgenstein considered 'tradition' as the observance of shared practices and customs we have inherited from our ancestors through a process of acculturation which needs a long time and a given upbringing. In order to adopt a foreign tradition, a "conversion" is necessary. This requires a very deep change because a cultural inheritance must be substituted for another. To realize the depth of this change, it must be kept in mind that this cultural inheritance or tradition entails to mold our very nature to fit the alien culture: in order to share some rituals, practices and customs our *attitudes* must be molded. As seen above, "attitude" (*Einstellung*) was one of the synonyms for 'certainty' Wittgenstein used in *On Certainty* (OC 381, 404), where he refers to 'persuasion' (*Überredung*) as a kind of conversion in which one's own world-picture is offered to someone who will adopt it (OC 92, 262, 512) if and when his certainties or fundamental attitudes or certainties are modified. As if this were not enough, Lurie (2012, 134) adds that the first symptom of the decline of a cultural tradition becomes apparent when it begins to be hindered and manipulated by means of intellect. Regarding our certainties, Wittgenstein warned that the fact of calling them into doubt through a question of the kind "How do I know ..." is enough to drag out the language-game or even to do away with it (OC 370). Since there is no room in our language-games – except in the philosophical ones – to call a certainty into question, the fact of expressing such a doubt constitutes a movement or possibility which is not included in our language-games. This apparent doubt would be as surprising as a tennis player stubbornly insisting on hitting the ball with his feet, or a basketball player refusing to stop holding on to the basket. After all, both actions would hinder the normal development of the corresponding game too.

Leaving aside the concept of 'tradition', I now want to analyze in more detail the role of *counterwill* in Wittgenstein's notion of 'certainty'. In Ortega's words, uses – like an ordinary greeting or the very use of language – do not depend on individual adhesions and are not imposed forcibly either, but end up being assimilated because of their social relevance (HG 267–268). In a similar way, I think that a linguistic rule consolidates as such when we take it for granted by participating in many language-games, so that an imposed rule will not really become a linguistic rule unless we end up taking it for granted. A linguistic rule emerges not only because it is used very often, but also because it is assimilated as a certainty by the users of the corresponding language. In the context of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, this consolidation does not require a given mental state,

but for every doubt about the validity of the rule to be excluded from our language-games. According to Wittgenstein, one cannot be wrong about his own name (OC 572, 579, 601, 613 – 614, 624, 628), just as one cannot make a mistake when identifying a color as 'blue' (OC 126, 340). Obviously, one can make a slip by using a linguistic rule. To give an example, I might say at a moment that my name is Michael, but the mere fact of recognizing that it was a slip already shows that such a slip was only an isolated anomalous use which would not at all alter my certainty that my name is José María. Of course, there can also be doubts to discern whether a given shade should be called 'greenish blue' or 'bluish green', but such doubts do not concern the certainty or security with which we usually identify the colors blue and green. Having said this, we should also remember that, according to Ortega, uses are not imposed forcibly. To analyze this point, let us imagine that the authorities of an invading army ordered that we give up considering red-haired people as human beings. Many people might try to follow this imposed use of language to avoid a severe punishment, but such a use, strictly speaking, would be a farce, for it does not depend on us to give up suddenly showing what Wittgenstein called "an attitude towards a soul" (PI 178). No matter how much we exert ourselves, the task of trying to give up considering red-haired individuals as human beings would be as absurd as trying not to consider our closest relatives and friends as human beings. The imposed use would not be an organic expression of a linguistic community, so it would be destined to extinction unless it ended up reflecting a spontaneous and deep-rooted attitude of such community. In this vein, Ortega claimed that public opinion and relevant use of language endure without anybody expressly defending them, while the particular opinion of a small group only exists inasmuch as one, several or many people take the trouble to put it forward (HG 266 – 267).

At this stage, it may be argued that Wittgenstein himself would have suggested a way of deliberately changing our certainties: for as can be read in *On Certainty*, when facts change, language-games also change, and with them, the uses or meanings of words change too (OC 63 – 65). Keeping this in mind, it could be objected that a certainty can be modified by altering facts. Let us resume the example of the previous paragraph and suppose that authorities had used a series of special effects to show how a group of red-haired individuals made things that cannot be considered as human at all: apparently they would turn into trees, later into different animals, etc. Faced with such a spectacle, someone might conclude that authorities were quite right when they warned that, at the very least, those red-haired individuals who turned into trees and animals are not human: and it might even occur that some onlooker suddenly gave up having an attitude towards a soul regarding red-haired people. Apparently, this procedure would allow the authorities to control that someone substitutes a certainty for another, but it is not the case. For if such

control were really effective, it should have been possible to choose which individual or individuals undergo the transformation, at which moment, which certainty is substituted and for which one, etc. However, the above-mentioned procedure would not allow the authorities to deliberately manipulate someone's certainty: at the most it might be *more probable* that this transformation *happened to* someone. In fact, it is possible that this procedure did not cause any conversion, even though a lot of people were seeing how a group of red-haired people apparently turned into trees and animals.[4]

That certainties cannot be dictated by any authority is a fact that Wittgenstein expressed in this important question: "Who decides what stands fast?" (OC 125) Once more, the answer to this question is negative, for what is certain or unquestionable is not something we furnish or impose, but something we find implicit in our language-games as we assimilate them. Just as no one decides what is a telling ground for something (OC 271), no one dictates what is objectively certain. It should be noted that Wittgenstein did not regard certainties as propositions, but as spontaneous attitudes or ways of acting. When Wittgenstein wonders how a child begins to share a language-game – and by extension, I would add, how a child begins to share certainties –, the only thing he can say is 'God knows': one day he begins to act in a given way (LWPP I 873). Indeed, when referring to the acquisition of certainties, Wittgenstein adds that "somewhere I must begin with not-doubting" (OC 150). Yet absence of doubt in this initial moment of beginning to act with not-doubting is not the result of a previous process of thinking: far from it, it is a way of acting in which doubt has not *even* been considered. It is something as immediate as the fact of spontaneously grasping a towel (OC 510): for we can doubt whether we prefer to grasp the towel sooner or later, but we do not doubt whether the towel exists or is a mirage, whether we still have the hand with which we are going to take the towel, etc. Just here Orteguian *counterwill* appears, i. e. in the complete spontaneity with which certainty is shown in our ways of acting and speaking. From a theoretical standpoint, it can be stated that certainty appears when there is no room in our language-games for it being called into question; but from a practical point of view, it might be added that this logical exclusion occurs because such way of acting and speaking is characterized by spontaneity and *counterwill* some time ago.

**4** As Moyal-Sharrock (2004, 83) pointed out: "Our certainty is conditioned, not justified, by the facts".

## 4 Conclusion

In this essay I have not revealed hitherto unknown thoughts from Wittgenstein and Ortega. Instead, I have simply tried to clarify some important aspects which both authors did not tackle clearly enough. So I have brought up Wittgenstein's work to shed light on ambiguous aspects of Ortega's work and vice versa. However, I have always tried not to distort their works, but contribute to mutually enrich them.

Regarding Ortega's work, the first conclusion was that ideas can only make sense if they are preceded by beliefs. To justify Ortega's ambiguity, it seems to be possible in principle to distinguish between two kinds of beliefs: on the one hand, those which the primeval man took for granted even before having forged any idea, and on the other hand, those beliefs which appeared later as further developments or crystallizations of previous ideas – I mean, ideas which in turn were preceded by beliefs. If this distinction is accepted, it would be coherent to affirm that ideas come from beliefs and vice versa, but in such a case it would be very important to specify what kind of belief we are referring to. However, someone might be tempted to regard Ortega's ambiguity as a virtue. For example, Ferreiro (2010) warns us that Ortega's aim was neither to constrict nor to specify, but to offer open and indefinite concepts because reality is unlimited too. Hence, we have to assume the inaccuracy of reality as an uncertain dimension of chance and hope which has absolutely nothing to do with hermetic and exhaustive conclusions. But even considering that Ferreiro's opinion is not only right but also very enriching, I also think that it is not enough to dissolve the ambiguity to which Ortega falls prey when he refers to the double origin of beliefs. In other words, I do not deny that Ferreiro's remark constitutes a very helpful key to understand Ortega's work, but if we bear in mind that it turns our attention away from a problem as important as the origin of beliefs, I conclude that Ferreiro implicitly highlights a weakness of Ortega's work too.

As regards Ortega's contribution to the enrichment of Wittgenstein's work, we have seen that Ortega emphasizes that beliefs are not something we *furnish* or *make*, but something in which we *already* are without even being aware of how and when we have begun to share them. Belief, therefore, is not something we decide to have at a given moment, but something that *seizes* us or simply *happens* to us. From this point of view, both Ortega and Wittgenstein present us with an image of the human being according to which he is unable to control his basic convictions, although Ortega is more explicit in this point. Some authors have also explained Wittgenstein's ambiguities. For example, Sádaba (1996, 17) pointed out that Wittgenstein often uses images or similes because what is really important should only be suggested without being concentrated on a concept apparently filled by a power

that in reality it has not. What lies behind this comment is, of course, Wittgensteins's well-known distinction between saying and showing; but even though Sádaba's comment is very interesting, it does not justify either, that Wittgenstein has not tackled more expressly and clearly a question as important as the possibility of changing our certainties at will. After all, to clarify this aspect is also a help to shed light on other questions as interesting as the process of persuasion mentioned in *On Certainty*. For although at first sight it may seem that someone is persuaded by the mere fact of being presented a world-picture different form the one he has, the truth is that persuasion does not take place if and when the individual who is persuaded wishes it so: instead, the persuaded individual is the one to whom it *happens* that he believes it.

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# Anatomies of Foolishness 1927 – 1937

**Abstract:** Intellectual vice and virtue and epistemic values and disvalues were the object of a great deal of reflection between 1927 and 1937. What, if anything, is to be learned from the writings during this decade of Benda, Ortega, Musil and their contemporaries about the values of correct belief, knowledge and exactness and from the earlier Austrian – Weininger, Husserl, Wittgenstein – obsession with clarity and clarification?

The philosophy of intellectual vices and virtues, of cognitive goods and evils, values and disvalues, and of foolishness does not display many high-points. Aristotle's account of non-ethical virtues and vices, medieval developments of this account, Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* and Descartes' reflections on the search for certainty are among the main contributions to such a philosophy.

The decade which begins in 1927 is marked by an unusual surge of interest in attitudes towards the values of truth, reason, knowledge and clarity. In that year Julien Benda publishes *La Trahison des clercs* (The Treason of the Clerisy), a treason due to the desire to abase the values of knowledge before the values of action. Ten years later Robert Musil publishes his address "Über die Dummheit" (On Stupidity). In between, a remarkable number of investigations of our relations to the disvalues of error, illusion, falsity, sham beliefs and inexactness appear.

In what follows I have two goals. First, to determine what can be learned from these investigations about what I shall call foolishness. Second, to identify an important current in twentieth-century thought which is invariably overlooked and its main antecedents. It is important to distinguish the first goal from a quite different project, that of evaluating the claims made by our thinkers about the bearers of cognitive vice and foolishness. Many of the writings to be considered belong to the genre of cultural and political criticism. We are told that this or that thinker, this or that part of some population is cognitively vicious. Such claims are, as philosophers say, contingent claims, that is, of little interest to philosophers. What interests me here is not the truth or falsity of such claims but the understanding of our relations to cognitive values which is to be found in the writings to be considered. This distinction is not always easy to respect. Some of our anatomists of foolishness take other philosophers, thinkers and artists to be on the side of cognitive vice. And, of course, it is one thing for a philosopher to be on the side of cognitive vice, to defend it, and an-

other thing to be cognitively vicious. But matters are slightly more complicated than this might suggest. Some of our anatomists merrily claim that large swathes of the population are indifferent to the value of reason, an empirical claim, sometimes because, like Nietzsche and William James, they are interested in what happens when people live according to this or that philosophy. Similarly, it is sometimes claimed that many of us in the West live as the philosophies of postmodernism tell us to live. But the evaluation of such an empirical claim cannot avoid investigating the philosophical claims of postmodernism.

I first (1) survey some of the main contributions to my topic, then (2) consider in more detail the writings of Julien Benda and José Ortega y Gasset[1] on cognitive values and (3) some of their Austrian predecessors. Finally (4), I examine two different accounts of foolishness and their relations to what our anatomists have to say.

## 1 Survey

In 1930 José Ortega y Gasset's *La Rebelión de las Masas* (The Revolt of the Masses) describes "mass-man" in terms of his relations to cognitive values or norms. Ortega wonders why there is still no study of our contact with the foolishness (*tontería*) of others:

> I often asked myself the following question. There is no doubt that at all times, for many men, one of the greatest tortures of their lives has been the contact, the collision with the folly of their neighbors. And yet how is it that there has never been attempted – I think this is so – a study on this matter, an Essay on Folly? For the pages of Erasmus do not treat of this aspect of the matter. (Ortega 1961, 53; the last sentence quoted is not to be found in the original Ortega 2000, 123)[2]

The first parts of Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities* (1930 and 1933) are just such an attempt. They present and analyze an extraordinary variety of fools and foolishness from the points of view of a narrator and hero who display a great interest in many normative matters but often seem to believe in little else than precision, reason, clarity and certain affective states.

In 1932 the great German literary critic and future author of *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages), Ernst Robert Curtius, publishes *Deutscher Geist in Gefahr*, in order to attack the relativism and sociologism of Karl Mannheim and the climate it express-

**1** On Musil on cognitive values, cf. Mulligan 2014.

**2** Unless otherwise indicated all translations in what follows are by me – KM.

es and grows out of. Already in 1927 Curtius had pleaded, somewhat effusively, for a "restauration of reason", and depicted "the anarchic state of European *Intelligenz*", "the incursion of democracy into the realm of the soul", in which "all differences of value have been effaced". Irony, he notes, "is one of the methods" which might help "to clean up our spiritual chaos", for "irony is an aspect of reason" (Curtius 1927, 859, 858).[3] Germany in 1932, Curtius thinks, has turned its back on *Bildung* and the will to know which belongs to it, has begun to destroy culture and deny value to reason. Irrationalism is everywhere, particularly in the "hatred of Geist and reason of a certain pseudo-romantic tendency in contemporary philosophy" (Curtius 1932, 20 f.), presumably the philosophies of Spengler, Klages and Lessing. The destruction of culture is the expression of a political hatred of culture, which comes in many forms. The new nationalist myth in Germany rejects *Geist* and culture and their autonomy; the intellectuals who propagate the myth are traitors to *Geist*, says Curtius, referring to Benda's critique of nationalism in *La Trahison des Clercs* (Curtius 1932, 43 f.).

