

Wittgenstein on Art and Creative Imagination: “How to Understand ‘Genius’ as Courage in Talent and Character Manifested Through Talent”

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In this paper I will intend to provide a Wittgensteinian account of creative imagination and the use and context of creative imagination in line with Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument as well as his numerous remarks on the concepts of genius, talent and art stated in *Culture and Value*. Wittgenstein's philosophical position regarding arts and the artistic creation, has been a topic rather rarely touched upon by philosophers elaborating on his work, since it suggests a peculiar point of view where the incapability of the agent to create and imagine “a world from scratch”, in other words “ex nihilo” privately in his mind poses questions about whether that allows enough room for creative imagination and the utter uniqueness of the artist which bear the mark of genius that eventually point to a break with tradition and bring about a revolution in the perception of art throughout the history of art.

There are certain concepts and positions, namely “language games” central to Wittgenstein's philosophy concerning “meaning” in his later period, especially in ‘Investigations’ which provide the basis for understanding the relation between genius and art, in other words the way creative imagination functions as well as its conditions of possibility of existence which forms the basis of art that has been revolutionary when its historical impacts get to be taken into consideration. Here, I tend to use the rather provocative word “revolutionary” for certain art works primarily in order to draw attention to the link between “genius” and artworks and artists whose work have marked turning points in art history. It should not be taken to mean that art works who have not somehow had a historical impact to bring about a change of meaning in the language games played with the genre of art in question are of lesser artistic or aesthetic value, rather, my emphasis on revolution in artistic discourse brought about by certain artists such as Picasso, Bach, Duchamp and the like, should encourage us to think about the inherent correlation between “genius” and a change of, a break of, i.e. a revolution of artistic meaning and uniqueness employed in the language game concerning art and creative imagination. In this sense, “genius”, or the impact of “genius” is precisely bringing about a change of meaning in the language game, in other words, introducing “a new rule” to the language game and waiting until the moment that this rule gets to be understood, i.e. be applicable or possible to follow by the players of the language game considering that genre of art at the setting of the life form where meaning as “making sense” occurs. On genius and how the break with tradition or change of meaning that “genius” brings about will occur, Wittgenstein's statement in *Culture and Value*: “If someone is merely ahead of his time, it will catch him up one day”(MS 110 11:25.12.1930) is a good example of how he thinks about the double sided effect of saying/creating something utterly new and unique. At the time of manifesting this “ahead of time”ness through an artistic creation, until the time it gets followable and understood by more than one person and more than once in history, it will bear the mark of privacy and hence the uncanniness of incomprehensibility, but through time, the utterly new will also become acquainted with and acquired among the possible life forms and “language games” to be played thereupon.

Wittgenstein, having dedicated much of his later work to demonstrating in various ways how “Understanding is a public phenomenon”, the occurrence of which is verifiable through certain publicly accessible signs of successive rule following, where failing to do so would be downright sufficient reason to doubt the occurrence of Understanding, gets to put forward that “Meaning is use” concerning the question of meaning in art and creative imagination, as well as in other discourses. I argue that, all he writes on “genius”, “talent” or art works throughout his remarks in *Culture and Value* should be thought of in accordance with this basic claim that “Meaning is use”.

We can easily be puzzled by trying to work out the connection that is supposed to exist between this seemingly linguistic claim and Wittgenstein's remarks on creative imagination such as “Genius is courage in talent” or “Genius is talent in which character makes itself heard”. In fact, stating that “meaning is use” amounts to be emphasizing the practical conditions of the phenomenon of meaning and hence communication, since meaning is to be understood as practiced through language games being diverse contexts of a life form shared by individuals whose “Weltanschauung”(worldview) is shaped by the same “conceptual scheme”. By the same token, when Wittgenstein makes remarks on Genius or the various qualities of a certain piece of art, his first concern is to acquaint himself and the reader with the practical conditions of possibility of the occurrence of Genius, which can be read both as a practical guide to creative imagination and uniqueness for the artist him/herself as a path to be found within, and as a practical guide for the audience, i.e. the consumer of the art to diagnose and value the creative imagination and uniqueness of the artwork or artist.

It will be helpful for us at this point to clarify and elaborate on certain remarks of Wittgenstein in *Culture and Value* on art and genius. Let us first draw our attention to his remark: “Genius is *courage in one's talent*”(MS 117 152 c: 4.2.1940) This is a remark that addresses the would-be artist on the verge of a creative process. It is basically a remark that is in accord with the rest of Wittgenstein's later thought, which does not attempt to refer to anything private and incommunicable in the individual and what is unique to the confines of his mind and the imagination within these confines whatsoever, on the contrary, doubting the very communicability even to one's own of this private sphere were it to exist, this remark is actually a call for the artist/genius/creative thinker to discover the path that leads from the common feature of talent that is found in many, to the rare feature of genius that is to be found in very few. With this remark, Wittgenstein's aim is to put forward that there is no mysterious link that inherently lies between talent and genius in the case of genius, however it is an observable act of courage, of basically believing in and acting out of talent and the effort and investment made thereupon that transforms the talented person into a Genius. Among countless instances of talented people, it is only the ones who have courage in this talent, who are courageous enough to base their lives on this talent and do whatever it takes such

as education, training, belief, unconditional dedication, solitude, despair, adventures, a meaningful life which gives them the sufficient emotional stimuli to express throughout their art/invention, devotion of a lot of time and energy to the realization of the particular artwork/invention in question be it their own personal life turning to a work of art during this very process- to reach their very personal, unique expression in the specified art form or scientific activity. Hence, by merely stating that "Genius is courage in talent" Wittgenstein gets to be saying a lot on the publicly accessible pattern of one's transforming one's art to a work of genius.

