

Unfounded foundations, grammatical relativism and Wittgenstein, the educator

Fundamentos Infundados, Relativismo Gramatical e Wittgenstein, o Educador

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Abstract

This is a critical review of Michael Peters's book, *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality*, in which I focus on the following assumptions in order to problematize them: Wittgenstein's supposed relativism and anti-foundationalism; his status as the leading representative of analytic philosophy; and the absence of mention in Peters's book of the publication of Wittgenstein's spelling dictionary in 1926, after a period in which he became a primary school teacher. The philosopher's preface to this dictionary, in my view, contains some evidence that may have led him to revise his main theses in the *Tractatus*, giving rise to a second linguistic turn in his thinking, in which the concepts of "language game", "family resemblances" and "following rules" are forged by him with the purpose of a grammatical description of the uses of problematic philosophical concepts. I argue that this phase of his life as an educator was intrinsically linked to that of the philosopher, leading him to an intermediate position between relativism and dogmatism.

Keywords: The later Wittgenstein. Philosophy of education. Grammatical description. Grammatical relativism. Antidogmatism.

Resumo

Trata-se de uma revisão crítica do livro de Michael Peters, *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality*, em que me concentro nos seguintes pressupostos, tendo em vista problematizá-los: o suposto relativismo e antifundacionismo de Wittgenstein; seu *status* como o principal representante da filosofia analítica; e a ausência de menção no livro de Peter da publicação do dicionário ortográfico de Wittgenstein em 1926, após um período em que se tornou professor de escola primária. O prefácio do filósofo a este dicionário, a meu ver, contém alguns indícios que podem tê-lo levado a revisar suas principais teses no *Tractatus*, dando origem a uma segunda virada linguística em seu pensamento, em que os conceitos de "jogo de linguagem", "semelhanças de família" e "seguir regras" são forjadas por ele com a finalidade de uma descrição gramatical dos usos de conceitos filosóficos problemáticos. Defendo que essa fase de sua vida como educador estava intrinsecamente ligada à do filósofo, levando-o a uma posição intermediária entre o relativismo e o dogmatismo.

Palavras-chave: O segundo Wittgenstein. Filosofia da educação. Descrição gramatical. Relativismo gramatical. Antidogmatismo.

1. Introduction

The publishing of the doctoral thesis by Michael Peters (1984), forty years after its defense, deals with a good part of the discussions which were brought up in a time when the philosophical educational thinking [1940-1980] inspired in the linguistic turn from the beginning of that century aimed at approaching the topic of rationality. Throughout the six first chapters, Peters deals with this topic using different perspectives, that are put together by him in two antagonistic positions: a conception of Philosophy-as-epistemology, which directs its efforts at “providing a set of universal standards or criteria to rationally evaluate competing knowledge claim” and the other which is supported by a Hegelian interpretation of the later Wittgenstein, “which is consonant with the historical notion of rationality I seek to develop” (Peters, 2020, p. 13). From this second position, Peters's main goal was “to argue for a notion of constitutive rationality over and against an absolutist one and to firmly advocate the move from logical to historical models” (Peters, 2020, p. 14).

According to Peters in his doctoral thesis, with the publishing of Peter Winch's book (1958) *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relationship to Philosophy*, a new linguistic turn took place, having as the target to answer the question of significant action in different cultures, using Wittgenstein¹'s ideas as a basis. Alongside this movement, the humanist psychology distances itself from behaviorism, having as one of its results the search for a concept of rationality in education that will question the existence of universal principles of human comprehension, as it was defended by Descartes, Locke, Kant and even by the early Wittgenstein. It is from this moment on that the concept of constitutive rationality began to arise, based on the ideas from the second moment of Wittgenstein thinking and its impacts on the philosophy of science, as well as on the ideas of the recent continental phenomenology.

Nevertheless, in this historical path followed by Peters that has as its investigative axis the problem of rationality, some of its assumptions about Wittgenstein called my attention and I would like to investigate them. I will focus on three of them, which, as I see it, lead to an interpretation of the concept of constitutive rationality that highlights the historical aspects of rationality whilst leaving in the shadows other aspects of the later Wittgenstein's second turn that I also consider to be relevant to clarify the problem of rationality. Here we have the assumptions: a) the later *Wittgenstein's ideas would have been appropriated by analytic philosophers in the same spirit in which they were formulated by him*, while our philosopher's concern, ever since he returned to Cambridge in 1929, was to dissociate himself from the scientism and analytical appropriation of his therapeutic results making it clear that the purposes of his philosophy were very different from those of his colleagues from the academia; b) the philosopher would have published only the *Tractatus* and one more article in his lifetime, *with no mention of the spelling dictionary published by him in 1926* (when he worked as a primary teacher in rural schools in the countryside of Austria), the result of literacy activities developed with his students that might have inspired the philosopher to rethink the language conception

¹ In this work, Winch opposes the idea that social studies should aspire to a standard of scientificity typical of natural sciences postulating an extreme separation within them, and the Western scientific rationality is then seen by him as only one among others. Despite the fact that many years later (2003), Winch, in the preface to the second edition of this work, will recognize mistakes in his interpretation of Wittgenstein's late work, there is no doubt that this small, great work of his was a milestone not only to the thinking of social and cultural studies, but also to the contemporary philosophy itself, by highlighting the importance of the Austrian's philosopher reflections on the linguistic sense, in view of the problem of rationality (distinct in different cultures).

presented in the *Tractatus*; and finally c) *the philosopher would have taken, in the second phase of his thinking, an anti-foundationalist position*, disregarding other interpretations that would say the opposite², based on Wittgenstein's own philosophical observations.