Karl Mannheim's 1929 *Ideologie und Utopie* (Ideology and Utopia), an influential contribution to the so called sociology of knowledge, may seem to be itself a plea for cognitive values. It is after all concerned to unmask the sources of irrational beliefs, ideologies and utopias, that is to say, fictions. But Curtius takes it to be a version of "sociologism", the view that sociology is the universal science, a view Mannheim presents, Curtius thinks, with an almost religious fervor. Mannheim's sociologism does deal with the function of mind in the contemporary world but offers not knowledge merely a personal confession. The fictions Mannheim and his followers claim to have seen through include all evaluations. But Mannheim's nihilism, Curtius suggests, is itself merely a personal inclination which relies on the rhetoric in favor of "dynamic" rather than "static" thought popularized by philosophies of life. Curtius' Mannheim is blind to all value except that of authenticity or sincerity. The root of his errors is his conviction that thinking can never be an end in itself. Mannheim is part of the confused and irresponsible irrationalism of contemporary Germany (Curtius 1932, 88 – 102).

Nicolai Hartmann's (1933) *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (The Problem of Spiritual Being) explores the variety of sham beliefs and sentiments and the self-deception they involve – in mass-suggestion, majority opinions, public opinion, political life, journalism, art, taste, life-styles and conventional morality. He describes a number of mechanisms essential to such phenomena and asks what, if anything, can counteract the spread of the sham. Thus the force of suggestion, he argues, leads individuals to draw no consequences from their knowledge that

**3** On Curtius, cf. Hoeges 1994.

they have been misled, it does not really convince but drowns out convictions and knowledge. Hartmann notes that Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time), in his descriptions of "Das Man", had isolated some aspects of these phenomena. But when Hartmann goes on to ask how sham and inauthenticity can be avoided the answer he gives is very un-Heideggerian. Heidegger's appeal to *Angst*, conscience and guilt cannot, he argues, tell us what it is in shared forms of life which works against sham and inauthenticity. Knowledge of all types and the pursuit of knowledge, in particular science, are the only spheres which are essentially free of sham, because of their essentially critical dimension and cumulative character. Science, he claims, differs from morality, ethos, art and legal traditions in two crucial and related respects. Science is cumulative and progressive and there is no such thing as sham knowledge. Science is free of sham knowledge *because* it is cumulative. What we call "knowledge" is always a mixture of knowledge and error. But error in science is not any sort of inauthentic taking to be true, the phenomenon induced by suggestion, for example in public opinion. It is no deviation from the idea of truth. Epistemic enterprises of all sorts provide a critical instance and an ideal against which all other aspects of the common mind can be measured. But, as Hartmann notes, his view is incompatible with the pragmatist conception of theoretical interest and the theoretical attitude.[4]

In 1929 Husserl announces that "the European sciences have lost the great belief in themselves, in their absolute significance", the "belief of the Enlightenment", the "great belief, once the substitute for religious belief, that science leads to wisdom" (Husserl 1974, 9). In lectures given in Prague (1934) and Vienna (1935) and in his 1936 publication of part of *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie* (The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology) Husserl pleads at length for a "heroism of reason", a heroism which turns out to be possible only for those prepared to swallow Husserl's transcendental idealism.

In 1934 another Austrian philosopher, Heinrich Gomperz, examines in a much more modest and rewarding fashion the possible relations between cogni-

**4** Hartmann 1962, chs. 40 – 41, 368 – 386. Hartmann, most unusually for a twentieth-century German philosopher uninfluenced by analytic philosophy, is a realist who writes clearly and gives arguments for and against his views and rejects all varieties of idealism. His *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* is an investigation of what today would be called the ontology of social and cultural facts. It contains some of Hartmann's contributions to his *Anti-Heidegger*. Thus Hartmann's realism leads him to condemn Heidegger's failure to distinguish properly between objective time (the B-series, before-after) and temporal consciousness (the A-series, present-past-future) (Hartmann 1962, 150).

tive values, in particular the end or value of scientific knowledge, on the one hand, and practical values and the exigencies of action, on the other hand, in a pioneering study, *Die Wissenschaft und die Tat*.[5]

The philosophical enemies of Husserl and Hartmann, the logical positivists and the logical empiricists, with whom Musil feels a definite sympathy, are also fascinated by cognitive values. Throughout the decade, Bertrand Russell and the only French member of the Vienna Circle, Louis Rougier, return again and again to a variety of cognitive vices. Rougier published five critiques of different kinds of *mystique* – revolutionary, democratic, Soviet, political and economic. What is a "mystique"? Rougier says

> Du XIXe au XXe siècle, on parle couramment de la mystique du progrès, de la mystique démocratique, de la nouvelle mystique américaine de l'efficience, de la mystique soviétique. *Le terme désigne alors un ensemble de croyances*, qu'on ne saurait ni démontrer en raison, ni fonder en expérience, mais *que l'on accepte aveuglement pour des motifs irrationnels:* par l'effet de la coutume dont parle Pascal, de l'éducation de l'autorité, de l'exemple, des préjugés prétendus nécessaires, bref de toute la pression du conformisme social. Ces croyances peuvent être morales, esthétiques, scientifiques, sociales, politiques. Toute doctrine telle que l'on n'éprouve plus la curiosité ou le besoin de la remettre en question, soit que l'on l'admette comme un dogme si évident que toute enquête sur son bien-fondé est superflue, soit qu'on y adhère par un acte de foi jugé si nécessaire par suite de sa bienfaisance sacro-sainte que l'abandonner serait scandaleux, est une mystique ou acceptée en tant que telle.[6] (Rougier 1935, 11; emphases mine – KM).

Many mystiques are value-judgments. Rougier, like other logical positivists and empiricists, is an anti-realist about values and an anti-cognitivist about value-judgments. But although some value-judgments express a simple preference without giving any reason, others involve a claim about the means appropriate to the realization of preferences. Such claims have a truth-value. Rougier's analyses of different mystiques study the relations between preferences and the claims about suitable means bound up with these. This strategy is now a very familiar one (Rougier 1935, 22f.).[7]

Russell, along with Guglielmo Ferrero, Ortega y Gasset and Aldous Huxley, Rougier asserts, is one of "the sages of the West", who have kept their heads amidst the

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**5** Gomperz 1934, cf. Gomperz 1938, and for a careful evaluation of Gomperz's views, cf. Rutte 1994.

**6** The term "mystique" is employed by Rougier's teacher, Edmond Goblot, in *La Barrière et le niveau. Etude sociologique sur la bourgeoisie française moderne* – la "mystique des jugements de valeur" (Goblot 1925, 25). Like Rougier, Goblot is a logician who writes about sociology – in this case about what was to become known in French sociology as "la distinction".

**7** The same strategy is employed by Goblot. On Rougier, cf. Marion 2007, in particular 212.

"universal folly" of collectivization and a stupefying conformism (Rougier 1938, 3). Russell's 1935 article, "The Revolt against Reason", the title of which is perhaps an allusion to Ortega's book, contains aspects of a credo which is best summed up in Russell's liberal decalogue, a text published in 1951, which repeats claims Russell made throughout his long career, before, during and after our decade. Every one of Russell's commandments concerns cognitive values or norms:

1. Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worth while to proceed by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
3. Never try to discourage thinking for you are sure to succeed.
4. When you meet with opposition, even if it should be from your husband or your children, endeavor to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.
5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
6. Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do the opinions will suppress you.
7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent that in passive agreement, for, if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.
9. Be scrupulously truthful, even if the truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.
10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness.[8]

## 2 Benda 1927 and Ortega 1930

Spengler's "creed of spiritual barbarism", says the Hungarian realist phenomenologist Aurel Kolnai, is one of the creeds that "have roused great men of the West such as José Ortega y Gasset and Julien Benda to their eloquent and immortal philippics" (Kolnai 1938, 215).

**8** Russell 1969, 71 f. Marion 2009 sets out Russell's attachment to cognitive values and anti-realism about values.

Benda's philippic refers to the values of justice and beauty, reason and truth[9] as the values of the clerisy. The attitude of the genuine "clerk" towards these values is, he argues, not at all practical, but contemplative, although he does and should preach these values, since all practical goals tend to "bend the truth" (Benda 1975, 98 f., 102). In particular, any value the passion for truth, reason or justice may have is not itself a clerical value.[10] Benda also refers to the moral value of thought. Most of us, he asserts, do not think, if by thinking is meant "a personal effort to penetrate further into reality or to explore the root of an *a priori* concept"; the "masses", the "people", the "vulgar" do not think (Benda 1948, 243 – 245). But thinking only becomes the object of systematic hostility and contempt towards the end of the nineteenth century.[11] "Intellectual probity", which Benda opposes to such contempt, is "the will to respect the truth, whatever it is, and the refusal to bend it in one's interest or in that of some group" (Benda 1948, 275).

The traditional attachment of the clerisy to the values mentioned is contrasted with the political passions of race, class, party and nation. The betrayal of the clerisy is its substitution of political passions for this attachment, in particular for the development of the networks of doctrines which increasingly subtend the different political passions.[12] The betrayal of the values of truth, reason and thought is a complex phenomenon which includes the rejection of conceptual thought in favor of intuition,[13] a rejection which is also a bugbear of Musil's; the promotion of the value of intuition over the value of clear and distinct ideas; the dismissal of non-contingent truths in favor of contingent truths;[14] and contempt for independent thought.[15] Nietzsche and then Sorel, Barrès and Péguy want "to humiliate the values of knowledge as against the values of action" (Benda 1975, 196). The modern "clerk", the traitorous "clerk", feels only contempt "for the beautiful Greek conception according to which science begins in the need to play, the perfect type of disinterested activity";[16] "sensibility to truth

**9** Benda 1975, 97. Engel 2012 is a wonderfully penetrating and thorough account of all aspects of Benda's thought, enlivened by a deep sympathy with Benda and frequent excurses which deal very effectively with the contemporary successors of Benda's enemies.

**10** Cf. Benda 1975, 104.

**11** Cf. Benda 1948, 269 – 270.

**12** Cf. Benda 1975, 121.

**13** Cf. Benda 1975, 165.

**14** As in, for example, Spengler and Wittgenstein.

**15** Cf. Benda 1975, 196, 166, 180.

**16** The internal relations between *homo ludens*, *homo sapiens* and the disinterested desire to know plays a central role in Gomperz's 1915 [1904] account of the ideal of inner freedom in

in itself outside every practical end, is a quite contemptible form of mind" and is replaced by the "glorification of prejudices" (Benda 1975, 199). "Intellectual activity" is said to be "worthy of esteem to the extent that it is practical and only to this extent" (Benda 1975, 197).[17] The "littérateurs" who are his contemporaries (Musil refers to "Literaten" in very similar terms) "make fun of reasoning", agree that "the question of truth and falsity is a matter of complete indifference". In spite of their undoubted brilliance they employ in a completely arbitrary fashion expressions such as "therefore", as do German philosophers of life.[18] One Bergsonian passion is the "hatred of science – more generally of the intelligence it signifies – the profound desire to humiliate its functions, to lower them to the lowest degrees in the scale of values" (Benda 1915, 139).[19] Unsurprisingly, Benda calls his *Trahison* "a book of combat" (Benda 1937, 99). Musil, too, speaks in the same terms of his work.

Benda does not take seriously the possibility that there might be, in addition to "universal" values, individual or personal values.[20] At one point, he notes the possibility that there are values which are relative to matters of fact rather than absolute,[21] but normally he assumes that one has to choose between universal values and individual or "relative" values, thus accepting an assumption made by his enemies, such as Barrès. Benda condemns particularisms of all kinds, in particular the substitutions of a personal morality for universal morality[22] and quotes one of the earliest formulations of post-Kantian normative particularism, due to Schleiermacher.[23] The view that there are both universal and individual values (for example, justice and the value for a lover of his beloved) was defended, perhaps for the first time, by the philosopher Max Scheler; the "right relation between value-universalism and value-individualism", he claims, is that the recognition and realization of universal values is a minimum which must be satisfied before the recognition and realization of individual values (Scheler 1966, 484). The point is not really very different from that made, in deontic terms, by Malebranche, in a passage

ancient philosophy, in Husserl's objections to Heidegger's account of theoretical attitudes as a "deficient mode", and in the anthropologies of Scheler and Ortega.

**17** Benda's criticisms of this pragmatism resemble in many respects the earlier criticisms given by Scheler minus the latter's intuitionism.

**18** On "donc" cf. Benda 1937, 70–71; on "also" cf. Benda 1947, 69.

**19** On Benda's wide-ranging critique of Bergson, cf. Engel's luminous chapter, "L'Anti-Bergson", Engel 2012, 77–138.

**20** Cf. Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011.

**21** Cf. Benda 1975, 91.

**22** Cf. Benda 1975, 163–165.

**23** Cf. Benda 1975, 167.

Benda quotes: "One must always dispense justice before exercising charity" (Malebranche, *Morale,* II, 7; Benda 1975, 59).