However, he makes it yet clearer that it is not the case that having talent and having likewise courage in that very talent are sufficient for genius to be the case, since "character" is "the ultimately indispensable feature of creative imagination and of genius which is the significantly remarkable bearer of the creative imagination in question and of "revolution-inciting" art, so to speak. In *Culture and Value*, he states: "Genius is talent in which character makes itself heard. For that reason, I would like to say, Kraus has talent, an extraordinary talent, but not genius (...) It is curious that this e.g. is so much greater than anything Kraus ever wrote. Here you see not merely an intellectual skeleton, but a whole human being. That is the reason too why the greatness of what someone writes depends on everything else he writes and does" (MS 136 59a:4.1.1948.) That is a remark pretty much in line with his writings on the conception of meaning, that is, what there is to the greatness of an artwork is that, only in so far as it bears the mark of being the outcome of a certain life experience lived by a certain artist in the form of a common story told in a personal way, it gets to be called a piece of genius, in the sense that it is an utterly unique and revolutionary way to refer to an ordinary life experience that could occur to anyone under the same conditions. In other words, only when the work of art reveals the artist's personal interpretation of what can be experienced by many and furthermore that this gets to be a repeatable practice on the part of the artist such that his audience come to guess his habits and emotive and cognitive attitudes looking at his art and thus feeling his character through his works, only then, can we say according to Wittgenstein, that we are confronted with a genius, say a genius artist, i.e. anyone who gets to be defined as making use of creative imagination. Of course not only character and the repeatability of this character's appearances and reflections, but also, being moulded by excellent technical and artistic skills of the artist with sufficient courage in his talent to go thus far in investing in it, are among the necessary conditions of genius, i.e. creative work that incites a sort of revolution in some aspect of the genre." The measure of genius is character, – even if character on its own does not amount to genius. Genius is not 'talent and character', but character manifesting itself in the form of a special talent.(...)"(MS 162b 22r c: 1939–1940)

In order to put forward the threefold nature of Wittgenstein's conception of creative imagination and hence the path to genius, as historically significant work with good originality-elsewhere in C&V he states: "it is already a seed of good originality not to want to be what you are not" – we should consider the example of an artist, a creative mind who can be thought as a concrete embodiment of manifesting these three necessary conditions in his path to bringing out the genius in him. When I gaze no further than into my own surroundings, as a philosopher coming from Istanbul, I am tempted to consider the example of Orhan Pamuk, the 2006 Nobel Prize winner in literature and actually his Nobel Prize speech, which later came to be published as a book called: "My father's suitcase". There he talks about his own process of becoming a writer putting that in the context of his

family, city, surroundings and habits, which we can more or less classify as the forming ingredients, foundations of his character. This speech-book is a particularly good example at hand to observe all three elements of Wittgenstein's discourse on genius and hence creative thinking. First, his example is that of someone who took courage in writing against all odds. His father, who enjoyed travelling, living to the full extent of life, social gathering, in other words who chose a life with more enjoyment and less deepening, lonely hours turning to years spent in a closed, darkish room with thousands of books, comes one day to his room to leave him a suitcase full of his notebooks and diaries. Pamuk, sincerely tells the story of how he almost fears to open and read the notebooks of his father, more than fearing from coming across a bad writer, he fears of actually coming across a good writer. Because if his father proves to be a good writer, i.e. a deep and sensible one although he never neither based his life on nor made challenging efforts on that, this will simply be a testimony to the fact that after all courage, courage to believe in and bleed for, so to speak, in one's own talent and making efforts merely as reflection of this courage, are unnecessary to the formation of genius. However, he does not come across any genius in his father's writings and talks about his relief of not coming across one. As for character, Pamuk writes in this very same essay, more than a couple of times about how one becomes a successful writer when he can tell his own personal story as if it is the life of others and still be himself in writing all these. It functions in such a way that, the reader identifies him/herself with every line of his writings as if he would be talking about their story while in fact it is him that is speaking in those very lines. For Pamuk, the path to being a good writer is through making one's personal life sound as if it is everyone's life dispersing it into thousand stories of thousand different characters each of which is unmistakably a reflection of a side of writer's own character and personal story. That is all there is to his genius as his character being felt, manifest through his works.

So far I have aimed to put forward a Wittgensteinian account of creative imagination depending on his writings on genius. It is no coincidence that almost every time Wittgenstein makes a remark on genius he does it in the context and exemplification of a concrete creative thinker or an artist and his uniqueness, i.e. his break with tradition in the sense of introducing the new, the utterly personal as the reflection of his character in the genre of art or science that he endeavours to create. Genius, in other words revolutionary creative thinking that introduces a new rule to the language game, a new context, stage setting to the pre-existing forms of life, is the act of one who has the courage to believe in his talent and who hence takes action on that as a reflection of his courage and through every such act of courage who manifests his own personal interpretation of what is accessible and liveable by everyone and envelops this new form of expressing the common with his personal seal, sent to the rest of the world from his address, namely his personal origin as the basis of his originality. And this seal, which has the mould of his character, no matter how many times sent to how many different targets, bears the mark of always the same sign imprinted on countless different envelopes. It is the seal of genius, namely courage in talent through which artist's character is heard and felt.

Literature

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