

Reasonable Doubt and Certainty, Wittgensteinian Solutions

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Abstract

The article underlines the particular position of certainty, states that it should be given quite different and specific place in philosophy. I think Wittgenstein unites his theory of meaning and epistemology by the problem of doubting. Here are united also theory of language game and problem of certainty. I think this is the most important moment to understand Wittgenstein's philosophy and generally the connections between epistemology and the theory of meaning. Realization of this moment can help us understand not only the parts of Wittgenstein's different philosophies but also it can invest in the understanding the connections between epistemology and the theory of meaning.

Keywords: reasonable doubt, certainty, language game, Wittgenstein

1. Introduction

In this article I argue that the problem of certainty and reasonable doubt are the main themes in Wittgenstein's philosophy. These are the main problems and all the philosophical views developed by Wittgenstein are united in them. Also I argue that certainty is not based on belief but it is being based on reason, on reasonable doubt.

Philosophy of language developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein which was presented in his so called second philosophy was a new word in the Semantics and the Philosophy of Language of that period. In particular, by introducing the concept of language game Wittgenstein introduced the new dimension, sphere where there are no firmly and invariably given meanings, but determination of meaning of a word he linked with our activities. The themes of his so called third philosophy were determined by the epistemological problems. So question of doubt became actual and Wittgenstein dedicated to it the whole scripts later published under the name of "On Certainty".

In this work Wittgenstein develops the idea that doubting acts only in particular language game and only in the frame of language game we are allowed to ask a question regarding what should be doubted. In my opinion this question is important moment in order to understand Wittgenstein's theory of meaning and epistemology, and find the main lines with the contemporary epistemology.

The problem of reasonable doubt is very interesting moment to understand Wittgenstein's philosophy in general, and specifically, for developing the view on what basis can we speak of having knowledge about something. I think that Wittgenstein's view about reasonable doubt is in some relation with Descartes' rationalism though Descartes' views were developed for quite different reasons. It is important also that we can discuss the question of reasonable doubt in context with certainty and understand it as whole with the theory of language games. By this we can present the particular picture of Wittgensteinian world, reveal the connections between Wittgenstein's semantics and epistemology and find the point where these spheres are intersected, this will help in finding some kind of connection between these two spheres. Knowledge, language game, doubt, reasonable doubt, certainty, meaning, and all these questions we can discuss all together.

2. Theory of language game as the basis for knowledge

Meaning of a word is the way we use it, it is settled in the language game. The word itself does not mean anything; it acquires meaning only in particular language context. Language game is activity. As Wittgenstein determines language game:

"We can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "language-games" and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game. I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game" (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 7).

Language game is the activity that has some particular sense:

"Very broadly, language-games are sections of language that can be used as examples to illustrate the idea that language is a *purposeful activity*. Language-games help us see that language is an *activity* we engage in – an activity with a *purpose*. Most importantly, for Wittgenstein, they also help us see that different areas of language are used for very different purposes: there is no one single purpose served by all areas of language" (Teyedor, 2011, p. 119).

The process of establishing meaning within the language game which is based upon our activities and by which the possibility of presenting the whole theory of meaning is rejected is complicated by Wittgenstein's metaphoric language. In spite of all these difficulties I think it is obvious that Wittgenstein's semantic viewpoint is based upon our activity. I think that move from this type of semantics to the epistemological problems should be special:

"Understanding the meaning of a word involves knowing how the word is used in language. You count as having understood a word when you are able to make the right moves with it in the section of language to which it belongs: when you are able to use it in an appropriate way. Learning the meaning of a word is therefore akin to developing ability or a skill: it involves acquiring an ability to use the word in a particular way" (Teyedor, 2011, p. 132=.

In order to understand meaning of a word we should learn its use in language. Language game is the dimension where the meaning of a word is given. Our activity plays the central role in developing such semantics.

3. Question of reasonable doubt and problem of knowledge

Since Descartes the problem of knowledge received much more attention; how we know what we know, what can we doubt, how to reply to skepticism, whether there is certain knowledge and etc. For Descartes everything is doubted besides his own consciousness. "I think, therefore, I am" is Descartes' intuitive statement which gives the wholeness of existence and thinking; it is the attempt to understand the existence as being dependent on thinking. It is very important moment when Descartes maintains that he can see this statement clearly, he speaks of light of thinking:

"I noticed that whilst I thus wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the 'I' who thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth 'I think, therefore I am' was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant supposition brought forward by the sceptics were incapable of shaking it" (Descartes, 2003, p.23).

The difference between the views of these philosophers lies in the view that Descartes doubts where Wittgenstein considers doubt as not reasonable.

Descartes searches indubitable. His aim is to reach the indubitable.

Many statements Wittgenstein considers as certain. According to Wittgenstein doubting everything is not reasonable, it is not rational:

"We could doubt every single one of these facts, but we could not doubt them all."

Wouldn't it be more correct to say: "we do not doubt them all."

Our not doubting them all is simply our manner of judging, and therefore of acting"

(Wittgenstein, 1969. 232).