Is a distinction between universal and individual values important for the philosophy of cognitive values? Consider the value of knowledge. Knowledge is sometimes of great extrinsic value (knowledge of the means necessary to realize one's projects) and sometimes of great extrinsic disvalue (unpleasant, painful, frightening, distressing, unacceptable knowledge). Is it ever intrinsically valuable? One may think that certain types of knowledge are intrinsically valuable *for* a particular person or at least better for that person than illusion or ignorance – for example, knowledge about one's life, vocation, about what is intrinsically valuable for oneself. (Perhaps a person's knowledge about what is intrinsically valuable for her is intrinsically valuable for her *because* its object is intrinsically valuable for her). But this is not the sort of epistemic value Benda has in mind. Truth, Benda thinks, following a long tradition, is, absolutely speaking, a good thing. But there are reasons, not dreamt of by Nietzsche and his ilk, for thinking that this is wrong. Consider justice, which is a value, and truth. If it is just that *p*, then it is good that it is just that *p* and, other things being equal, it is good that *p*. But if it is true that *p*, it does not follow that it is good that it is true that *p*, unless what is substituted for the variable is itself a positive, axiological predication, nor is its being true that *p* a reason for thinking that it is good that *p*. So truth is, strictly speaking, no value.[24] Of course, what is often intended by talk of the value of truth is the value of true beliefs or the claim that true beliefs are better than false beliefs. But beliefs are correct or incorrect, rather than true or false, and a belief that *p* is correct only if, and because (it is true that) *p*. Another thing often intended when one speaks of the value of truth is the importance of considering and finding out whether some claim is true. But then we are back with the value of knowledge and its acquisition.[25]

Ortega's once influential philippic combines social philosophy, cultural criticism and political philosophy. Its subject is what he calls mass-man. Unlike earlier social philosophies and theories of "the masses" and elites or influential minorities such as those of Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels and Leopold von Wieser, Ortega does not, when he is being careful, assign individuals to one of the two categories, the elite – the select minority – or the masses. Rather, he suggests, a mass-man is hidden in each of his European contemporaries. An even more important difference between Ortega and his predecessors is, as I have al-

**24** The thesis, but not the argument, is given by Scheler 1966, 125, 197 f.

**25** The view that some kinds of knowledge are intrinsically valuable for a person is to be found in Scheler's later writings. Something like this view is dismissed in favor of the absolute conception by Hartmann. Hartmann 1962, 383 f.

ready noted, that the nature of mass-man is elucidated, in particular in chapter 8 of his *Revolt*, in terms of an individual's relation to cognitive values or norms:

> The "ideas" of the average man are not genuine ideas, nor is their possession culture. An idea is a putting truth in checkmate. Whoever wishes to have ideas must first prepare himself to desire truth and to accept the rules of the game imposed by it. It is no use speaking of ideas when there is no acceptance of a higher authority to regulate them, a series of standards [*normas*] to which it is possible to appeal in a discussion [...] There is no culture where there is no respect [esteem, reverence, *acatamiento*] for certain final intellectual positions to which a dispute may be referred [...]. Properly speaking, there are no barbarian standards. Barbarism is the absence of standards to which appeal can be made. The varying degrees of culture are measured by the greater or less precision of the standards.[26] (Ortega 1961, 54–55, Ortega 2000, 97)

"Intellectual indocility", the "closing up" or "obliteration" of the average soul, "intellectual hermeticism" (narrow-mindedness, *Borniertheit*) is just what the revolt of the masses consists in:

> The individual finds himself already with a stock of ideas. He decides to content himself with them and to consider himself intellectually complete. As he feels the lack of nothing outside himself, he settles down definitely amid his mental furniture. Such is the mechanism of self-obliteration. (Ortega 1961, 52, Ortega 2000, 94)
>
> Under the species of Syndicalism and Fascism there appears for the first time in Europe a type of man *who does not want to give reasons or to be right*, but simply shows himself resolved to impose his opinions. This is the new thing: the right not to be reasonable, the "reason of unreason". Here I see the most palpable manifestation of the new mode of being of the masses, [...]. (Ortega 1961, 55–56, translation modified, Ortega 2000, 98)

The average man

> [...] wishes to have opinions, but is unwilling to accept the conditions and presuppositions that underlie all opinion. Hence his ideas are in effect nothing more than appetites in words, something like musical romanzas ... To have an idea means believing one is in possession of the reasons for having it, and consequently means believing that there is such a thing as reason, a world of intelligible truths. To have ideas, to form opinions, is identical with appealing to

**26** One account of elites and masses which may be thought to anticipate that given by Ortega is Pareto's sociology of elites, derivations and "residues". But Pareto is far more interested in describing the variety of human stupidity than our relations to cognitive values. Indeed he thinks that value terms cannot be employed in rigorous reasoning. And, as Aron points out, according to Pareto, but not Ortega: "The elite is composed of those who have succeeded in their activities – the prostitutes as well as the recipients of the Nobel Prize" (Aron 1988, 368). On Benda as a precursor of Pareto and on Benda's *Anti-Bergson* as an application of what Pareto calls the theory of derivations, cf. Bousquet 1960, 162.

> such an authority, submitting oneself to it, accepting its code and its decisions, and therefore believing that the highest form of co-existence is the dialogue in which the reasons for our ideas are discussed. But the mass-man would feel that he has lost himself if he accepted discussions, and instinctively repudiates the obligation of accepting that supreme authority lying outside himself. Hence the "new thing" in Europe is "to have done with discussions" and detestation is expressed for all forms of co-existence which imply respect for [*acatamiento*] objective standards, ranging from conversation to Parliament, and taking in science. (Ortega 1961, 56, translation modified, Ortega 2000, 98 f.)

Ortega does not spare his compatriots:

> The paucity of Spanish intellectual culture is shown, not in greater or less knowledge, but in the habitual lack of caution and care to adjust one's self to truth which is usually displayed by those who speak and write. It is not the fact of judging rightly or wrongly – the truth is not within our reach – but the lack of scruple which makes them omit the elementary requirements for right judgment. We are like the country priest who triumphantly refutes the Manichean without having troubled to inquire what the Manichean believes. (Ortega 1961, 55, Ortega 2000, 98)

Does the prominence of cognitive values or norms in Ortega's *Revolt* owe anything to Benda's earlier work? Ortega says that his book develops ideas published earlier in *España Invertebrada* (1922, Invertebrate Spain). This is indeed the case. But the distinction between masses and minorities drawn by Ortega in 1922 is not set out in terms of attitudes towards cognitive values or norms, although one form of irrationality, *ressentiment*, does play an important role in the book.[27] It is a book concerned more with aristophobia[28] than with alethophobia.

But in "Reforma de la inteligencia" (parts of which were first published in 1925 and 1926) Ortega does indeed anticipate some of Benda's most striking claims. Intellectual inquiry, he claims, is primarily a useless luxury, a sport, and only secondarily useful; the introduction of practical norms into thinking "paralyzes and blinds" it (Ortega 2008a, 119). Intellectuals began to try to run the world around 1800 and their imperialism has been a complete failure. The more intellectuals behave as apostles the more the quality of their thought suffers. They must therefore retreat from society, from the public to the private sphere. Intellectual minorities must eliminate from their work all political and humanitarian pathos. They must cease to be taken seriously. But this retreat must not be sudden, Ortega says, like a good conservative, because of the omnipresence of intellectuals in society.[29] In

**27** Cf. Ortega 1998, 47, 56, 108, 81, 112.
**28** Cf. Ortega 1998, 92.
**29** Cf. Ortega 2008a, 121 – 123.

a 1933 addition to his text, Ortega says that intelligence requires solitude for "the attention of others seduces us into thinking *for* them" and makes intelligence servile. Ortega's invitation to intellectuals to retreat from the public sphere in order to avoid epistemic vice had been formulated even earlier. In 1924 he writes: "The intelligentsia [*la inteligencia*] ought not to aim to command, not even to influence and save man" (Ortega 2008b, 112).[30]

The anatomies of foolishness between 1927 and 1937 briefly considered here share many preoccupations and obsessions. Two examples must suffice. Nationalism and its associated cognitive vices play a central role in the writings of Curtius, Musil and Benda. And Curtius and Benda see in humanism, about which they are most eloquent, an alternative to what they most deplore.[31]

## 3 Austrian clarification

The main immediate predecessor of our anatomies is the obsession with clarity, exactness and precision in the thought and art of Austria-Hungary which begins at the end of the nineteenth century. Klimt's *Nuda Veritas*, Otto Weininger's near identification of "logical" and ethical values, Rilke's scorn for the *à peu-près*, Karl Kraus' "ethics of language" (Brecht), his identification of ethical vice in errors of punctuation, and the striving for clarity of Husserl and Wittgenstein are some tips of this particular Austrian iceberg. Another is Brentano's successful propaganda in Vienna towards the end of the nineteenth century for his vision of the history of philosophy as a series of efforts driven by a disinterested theoretical interest which regularly gives way to philosophical decadence when the primacy of practical interests asserts itself and then collapses into mysticism or obscurantism. Some of our anatomists belong to this Austrian tradition – Husserl, Gomperz and Musil, the most exact writer of literature ever (Broch). One non-Austrian predecessor of our anatomies is Scheler's identification of a misological tendency in German thought he called "Pan-Romanticism" (the already

**30** As Pascal Engel has pointed out to me, Benda sketches some of the ideas he was to develop in *La Trahison* already in 1925, cf. Lefèvre 1925, 33 – 36.

**31** Curtius 1962 [1921] is a detailed study of Barrès and French nationalism. Philistinism combined with ressentiment is, according to Curtius, the most powerful enemy of humanism (Curtius 1932, 127 f.).

mentioned trio, Klages, Spengler and Lessing), a tradition which is also the object of Musil's irony.[32]

The well-known prominence of clarity as a value or end in Austrian thought and art[33] can easily hide an important difference between attitudes towards this end or value.

Kienzler points out that one of the most common expressions in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is "it is clear that ..." (Kienzler 2011). The clarity connective is even more frequent in Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. But the place of clarity in the thought of the two Austrian philosophers is by no means the same. In Wittgenstein, as Kienzler nicely puts it, it is clarity not distinctness (*Deutlichkeit*) which counts. But according to Husserl and other heirs of Brentano, the values of clarity and of distinctness derive from the value of knowledge, in particular systematic knowledge, first and foremost, philosophical knowledge, followed by empirical, scientific knowledge. For Wittgenstein, on the other hand, early and late, "clarity, transparency, is an end in itself"; his striving after this end remains the same "in no matter what structure" (Wittgenstein 1984, 459).[34]

Whether clarity can or should be an end or a value in itself independently of the value of some type of knowledge, whether systematic or not (for example, self-knowledge), is an interesting question which cannot be pursued here. For present purposes it is only important to note that something like Wittgenstein's ideal is to be found in the works of other Austrian thinkers. Musil, in one mood, liked to say: "one can also love clarity" (Musil 1983b, 1212). Hugo von Hofmannsthal plugged the claim that clarity is distinctively Austrian and a very good thing.[35] Something like Wittgenstein's ideal of clarity is also omnipresent in

**32** Cf. Mulligan 2014. Scheler (1971) is also the author of one of the few systematic modern attempts to understand the relations between ethical and cognitive values. He is also an important influence on Hartmann, Curtius and Ortega.

**33** Cf. the excellent recent paper by Kienzler 2011, Mulligan 1989, 1990.

**34** But cf. Wittgenstein 1979, 81 (13.8.16) and, on this passage, Smith 2003.

**35** Cf. Hofmannsthal 1952 [1915], 257. In the same passage, Hofmannsthal also declares that the present, a "sense of the present", is Austrian and that it and clarity are the "secret source" of Austrian happiness. A year later, Wittgenstein declares that "only one who lives not in time but in the present is happy", Wittgenstein 1979, 74 (8.7.16). Unlike Wittgenstein, Hofmannsthal seems to think that to live in the present is to live in time. Wittgenstein and Weininger, unlike Hofmannsthal, think that, as Weininger puts it, "the present and eternity are related", Wittgenstein because to "live in the present is to live eternally", that is to say, atemporally (*Unzeitlichkeit*) (TLP 6.4311), and Weininger because "[t]he present is the form of eternity". In explaining what he means by "eternity", Weininger says: "Atemporal (*zeitlos*), general logical judgments have the form of the present" and that "all eternity lies in every present".

the writings of one of his heroes, Karl Kraus.[36] But it is in the work of another hero of Wittgenstein, Otto Weininger, that clarity is not only the object of an extended analysis but also idolized.

In a letter to G.E. Moore Wittgenstein says that, roughly speaking, if one puts a negation sign before the whole of Weininger's book, *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Sex and Character), it nevertheless "expresses an important truth" (Wittgenstein 1980, 183 (23.8.1931)). We will perhaps never know exactly what truth Wittgenstein had in mind. But one candidate is Weininger's account of clarity and the account of ethical and logical value of which it is a part. This account should not be confused with Weininger's claims about the exemplifications and non-exemplifications of such values. Even if one puts the negation sign before these, this detracts not a bit from the (im)plausibility of the account.

Weininger yokes together ethical and logical value: "the idea of truth" is the "highest value of logic as of ethics". He thinks he is allowed to do this because the truth of truth-bearers and truthfulness (*Wahrhaftigkeit*) are, in ways never really made clear, two sides of the same coin. He opposes clarity to obscurity but often identifies clarity with distinctness and articulation (being *artikuliert*, *gegliedert*) and obscurity with, for example, indistinctness, blurredness (*Verschwommenheit*), vagueness or indefiniteness. Clarity and obscurity, he thinks, are features of psychic contents or data, the contents of ideas (*Vorstellungsinhalt*), presentations and experiences. The degree zero of clarity is described in terms of a lack of awareness of a distinction (due to Avenarius), present in all experiences and presentations, between *elements* – sensory (red, sweet) and non-sensory (what is believed or conjectured) – and *characters* (belief, conjecture, knowledge, familiarity, certainty). Where the element and character in an experience or content are absolutely indistinguishable Weininger baptizes the latter *Heniden*. They are the degree zero of psychological or mental articulation. And Weininger refers to his "theory of Heniden" as though it were a new theory (Weininger 1921, 114).[37]

Clarity is not clarification (*Klärung*) and the philosophy of the latter has often been neglected in favour of the philosophy of the former. This is perhaps why Weininger calls his concept of clarification a "new concept". To the different degrees of clarity or distinctness and differentiation, which are stages (*Etappen*) on the journey towards clarification (*auf dem Wege der Klärung*) correspond different levels of understanding. Thus degrees of clarity are conceived of as the re-

**36** Cf. Kienzler 2011. But the importance of *differences* in Kraus' writings entails, I suggest, that Kraus' ideal includes the idea of distinctness. On differences in Austro-German philosophy, cf. Mulligan 2012, ch. 1.