It is clear that the above problematizations do not touch even remotely on the merit of Peters's work here in question; on the contrary, they should only be seen as an opportunity for dialogue with other interpretations of the mature Wittgenstein, which are present in my own research on the fertility of his ideas for the field of education.

2. Wittgenstein, an analytical philosopher?

Wittgenstein has been considered by part of the philosophical and educational community as the main representative of the analytical field of contemporary philosophy, and thus, the ones who defend his ideas in the educational area would be automatically aligned with a conception of neoliberal and conservative education, and therefore, contrary to the conceptions of education that has as members philosophers that represent the post-truth era, such as Deleuze³, Derrida, Foucault and others. However, increasingly, philosophers of education are taking up Wittgenstein's writings from other perspectives that, in my view, are proving to be more fruitful for the educational debate, such as Paul Smeyers, James Marshall, Nicholas Burbules, Jeff Stickney, Michael Luntley and of course Michael Peters⁴ himself, among others; and even thinkers from other areas of knowledge have revisited Wittgenstein's work in order to shed new light on the anthropological (as seen in Clifford Geertz⁵'s *The Interpretation of Cultures*) and political debates (among other authors, Chantal Mouffe⁶ stands out), as has also been intensified in recent decades the use of Wittgensteinian concepts in the studies of psychology, psychoanalysis and mathematics education (Jacques Bouveresse⁷, Anna Sfard⁸), among others. All of them heavily influenced by the ideas of the mature Wittgenstein showing no affinities with the movement of the so-called analytic philosophers of education, much less with the Oxford linguists and philosophers (Austin, Grice, Benveniste, Searle) or the members of the Circle of Vienna (Schlick, Waismann), these last fellow countrymen of Wittgenstein, and sharply criticized by him⁹.

² I am particularly talking about the transcendental interpretation of Wittgenstein's ideas, in which I include myself. Cf. Oliveira (2019, p. 585).

³ Deleuze, for instance, loathed Wittgenstein, as he once claimed in one of his interviews about *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*. When he gets to the letter "W", Deleuze says that the Austrian philosopher is a "philosophical catastrophe" and a few other accusatory adjectives. Cf. <http://clinicand.com/o-abecedario-de-gilles-deleuze/>

⁴ Cf. Michael A. Peters, Nicholas Burbules and Paul Smeyers (2008). *Showing and Doing: Wittgenstein as a Pedagogical Philosopher*. London: Paradigm Publishers; and more recently, Peters, Michael A. & Stickney, Jeff. (2017). *A Companion to Wittgenstein on Education Pedagogical Investigations* (ebook). Singapore: Springer.

⁵ Cf. Geertz, Clifford (1978). *A Interpretação das Culturas*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Zahar.

⁶ Cf. Mouffe, Chantal (2001). *The legacy of Wittgenstein: Pragmatism or Deconstruction*. Frankfurt am Main – Nova Iorque: Peter Lang.

⁷ Cf. Jacques Bouveresse (1991). *Philosophie, mythologie et pseudo-science. Wittgenstein lecteur de Freud*. Paris: Editions de l'Éclat; Jacques Bouveresse (1996). *Wittgenstein reads Freud: The Myth of the Unconscious*. Princeton University Press, and Jacques Bouveresse (1988). *Les Pays des Possibles - Wittgenstein, Les Mathématiques et le Monde Réel*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

⁸ Cf. SFARD, A. (2008) *Thinking as communicating: human development, the growth of discourses, and mathematizing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Although I greatly admire the rigorous and fertile work of Israel Scheffler, Gilbert Ryle, Michael Oakeshott, John Passmore, and many others in the analytic philosophy of Anglo-American education, particularly in the 1960's and 1970's, and even using them in my own texts, the contribution of the second Wittgenstein to education, without a doubt, is fundamentally found in his original way of doing philosophy, refusing to postulate theses and clarifying thought confusions that came from an exclusively referential conception of language. In the 80's, the

More recently, two collections in the field of philosophy of education have been published, which I consider a milestone in the history of philosophy of education from a Wittgensteinian perspective: the collections already mentioned above, *Philosophy and Education: Accepting Wittgenstein's Challenge* (1995), organized by Paul Smeyers and James Marshall, in which Michael Peters also contributed an article; and *A Companion to Wittgenstein on Education* (2017), edited by Michael A. Peters and Jeff Stickney. In my view, most of the texts in these two collections significantly distance themselves from an interpretation of Wittgenstein as an analytic philosopher, making way for other philosophers of education to be inspired by the anti-dogmatic spirit of his philosophy, in addition to occasional conceptual analyses, characteristics of analytic philosophy as it developed in its early years, and which had been sharply criticized by Wittgenstein.

