

Interpretation of Psychological Concepts in Wittgenstein

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Starting from 1929, the year of his return to Cambridge after a period of silence and reflection spent teaching in elementary schools in Austrian villages, Wittgenstein brought irrevocably to light the philosophical debate about the analysis of the relationship of the inner man and external representation (Bouveresse 1971; Lazerowitz and Ambrose 1985c). As Gargani says (1982), the works that indicate this direction of analysis are in particular *The Blue and Brown Books*, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and *Philosophical Investigation*. A widespread interpretation of Wittgenstein's observations on mental phenomena demands that he is opposed to the idea that they are phenomena that imply private representation, in the first person, accessible only to he/she who experiences them and are as a consequence unavailable for public investigation or in the third person (Malcolm 1986; Budd 1989; Stern 1995; Engel 1996). As he says in *Philosophical Investigation* (1953: 63), it is the instruments of grammar and linguistic games which provide a means to interpret psychological concepts. The external character of linguistic rules and their applied, intrinsic nature constitute the basis for a transposition of the inner being itself onto the level of anthropological practices.

The dichotomy between the Interior and the Exterior, or more precisely between the inner being and its expression, thus loses any relevance (Kenny 1973; Budd 1989). This leads to the negation of research that aims to reach stable meanings in a perfect isomorphism between internal states and the exterior world (Block 1981; Charles and Child 2001), chase away the ghost in the machine (Ryle 1949) reducing the description of internal states to the description of the use of the words that depict them. In fact, as he says in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (1980: I § 830), for some words, philosophers fashion an ideal use that, however, in the end isn't useful at all.

In this way language has a direct relationship with the aims for which it is used. The meaning of a word isn't to be looked for in what happens in our mind while we say it, but instead it is to be found in the use and the context in which it is employed. The unity of the language and the myth of philosophy as a normative science that tries to impose a higher order onto ordinary language show themselves to be illusory. Since every sentence of our language is ordered as it is and this order is in itself perfect and must also be present in a vaguer sentence. It is mistaken to say that in the philosophical sciences one must consider ideal language to be opposed to ordinary language. This has, in fact, created the idea that it is possible to improve ordinary language, but ordinary language is already correct (1958: 40). The inner world and its concepts thus spread across the surface of language and its rules, where the very essence is represented by Grammar (Cavell 1969; Baker and Hacker 1985; Hacker 1990).

The simplification of language and meaning to their usage imply a consideration and an investigation of the rules of their use, and our attitude towards them. For instance, internal states such as hoping, feeling pain, and understanding would not be possible without making use of a language. These are natural activities, like eating, walking, drinking (1980: I §25) and when faced with these we don't have to pose the problem of a theoretical legitimi-

zation and of a logical foundation, as stated instead in *Tractatus* (Popper 1957: 163-164; Anscomb 1959; Black 1964; Fogelin 1976; Hintikka and Hintikka 1986).

Wittgenstein, therefore, affirms the grammatical and conventional nature of the sentences that we opt to use in our daily lives (Kripke 1982). He refuses to accept the idea that the meaning of a word can be explained by psychological causes and the effects of the use of the word. This is in disagreement with the analysis of language as a psychological mechanism. His conception of the meaning of a word derives from the use that is made of it on a daily basis. The philosophical analysis of language is restricted to the description of its grammatical nature.

In *The Blue and Brown Books* (1958: 13) he says that it is the duty of the philosopher to understand the function of grammar. Grammar for Wittgenstein must describe the use of the words in the language and not look for, on the other hand, an explanation for their use in their meaning. And in trying to investigate the relationship that runs between internal states and external representations, he develops an analysis of the terms of our language by focusing on the concepts of a psychological nature, which are used every day in ordinary language. Like every linguistic expression, even concepts of a psychological nature must be subject to this infinite variety in language use, imposed by the several possibilities of usage that every expression possesses. The duty of philosophy is that of describing the use of words with psychological meaning by concentrating on their scope in relation to the exact moment and to the specific context in which it occurs.

The idea that in order to understand a general term one must find the element which is always present when it is used has paralyzed philosophical research. In fact, it has not only yielded no result, but it has induced philosophers to ignore, as irrelevant, concrete cases. Wittgenstein is interested in the language concerning psychological concepts because philosophical problems about the nature of the mind derive from the confusion over the use of our psychological vocabulary. The issue of interiority is transposed onto the dimension of linguistic practices and is not handled by taking into account facts of a psychological nature. While stating that it is not the duty of psychology to explain the meaning of the concepts that refer to internal states, he attempts a real neutralization of the psychological disciplines (Trincherò: 1986). The Austrian philosopher replaces the notion of psychological facts and phenomena with the notion of psychological concepts, thereby placing the focus on an analysis of a conceptual nature. The psychological concepts therefore would take life only in the context of linguistic expression.

To further study a psychological concept in detail, it is illuminating to analyze the expression "to be afraid". This does not consist in the experience of an occult process and then externalizing it by describing it through words, but in that intransitive and immanent linguistic act, in which, according to the Austrian philosopher, being afraid is acting afraid.

Analyzing the expression to be afraid is treated in great depth by Wittgenstein in both the second part of

Philosophical Investigation and Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology. During the analysis a lot of attention is granted to the notion of context and to the transposition of this same expression in different linguistic games. In *Philosophical Investigation* (1953: II § 9) he writes:

I am afraid. I am sorry to have to confess it.
I am still a bit afraid, but no longer as much as before.
At bottom I am still afraid, though I won't confess it to myself.
I torment myself with all sorts of fears.
Now, just when I should be fearless, I am afraid!
To each of these sentences a special tone of voice is appropriate, and a different context.
It would be possible to imagine people who as it were thought much more definitely than we, and used different words where we use only one.
We ask "What does 'I am frightened' really mean, what am I referring to when I say it?" And of course we find no answer, or one that is inadequate.
The question is: "In what sort of context does it occur?"

Wittgenstein links the comprehension of a psychological concept such as being afraid to an exact interpretation of context. Language is not conceived as a static image of logical rules far from real contexts of interaction, but rather as a living entity which transforms itself through its constant usage. Thus, the meaning of a psychological concept, like every linguistic expression, is contained in the use that is made of it (1953: II § 9):

Describing my state of mind (of fear, say) is something I do in a particular context. (Just as a sit takes a particular context to make a certain action into an experiment.)
Is it, then, so surprising that I use the same expression in different games?

The importance of the context is therefore tightly linked to the possibility of using the same expression in different linguistic games. Fear can be of several types and can take on different meanings and shades according to the context in which it is placed. If such an assertion can have a deep impact on the linguistic expressions employed in everyday language, it is even more if valid also for psychological concepts, which often represent states of difficult communication and interpretation even for the person who experiments with them. For Wittgenstein, all this has no *raison d'être* because the analysis of externalisation of individual internal states is possible only by taking the analysis onto a linguistic plane. No more misunderstandings and obscurity, interpretation and understanding are possible.

In conclusion, citing the famous example of fear, I have presented a significant analysis, albeit not exhaustive, which requires further investigation concerning what Wittgenstein says in general about linguistic expressions and in particular psychological concepts. Highlighting the importance of context and the effective use of language and eliminating the need for inaccessible and mysterious internal processes, Wittgenstein states, as was demonstrated in this article, mental states do not come before language nor accompany a sequence of words, but are lived and experienced in the context of linguistic expression.

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