**37** Although Weininger refers to Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, he does not refer to Husserl's account of clarity and clarification.

sults of the process of clarification or the reverse of this process. The process of clarification "from complete confusion to radiant clarity", can be seen in the transition from pre-thoughts (*Vorgedanken*) to new thoughts, and in particular in scientific discoveries, artistic creation and technical inventions. The process extends over the whole of human history, over generations and over the life of an individual. Anticipations (*Ahnungen*) precede clear knowledge. A similar process is to be found in the development of artistic styles, in painting and in music. But the process can also run backwards. It can be observed in all learning processes, as when one emerges from darkness and comes to master an idea in mechanics or mathematics and finally possesses "a fully distinct thought the contours of which are no longer obscured by fog" (Weininger 1921, 112 – 125). Memory, too, illustrates the process.[38]

What Wittgenstein in 1931 calls his "work of clarification" (Wittgenstein 1984) has a complicated relation to clarification à la Weininger Whereas Weininger thinks that the "intellectual (*gedanklich*) progress of humanity", scientific and non-scientific, is based almost exclusively on "a process of clarification", "a better and ever better description and knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) of the *same* things", Wittgenstein, in a passage already quoted, opposes the spirit which expresses itself "in building ever larger and more complicated structures" and the spirit which expresses itself "in striving after clarity and perspicuity in no matter what structure". "The first ... adds one construction to another, moving on and up, as it were, from one stage to the next, while the other remains where it is and what it tries to grasp is always the same". He reserves the word progress for the former project. Here clarity is a means to the end of constructing more and more complicated structures. And he implies that this is true of science. Wittgenstein's thoughts, he says, do not move like those of scientists: "Each sentence that I write is trying to say the whole thing, that is, *the same thing* over and over again ..." (Wittgenstein 1984, 459; my emphasis – KM). Weininger's clarification, then, is, amongst other things, a means towards scientific and artistic progress but, like Wittgenstein's clarification, it involves repeated attempts to clarify the same things. And Weininger's logico-ethical hero, who is tortured by his lack of clarity, has a good claim to figure prominently in the truth Wittgenstein found in Weininger's work.

Unclear ideas, according to Weininger, are central not only to the lowest levels of the intellect. They also play a more noble role, which will doubtless strike some as anticipating one of the themes of the *Tractatus:*

**38** Indeed Weininger uses his account of clarification to throw light on a number of different psychological phenomena, many of which were to interest Wittgenstein.

> The absolute henid does not allow language at all, since the articulation of speech follows only from the articulation of thought. But there is also on the highest level of the intellect which is possible for man something unclear (*Unklares*) and therefore inexpressible (*Unaussprechliches*). (Weininger 1921, 122)

Clarity and clarification are at the heart of the reflections and projects of both Weininger and Wittgenstein. But it is by no means clear what Weininger took the relation between clarity or clarification and the value of truth-cum-truthfulness to be. Nor is it obvious what Wittgenstein took the relation between clarity and other *Selbstzwecke* to be. In the case of Weininger, since clarification is required to distinguish feeling from thinking, clarification and clarity are a necessary condition for decisiveness in judgments and a certain degree of clarity is necessary in order to judge. But, as far as I can see, that is all Weininger says – clearly – about the relation between the value of clarity and logico-ethical value.[39]

## 4 Foolishness?

Our anatomists see everywhere an indifference or hostility to truth, knowledge, reason, justification and argument and deplore this. Sometimes they use the language of cognitive values or norms. Sometimes their views of values and norms are those of the naive realist (Husserl, Benda, Curtius) sometimes they are anything but that (Pareto, Russell, Rougier).[40] Their pleas are a mirror-image of the philosophies of Nietzsche, Bergson and pragmatism and in particular of versions of the idea that vital values are more important than cognitive values. I have called blindness, indifference or hostility to cognitive values foolishness.[41] This way of understanding foolishness differs from many traditional accounts

**39** So much for the immediate *predecessors* of our anatomists of foolishness. Did they have any *successors?* The decade from 1927 to 1937 was followed by many accounts and criticisms of cognitive vices, in particular in totalitarian thought and in totalitarianism. One early contribution to the genre is the very thorough anatomy of the intellectual foundations of Nazism, *The War against the West*, published in 1938 by the already mentioned Aurel Kolnai. *La pensée captive* (1953), by the Polish poet and thinker, Czesław Miłosz, is a remarkably subtle account of the variety of cognitive vice in totalitarian thought and society, cf. Mulligan 2013. Both Kolnai and Miłosz were influenced by Scheler. Their books are unfortunately not as well-known as the important analyses of Koestler, Talmon, Arendt and Aron.

**40** In his 1923 sketch of a naive realist philosophy of value, Ortega identifies the values of knowledge and exactness as two "spiritual, intellectual" values, Ortega 2004, 38. But as his philosophy becomes increasingly vitalist he modifies his early account of the value of knowledge, Ortega 1966, 161, 168 – 170.

**41** Cf. Mulligan 2009.

of foolishness, as we shall see. Of all our anatomists, Ortega is the only one who uses the term foolishness (*tontería*) in a similar way, as far as I can tell. Foolishness, so understood, is not stupidity. Foolishness, unlike stupidity, is a trait or vice or habit for which one is responsible.[42]

Benda and Musil make related distinctions. The lowering of the intellectual tenor or attitude of a life (*tenue intellectuelle*), Benda says, is not be confused with a lowering of intelligence.[43] And Musil distinguishes between two types of "Dummheit". The first is based on weakness of understanding and is, above all, slow. Of the second type, the "higher, pretentious form of stupidity", Musil says that it "is not so much lack of intelligence as *failure* of intelligence". It is a disease of culture and of the mind (Musil 1983a, 1286 f.). Benda locates the fundamental cause of the betrayal of the clerisy in its thirst for sensations, just the cause Socrates located behind the philosophies of the sophists, the patrons of the treacherous clerisy.[44] Musil describes the higher form of *Dummheit* as the adaptation of the mind (*Geist*) to life, an adaptation which, he thinks, threatens life itself. Musil's diagnosis refers to the preference for vital values over cognitive values, Benda's to the preference for sensory or hedonic values. But Benda also sometimes gives a diagnosis like Musil's.

Weininger, too, distinguishes between two different attitudes towards intellectual values and norms. It is part and parcel of the unity which Weininger calls intellectual and ethical (*sittliches*) conscience that if someone has such a conscience, then he "accepts the logical axioms as the judge of what he says", makes them the "continuing guidelines and norm of his judgment", feels the need for "logical support for what is thought", is one for whom "logic is a standard". Such as one

> [...] feels ashamed in front of himself, feels guilty, if he has neglected to justify a thought, uttered or not, because he feels the obligation to do so, to adhere to logical norm which he has placed over himself once and for all. (Weininger 1921, 186)

**42** On at least one occasion Ortega uses "tonto" to mean *stupid*, the opposite of *intelligent* or *clever*, Ortega 1961, 53, Ortega 2000, 95.

**43** Cf. Benda 1975, 212, cf. 97. Benda also quotes and endorses Malebranche's "delightful remark": "Le stupide et le bel esprit sont également fermés à la vérité; il y a toutefois cette différence que le stupide esprit la respecte, tandis que le bel esprit la méprise." (Benda 1975, 209) On this remark, cf. Engel's no less delightful pages (2012, 248 – 50).

**44** Cf. Benda 1975, 90, cf. 211. In their program for the Vienna Circle, Neurath et al. note a kinship between their view and the views of the sophists rather than the Platonists, and proclaim that "the scientific world-view serves life", Neurath et al. 1979 [1929], 87, 100.

Then there are those without such a conscience, who are gullible, feel no need to justify what they think, for whom logic is neither a measure nor a judge but a tool and often a hangman. Such a person may well be consistent – but feels a demand for proof to be "uncomfortable and a burden, as directed against his nature" and has "no intellectual conscience" (Weininger 1921, 186) and so can have no ethical conscience.

The identification of foolishness with blindness, indifference or hostility to cognitive values involves something of a departure from traditional conceptions of foolishness. These employ what might be called a *thick* conception of foolishness and wisdom. The thick conception contains two central claims. First, foolishness is not only opposed to wisdom, it is the absence of wisdom. Second, to be wise is not only to be cognitively virtuous, it is to know certain things, often to possess knowledge, theoretical or practical, of what is most important, of the highest or last things, of first principles etc. The thick conception combines naturally with the curious idea that only philosophers can be wise and thus that the mere non-philosopher avoids foolishness only to the extent that he approximates to the status of a proto-philosopher. This bizarre idea, so flattering to the philosopher, was perhaps last taken seriously by Husserl.

The thick conception may be distinguished from a *thin* conception. On this view, of the two, wisdom and foolishness, it is foolishness which wears the trousers. To be wise is to be the sort of person who is capable of foolishness and avoids being foolish. As Ortega nicely puts it: "the man of sense [*el perspicaz*] [...] is constantly catching himself within an inch of being a fool; hence he makes an effort to escape from the imminent folly"; he "sees all the time at his feet the open and unfathomable abyss of foolishness (*estulticia*)" (Ortega 1961, 53; Ortega 2000, 95; Ortega 1998, 142). And, on the thin conception, foolishness is, as suggested, indifference, hostility or blindness to cognitive values. To the extent that wisdom *can* be characterized positively it is in terms of a due appreciation and knowledge of cognitive values and their exemplification. Since knowledge and justification are important not only in theoretical and practical matters, reason is not only theoretical or practical. Our preferences, attachments and affective attitudes, just as much as our beliefs and our actions, may be informed by alethophobia, cognophobia, misology or blindness to cognitive values, and may be correct or incorrect.[45]

**45** Cf. Mulligan 2009. The thin conception of foolishness differs from traditional, thick conceptions in one other respect: "foolishness", like such cognate terms as "Torheit" and "sottise" often connotes the opposite of practical wisdom (*Klugheit*). Cf. Bollnow 1958, 99 – 114.

The affective attitudes towards cognitive values which are at the heart of Benda's betrayal of the clerisy and Ortega's mass-man are still with us. This is not, it is true, a philosophical claim. But it is a relatively uncontroversial claim. Indeed Benda noted that the betrayal of the clerisy in the 50 years preceding 1927 was no mere fashion which would be followed by a contrary movement.[46] Postmodernism's suspicion of the values of truth, knowledge and reason is the direct descendant of the traditions of thought analyzed by Benda and Musil. One immediate consequence of the thin characterization of foolishness proposed here is that postmodernism is foolish and that postmodernists, if sincere, are to that extent, foolish. This is a pleasing consequence. But of course being pleased by the consequences of one's views is to hover over the abyss of foolishness, or worse.

The curious neglect of the anatomies of foolishness considered here, and of the tendency they represent, is all the more surprising for those of us who think that the prose of Benda, Musil and Ortega, belongs to the great prose of the French, German and Spanish languages. A greatness due in part to the striving for clarity inseparable from and palpable in their prose.

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**46** Cf. Benda 1975, 202.

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Ana María Rabe

# Scientific Rationality, Experience of Limit, and the Problem of Life and Death in 'Tractatus'

## Wittgenstein in Dialogue with Newton and Tolstoy

**Abstract:** The article aims at examining and relating the two poles, which mark Wittgenstein's early language philosophy: scientific rationality, on the one hand, and belief concerning questions of life, death, and practice, on the other hand. The first pole becomes manifest, inter alia, in the particular analysis of the epistemic value of physical world models described in the *Tractatus*. It becomes even more evident in Wittgenstein's central conception of "logical space" of language, and the associated notion of "logical place" belonging to a proposition with sense, which presupposes the principle of simultaneity together with other fundamental postulates of classical mechanics. The second pole is introduced by a brief discussion of the conditions, which hold when one seeks to speak from the limits of language about things that don't lie within logical space. In dialogue with Tolstoy's ethical convictions, which had a great influence on Wittgenstein, the article will finally address questions beyond scientific rationality, which are of vital importance for human being, like those concerning practice of life, belief, sense of life and death, or true life in present.

## 1 Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein's early theory of language is significantly based on ideas and models which originate from theoretical mechanics. This is understandable, if one remembers that he attended a scientific and technical preparatory school in Linz, that in 1906 he wished to study with Ludwig Boltzmann, and that, because of the suicide of Boltzmann in the same year, he went to Berlin, to the former Technische Hochschule, where he studied mechanical engineering from 1906 to 1908.

In *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which resulted from notes written during the First World War, Wittgenstein tried to show the possibilities and limits of a language that refers to the world and that could be claimed to be true. We will see that Wittgenstein's early language program is closely linked with his interest in the principles and theoretical foundation of science, particularly of classical

physics. At the same time, however, he wished to demonstrate that the fundamental questions of life have to be localized beyond these limits.