Indeed, after returning to Cambridge in 1929, Wittgenstein started becoming uneasy about the dissemination and appropriation of his ideas by the analytic philosophers of Oxford and by the scientists and philosophers of the Vienna Circle, who were using them for entirely different purposes¹⁰. In his Cambridge lectures between 1930 and 1932, he told his students that the philosophical practice of his time was a practice of professionals, of “skillful philosophers”, by applying methods molded in the scientific ideal of precision and impersonality (Moreno, 2019, p.55), reducing philosophy to the elaboration of new theses. However, this criticism of Wittgenstein was not aimed at adopting a method, as he himself was proud to have found his own method. However, unlike expert philosophers, his method consisted of *dissolving* problems of a conceptual nature, not of building new theses. In his classes Wittgenstein would have stated that,

The nimbus of philosophy has been lost. For we now have a method of doing philosophy and can speak of *skilful* philosophers. Compare the difference between alchemy and chemistry; chemistry has a method and we can speak of skilful chemists. But once a method has been found the opportunities for the expression of personality are correspondingly restricted. The tendency of our age is to restrict such opportunities; this is characteristic of an age of declining culture or without culture. A great man need be no less great in such periods, but philosophy is now being reduced to a matter of skill and the philosopher's nimbus is disappearing. (Wittgenstein, 1988, p. 24)

In the passage above, Wittgenstein refers to the new philosophers of his time as being of a scientism¹¹ nature, for adopting the model of the natural sciences for their investigations. While the method that Wittgenstein had discovered went in the opposite direction:

In science you can compare what you are doing with, say, building a house. You must first lay a firm foundation; once it is laid it must not again be touched or moved. In philosophy we are not laying foundations but tidying up a room, in the process of which we have to touch everything a dozen times. (Wittgenstein, 1988, p. 28)

So, although Wittgenstein's influence on the members of the Vienna circle and the Oxford philosophers was immense, paradoxically he turned his back on them all, literally. The

philosopher of education D.H. Hamlyn (1989) well noticed in his text “Education and Wittgenstein’s Philosophy”: “(...), nothing that Wittgenstein wrote was by intention a contribution to the philosophy of education” (p.213) concluding further on that the interest of his philosophical reflection for education lies fundamentally on what “he has to say in philosophy in general” (p. 221), and I would add, for therapeutic purposes.

¹⁰ Some of them have had contact with his ideas using the notes taken by Wittgenstein’s students in his classes in Cambridge, which were later compiled into what came to be known as *The Blue and Brown Books*. The *Blue Book* original text was dictated to students by Wittgenstein in the course he gave from 1933 to 1934 and the *Brown Book* in the following year.

¹¹This very same criticism was also directed to anthropologists, such as the British Sir James Frazer. Cf. *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough*. Translation to Portuguese and notes commented by João José R. L. Almeida. Access link: <http://www.psicanaliseefilosofia.com.br>

episodes in which Wittgenstein reluctantly agreed to meet some of the members of the Vienna Circle became famous, and to the surprise of some of them, when they were finally greeted by our philosopher, he literally turned his back on them and began to read some poem. According to Monk (1995):

To convince Wittgenstein to participate in these meetings, Schlick needed to assure him that the discussions did not have to be philosophical; he could talk about whatever he wanted. Sometimes, to the surprise of those present in the meetings, Wittgenstein turned his back on everyone and began to read poems. In particular (...) he would read the poems of Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet who was then very much in vogue in Vienna and whose poems express a mystical posture diametrically opposed to that of the members of the Schlick Circle. [...] For positivists, clarity goes hand in hand with the scientific method; for Carnap in particular, it was a shock to realize that the author of the book they considered the very paradigm of philosophical precision and clarity was so determinedly unscientific in temperament and method. (Monk, 1995, pp. 225-6)

In fact, Wittgenstein was keen on showing the distance from his method in relation to the purposes of the scientists of his time, as we also see in one of his prefaces to *Philosophical Investigations* written in 1930, prior to the one which was actually published:

It makes no difference to me whether the typical Western scientist will come to understand or value me, since he does not understand the spirit in my writing. (...) Their activity is based on building an increasingly complicated product. And clarity itself is at the service of that end; it is not an end in itself. For me, on the contrary, clarity, transparency, is an end in itself. It is not of my interest to start a construction, but rather to have in front of me, transparently, the bases for possible constructions. Thus and therefore, my final purpose is different from that of scientists and my way of thinking different from theirs. (Wittgenstein, apud Moreno, 2019, pp.63-64)

Not that Wittgenstein's method didn't involve some kind of skill, but it would be of a very different kind from skillful philosophers, as the skill or expertise required in his own method was very difficult to obtain, requiring an effort that would many years later be described by his colleague and friend Moore as follows: "One difficulty was that it required a "sort of thinking" to which we are not accustomed and to which we have not been trained - a sort of thinking very different from what is required in the sciences. And he said that the required skill could not be acquired merely by hearing lectures: discussion was essential." (Moore, Apud Moreno, 2019, p. 59)

Therefore, it was not a method that would lead to theoretical truths from the application of canonical procedures that would lead to exact and precise results, accumulating them in a progressive way, but on the contrary, the purpose of its method was only to persuade its interlocutor to change his will to *do something* and perceive new ways of seeing something. According to Moreno (2019):

One can see that it was fundamentally about *doing something* using the philosophical reflection "*to get something settled*" – and not, let us remember, about making new results and accumulating from them solutions and new theses. It was about doing something to intervene in the *will* of their interlocutors, making them do something they did not mean to do – even if that did not change their beliefs – namely, it was about *persuading them* into realizing new points of view and not about *convincing them* of the truth using reason and definite grounds. The therapeutic *action* should focus on the will and have as a result a new *voluntary action* from the interlocutors: admitting and respecting new points of views about the meaning of the concept. Here is the practical aspect of the philosophical-therapeutic method, in its ethical combat against dogmatism rooted in grammatical will. And once again, it must not be forgotten that, for Wittgenstein, therapy must be, above all, an exercise in self-therapy. This ethical and personal attitude has, as we see, consequences in Wittgenstein's own philosophical

activity, making him avoid presenting positive results in the form of new theses on mathematical, logical, psychological, perceptual, ethical or aesthetic facts, facts of a special nature, but traditionally presented according to the grammatical model of the empirical facts of the natural sciences. (pp. 60-61)