"A doubt without an end is not even a doubt" (Wittgenstein, 1969. 625).

Wittgenstein maintains that the doubt should be reasonable that means we should have the basis for it.

According to Wittgenstein both Moore and Cartesian Sceptics understood the nature of doubt incorrectly; such doubt is pointless and reasonable man cannot have such doubt:

"The reasonable man does not have certain doubts" (Wittgenstein, 1969. 220).

"If my friend were to imagine one day that he had been living for a long time past in such and such a place, etc. etc., I should not call this a mistake, but rather a mental disturbance, perhaps a transient one" (Wittgenstein, 1969.71).

As Kenny maintains Cartesian doubt destroys itself:

"Wittgenstein argues, Cartesian doubt in a way destroys itself, since it is so radical that it is bound to call in question the meanings of the words used to express it" (Kenny, 2006, p.162).

According to Richter the problem with scepticism is that it refutes itself:

"One Wittgensteinian response to a sceptic who, after a philosophical enquiry into human knowledge, concludes that nothing is certain, is to show that her enquiry itself presupposes or rather includes certainty. The act of uttering a sceptical doubt implies assurance that the

sceptic's words have meaning and that her audience exists. This is a kind of Moorean point that Wittgenstein makes much use of in *On Certainty*. Scepticism is self-contradictory" (Richter, 2004, p. 87).

The novelty of Wittgenstein's view regarding the question of doubt is bringing forth the problem of reasonable doubt. According to Wittgenstein doubt is given in the language game and it does not have meaning without it. This is the starting point for developing Wittgensteinian semantics. This moment transfers question of doubt in a quite different dimension.

According to Wittgenstein Moore was right when claiming that some statements about outside world can have the same epistemological status as mathematical statements. Wittgenstein is against Moore that not only Moorean statements are certain, but many statements have the same status:

"Every language game is based on words 'and objects' being recognized again. We learn with the same inexorability that this is a chair as that $2 \times 2 = 4$ " (Wittgenstein, 1969. 455).

"There are, however, certain types of case in which I rightly say I cannot be making a mistake, and Moore has given a few examples of such cases" (Wittgenstein, 1969. 674).

"Not only are Moorean certainties necessarily groundless, but that also rational doubt of a Moorean certainty is simply impossible" (Pritchard, 2015, p.65).

When discussing problem of doubt in philosophy I think that the main point should be that everything can not be doubted, doubt should have an end, expressed in Wittgensteinian words. Since Antiquity until today the problem of scepticism is exactly this point and Moore also faces this problem.

Doubting is affordable only in particular language game, maintains Wittgenstein, at the same time language game does not depend on us, it exists "there", independently from us:

"The idealist's question would be something like: "What right have I not to doubt the existence of my hands?" (And to that the answer can't be: I *know* that they exist.) But someone who asks such a question is overlooking the fact that a doubt about existence only works in a language-game. Hence, that we should first have to ask: what would such a doubt be like? and don't understand this straight off" (Wittgenstein, 1969. 24).

"You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable).

It is there-like our life" (Wittgenstein, 1969. 559).

It is very important starting from the language game to doubt where should be the place of certainty.

4. Reference between language game and certainty

As Wittgenstein maintains, doubting needs indubitable, the ground:

"If he calls *that* in doubt - whatever "doubt" means here he will never learn this game".

"One cannot make experiments if there are not some things that one does not doubt."

"There is something universal here; not just something personal."

"Something must be taught us as a foundation" (Wittgenstein, 1969. 329, 337, 440, 449).

According to Wittgenstein during the process of acquiring knowledge it is very important to line out the basic statements.

Doubt in the process of receiving knowledge is the means for acquiring knowledge but doubting needs the basis, at the same time doubting is possible only in the range of particular language game and doubting presupposes certainty. So certainty is beyond the language game:

“(1) Doubt needs grounds. (2) Doubt must amount to something. (3) Doubt presupposes the mastery of a language-game. (4) Universal doubt impossible. (5) Doubt presupposes certainty” (Kenny, 2006. p. 162, 163).

In my previous article¹ I have discussed the question that reference between language game and certainty is problematic in Wittgenstein’s philosophy; Wittgenstein in some paragraphs maintains that our actions are the basis, in some other paragraphs he considers language game as being such basis, but in the others he claims certain statements as basic, the statements knowledge about which we do not get via language game:

“If I say "we assume that the earth has existed for many years past" (or something similar), then of course it sounds strange that we should assume such a thing. But in the entire system of our language-games it belongs to the foundations. The assumption, one might say, forms the basis of action, and therefore, naturally, of thought” (Wittgenstein, 1969. 411).

The basis for the language game in this case is certain statements, so basis of language game is not actions but the activity itself has basis in the form of certain statements. Presumably, Avrum Stroll develops this viewpoint when claiming that language game has its basis beyond itself:

“The foundations of the language game stand *outside* of and yet *support* the language game” (Stroll, 1994, p.138).

“Knowledge belongs to the language game, and certitude does not” (Stroll, 1994, p.145).