For Wittgenstein, to talk with sense means to articulate something that could happen in the world, i.e. that could be a *fact*. But how do we know, if something could happen in the world? To answer this question, one needs a previous idea of the structure of the world, of its inner constitution, as well as of the fundamental laws which rule the world. Accordingly, as Wittgenstein sets out to establish the necessary preconditions that make talking with sense possible, i.e. to say something verifiable, he has to assume a certain framework of the world. The aim of the first part of this study is to show that the framework of the world presupposed by Wittgenstein is significantly marked by ideas which originate from theoretical physics.[1] The latter explains, among other things, the appearance of spatial and illustrative notions in Wittgenstein's otherwise abstract logical language theory. So, one of the central notions of the *Tractatus* is "logical space" which, according to Wittgenstein, contains the totality of all verifiable propositions. As it will be shown, the notion of logical space is connected to

**1** Among the authors who have recognized the impact of theoretical physics on the *Tractatus*, we find Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, who saw "essential influences of the theories of Hertz and Boltzmann" (Janik/Toulmin 1987), Timm Lampert, who conceives the *Tractatus* as the "philosophically clarified and generalized expression of a physicalistic worldview" (Lampert 1987, 200), and David Hyder, who establishes connections with Helmholtz' "Tatsachen in der Wahrnehmung" and Hertz' "Mechanik" (Hyder 2002). Mc Donough finds a similarity between the sketches of a mechanistic cognitive science offered, on one side, in the *Tractatus* and, on the other side, Hertz's mechanics (Mc Donough 1994, 221). According to Peter C. Kjaergaard, the Hertzian system became "prototypical for science" in the *Tractatus*, so that Wittgenstein's conception of the natural sciences was "strongly influenced by the relational mechanical representation developed mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century" (Kjaergaard 2002, 131).
Among the interpreters of the *Tractatus*, who go furthest in the evaluation of the importance of physical principles for Wittgenstein, are Rom Harré and Louis Caruana. The first claims that "the logic of the *Tractatus* is nothing more nor less than the extension of the basic principles of the German interpretation of physics to a perfectly general account of what a formal description of the material world in all its aspects would be like" (Harré 2001, 212–213). According to Harré, the sources of Wittgenstein's "picture theory of meaning, the doctrine of simple objects and the truth-tables as iconic displays of the domain of possibility" can be seen in the ideas developed by Helmholtz, Hertz, and Boltzmann, who assume a "world represented in the laws of physics extended far beyond the bounds of human sensory capacities" (Harré 2001, 214). Following the thesis held by Harré, Louis Caruana also states that the *Tractatus* is "more influenced by the natural philosophy of scientists like Hermann von Helmholtz, Heinrich Hertz and Ludwig Boltzmann, than by Russell's empiricist background" (Caruana, 2003, 568). Caruana is convinced that science plays a "role of a *source of inspiration* from which Wittgenstein could draw useful models for a philosophical representation of the world" (Caruana, 2003, 597).

other transcendental conditions that are closely related to the theoretical premises of the world system presupposed by classical mechanics.[2]

Wittgenstein's central aim in his *Tractatus* is to show the limit that separates what can be said with sense from what can only be shown. This doesn't mean that Wittgenstein only valued verifiable propositions, and generally only what can be comprehended by logic and science. On the contrary, the most important questions for him were those which have to do with existence, being of the world, and human life. They were so important to him that he decided to find a way to block metaphysical speculations that claimed to represent truth. These fundamental existential and ethical questions represent the reverse of the language theory of the *Tractatus*.[3] As will be shown in the second part of this study, Tolstoy's notion of time, life and death had a decisive impact on Wittgenstein's early moral and ethical beliefs. Tolstoyan traces can be found in the propositions of the *Tractatus*, which deal with the problem of life and death, and the limits of the world. Wittgenstein admired Tolstoy's folk tales and his commentaries of the gospels, which, during the First World War, provided him the moral support that he needed at that time.

## 2 The scientific net for describing the world

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein refers several times to Newtonian mechanics. In a long passage, which appears in 6.341, Wittgenstein characterizes classical mechanics as a net that describes the world: "Newtonian mechanics, for example, imposes

**2** In Chapter 5 titled "Der starre Raum und die Körper", which belongs to my book "Das Netz der Welt", I have presented and elaborated the theoretical foundations of Newton's theory of gravity, such as the dualism between space and body. This chapter serves in the same book in a later chapter titled "Raumlogik" to show deep analogies between the conception of logical space in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and fundamental theoretical presuppositions of classical mechanics (Rabe 2008, 141 – 167, 197 – 222).

**3** In a letter to L. von Ficker of October/November 1919, Wittgenstein points out the important ethical reverse of his book: "[...] since the sense of the book is an ethical one. Once, I wanted to add to the preface a sentence which, in fact, doesn't appear in it, but which I write to you now, as it may provide a clue for you: namely, I wanted to write that my work consists in two parts: in the one that is available here, and in all what I have *not* written. And precisely this second part is the important one. Cause the ethical is delimited by my book, so to speak, from the inside; and I'm convinced, that, *strictly speaking*, it can ONLY be delimited in this way. In short, I believe: All what *many people prate* nowadays is determined by me keeping silence on it." (Wittgenstein 1980, 96 – 97; my translation)

a unified form on the description of the world. [...] The different nets correspond to different systems for describing the world."(Wittgenstein 2001, 81f.)

Thus, classical mechanics provides a "net", as Wittgenstein characterizes the coherent theoretical framework of a physical system that describes the world "in a unified form". In fact, in Newtonian mechanics, we find interrelated theoretical propositions based on the three Laws of Motion, which presuppose a theoretical framework determined by the notions of inertia, absolute time, absolute space, and absolute motion. Now, what is the status of this framework? From the logical point of view adopted by Wittgenstein, we cannot say anything about its ontological status. It has rather to be presupposed transcendentally, since its role is just to make possible the description of all dynamic phenomena of the world and their explanation by universal laws. Newton shows, for example, that we have to presuppose the same law of gravitation on earth as in the solar system, although we find different conditions in each frame of reference and thus different phenomena: in one case falling motion, in the other elliptic orbits. In classical mechanics, all propositions which describe gravitational (= dynamic) phenomena are based on Newton's elementary axioms, which represent the fundament of the scientific system of mechanics. Accordingly, Wittgenstein claims:

> 6.341 [...] The different nets correspond to different systems for describing the world. Mechanics determines one form of description of the world by saying that all propositions used in the description of the world must be obtained in a given way from a given set of propositions – the axioms of mechanics. It thus supplies the bricks for building the edifice of science, and it says, 'Any building that you want to erect, whatever it may be, must somehow be constructed with these bricks, and with these alone.'
> (Just as with the number-system we must be able to write down any number we wish, so with the system of mechanics we must be able to write down any proposition of physics that we wish.) (Wittgenstein 2001, 82)

We may now inquire whether the theoretical net that we lay over the world is true; i.e. if the world is in fact structured in the same way as it appears through the net. When applied to classical mechanics this means that we ask for the existence of a "frame of reference", an "absolute space", a "straight motion in a constant velocity", an "inertial or heavy mass", an "absolute motion", and so on. Do we find a counterpart to all these notions in empirical reality that enable us to formulate the laws of motion and to conceive the world in a unified form?

According to Wittgenstein, the fact that the world is describable through a logically coherent net does not imply the *existence* of any things or entities, since there may be nets suitable for worlds, which may comprise different kinds of objects. Thus, we may lay, for example, a Cartesian coordinate system over different pictures in order to localize the elements that they contain. The

fact that we can apply the same coordinate system to various pictures, however, doesn't necessarily imply that the latter are composed by the same elements. Generally speaking, the Cartesian coordinate system, however efficient, doesn't provide us with the knowledge of any existing element; it only shows us certain relationships, i.e. the mutual positions which certain elements belonging to the same picture occupy within the fixed geometrical frame of reference which has been laid over the picture. Analogously, scientific frameworks do not prove the existence of anything. A physical theory may certainly deliver insight into a broad spectrum of relationships, it may be proved by experiment, and may allow predictions that may come true later. In sum: it may be a framework convenient for practical use. However, the theoretical net doesn't tell us – and is unable to tell us – *what* exists. Hence, it can hardly be "true" or "false", but only good or bad, suitable or defective, simple or complicated, comprehensive or incomplete, as Wittgenstein suggests when he makes the following comparison:

> 6.342 And now we can see the relative position of logic and mechanics. (The net might also consist of more than one kind of mesh: e.g. we could use both triangles and hexagons.) The possibility of describing a picture like the one mentioned above with a net of a given form tells us nothing about the picture. (For that is true of all such pictures.) But what *does* characterize the picture is that it can be described *completely* by a particular net with a *particular* size of mesh.
>
> Similarly the possibility of describing the world by means of Newtonian mechanics tells us nothing about the world: but what does tell us something about it is the precise *way* in which it is possible to describe it by these means. We are also told something about the world by the fact that it can be described more simply with one system of mechanics than with another. (Wittgenstein 2001, 82)

The epistemic value, which we find in a physical theory, is not to be confused with ontological validity. No system, no theory is able to show what entities may underlie the phenomena and decide the state of affairs. So, what epistemic interest may we find in a theoretical framework like the one presupposed by classical mechanics? Where is "absolute space", "absolute time", the "inertial body" that moves straight on in a constant velocity? The force of gravity, or rather the interactive principle of acceleration, is untraceable. Couldn't we just ignore all of these theoretical presuppositions? Wouldn't it be better, if we concentrated our attention on physical laws that have a practical application and allow for empirical measurements?

## 3 The epistemic value of the net

From an epistemological point of view, however, it makes sense to be aware of the theoretical foundations of a physical system. Although they don't give us an answer to *what* exists, and although we don't know, if they, by themselves, are "true" or "correct", they will show, *how* men once looked or probably look in the present at reality. In other words: they reveal the background which grounds and guides certain beliefs and perceptions, which men assume to be true or false. In this sense, the theoretical framework of a scientific system brings to mind a central notion of Wittgenstein's late work *On Certainty*, which appears under the denomination of "picture of the world" (*Weltbild*). In this writing Wittgenstein conceives a "picture of the world", which one has to understand in contrast to the early conception of "picture" developed in the *Tractatus*, as the "background" of assertions which men hold as true or false. As he emphasizes, "I did not get my picture of the world 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." (Wittgenstein 1975, no. 94) Obviously Newton didn't inherit the theoretical framework of the mechanics which he developed, nor did he "learn it as a child"; nevertheless, he didn't "invent" it. (Wittgenstein 1975, no. 167) He rather constructed it as a coherent "building" for describing the world as a totality of dynamic relations; he built an "edifice" (Wittgenstein 2001, 82) which brought together different elements from already existing theoretical presuppositions in other world views, like the duality of space and matter (conceived as physical mass) or the notion of empty space, which had been presupposed by Democritus and Leucippus, or the Euclidean notion of a straight line. Now, central elements of the building constructed by Newton, which sustains his gravitational theory, have for centuries served us as a unquestioned, "inherited" background for countless beliefs related with gravity, simultaneity, the rigidity of space etc. Thus, Newton's system belongs to the world picture of innumerable people, which – be it "true or false" – represents the "substratum" of their "enquiring and asserting" (Wittgenstein 1975, no. 162).

Reflecting on the theoretical foundation of certain scientific systems not only sheds light on the "inherited background" or "picture of the world" of many people, societies and generations. It also reveals the general principles that made specific knowledge or certain technical inventions possible. Thus, Newton wouldn't have thought of an interacting principle, which made the finding of the universal law of gravitation possible, if he hadn't abandoned a scholastic world picture which assumed immanent qualities. His gravitational theory

could only be developed against a background which presupposed an empty, absolute space instead of the Cartesian matter continuum, or a heliocentric planetary system instead of a geocentric one.

Generally speaking, scientific world models serve in theoretical respect to facilitate true statements concerning the world. According to the *Tractatus*, a true proposition rests always on the framework of certain theoretical presuppositions. It is actually the framework, which carries and surrounds the proposition and which enables the latter to have sense and to be true or false. Mechanics tend to provide such a consistent framework for true propositions. In this sense, Wittgenstein claims in 6.343: "Mechanics is an attempt to construct according to a single plan all the *true* propositions that we need for the description of the world." (Wittgenstein 2001, 82f.) Thus, the sense and epistemic value of the theoretical foundations of a mechanical system lies in the provision of a stable basis for true propositions. This conception becomes evident, if we read the following assertions from the *Tractatus:*

6.34 All such propositions, including the principle of sufficient reason, the laws of continuity in nature and of least effort in nature, etc. etc. – all these are a priori insights about the forms in which the propositions of science can be cast.

4.11 The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science (or the whole corpus of the natural sciences).

The value of a mechanical system depends on whether it provides a consistent framework that allows us to say something precise, coherent, and at the same time verifiable about the world. As we have seen, according to the *Tractatus*, there cannot be, however, any world system that is "true" in an ontological sense. Thus, it may be that there are two different world models that are effective at the same time. Even so, we may evaluate the theories differently. According to Wittgenstein, the basic criteria for an evaluation of a physical system are: 1. logical coherence, 2. enabling of true propositions, 3. simplicity, i.e. as little theoretical presuppositions as possible. The criteria mentioned before are implied in the passages that have been quoted above". The criterion of simplicity can be found in the assertion that belongs to 6.342: "We are also told something about the world by the fact that it can be described more simply with one system of mechanics than with another." (Wittgenstein 2001, 82) The other two criteria – logical coherence, which requires the use of a *single* plan, and enabling of true propositions – appear in the following proposition 6.343: "Mechanics is an attempt to construct according to a single plan all the *true* propositions that we need for the description of the world." (Wittgenstein 2001, 82f.)

The above-mentioned criteria coincide with the three postulations made by Heinrich Hertz in the introduction of his *Principles of Mechanics* published in

1894. Like Wittgenstein, Hertz assumes that different world systems may be valid (effective) at the same time. A physical theory, which Hertz also characterizes as a "Bild" (usually translated as "image"), has to fulfill the following criteria. It should be "logically permissible", "correct", and "appropriate", i.e. "simple" ("logisch zulässig", "richtig" and "zweckmäßig" resp. "einfach") (Hertz 1899, 2; Hertz 1996, 68). As for the first criterion, i.e. logical permissibility, it means that images should not "implicitly contradict the laws of our thought" (Hertz 1899, 2). This consideration corresponds to Wittgenstein's allusion to logical coherence, when he emphasizes that mechanics attempts to construct propositions "according to a single plan".