So, unlike the analytic philosophers, Wittgenstein did not intend to produce new theses following the models of the natural sciences, but to do the *therapy* of concepts that are dogmatically applied by certain philosophical strands, still tied to an exclusively referential model of language. Interestingly, he applied this same method in his Cambridge classes with his students: “I’m not teaching you anything; I’m trying to persuade you to do something.” (Wittgenstein, apud. Moreno, 2019, p. 60), an attitude that, in my opinion, is still quite inspiring to think about the relationship between teaching and learning, and above all, to think about the purposes of teaching. (Gottschalk, 2020b)

This entire digression aimed at emphasizing the enormous distance between the late Wittgenstein's therapeutic method and that of the analytic philosophers, *including the analytic philosophers of education* presented in Peters's recent book, throughout the historical analysis that he develops in the third chapter. Wittgenstein's therapy, which makes it possible to relativize dogmatic images that result from traditional philosophical theories, aiming at the cure of confused thinking, bypasses the procedures of the analytical philosophers mentioned by Peters, whose purposes are of another order, namely, classificatory purposes of educational concepts and precise delimitation of their grammars. Wittgenstein's philosophical spirit, on the contrary, will explore the limits of meaning, inventing unusual situations to mobilize the will of his interlocutors to change their way of thinking. This style of philosophy has perhaps not been sufficiently understood by philosophers of education who limit themselves to a classificatory analysis of educational concepts, without realizing the potential of Wittgensteinian therapy to see new aspects of these same concepts, thus fighting dogmatism that assault us all the time.

3. Wittgenstein’s spelling dictionary and the problem of rationality

In the preface to his book, Peters claims that “he [Wittgenstein] only published the *Tractatus* and one paper during his lifetime” (preface, p. v) and also mentions the fact that Wittgenstein was a primary school teacher (1920-1926) right after the First World War¹². However, Peters does not mention that one of the activities that the philosopher carried out with the children was the creation of a spelling dictionary, published in 1926, and whose preface heralds significant changes in his thinking.

In fact, the period of life in which the philosopher dedicated himself to teaching children of various ages to read and write, has only recently attracted more attention, and has been explored by several authors in various fields of knowledge, from the innovative linguistic issue in the organization of words (Oliveira, 2020; Hübner, 1977; Menger, 1994) to the more specifically educational and philosophical issues (Gottschalk, 2009; Reis, 2010; Moreno, 2000; Monk, 1995; Bartley, 1978), especially concerning the methods of active pedagogy advocated by the Glöckel Reform employed by Wittgenstein in his classes, while explicitly rejecting some of its principles, as can be seen in his preface to the spelling dictionary he published, or even in letters where he reports on the activities developed with his students.

A spelling dictionary aimed at the communities in which Wittgenstein taught proved to be essential so that their young students could be satisfactorily literate, escaping from the

¹² From the reports of Wittgenstein's biographers (Monk, 1995; Bartley III, 1978), we learn that he himself asked the Austrian government to be sent to very poor villages in Austria, totally devastated by the First World War.

difficulties faced when students needed to check the existing dictionaries at that time; for example, when they had to find certain compound words, having in mind that the German language is dominated by them. Young children were simply unable to separate a compound word into two or more simple words to find the correct way to spell them, and ended up giving up on using the available dictionaries. To overcome this specific difficulty, Wittgenstein chose to group words derived from the same root word, breaking with the linearity of a traditional dictionary. Commentators on his work interpret his decision as one of the factors that started his new conception of language (Bartley III, 1978; Moreno, 2000; Gottschalk, 2009; Reis, 2010), when realizing that the same word could be used in very different ways related to each other through *family resemblances*, one of Wittgenstein's fundamental concepts forged in the second phase of his thinking.

I insist on this point, given the unusual organization of Wittgenstein's spelling dictionary, resulting from the establishment of new criteria for the words chosen one by one by him to be included in this dictionary, and given the signs present in its preface indicating a shift in the philosopher's way of seeing the use of words in those communities where he was teaching (with different dialects), we have enough suggestive elements to conclude that this teaching experience may have led him to revisit the issues that were still open in the *Tractatus*, his first major work, which had as its central theme the relationships between language, thought and the world from an atomist and referential view of language. The dictionary seems to have led him to recognize the multiplicity of uses we make of our words and linguistic expressions, thus breaking with his earlier figurative and atomistic conception of language. Thus, here we have an unusual case of a pedagogical practice having surreptitiously led to a new philosophical conception, and not vice versa, as it usually happens.