I suppose that this problem should be solved using the view about reasonable doubt; reasonable doubt is the means for reaching the certainty, its aim is certainty. Doubt itself is reasonable only in the range of particular language game.

As Pritchard maintains, doubting presupposes certainty:

“Wittgenstein cautions that if you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (Pritchard, 2015, p. 66). So in order to check some statements for their certainty we should already have accepted some statements as certain. Language game has some certain statements as the basis, toward which asking questions is not reasonable. It follows that language game and reasonable doubt are in some connection with each other, in particular cases they serve as the basis for another. According to Wittgenstein, in the basis of all knowledge lies system of some beliefs. We have belief in knowledge gathered by mankind, we accept some fundamental statements as certain, they are certain because in other cases even thinking would be impossible.

¹ “Ludwig Wittgenstein: Meaning, Language Game and Knowledge”, International Scientific Journal “Intellectual”, No. 24, Tbilisi, 2013. pp. 42-46.

Doubt should have belief as the basis, doubt presupposes certainty:

“Whenever we test anything, we are already presupposing something that is not tested”
(Wittgenstein, 1969. 163).

So doubt needs the basis, it should refer to something special and should not be just expressing the doubt, it is the mastering of language game, beyond language game and about whole language game doubt is impossible, doubt presupposes certainty.

Wittgenstein does not give any notes about methodical doubt, i.e. doubt as method for acquiring some certainty, he is not interested in this problem developed by Descartes, but he opposes Descartes' views, as doubting everything he considers unreasonable, for him not only Descartes' Cogito is certain, but a lot of statements are certain as well, those which a man uses in everyday situations. But I still think that Wittgenstein's reasonable doubt should be in some connection with Descartes' view of 'natural light'. Descartes' rational moment in process of doubting have some similarities with Wittgenstein's reasonable doubt, as both of them use rational abilities during search for the basis for knowledge.

When criticizing scepticism Moore's aim was showing that scepticism can be over, as there are some statements which confirm existence of outside world and that are certain; at the same time Moore is against Descartes' view as he claims those statements as certain that are considered as doubtful according to Descartes.

According to Wittgenstein, Moore was mistaken when considering that some certain statements can be considered as confirming the existence of outside world and also when claiming that he has knowledge of such statements; knowledge of such statements is not reasonable. We have not knowledge but belief that fundamental statements are certain. Certainty itself is starting point in acquiring knowledge.

Wittgenstein's viewpoint is interesting as he gives particular way of discussing this problem, namely, as it is common for Wittgenstein's style a lot of interesting questions and answers are given. In order to understand the nature of doubt he underlines that doubt necessarily means that what is certain, also that doubt is possible only in particular language game and so, doubt discussed beyond language game is not reasonable. Language game itself is neither reasonable nor unreasonable and so doubting it is impossible. At first sight there seems not any novelty here when Wittgenstein claims belief as the basis for knowledge, but it is interesting his view regarding transition of knowledge to others, especially when he underlines that knowledge is transferred on the basis of certainty, that doubt follows certainty: “We teach a child "that is your hand", not "that is perhaps [or "probably"] your hand". That is how a child learns the innumerable language-games that are concerned with his hand”
(Wittgenstein, 1969. 374).

“The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief” (Wittgenstein, 1969. 160). In my view this remark is very interesting to understand the nature of basis of knowledge and the doubt.

When Wittgenstein claims that: “Something here is universal...”, I consider this statement as the most important one. It is the fact that this is the only thing from which we can start when overwhelming doubt though this process is accompanied by some difficulties. What way we

choose every direction has some problematic developments, but we should choose some system or viewpoint as preferred and I think such should be the most effective one.

I think Wittgenstein's view about certainty does not remove problem of scepticism in philosophy though it introduces very important point. The problem of certainty necessarily should be discussed in pairs with theory of language game; statements are considered as certain in particular language game, but this is not what Wittgenstein claims as belief but more rationality should be put in this moment. I think we consider some statements as certain not because of our believing in them but this is belief based on more justified and various causalities which can easily not be named as belief. Example, when Wittgenstein discusses that we have belief of knowledge gathered by mankind or that we accept fundamental statements as certain on the basis of belief, I think this belief is not what we ordinarily call belief or this is not belief at all, there is a rational moment here that determines our disposition.

5. Conclusion

I think that that Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy is united by the questions of certainty and reasonable doubt. Wittgenstein's view of reasonable doubt has some crossings with Descartes' rationalism, with natural light of mind, though Wittgenstein criticizes Descartes doubting, scepticism and considers such scepticism as impossible because such doubt is not reasonable. I think Wittgenstein unites his theory of meaning and epistemology by the problem of doubting. Here are united also theory of language game and problem of certainty. The basis of language game is presented by the certain statements which are the basis of our knowledge. Reasonable doubt is the possibility of accepting certainty as the basis; I think this is the most important moment to understand Wittgenstein's philosophy and generally to comprehend the connection between epistemology and the theory of meaning. Realization of this moment can help us understand unifically not only the parts of Wittgenstein's different philosophies but also it can invest in the understanding the connections between epistemology and the theory of meaning.

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