As for the second criterion, i.e. correctness, Hertz denotes as "incorrect" any permissible images, if "their essential relations contradict the relations of external things" (Hertz 1899, 2). As he points out, we can decide "without ambiguity [...] whether an image is correct or not" (Hertz 1899, 3). Analogously, Wittgenstein characterizes mechanics as the attempt to construct "all the *true* propositions that we need for the description of the world" (Wittgenstein 2001, 83). For Wittgenstein, "true" is synonymous to "correct". A true, i.e. correct picture ("Bild") implies, just as Hertz asserts, an exact, unambiguous correspondence to reality, as we learn in *Tractatus* in 2.21: "A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false." (Wittgenstein 2001, 12), and in 4.023: "A proposition must restrict reality to two alternatives: yes or no." (Wittgenstein 2001, 25)

With respect to the third criterion, simplicity, Hertz points out that, if we compare two images of the same object, we will judge that to be more appropriate, which is more "distinct", i.e. which "pictures more of the essential relations of the object". In the case of it being as distinct as the other, the "simpler of the two" will be more suitable, i.e. that image "which contains, in addition to the essential characteristics, the smaller number of superfluous or empty relations" (Hertz 1899, 2). This statement is perfectly compatible with Wittgenstein's assertion according to which we are "told something about the world", when we find out that it can be described "more simply with one system of mechanics than with another" (Wittgenstein 2001, 82). This means, just as Hertz suggests, that if we have two scientific models, that correctly describe the world, we should find out which of the two is simpler in order to evaluate their effectiveness.

What has been said may suffice to show that Wittgenstein's comprehension of the transcendental status and epistemic value of a physical system owes much to ideas which appear in Hertz' *Principles of Mechanics*. On many occasions Wittgenstein stressed the importance of Hertz' work, and it is significant that he mentions Hertz in the *Tractatus* just after the quoted passages on the mechanical systems which describe the world. So, in 6.361, he affirms: "One might say, using Hertz's terminology, that only connexions that are *subject to law* are *thinkable*." (Wittgenstein

2001, 83) There is evidence that Wittgenstein adopted essential features from Hertz' image theory for his own picture theory. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the notion of "Bild" in *Tractatus*, usually translated as "picture", differs from Hertz' conception of "Bild" which has been translated as "image". Whereas Hertz uses this term to denote a complete physical system, like Newton's mechanics, Wittgenstein conceives, in the *Tractatus*, a "Bild" as a fact which presents a situation in logical space (cf. 2.141, p. 102; 11, p. 9).[4] Wittgenstein could have also adopted this notion from Ludwig Boltzmann or Ernst Mach.[5]

According to the picture theory of the *Tractatus*, a proposition is a picture insofar as it expresses a thought, a so-called "logical picture" (2.182, p. 11; 3, p. 12). A physical theory, in contrast, is characterized as a "net", "network" (5.511, p. 59), a "system for describing the world" (6.341, p. 82), a scientific "edifice" or "building" (6.341, p. 82). Wittgenstein cannot consider a physical system as a picture. Otherwise it could be true or false like a verifiable proposition, which is based on a logical picture. But this is impossible, since a physical system provides the foundation that allows for the formation of true or false pictures. Obviously, there is no way to find out if the fundament, on its part, is true. One may only indirectly infer its value from the scope and effectiveness of a world system. The evaluation may start from the verification of pictures which arise from this system. Indeed, one may say in an abbreviated way, that a theory has been verified. In this sense, one may observe, that the General Theory of Relativity was confirmed by the results of a British expedition in 1919. But strictly speaking, one should say, that a picture, which derived from the General Theory of Relativity – e. g. the deflection of light by the gravitational field of the sun –, was confirmed by the results of the British expedition in 1919.

**4** J. Griffin, one of the first interpreters of the *Tractatus*, who pointed out the influence of Hertz on Wittgenstein's picture theory, cites a number of correspondences between their conceptions of picture. He doesn't mention, however, that Wittgenstein applies the concept of *Bild* to something different than Hertz (Griffin 1964, 99 – 102). As P. Kjaergaard points us, it is B. McGuinness, who has further explored, in contrast, "Hertz's role in the relation between the picture theory and Wittgenstein's idea of different scientific descriptions represented by different kinds of networks" (Kjaergaard 2002, 124).

**5** As Borzeszkowski and Wahsner point out, in Boltzmann's conception, a "Bild" is what we learn from nature through experimentally grounded, mathematically formulated natural science (Mach 1988, 610). Boltzmann's conception of "Bild" can be found in his publication "Der zweite Hauptsatz der mechanischen Wärmetheorie" (Boltzmann 1979, 26 – 46). Mach presents his conception of "Bild" in his text "Beschreibung und Erklärung" (Mach 1910, 411 – 127).

## 4 From physical world system to language theory

As we have seen, Wittgenstein conceives a physical theory as a net, which we lay over unstable states of affaire in order to describe the world. The way in which he refers to the theoretical foundations of mechanics shows that we should ascribe them transcendental rather than ontological status.[6] Certainly, this evidence is important with respect to the theoretical-linguistic program of the *Tractatus*, because it clarifies the epistemic value, which we should attribute not only to physical theories, but also to the theory of the *Tractatus* itself.

One should consider the world conception of the *Tractatus* only in connection with its corresponding language theory, but not separately, since its single purpose is to provide the foundations that make it possible to say something "with a sense" (= *sinnvoll*).[7] In fact, according to Wittgenstein all propositions "with a sense", i.a. that say something precise, verifiable in reality, are based on a logical framework, which corresponds to the general framework of the world presupposed in the *Tractatus*. If we take a closer look at the way the latter is structured, we may find a number of notions, which belong to the structure of a mechanical world system. Certainly, we don't think in an elaborated scientific model. If Wittgenstein had oriented his world conception towards a concrete physical theory, he would have contradicted the transcendental character of the *Tractatus*. For, this would have implied that he had taken a certain world system to be true and thus existent. As we have seen, according to the *Tractatus* there cannot be, however, any true world system in an ontological sense.

The statements of the *Tractatus* on the world have no ontological character, that is, they don't claim any existence. They rather belong to logic, more precisely, to "logical space", which applies as much for language as for the world. Thus, Wittgenstein states in 5.61: "Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. So we cannot say in logic, 'The world has this in it, and this, but not that.'" (Wittgenstein 2001, 68) The world system presupposed by Wittgen-

**6** E. Stenius is one of the first interpreters, who recognized the transcendental character of the *Tractatus* and who pointed out connections to Kantian philosophy, as well as the modifications made by Wittgenstein. Cf. his chapter on "Wittgenstein as a Kantian Philosopher" in his book on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (Stenius 1964).

**7** Cf. Stenius: "Thus to be possible to theoretical reason corresponds in Wittgenstein's philosophy to possibility in terms of what is describable in meaningful language. This is the essential modification of the Kantian view which gives rise to all differences between Wittgenstein and Kant." (1964, 218)

stein fulfills its function within the logical program of the *Tractatus*, which consists in showing the transcendental conditions that make it possible to say something with a (precise, verifiable) sense. Thus, the propositions, which claim something concerning the world, are inseparably linked to the logical-linguistic program of the *Tractatus*. Beyond this program, they lose their sense, as Wittgenstein suggests at the end of the *Tractatus:*

> 6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) | He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. (Wittgenstein 2001, 89)

Wittgenstein doesn't present nor construct any world system that would be appropriate in a scientific-physical sense. Instead of adopting a specific physical theory, he rather orients himself in notions which appear in the theoretical writings by physicists such as Ernst Mach, Ludwig Boltzmann, or Heinrich Hertz, and extracts from them general principles. Thus, Wittgenstein doesn't advocate any kind of atomism as the one Boltzmann represents in opposition to Mach. He also does not follow the Hertzian purpose to transform mechanics based on the model of electrodynamics, and to convert the dynamic world system into a consistent geometric model, an aim that neither Hertz nor Einstein managed to achieve completely.

Wittgenstein rather singles out all of the fundamental presuppositions of a mechanical world system, which he needs in order to construct the logical framework for verifiable propositions. In doing so, he adopts some conceptions from Mach, Boltzmann, or Hertz. The following comparison between the basic features of the world and language framework of the *Tractatus*, on the one hand, and the fundamental presuppositions of Newtonian mechanics, on the other hand, are intended to show that Wittgenstein's general conception of the structure of the world (and language) harmonizes well with basic theoretical-physical notions. Newton's mechanical system is well suited to illustrate this circumstance because before the publication of Einstein's Theory of General Relativity, it was the only world model that provided a unified understanding of empiric phenomena.

But how does the framework of the world, which – according to Wittgenstein – underlies the language with a sense, look like? To this effect it is convenient to emphasize the statements of the *Tractatus*, which characterize the framework in its essential features. The following selected propositions will be quoted in an order which, in fact, doesn't correspond to the chronology of the *Tractatus*, but reveals the affinity between Wittgenstein's logical world and language framework and Newton's physical world model:

1 The world is all that is the case.
1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.
2 What is the case – a fact – is the existence of states of affairs.
2.01 A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things).
2.04 The totality of existing states of affairs is the world.
4.11 The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science (or the whole corpus of the natural sciences).
2.02 Objects are simple.
3.411 In geometry and logic alike a place is a possibility: something can exist in it.
2.0272 The configuration of objects produces states of affairs.
2.0271 [...] their configuration is what is changing and unstable.
2.013 Each thing is, as it were, in a space of possible states of affairs. This space I can imagine empty, but I cannot imagine the thing without the space.
2.0131 A spatial object must be situated in infinite space. [...]
2.202 A picture represents a possible situation in logical space.
3.42 [...] (The logical scaffolding surrounding a picture determines logical space. The force of a proposition reaches through the whole of logical space.)
2.11 A picture presents a situation in logical space, the existence [*Bestehen*] and non-existence [*Nichtbestehen*] of states of affairs.
3.4 A proposition determines a place in logical space. [...]
3.41 The propositional sign with logical co-ordinates – that is the logical place.

As we will show by means of the selected propositions and along the proposed order, one can find many analogies between the theoretical principles which apply to the logical framework of world and language in the *Tractatus*, and the general theoretical presuppositions which ground classical mechanics.

According to the *Tractatus*, the world – to which language with sense refers – is composed by facts (1; 1.1). The facts derive from "states of affairs" (*Sachverhalte*) which combine objects (2; 2.01).[8] The totality of "existing" – or more precisely "holding"[9] – states of affairs comprehends the world which can be depicted by the totality of true propositions, i.e. by the whole corpus of the natural

**8** Similarly, Ernst Mach stresses that we have to describe facts – or "complexes" –, not objects.
**9** The translation of "bestehende Sachverhalte" by "existing states of affairs" may be misleading, as Wittgenstein doesn't hold any "existence". By using the German verb "bestehen" he doesn't say that states of affairs "exist" (in an ontological sense), but rather that they are holding or "are the case", as he emphasizes at the beginning of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein attaches much importance to this circumstance. In the publication of the letters to C.K. Odgen in 1922 – 1933, published by G.H. von Wright together with two sets of separate sheets of comments on the English translation of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein makes the following remarks concerning the misleading translation of "*Bestehen*" by "existence": "'The existence of such ...' seems wrong. That a relation exists cannot be asserted at all. What we can assert is that it *holds* between certain objects. So put 'holding' instead of 'existence' or something synonymous." (Wittgenstein 1973, 28)

sciences (2.04; 4.11). Wittgenstein leaves open, what he means by "simple" "objects" (2.01; 2.02) which are combined in the states of affairs.[10] In any case, they don't have to be interpreted as existent in an ontological sense, nor as quantifiable unit in a mathematical sense, but rather as a not describable substance which we have to presuppose theoretically in order to make possible a language which depicts the world (1.1).

From here we find fundamental analogies to the world system of Newtonian physics. According to the *Tractatus*, language with sense, which is able to depict reality in a correct way, doesn't refer to separated single entities, but rather to "states of affaires". It is of special interest to point out that the corresponding German term used by Wittgenstein – "*Sachverhalte*" – means literally the "behavior" or "acting" of objects. Analogously, classical mechanics, which grounds the modern science of dynamics, does not focus on independent single bodies, but on the interaction of bodies. The principle which consists in not dealing with single entities, but rather with interactions, is a presupposition assumed by theoretical physics in general, and thus also by Mach, Hertz and Boltzmann.

The states of affairs, that can be depicted by propositions, appear as such only within particular configurations (2.0272), i.e. within certain combinations of objects, whose arrangements are not fixed and permanent, but rather "changing" and "unstable" (2.0271). In order to visualize an observable state of affairs one may use quantifiable objects. Beyond the configuration, where they represent the points of reference of the observed states of affairs, however, the quantifiable objects, which Wittgenstein calls "complexes", don't have any separate identity.[11] Likewise in mechanics, quantifiable bodies figure only within a certain

**10** In his reference to "simple objects", Wittgenstein may have been inspired by Boltzmann. In his writing "Der zweite Hauptsatz der mechanischen Wärmetheorie" ("The Second Law of Mechanical Theory of Heat"), Boltzmann points out the indeterminableness of simple elements: "[...] but aren't, for sure, the sensations, the elements of our whole thinking, something simple? I think, that even with respect to this, our consciousness cannot say anything; the sensation leaves this completely undefined, it only tells us that a sensation of red is other than a sensation of blue, but it doesn't say, if both are simple elements or complicated dislocations of countless atoms, comparable, for example, with wave movements. We can feel red, but we cannot feel what the sensation is." (Boltzmann 1979, 44 ff.; my translation)

**11** Wittgenstein's characterization of bodies or phenomena as complexes, which can be broken down into their constituents, shows a clear influence by Mach. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein states: "2.021 Every statement about complexes can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into the propositions that describe the complexes completely." (Wittgenstein 2001, 7) Similarly, Mach affirms: "The complexes broke down into elements, i.e. ultimate components, which we have not been able, so far, to decompose further. The nature of these elements may be left open; [...]." (Mach 1922, 4; my translation)

configuration[12], i.e. within a context built in order to describe specific physical phenomena. If we consider, for example, sun, moon, and earth, we observe dynamic interactions between sun and moon, moon and earth, as well as earth and sun, which appear in permanently shifting constellations.