Therefore, once again, this new digression is justified by the strangeness of the absence of a mention of Wittgenstein's dictionary in Peters's book, a publication disdained by Wittgensteinian philosophers because it is a period of his life that "officially" had been dedicated only to teaching. However, it is precisely because Wittgenstein had this teaching experience that Wittgensteinian philosophers of *education* should, in my view, look more closely at the possible relations of his pedagogical practices with his subsequent reflection on the limits and constitution of linguistic meanings, with immediate repercussions for issues related to teaching and learning, among them, the problem of rationality, seen by him as multiple ways of thinking and acting inside *language-games*, as we will see next. In fact, years later he would make the following therapeutic observation, which is among others, of great interest to the philosophy of education: "Am I doing child psychology? - I am making a connection between the concept of teaching and the concept of meaning." (Zettel, § 412). And a little further on, he insists on the importance of training in the acquisition of meanings, urging educators to pay more attention to this initial phase: "Any explanation has its foundation in training. (Educators ought to remember this.) (Zettel, § 419). In other words, through teaching we transmit rules for meaning, which express a chain of reasons rooted, ultimately, in our forms of life. And that takes us to one of the most famous paragraphs of PI:

"How am I able to follow a rule?" - If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my acting in this way in complying with the rule. Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do." (Wittgenstein, PI §217)

In this paragraph, the question of rationality takes on another dimension, by highlighting the conventional nature of the rules we learn to follow in our ways of life. There is no more room for a single and universal rationality conception. However, contrary to Peters's Hegelian interpretation of Wittgenstein, we do not have here a skeptical Wittgenstein answer to the

problem of rationality as conceived from the point of view of a philosophy-as-epistemology, in which universal principles of human understanding were presupposed, established since Descartes, passing through Locke and Kant, and even present in the early Wittgenstein. In the second phase of his thinking, Wittgenstein will assume an intermediate position between the relativism and dogmatism of traditional philosophy, which makes it possible, in my view, to have another notion of reason, so to say different rationalities constituted in language, or rather, in the various "language-games"¹³.

4. Was Wittgenstein a relativist?

As David Stern (1991) points out in his text, "Heraclitus' and Wittgenstein's River Images: stepping twice into the same river", Wittgenstein draws an analogy between language and a river, in which empirical propositions would be in the flow of the river, while grammatical propositions would be the "hardened" empirical ones that laid themselves down in the riverbed. This image of language appears in his last writings, in *On Certainty*, as we can see in the following paragraphs:

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, OC § 96)

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. (OC § 97)

Through this analogy between language and a river, Wittgenstein makes a distinction between two types of propositions: empirical and what he calls grammatical. Empirical propositions can be verified in the world, having a descriptive function (they are in the river flow), while grammatical statements, which would be crystallized empirical propositions, end up in the riverbed. The latter ones would be our unquestionable certainties, our deepest convictions. For example, the conviction that "This is my hand", that "The Earth exists", that "Every object is identical to itself", "Everybody has extension" etc., that is, statements that involve a need, we cannot imagine their opposite. They are, as Wittgenstein says, our unfounded foundations, as they come to play the role of rules we have learned to blindly follow. I do not see, therefore, as Peters suggests, a dissolution of form and content in Wittgenstein; on the contrary, our empirical propositions can be seen as expressing our doubtful knowledge (they are part of the river's flow), whereas grammatical propositions shape these contents, "as channels for such empirical propositions". Furthermore, when we enunciate something, we know how to discern whether we are making a grammatical or empirical use of the statement in question. Not making this distinction is one of the main sources of conceptual confusion; it is when the traditional philosopher starts to do metaphysics, believing that a grammatical proposition would also be describing something in the world, a confusion that, in my view, also occurs in pedagogical practices linked to a referential conception of language (Gottschalk, 2020).

According to Wittgenstein, grammatical propositions are gradually constituted, forming a system of utterances related to each other, which he calls the Grammar of uses of our

¹³ The Wittgensteinian concept of language-game is established in the second phase of the philosopher's thinking. Quite succinctly, it designates situations of use of words, involved in various activities, including interlocutors, feelings and objects which are used as samples of how we apply words, and other pragmatic elements (PI, §§ 7, 23). These are regulated activities, hence the importance of the concept of "following rules" in Wittgenstein.

language. This Grammar would be autonomous in relation to the empirical, owing nothing to the facts of the world. Even though a grammatical statement may have originated in the empirical world, over time it can gradually crystallize as a grammatical proposition, becoming a *condition of meaning* for the other propositions of our language. Furthermore, this system of propositions that we follow blindly also *constitutes* the meaning of the objects of the world: “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)” (Wittgenstein, PI § 373) The grammatical propositions are intertwined with each other, constituting our view of the world, becoming a condition of meaning for what we think, say, feel and do. In this sense, Wittgenstein is by no means relativist, as we see in the following passage from his last writings in *On Certainty*¹⁴:

It is quite sure that motor cars don't grow out of the earth. We feel that if someone could believe the contrary he could believe everything that we say is untrue, and could question everything that we hold to be sure. But how does this one belief hang together with all the rest? We should like to say that someone who could believe that does not accept our whole system of verification. This system is something that a human being acquires by means of observation and instruction. I intentionally do not say "learns". (OC § 279)

