

The Game you didn't realize you were playing

Introduction

20th century philosophy was dominated by two titanic schools of thought, the analytic and the continental. Traditionally, these schools have been considered in bitter opposition. However, current scholarship is now undertaking a re-examination of these two schools historically, focusing far more on the commonalities than the differences. My supervisor, Prof. Philie, is one such scholar. He is currently engaged in a comprehensive examination of major conceptions of rationality in both analytic and continental philosophers throughout the last century.

My portion of this project was a traditional passage by passage analytic, dialectical examination of the beginning sections (1-64) of *The Philosophical Investigations*, the definitive work of later Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein was one of the most important (if not the most important) thinker of the early 20th century. In particular, his later work marks a fundamental shift from conceptions of language (and thereby rationality) beginning explicitly as far back as Plato. In this way, the examination of not only his presented "philosophy" but the presentation of his "philosophy" serves as a key step in any survey of philosophical "progress" of the 20th century.

References, Acknowledgements, and Contact Info

Bibliography
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*; 2nd ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958. Print.
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Contact Information
e-mail: miller.benjamin@gmail.com
phone #: (613) 407-1810

Methodology

The research into Wittgenstein's conception of rationality initially occurred in three main parts: background, analysis, discussion. Wittgenstein's writing cannot be understood on its own. It was first necessary to understand Wittgenstein's later work which he is often implicitly and sometimes explicitly refuting in the *Philosophical Investigations*. It was also necessary to do some cursory examinations of prior conceptions of languages (Plato's, Augustine's, and Descartes'). This was then followed by a highly speculative section by section reading with notes and commentary of sections 1-64 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. These notes and commentary were then discussed in weekly meeting with my supervisor.

After about a month with this method, there was then a radical break from the highly speculative approach and analysis that focused on theory construction. This was replaced by the realization that the *Philosophical Investigations* itself was a language-game (something which I will expand on). The research method then became one of treating the text as conversation and the analysis as attempting to discern the intentions of the speaker. Both background and discussions stayed the same.

By: Benjamin Miller

Under the supervision of: Prof. Patrice Philie

Pre



The Glass City



1:1



ONE

Post



GAMES



MORE!!!!



TOOLS



MANY

Results

The first successful analytic remark from my reading of Wittgenstein was the elucidation of the implicit argument of sections 1 and 5 of the *Investigations*. That argument is essentially that an Augustinian (i.e. traditional) conception of language makes two foundational mistakes: one, assuming the meaning of each and every word is tied to an object "in the world", two, assuming that all words are uniform in their kind (i.e. how they are learnt, how they are used, etc.). He then gives his famous 5 red apples analogy to dismiss both these assumptions as being an incomplete picture of language. Wittgenstein spends much of section 1-64 building on the implications of this refutation.

Then in section 11, Wittgenstein reveals the insight that words are like tools and, just like tools, are diverse in their uses, and are also defined by their uses. A word's meaning is therefore its use. This is taken to its logical limit when we understand all of these tools within the context of the situations in which they are used. This, Wittgenstein calls language-games, this is the central concept of the philosophical investigations. Language-games are any set of circumstances (and indeed all sets of circumstances qualify) in which the context must be known and so in this way affect the use (and therefore meaning) of language. This sounds complicated, but it is as simple as saying the way a teacher and a student interact is different from the way two lovers interact. Once all of these concepts are understood, then it is possible to grasp Wittgenstein's conception of rationality.

Conclusion

Once I understood those three key concepts--the object related mistake, the meaning as use, and the language-game--some of the implications for rationality became clear. If everything linguistic can be understood as a game, then being able to use language (rationality) is most fundamentally about rule following. Though it was outside of the scope of my research to say whether this is proof of a common mental space both analytic and continental schools share, I was able to reflect on the experience of researching the *Philosophical Investigations* much better.

The conclusion I came to was that what made my second reading so successful, which was not present in my first reading, was my refocusing of who my conversation was with. In my first reading, it was largely with myself and with Professor Philie, however, my second reading explicitly treated the *Philosophical Investigations* as a conversation with Wittgenstein. This realization allowed me to take the implications one step further and generalize about a point in the philosophy of (at the very least) philosophy education. Basically, given Wittgenstein's conception of rationality and understanding, the language-game of learning has quite essentially to do with the student truly appreciating with whom they are playing. This may seem like an obvious point, but for the vast majority of students, the process of learning happens between themselves and the teacher or even themselves and the institution. Very rarely does it occur to anyone but the most naturally passionate students that their conversation is in fact with the author of whatever text they are studying.