## 5 Space and place in Newtonian mechanics and in Wittgenstein's language theory

At this point, the question may arise as to how it is possible to recognize specific configurations or states of affairs, if all objects or phenomena of the physical world are constantly moving and shifting. The solution lies in Newton's concept of "absolute space" and, as we will see, in the directly connected concepts of "absolute place" and "absolute time". In Newtonian physics, all dynamic phenomena, which constitute the world, are incorporated in an inertial frame of reference that can be realized by a multiplicity of empirical frame of references. The theoretical presuppositions, which the inertial frame of reference has to fulfill, are ideally joined in the immobile, uniformly structured, Euclidean (i.e. not curved), so-called "absolute" space. Similarly, Wittgenstein presupposes for all states of affairs a homogeneous, empty, infinite space. In the *Tractatus* it is referred to as "logical space", which means that we have to conceive of it as a space of *possibilities* presupposed by logical demands. In sections 2.013 and 2.0131, Wittgenstein states that "[e]ach thing is, as it were, in a space of possible states of affairs. This space I can imagine empty, but I cannot imagine the thing without the space. | A spatial object must be situated in infinite space."[13] Wittgenstein's logical space of possible states of affairs, which contains all things and which holds fundamental analogies with Newton's absolute space, provides the necessary framework for propositions, or generally speaking, for pictures. As he suggests in the *Tractatus*, "[a] picture represents a possible situation in logical space" (2.202).

Neither Newton nor Wittgenstein conceives space as "existing". In mechanics, as well as in the *Tractatus*, space has transcendental status. In classical

**12** Boltzmann also speaks of "configurations" when he refers to "work", the third form, which the principle of conservation of energy can adopt. "This form, which is harder to understand", is suggested, according to Boltzmann, by "work relationships of magnets and electric currents", which depend in many ways on the configuration (Boltzmann 1979, 33).

**13** Even Hertz, who has in mind a geometrized world model, and in this context the conception of an Aether, which moves with the electromagnetic fields, cannot get along without the presupposition of a rigid, empty space. Thus, Einstein observes that in Hertz, the "suggested dualism is still unmitigated" (Einstein 1920, 6; my translation).

physics, the so-called "absolute space" is a theoretical presupposition which is necessary to enable the notion of passive inertia, absolute motion, and reciprocal, active acceleration, and thus of concrete gravitation which can be proved by experience. In the *Tractatus*, the theoretically presupposed "logical space" represents the necessary condition which enables language "with sense", i.e. which allows us to represent a situation (*Sachlage*) and thus to refer to facts in a definite and precise way which can be true or false. The condition which makes the "agreement or disagreement of its sense [of the picture] with reality" (Wittgenstein 2001, 12) possible is directly linked to the notion of a Euclidian-Cartesian space with fixed coordinates and reciprocal unalterable places, i.e. crossing points.[14] Likewise, in mechanics, absolute space is conceived as a "immovable", rigid Euclidian inertial frame of reference with "absolute places" that all "remain unmoved", i.e. "retain the same given position one to another", as Newton says in his *Principia Mathematica* (Newton 1974, 9). As we have pointed out above, absolute space can be realized by a multiplicity of empirical frame of references. Similarly, in the *Tractatus*, there is a fixed "scaffolding" which visualizes logical space and "surrounds", as Wittgenstein states metaphorically, the verifiable propositions which refer to states of affairs (cf. 3.42).[15]

Wittgenstein also makes use of the notion of place which corresponds to the Newtonian Euclidian space conception. Thus, he holds that a "proposition determines a place in logical space" (cf. 3.4.). In fact, the univocal and immobile places in logical space give propositions the possibility to take up definite positions in order to make verifiable statements. Classical mechanics, alike, makes the theoretical presupposition of a rigid spatial framework composed by absolute places which allow the location of relative places and the observation of empirical positions, movements and interactions.

The notion of unalterable, definite places in the *Tractatus*, which corresponds to the Newtonian notion of absolute places, is decisive for Wittgenstein's conception of sense and truth, and thus for his language theory. As we will see, the two necessary conditions, which he presupposes for a proposition in order to have a sense, i.e. to be true or false, are directly connected with this place con-

**14** In his book on Wittgenstein's early life, Brian McGuinness establishes an interesting connection between the central conceptions of the *Tractatus*, the picture theory, and the geometrical subjects Wittgenstein had to study in Berlin as a student of engineering (McGuinness 1992, 110).

**15** Also Botzmann, as well as Hertz, as the first states, assume a coordinate system. In his writing *Über die Grundprinzipien und Grundgleichungen der Mechanik*, Botzmann affirms: "I assume, like Hertz, pure thought things [*Gedankendinge*], precise, material points; I correlate their position to a likewise thought rectangular coordinate system and figure an image of their motion at first as follows [...]" (Boltzmann 1979, 167; my translation).

ception and thus, with the Newtonian notion of absolute space, as well as of absolute time. As to the latter, we have to make some remarks, before we explain the two mentioned conditions for a proposition with a sense.

## 6 The role of the principle of simultaneity in *Tractatus*

In Newton's physical system, we have to consider the uniformly advancing "absolute" time, as well as the homogenous "absolute" space as theoretical presuppositions which are directly related with the ideal, i.e. transcendentally presupposed faculty of a body to remain in an unaccelerated state of motion. The latter manifests itself under the ideal conditions of a state of weightless, i.e. under exclusion of "forces impressed upon it", in "a state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line".[16]

Without the theoretical presuppositions of the Euclidian rectilinearity and the uniformly advancing time, exemplified in a uniform motion, Newton wouldn't have been able to formulate the first of the three Laws of Motion which are the basis of classical mechanics. As stated before, Euclidian structured absolute space is directly connected with the notion of absolute places. Conceived as immovable places, i.e. as places that "retain the same given position one to another" (Newton 1974, 9), they cannot be disconnected, for their part, from absolute, uniformly advancing time as represented by a straight arrow of time, which enables stable rectilinear distances between absolute places. Thus, absolute time, absolute space, absolute place, inertia as a passive principle, as well as absolute motion as an active principle which has to be added to Newton's list of absolute notions, are directly interrelated. It is only against the background of a rigid space with its corresponding immobile places that time can be conceived of as uniformly advancing; such as, conversely, the latter is necessary to conceive the immobility of absolute places which constitute rigid space.

In a negative sense, the interrelated absolute notions of classical mechanics mean firstly, that distances between absolute places, which represent empty intermediate spaces, cannot vary; secondly, that every place corresponds to a single point, whereby there are no overlaps of points, and thus, of places. Thirdly, they imply that time cannot stand still, go back, spin, recur or expand, and final-

**16** Cf. Newton's first law of motion: "Every body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it." (Newton 1974, 13)

ly, that every moment corresponds to a single point in time, so that moments cannot overlap.

The fact that, according to Newton's theoretical presuppositions, neither places nor points of time can overlap is expressed in a constitutive principle of classical mechanics which will be entitled in the following as "principle of simultaneity". This principle means that every event occurs in a given moment at a single place, so that nothing can occur simultaneously at two places. Thus, if something happens at the same time in two places, we have to assume two different events. Conversely, according to the same principle, two different events cannot happen simultaneously in the same place.

The principle of simultaneity in classical mechanics is fundamental for Wittgenstein's early language theory, because it represents the necessary condition that a proposition with sense has to fulfill. In the context of the *Tractatus*, this means that a proposition with sense has to occupy a place in logical space, whereby it can take only one single place at once. Yet, what happens with a propositional sign which pretends to occupy two places simultaneously, as contradiction and tautology suggest? According to the language theory of *Tractatus*, based on the principle of simultaneity, such a propositional sign cannot be located within logical space. It has to be seen as the limit of what can be said. Certainly, it can be understood, in contrast to a nonsensical propositional sign that doesn't occupy any place in logical space. But at the same time, as a border case of what can be said, it cannot be represented, unlike a proposition with sense, which is situated within the logical space. Thus, contradiction and tautology cannot be considered as correct or false. As Wittgenstein suggests, they rather delimit "from inside", as well as "from outside" the totality of propositions which do offer the possibility to be a correct or a false representation of reality.

We will consider, at first, the case of contradiction. The impossibility of being represented, and the senselessness which characterizes the contradiction is explained by Wittgenstein with recourse to the principle of simultaneity, fundamental for Newtonian mechanics. The contradiction pretends to occupy two places in logical space at the same time, which is, as Wittgenstein emphasizes, "logically impossible". In the *Tractatus*, he illustrates this circumstance by analogy with the fact that two colors cannot take up the same place in the visual field, just as in physics a particle cannot have two velocities at the same time:

> 6.3751 For example, the simultaneous presence of two colours at the same place in the visual field is impossible, in fact logically impossible, since it is ruled out by the logical structure of colour. Let us think how this contradiction appears in physics: more or less as follows – a particle cannot have two velocities at the same time; that is to say, it cannot be in two places at the same time; that is to say, particles that are in different places at the same time cannot be identical. (Wittgenstein 2001, 85)

The contradiction cannot be situated within logical space because it tries to occupy two places at the same time. But it should neither be located beyond logical space, i.e. the space of possibilities, as one can understand it. In fact, one can understand the pictures which are contained in the composed propositional sign. Thus, in the case of the contradiction "It is raining and not raining", each of the two parts which constitute the propositional sign (1: "It is raining", 2: "It is not raining"), separately presents a possible state of affairs. The two states of affairs, being one the contrary of the other, may take place at two different moments, which can be represented consecutively. However, it is impossible to represent the coincidence of both states of affairs, since this would imply the coincidence of two places at one single place, which is impossible. Since the contradiction claims at the same time the positive and the negative extremes of the representation of a certain state of affairs, it cannot have sense. It can only have the function to show the "outer limits of propositions", as Wittgenstein holds in 5.143 (Wittgenstein 2001, 48), which means that it points at the two opposite ends of a proposition with sense: the positive and the negative pole. Consequently, if we formulated all possible propositions in the form of a contradiction, we would reach the outer limits of all what can be said with sense.

Let us consider now the tautology "It is raining or not raining", which Wittgenstein presents in point 4.461 of the *Tractatus:*

> 4.461 Propositions show what they say: tautologies and contradictions show that they say nothing.
> A tautology has no truth-conditions, since it is unconditionally true: and a contradiction is true on no condition.
> Tautologies and contradictions lack sense.
> (Like a point from which two arrows go out in opposite directions to one another.)
> (For example, I know nothing about the weather when I know that it is either raining or not raining.) (Wittgenstein 2001, 41)

Like the contradiction, the tautology pretends to occupy two places simultaneously. But whereas the contradiction asserts the actual occupation of two places at the same time, which cannot be the case on no condition, the tautology suggests a situation where the two simultaneously asserted possibilities – "it is raining" or "it is not raining" – disable each other, so that, effectively, nothing is asserted. Thus, a tautology has no truth-conditions, as Wittgenstein claims. In the illustrative terminology of the *Tractatus* it is the "unsubstantial point" at the center of propositions in opposition to the contradiction, which represents, as we have seen, the "outer limits of propositions" (Wittgenstein 2001, 48).

The fact that tautology and contradiction confine from inside and from outside what can be said with sense, not only means that they indicate at what point the sense of a proposition gets lost, but also at what point it starts. In

order to grasp a sense and to provide a picture which can be compared with reality, a proposition has to fulfill the principle of simultaneity. Starting from the limiting cases of tautology and contradiction, this means that one of the two poles – the positive pole ("it is raining") or the negative pole ("it is not raining") – has to be fixed. There can be just *one single* place that may be occupied, that is, either the positive or the negative pole. Once the propositional sign gets either a precise positive affirmation or a clear negation of a particular state of affairs, it can be considered and treated as a verifiable proposition with sense. To this regard, Wittgenstein claims in 4.023: "A proposition must restrict reality to two alternatives: yes or no" (Wittgenstein 2001, 25). If a comparison with reality shows that the proposition is true, the sense of the latter, i.e. the state of affairs which has been affirmed or negated, will be preserved. In the case of falsehood, the sense will be inverted. The affirmation becomes a negation, and the negation an affirmation.

The presented cross connections between the theoretical fundaments of both, Wittgenstein's world and language theory, on the one hand, and Newton's mechanics, on the other hand, should suffice to show the impact of scientific rationality on the *Tractatus*. As we have seen special importance is given in this context to the principle of simultaneity, which concentrates the theoretical presuppositions of classical physics. This scientific principle provides the central argument of Wittgenstein's early language theory, as it establishes the conditions and the limits of what can be said with sense.

# 7 Conceivable possibilities and experience of limit

As has been shown in the previous chapters, the *Tractatus* presupposes a space for verifiable propositions that contains all possibilities, to be precise, all *conceivable* possibilities. Only within this space of possibilities – the "logical space" – do we find propositions and representations that have sense and can be compared with reality. It is important to point out that only from a logical-transcendental point of view does it make sense to study the possibility of truth and falsehood of certain propositions, or – what results to be the same – to investigate, if a certain state of affairs is effective or not. The assertion of a possibility, however, doesn't bear any ontological implication, as truth and falsehood is only valid within logical space, i.e. within the invisible, stable framework of conceivable *possibilities*.

Certainly, there may be things beyond logical space that may have nothing to do with the logical laws to which a verifiable language is related. The latter, whose propositions with sense move only within the limits of logical space, won't be able to describe anything beyond these boundaries, i.e. anything that cannot be represented or verified. Thus, a language which is based on scientific rationality isn't able to respond to questions raised by the problem of life and death, as Wittgenstein claims nearly at the end of the *Tractatus*, in 6.52: "We feel that even if all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer." (Wittgenstein 2001, 88)

Wittgenstein's reflections on life and death require that we reconsider his conception of limit. As has been shown, his notion of "logical space" contains all of what can be said with sense, i.e. all possibilities that can be communicated, localized, and verified by comparison with facts of the world. Thus, Wittgenstein says in 5.6: "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world." And he adds in 5.61: "Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits." (Wittgenstein 2001, 68)

At no point does Wittgenstein claim the existence or non-existence, the value or non-value of anything. He neither privileges, in general, logics to questions which go beyond. It is important to point out that in the *Tractatus* he doesn't start from a fixed position within the logical space, from where he would decide what things should be included in the latter and what should be excluded from it. This would be an immobile, dogmatic attitude, which presupposes what one pretends to find out: the limits of language, within which one can say something clearly and precisely, and thus, speak with sense. The delimitation itself, however, doesn't mean that what falls out of the limits doesn't exist or doesn't have any value.

But how can we identify where the line between what can be said with sense and what is "nonsensical" (*unsinnig*) can be drawn, if we are already using language? How can we be sure that the propositions used to draw the line have themselves sense? Where do they receive the authority from to decide what has sense and what is nonsensical?