As Wittgenstein observes, this system is acquired, not explicitly learned, its utterances entail a need. The questioning of one of them would be to question all the others. It is not possible to doubt them; they express our certainties, our deepest convictions. In this way, I think Wittgenstein dissolves skeptical arguments, to the extent that these more deeply held beliefs contain a need that we do not let go of, it must be so. However, throughout his book, Peters maintains the idea that Wittgenstein would have taken a relativist position, even in the last chapter that came after the original text of his doctoral thesis. Despite that, in its preface, he admits “that beliefs do not stand in isolation: they are part of an interconnected system, web or framework, for which there is no external justification” (p. 13), resorting then to Hegel's ideas to highlight the dynamic character of these structures *throughout history*. In fact, Wittgenstein's observations emphasize changes in the “river of language”, as we have seen above (OC §§96-97), but in another sense, different from the historicity of our beliefs. I think that Wittgenstein's “ace in the hole” goes beyond occasional changes in our most fundamental beliefs over time, as he observed that the same proposition can play different roles depending on the context in which it is used. An example from Wittgenstein himself is the empirical proposition, “Water boils at 100°C”. Although this statement was initially considered a property of the natural element water, and therefore, with a *descriptive* function, scientists at some point in the history of science started to use this same statement as a *criterion* for what it means to be water, that is, that statement now has a *grammatical* rather than an empirical use. In other words, the same statement starts to have a normative function; for something to be water it *must* have a boiling point of 100°C under certain conditions of temperature and pressure. Therefore, it is not exactly a conceptual *evolution* that takes place throughout the history of the concept of water, but another *use* of this concept, which may, at a later time, return to an empirical use.

Another very enlightening example, this one totally disconnected from a historical development of the concept, is when a child is learning the name of colors. Suppose they ask us, “What color is red?” We point to a red object and say emphatically, “*This* is red!” At this moment we are using this proposition normatively, saying *what it is* to be red, that is, we are making a grammatical use of the proposition. Once the child learns the concept of red, they will then be able to use the same statement to describe the red objects around them, that is, this *same statement* will have a descriptive function. In other words, it is not just a question of a historical

¹⁴ In this text, I will use the acronyms OC for *On Certainty*, PI for *Philosophical Investigations*, and Z for *Zettel*.

evolution in the use of our concepts, but of different uses of the same proposition *in different contexts*. As Wittgenstein says in the passage above, it is in usage that “I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself” (OC § 97).

Thus, we can conclude that there is no relativism in Wittgenstein in the sense that *everything goes*; at most we could speak of a *grammatical* relativism, in which the foundations for what is being said contains a need: it *must* be so, given certain circumstances. Although these fundamentals could be different in another form of life, we do not give up on them when we think, act and express ourselves through language. We follow the rules blindly, as Wittgenstein says, without hesitation.

5. Was Wittgenstein an anti-foundationalist?

At the time Peters wrote his thesis, his aim was to reconcile antagonistic positions such as Michael Young's humanism and Harris and Matthews' structuralism “in the proposal of a Wittgensteinian-inspired research programme in philosophy of education”. As already announced in the first chapter of his thesis, Peters makes a Hegelian interpretation of the later Wittgenstein that makes it possible to establish relations between him and Marx, as well as with the historical turn of philosophers of science such as Kuhn, Toulmin and Feyerabend, and also with Gadamer. An ambitious project, carried out with mastery, and which had as one of its cores to show the movement that is consolidating “from logical to historical models of scientific rationality” (p. 15). Lastly, inspired by the debate between Gadamer and Habermas, he will conclude his thesis proposing the adoption of “the notions of tradition and dialogue as the basis of an historicist theory of rationality (and knowledge)” (p. 17), with the expectation of implications not only for the philosophy of education but also for educational research.

I would, however, now like to problematize the third assumption, namely, that Wittgenstein would have assumed in the second phase of his thinking an anti-foundationalist position. Peters's position about it does not undermine his project of a theory of rationality linked to historical models of scientific rationality, but this claim may restrict the meaning of rationality in the second phase of Wittgenstein's thinking as if there was only one historical aspect to be unraveled. In fact, in chapter 2 of his thesis, Peters states that Wittgenstein after *Tractatus* gave up “the notion of foundations for language: as no justification for linguistic practices could be found in an independent reality outside language, if it was sought at all, it must lie within them, and ultimately within the form of life they, in part, comprised.” (p.35) However, the fact that the philosopher had given up the notion of foundations for language, as stated above, does not mean he had given up every type of fundament.

Even in the last chapter of his book, written later, Peters reiterates Wittgenstein's supposed anti-foundationalism by comparing him to Dewey. According to Peters, the debate between the new historicists and the dominant positivist movement in the 1960s was intensified by contributions of “the work by Foucault on ‘discursive formations’”, and by Ian Hacking on historical ontologies and styles of thinking” (p. 228). At the same time, it also starts the search for the foundation in the historical-social sciences in relation to the natural sciences, seeking the specific in opposition to the universality of natural laws and the causal explanations of the natural sciences. In this context, the concept of rationality would have acquired new meanings throughout history, highlighting two modalities that would still be very active: the instrumental view (means-ends) and the formal version (rules-based). Mainly in the philosophy of education, the theory that “education is and should concern the advance of Reason” (p. 229) with universal standards or criteria of rationality remains, and it starts to be opposed by Dewey, Wittgenstein e Foucault. According to Peters, the three thinkers “advanced non-foundationalist accounts of

knowledge and ultimately paved the way for post-foundationalist based on ‘the primacy of practice’” (p. 229). Later on, he compares Dewey to Wittgenstein, affirming that Wittgenstein would be as anti-foundationalist as Dewey:

Dewey’s (1960, orig. 1929) *The Quest for Certainty* and Wittgenstein’s (1969) *On Certainty* might be read as a form of epistemological contextualism that asks foundationalism: they are alike in the sense that they do not believe that there is some fundamental belief or principle which is the basic ground or foundation of inquiry, knowledge and rationality. (Peters. 2020, p. 229)