If one seeks to avoid being dogmatic or arbitrary, one has no other option but to find the line *by tracing it*. One has to do it, however, not from one fixed side nor from the other, but rather with the aid of what offers the *in between*. This purpose, in fact, seems to be impossible, since it means that one has to find the limit using it at the same time. However, it is exactly what Wittgenstein aims at. He understands and practices philosophy as an "activity" that searches and traces the limit between all what can be said with sense, on the one hand, and all what appears or claims to have sense, but is in effect "nonsensical", on

the other hand. In this context, he delimits the logical space not from a rigid, doctrinaire standpoint, but in motion, using propositions as the limit of what can be said. Like contradictions and tautologies, these propositions, which are moving on the border, lack sense because they cannot be fixed in a single place in logical space. Just like in the case of the former, one can, nevertheless, understand them. Even if they don't say anything, they show, in a paradoxical way, the possibilities and limits of propositions, as contradictions and tautologies do. This is the sense of the famous metaphor of the ladder, which appears at the end of the *Tractatus*, where Wittgenstein says:

> 4.112 [...] Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. [...]
> 6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) (Wittgenstein 2001, 29, 89)

To climb up the ladder means to move on the borderline. In fact, while one is advancing on the border, one is doing something that lacks sense, provided that we conceive "sense" as something that can be clearly localized in *a single* place at *a single* moment. But this doesn't imply that one is doing something nonsensical. Only from the stable, fixed position on the top, after having thrown away the ladder, one judges the enterprise as "nonsense". Finding and establishing a limit by tracing it brings along that one moves *simultaneously* on both sides of the line, and at the same time in none of them, like the figure in M.C. Escher's picture "Belvedere" (1958), which is climbing up a ladder in a building that leads at the same time inside and outside the building. While the man is advancing, he doesn't see the nonsense he is performing. But how is he able to perform something that is logically and factually impossible? And how can we understand this picture, even if it is an impossible situation? The only option left is to abandon the stable, fixed position on the top. In fact, the man in the picture can climb up the ladder simultaneously inside and outside the building, only as long as he is in motion, i.e. as long as he goes on climbing up. Analogously, we can follow him, as long as we move our eyes from one place to the other, focusing at one moment on one point, and at the next moment on another point. But once we adopt a fixed position and try to recognize the whole situation as something that happens at a single moment in a single place, we have to admit that the situation is impossible. The man, who climbs up the ladder starting apparently from inside the building, finally realizes, after having reached the top, that he finds himself outside the building. But is he really outside? Seen as a whole, the picture suggests that he stands at the same time inside and outside. To assert the possibility of this situation would be nonsense. Analogously, Wittgenstein

says that the person, who has climbed up the ladder and is sitting now on the top, realizes "finally" (*am Ende*, Wittgenstein 1984, 85) that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are "nonsensical". This is so, since the propositions used by him during the activity of the climbing have been establishing the limits of logical space moving precisely *on* this limit. Thus, he acted with their help at the same time from inside and from outside the logical space.

Moving in the *in between*, i. e. in the borderline between the space of what can be said, depicted and imagined in a precise way, and the area which goes beyond our imagination, something may appear, although it may not be representable in a precise, verifiable way. In this limit, "life is at stake", as asserts Spanish-Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida, searcher of limits, who tried to give his sculptures a unity and sense, which evolves in space and time (Chillida 2005, 32). Wittgenstein, for his part, claims in 5.621 "The world and life are one." (Wittgenstein 2001, 68) In his conception, world and life cannot be separated, which is why he claims in the *Tractatus* that the world is always *my* world. What philosophy calls "subject", i. e. the metaphysical subject, isn't something that belongs, according to Wittgenstein, to the world, though one has neither to consider it as something that exists independently. "Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found?", asks Wittgenstein in 5.633 of the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 2001, 69). The sole solution is to consider it a "limit of the world": "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world." (Wittgenstein 2001, 69)

After all, if the so-called "subject" is a limit of the world, which coincides with the limit of the language, we have to assume that we find all metaphysical problems related to the subject, e. g. the question of the meaning of life and death, just at the limits of what can be said.

## 8 The problem of time, life, and death

The commentaries in the *Tractatus* about will, subject, sense of life, and "feeling the world as a limited whole" show the profound impact that Tolstoy's ideas had on Wittgenstein. There are indirect references to Tolstoyan ethical conceptions, as well as passages that adopt almost literally Tolstoy's words.[17] This becomes

**17** In her book on Tolstoy as critic of culture in the German discussion at the turn of the century, Edith Hanke shows the intense discussion on Tolstoyan ideas that took place in German intellectual circles (Hanke 1993). On the wide and deep influence that Tolstoy had on philosophers and writers around the world in the last decades of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century, see also Rabe, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2012.

clear, if one compares passages of Tolstoy's commentaries of the gospel with quotes from the *Tractatus* that refer to the problem of life and death.

To begin with, there are profound similarities concerning Wittgenstein's and Tolstoy's respective ethical attitudes. Wittgenstein considers the problem of life, which he links with the question concerning the right life in an ethical sense, as a "riddle" that philosophy cannot resolve. One can only respond with life itself, i. e. in an indirect way, putting one's convictions into practice. The same inclination to life praxis combined with a strong criticism and delimitation of language can be found in Tolstoy's thought. Thus, the Russian writer affirms: "We don't have to believe in words, but in good works. From the works, which I do, as you will understand, I teach truly or not. Do what I do, don't prove any words."[18] (Tolstoi 1898, 111–112)

The quotation belongs to a particular interpretation of the gospels, which Tolstoy made in the form of a series of commentaries and which were published for the first time in London in 1885 under the title *The Spirit of Christ's Teaching (A Commentary of the Essence of the Gospel)*, since they couldn't appear in Russia until 1906 because of Tolstoy's excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church. In Germany, the book was published under the title *Kurze Darlegung der Evangelien* in 1898, in a paperback edition of the publishing house Philipp Reclam, the same which Ludwig Wittgenstein bought during the First World War, and which saved his life, as he affirmed, since it helped him to overcome his suicidal thoughts.[19] In these commentaries, we find the spiritual core of the life praxis based on charity, as Tolstoy understands it. The idealized Christ who does good and serves mankind without any pretensions or expectations provides Tolstoy with a tool for understanding that charity implies "forgetting oneself", i. e. freeing oneself from the vanities, frustrations, and preoccupations that keep one from being in harmony with oneself and others. Only the person who transcends the limitations of self interest, particular anxieties and desires, i. e. who lives plenary in present, will be aware of the other human being and will care for him, as Tolstoy affirms in the following passage:

> Don't worry about future. Live the present day. Care for being in the will of the Father. Wish only what is important, and everything else will come alone. (Tolstoi 1898, 69)

**18** All Tolstoyan quotes, which appear in this text, are translation made by myself from the German translation, which Wittgenstein read. The German quote runs: "Nicht Worten muß man glauben, aber Werken. Aus den Werken, die ich thue, werdet ihr verstehen, lehre ich wahr oder nicht. Thut was ich thue, prüft keine Worte." (Tolstoi 1898, 111–112)

**19** Cf. Wittgenstein's entry in his diary on 11 October 1914, he writes that he carries "*always* the 'Darlegungen des Evangelium' by Tolstoy, like a talisman" (Wittgenstein 1992, 29).

> If a farmer looks back, he cannot plow. Such as you look back, as long as you look back, you cannot plow.
>
> You have to forget everything, except the furrow that you are opening; this is the only way you will be able to plow. If you think in what you will get from your carnal life, it means that you haven't understood real life, and that you cannot live according to it. (Tolstoi 1898, 97)[20]

According to Tolstoy, one could overcome the limitations of life and the final limit of death, if one succeeded in freeing oneself from constant preoccupation for one's welfare and in living a "present", that is, "true" life that transcends time and space.[21] In the chapter titled "Life is Beyond Time" of his commentaries of the gospels, Tolstoy says:

> Jesus Christ said: "All person who has renounced his house, sister and brother, father and mother, wife and child, as well as his fields for the sake of my doctrine, receives hundred time more sisters, brothers, and fields, and everything he needs; besides, however, he receives even life beyond time." (Tolstoi 1898, 129)[22]

This was exactly what Tolstoy searched for himself: a life beyond time, i.e. a life in which death would not exist. In the previous chapter to the quoted one we find many allusions to the possibility to overcome death. Thus, Tolstoy puts Jesus' doctrine into the following words:

> The person who understands and fulfills my doctrine, won't see death. (Tolstoi 1898, 119)

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**20** "So sorgt denn nicht um das Künftige. Lebt den gegenwärtigen Tag. Seid besorgt um das, daß ihr im Willen des Vaters seid. Verlanget nach dem, was allein wichtig ist; alles übrige wird euch von selbst werden." (Tolstoi 1898, 69) "Blickt der Pflüger rückwärts, so kann er nicht pflügen. Wie du auch rückwärts blickest, so lange du rückwärts blickst, kannst du nicht pflügen. | Alles muß man vergessen, außer der Furche, die man zieht, dann nur ist es möglich zu pflügen. Wenn du erwägst, was herauskommt für das fleischliche Leben, dann verstandest du das wirkliche Leben nicht und kannst es nicht leben." (Tolstoi 1989, 97)

**21** In an interesting footnote of the German translation of Tolstoy's commentaries, the translator emphasizes that Tolstoy makes use of the fact that the Russian word "nastaiáschtschi", which has been translated as "*gegenwärtig*" (= "present"), also means "*echt*" (= "authentic/genuine/true") in the sense in which we speak of a true friend or a genuine diamond (Tolstoi 1989, 69).

**22** "Jesus sagte: Ein jeder, der sich lossagte von seinem Hauswesen, von Schwester und Bruder, Vater und Mutter, Weib und Kind und Land um meiner Lehre willen, der erhält hundertmal mehr Schwestern und Brüder und Land und alles was nötig ist zu diesem Leben, zudem aber empfängt er noch das Leben außerhalb der Zeit." (Tolstoi 1898, 129)

> My doctrine is the resurrection to life. The person who believes in my doctrine will remain alive, even if he dies fleshly; and whoever lives and believes in me, won't die. (Tolstoi 1898, 121)[23]

The idea that death and, with it, the riddle – or sense – of life are beyond time and space, appears also in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein, who adopts this idea from Tolstoy's commentaries of the gospels, affirms that the riddle of life and death disappear, when one succeeds in living in the present. In this sense, he affirms in the *Tractatus:*

6.4311 Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death.

If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.

Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits.

6.4312 [...] The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time. (It is certainly not the solution of any problems of natural science that is required.) (Wittgenstein 2001, 87)

To live in the present means for Wittgenstein "to live eternally", i.e. beyond time. The person who has found true life, has put himself outside of time. He has reached an existential state that doesn't require any proof, explication or justification. He no longer needs any consolation or answers, for the existential problem has disappeared. So, Wittgenstein claims in 6.521 that the "The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem." (Wittgenstein 2001, 88) And he adds: "(Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?)" (Wittgenstein 2001, 88 – 89)

We find similar reflections in Tolstoy's commentaries of the gospels, in a passage which refers to the story of a blind man, who had been healed and who is unable to prove or to explain how he had been healed:

> To claim proofs of truth for my doctrine is the same as if people claimed proofs to a blind, demanding from him to explain how he saw the light.
>
> The healed blind, who is the same person as before, would only be able to say that he was blind, and that he can see now.

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**23** "Der, der meine Lehre erfassen wird und erfüllen, der wird den Tod nicht sehen." (Tolstoi 1898, 119) "Meine Lehre ist die Erweckung zum Leben. Wer glaubt an meine Lehre, der bleibt leben, ob er auch fleischlich stürbe, und jeder, der lebt und glaubt an mich, der wird nicht sterben." (Tolstoi 1898, 121)

> The same thing and nothing else can a man say, who didn't understand before the sense of his life, but who understands it now. Such a man could only say that he didn't know before true salvation of life, and that he knows it now. (Tolstoi 1898, 110)[24]

Let us finally go back to Wittgenstein. In the assertion of the *Tractatus* that follows the last quoted passage with the implicit allusion to Tolstoy's indication of the ineffability of the blind's healing, Wittgenstein indicates that there may be something that appears indirectly, in a special experience which cannot be conceived within logical space. In the borderline experience of the mystical, an ineffable truth that cannot be proved nor said in a precise way may "show itself", "make itself manifest" (*zeigt sich*), as Wittgenstein claims:

> 6.522 There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical. (Wittgenstein 2001, 89)

The limit between what can be said with sense and what doesn't say anything is neither an empty nor a fixed line. As pointed out before, it rather has to be conceived as an active, dynamic state, in which something occurs and appears in a negative way. Thus, the positive answer, i.e. the "solution of the problem of life", has to be seen "in the vanishing of the problem", as Wittgenstein claimed (Wittgenstein 2001, 88). This means that the person, who had been searching a solution and who has "found" it now, doesn't stay any longer in logical space with its immovable, precise logical places. He hasn't found sense of life in any fact, any verifiable answer, any picture that could be located and fixed in a single moment and a single place. The response appears by disappearing, in a dynamic and ineffable experience: the "feeling of the world as a limited whole", which Wittgenstein characterizes as "the mystical" (Wittgenstein 2001, 88). The mystical feeling is nothing else than an experience of the limit, i.e. an experience of what we have called the *in between*, where life is at stake.

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**24** "Beweise verlangen für die Wahrheit meiner Lehre ist gleich dem, daß man Beweise verlangt von einem Blinden dafür, daß er das Licht so oder so zu Gesicht bekam. | Der geheilte Blinde, der der gleiche Mensch geblieben, der er war, könnte nur sagen, daß er blind war, jetzt aber sehe. | Genau so viel und nicht mehr kann der Mensch sagen, der zuvor den Sinn seines Lebens nicht verstand, nun aber ihn verstanden hat. Solch ein Mensch könnte etwa nur sagen, daß er zuvor das wahre Heil des Lebens nicht kannte, jetzt es aber kenne." (Tolstoi 1989, 110)

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