Thus, the proximity between Wittgenstein and Dewey would be due to the fact that both reject “all forms of foundationalism to emphasize the primacy of practice and practical reason” (p. 236). However, from my point of view, Peters disregards the enormous difference between them considering both the fundamentals of meaning (expressed linguistically by grammatical propositions in the case of Wittgenstein) and the criteria of truth (which is reduced to *the* criterion of utility, in the case of Dewey, hence his anti-foundationalism). In Dewey’s pragmatism, something is considered true if it proves to be useful in effectively solving a given problem; while for Wittgenstein, utility was seen by him as *one* of the criteria of truth, among others, within language games. In other words, from Wittgenstein’s perspective, as opposed to Dewey’s, something would not be true *because* it is useful, but it is useful because it is considered true:

But you aren’t a pragmatist? No. For I am not saying that a proposition is true if it is useful. The usefulness, i.e., the use, gives the proposition its special sense, the language-game gives it. And insofar as a rule is often given in such a way that it proves useful, and mathematical propositions are essentially akin to rules, usefulness is reflected in mathematical truths. (Wittgenstein, RPP, §266)

Obviously, our philosopher does not defend the existence of definitive, extralinguistic and universal ultimate foundations. But this does not mean that there are no ultimate foundations that guide our investigation, knowledge and rationality, within our form of life¹⁵. The Grammar of uses we carry within us can be seen as part of deep agreements in language, shared by a language-speaking community within a particular culture. It is not an agreement of an empirical historical-sociological nature, or as Wittgenstein says, an agreement of opinions, but something deeper: “‘So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?’ - What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life”. (PI § 241) In other words, the grammar of life forms is our language games, which we are gradually introduced to through agreements in language rather than through empirical sociological, psychological or historical processes. Grammar is not given, but rather a *construction* that constitutes our world-picture (*Weltbild*):

In general I take as true what is found in text-books, of geography for example. Why? I say: All these facts have been confirmed a hundred times over. But how do I know that? What is my evidence for it? I have a world-picture [Weltbild]. Is it true or false? Above all it is the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting. The propositions describing it are not all equally subject to testing. (OC §162)

In turn, this basis to “all my enquiring and asserting” is gradually constituted through education and science as Wittgenstein observes further on: “‘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.” (OC §298) One can see these shared certainties as a

¹⁵ Most of the time in this text, I am interpreting the term “form of life” as used by the later Wittgenstein in the sense of a human form of life distinct from the form of life of non-human animals.

kind of mythology, not in the metaphysical sense of *a priori* truths, but in the sense of expressing *a need* that we do not give up. As I have already pointed out above, although these truths may even have an empirical origin, at some point they crystallize in the form of grammatical propositions, namely, statements that we no longer put to the test: it *must* be so. These propositions are related to each other in such a way that to question one of them would be to question the entire system of propositions, as Wittgenstein observed in OC § 279.

Thus, from formal and informal education, our image of the world is gradually being constituted. It is not up to this linguistic level to speak of truth or falsehood, that is, it is not possible to question the propositions that express this image or even confirm them. These propositions most of the time are not even explicitly taught, but are sort of “swallowed”, as he observes in this other paragraph of OC:

I am told, for example, that someone climbed this mountain many years ago. Do I always enquire into the reliability of the teller of this story, and whether the mountain did exist years ago? A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it. It doesn't learn at all that that mountain has existed for a long time: that is, the question whether it is so doesn't arise at all. It swallows this consequence down, so to speak, together with what it learns. (OC §143)

The convictions that we acquire (swallow) about the world start to constitute an *open* system of statements shared by a community and that become a *condition of meaning* for the other propositions, certainties that become the *foundations* of all possible knowledge. So, I wouldn't say that Wittgenstein gives up on fundamentals, but simply observes that they are unfounded fundamentals, as he used to say, and so well expressed in his famous paragraph from the above mentioned PI, in which he uses the metaphor of the sword that bends when it hits hard rock (our life forms). Philosophical confusion arises precisely when extralinguistic foundations are sought for this hard rock linguistically expressed by grammatical propositions, as if these had a descriptive function, referring to something in the world external or internal to the subject. To clarify these confusions will be the task of the later Wittgenstein, namely, to show that confused thinking comes from a strictly referential conception of language, when it is assumed that *all propositions must* refer to something extralinguistic, disregarding the multiplicity of functions of our language. This will be the purpose of his philosophical therapy: “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.” (PI, §124) In other words, it is not philosophy's role to base language, but only *to describe its grammar of uses* as we actually use it, with therapeutic purpose, namely, to cure confused thinking. However, Peters interprets this same statement (PI, §124) differently: “Clearly, Wittgenstein is repudiating the notion of foundations of language, and thereby, the idea of a linguistic first philosophy whose central concern is the search for criteria which define, in the form of necessary conditions, our most fundamental concepts and beliefs.” (Peters, p. 36)

Although, in fact, it is not for philosophical therapy to present ultimate criteria of meaning, it is precisely the description of grammatical propositions that interests Wittgenstein, it is the exploration of the linguistic foundations of meaning that makes it possible to clarify the confusions of traditional philosophy, by recognizing a paradigmatic function in them, rather than descriptive. According to Moreno:

(...) the therapist philosopher does not seek ataraxia, but, on the contrary, seeks clarification within the chaos: he does not limit himself to opposing philosophical theses to verify their equivalent virtues, but seeks to imagine new situations or forms of life that are unusual from the point of view of usual grammar, to show that the opposing theses are equally confused. The skeptic neutralizes the conflicting philosophical theses, denouncing their contradictory virtues, while the therapist

denounces their internal confusions. Wittgenstein does not suspend judgment as to fundamentals; on the contrary, he recognizes the fundamentals as being the limits of meaning and shows their conventional nature. Thus, he dissolves the confusions generated by the philosophical assumption, shared by the skeptic and the dogmatist, that the foundations are not mere conventions. The dissolution of confusions does not lead to ataraxia, but to a willingness, let us say, more generous, to admit other conventions as foundations of meaning. Here, there is no peace of mind, desired or achieved, because the ethical attitude assumes a constant state of dissatisfaction with its own values, concepts and paradigms. It is dissatisfaction with their own certainties, their forms of life that moves the therapist to always look for conceptual chaos: only then does he feel at ease, where habitual certainties can obscure the conventional nature of grammars, but especially of our own grammars, and where the healing process also begins. (Moreno, 2019, p. 51)

Thus, it is at the paradigmatic level, constituted by grammatical propositions, that philosophical difficulties arise, and it is precisely there, according to Moreno, that the therapist philosopher feels at ease: on the edge of conceptual chaos. By relativizing our conditions of meaning, the philosopher, in addition to clarifying conceptual confusions, expresses his ethical attitude by fighting the dogmatism of epistemological conceptions that presuppose extralinguistic foundations, or that naturalize foundations that are of a conventional nature. This is Wittgenstein's therapeutic purpose, far from the purposes of Dewey's utilitarian pragmatism or Foucault's historical approach.

Based on the reasons above, I disagree with Peters's assertions regarding Wittgenstein's supposed anti-foundationalism. Although in fact it is not about an extralinguistic foundation, I think that this does not authorize us to understand that for Wittgenstein there are no foundations. He only denies the existence of *definitive and extralinguistic* foundations, and emphasizes the importance of the existence of foundations *in language* as a condition for the constitution of meanings, and consequently, in a way, for the constitution of multiple rationalities. Rationalities that could be others, in another form of life.

6. Wittgenstein's second linguistic turn and the problem of rationality

Based on the above considerations, I venture to say that there was a second linguistic turn in the thinking of the later Wittgenstein, which provided us with a new understanding of the relationship among language, thought and world, revolutionary, and at the same time, still poorly understood in the field of education, and I dare say, even among some of the so-called Wittgensteinian philosophers. The concepts forged by him, such as the “language game”, “family resemblances”, “following rules”, among others, lead to a new conception of reason, based ultimately on the Grammar that “we carry within us”, as the philosopher says. We learn to follow its rules, which, by the way, do not determine what we think, do or speak, but only delimit a field of meaning within our various language games. The boundaries among these games admit a certain vagueness, which allows the passage from one game to another¹⁶, what we could call reasoning. We learn to play a game at the expense of another, depending on the context of use of our linguistic expressions.

To reason, therefore, from this Wittgensteinian perspective, is to be able to follow rules as well as the ability to invent them, without being *determined* by them. As Wittgenstein observes, the rules only establish a field of action (PI, §68), delimiting what makes sense and what does not. It is in this sense, I think, that the second Wittgenstein contributes to “dissolving”

¹⁶ This is, as I understand, what also allows the comprehension of cultures so different from ours (Gottschalk, 2019).

the problem of rationality (and not to solving it, as the analytic philosophers of his time intended).

Despite these therapeutic results of the mature Wittgenstein, which, in my view, completely clarify the problem of rationality, Peters ends his book by presenting a fuzzy portrait of our philosopher, by not distinguishing the linguistic turn in which he, in fact, initially participated, of his mature ideas, which inaugurate a second linguistic turn, even more radical than the first. Indeed, when characterizing Wittgenstein's contribution in the twentieth-century, even in the last chapter of his book, Peters (p. 234) still takes up certain statements that Wittgenstein had made in the *Tractatus*, in particular his last aphorism, “that we cannot speak of we must pass over in silence”, in which our philosopher refers to the propositions of ethics, aesthetics, religion and even those of philosophical discourse, as well as the idea that “the goal of philosophy is to provide an understanding or survey of our conceptual schema in order to resolve problems that arise from the misuse of words”, among other ideas of the early Wittgenstein. Whereas the mature Wittgenstein, in my view, pushed the linguistic turn in far more fertile directions, admitting the linguistic expression of those propositions, pulling them out of silence, and looking at them as expressive propositions of our language, which, by the way, is in order, it is not appropriate to reform it, as he observes in PI:

(...) it is clear that every sentence in our language ‘is in order as it is’. That is to say, we are not striving after an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language still had to be constructed by us. On the other hand, it seems clear that where there is sense, there must be perfect order. — So there must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence. (PI, 98)

Therefore, in the second phase of his thought, the aim of his philosophy will no longer be to present the fixed structure of language, its logical form, much less to reform it; but it will be the treatment of confused thinking, trapped by dogmatic images that are fixed in our thinking, such as the exclusively referential use of language, the mother image of all others. I think that fighting dogmatism is what most differentiates Wittgenstein from other representatives of the linguistic turn, and that makes him particularly interesting to think about the formation of a rational human being, or rather, of a *reasonable human* being, capable of fighting dogmatic positions, which has become even more essential in the dark times we are going through. In this sense, the formation of a reasonable human being may be seen as one of Wittgenstein's main goals, as an educator.

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