

Rationality is the activity of the most robust imagination (with apologies to Wallace Stevens): João José R. L. de Almeida, Antonio Miguel, Carolina Tamayo, Elizabeth Gomes Souza

**A Racionalidade é a Atividade Mais Robusta da Imaginação (com
desculpas a Wallace Stevens): João José R. L. de Almeida, Antonio Miguel,
Carolina Tamayo, Elizabeth Gomes Souza**

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Michael A. Peters

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1482-2975>

Beijing Normal University, PR China

michael.peters@waikato.ac.nz

This review sparkles like a bright navigation star at night. First, it is a collective review. (I am very keen on collective writing). Second, it makes reference and is framed by the Kadiweu indigenous language of Brazil. This is a real innovation that signals Wittgensteinian depth and one of the broad consequences of taking his thought seriously. Third, it is like a quartet put to music with spontaneous voices, though independent from one another, drawing out some of the consequences of my interpretation of Wittgenstein for decolonial discourse. I am impressed with the complexity and the cultural artifact that stands as something more than a review, expanding the genre and focusing the content to important pedagogical problems with excerpts from ‘LW’ and ‘MP’ and internal agreements and disagreements. This is truly a great review.

Two critical issues emerge: first, the ‘problem of rationality’ and whether one should properly ascribe this to Wittgenstein. In this case ascribing any notion of rationality to Wittgenstein is a mistake because *pace* Wittgenstein’s therapeutic view, philosophy leaves everything as it is and philosophy does not advance anything theoretical. For a philosopher who manages to erect a whole host of new concepts (‘language-games’, ‘family relationships’ etc.) while articulating and explicating their relation to one another, this is a *miraculous* achievement. It’s a little like the ladder propositions of the *Tractatus* that we can discard once we have climbed up but as Frank Ramsey explains ‘What we can’t say we can’t say, and we can’t whistle it either.’ The notion of ‘serious nonsense’ and what a logical language can properly express Ramsey found difficult to accept. In the same way we might argue that for a philosopher who insists that philosophy in the end must not interfere with ordinary language and is purely therapeutic, intrudes upon a delicate transparency. It is interesting that the philosophical effects that Wittgenstein has had, also introducing a raft of new concepts into ordinary language. The stipulation that philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language seems contradicted in practice by the adoption of Wittgenstein’s concepts and metaphors -- a paradox at least as interesting as that facing the *Tractatus*. It is also the case that

therapies, whether conceptual or cognitive or not, take in a wide range of approaches including action-oriented and drama-based therapies. In the case of analytic philosophers of education who step outside their Wittgensteinian brief, it is clear that they contradict Wittgenstein by insisting on the practice of a foundational linguistic hygiene with our fundamental educational concepts in the search for both necessary and sufficient conditions for the use of a concept. Richard Rorty (2007) in ‘Pragmatism and Romanticism’ and knowing full well Wittgenstein’s dictum that we must resist the temptation to philosophise, suggests:

Rationality is a matter of making allowed moves within language games. Imagination creates the games that reason proceeds to play. Then, exemplified by people such as Plato and Newton, it keeps modifying those games so that playing them is more interesting and profitable. Reason cannot get outside of the latest circle that imagination has drawn. It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that imagination holds the primacy (cited in Peters, 2020).

It is like those wanting to play the Wittgenstein game can describe the game phenomenologically while themselves making a move in the game. I think that faithfulness to Wittgenstein is certainly an interpretative matter of some concern but shouldn’t stop us from making what appear to be ‘illicit’ moves in the game, especially after achieving some mastery. Indeed, such an interpretation lends itself to a creative theory of philosophy from that of the novice learning elementary moves in the games, to immediate players able to put together a strategy based on a series of related moves, to a kind of game mastery where the player-philosopher is able to invent a new move, or in exceptional cases, create a new game. This really constitutes a rational account of creativity that I am not particularly happy with because it does not incorporate rhetoric or image that may lead to a change of attitude much more than an argument: ‘A picture holds us captive’ (Peters & Stickney, 2020).

In this regard, in a recent essay, I indicated that when we turn to Wittgenstein’s work we do not see any systematic engagement with traditional philosophical problems, drawing on Grimmel’s (2015) work:

Thus, when we turn to the concept of rationality ‘as a central concept in occidental philosophy and social sciences never seemed to spark the interest of Ludwig Wittgenstein’ yet ‘although “rationality” does not explicitly show up in his works – Wittgenstein not only deals with questions definitively ascribed to the conceptual history of the term, but he also works towards a transformation of the concept’ ...

When we turn to a rule-governed grammar of the ordinary and the everyday that gives expressive force to a form of life, Wittgenstein’s view serves to dethrone ‘the notion that sees science as the greatest embodiment of rationality and exemplification of rationality at its best’. Certainly, for me this is an important consequence and one that has contemporary consequences when, for instance, those implicitly defining themselves as scientists want to suggest that indigenous thought doesn’t not measure up to western science. This is what happened recently in New Zealand when five professors at Auckland University responding to proposed changes to the school curriculum claimed Māori knowledge (mātauranga) ‘is not science’.¹ I thought that these debates were a historical relic of western cognitive superiority that was part of a savage colonialism that prevented Māori from speaking their own language

¹ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/scientists-rubbish-auckland-university-professors-letter-claiming-maori-knowledge-is-not-science/GN55DAZCM47TOZUTPYP2Q3CSLM/>

at school. Wittgenstein at least opened up a different epistemological perspective that was not based on the arrogance of the coloniser (Stewart, 2005, 2018; Hughes Laura, 2018).

This is what I was trying to get at by talking about ‘constitutive rationality’ but as the four critics point out I end up by reifying it as ‘the problem of rationality’ and calling for it as a solution rather than, in more of a Wittgensteinian style, allowing it to dissolve through the ordinary description of the language-game of justification and of giving reasons. I think this criticism has some force against my conception and also goes some way also to explaining my imposition of a Hegelian framework of historicism to describe the influence of Wittgenstein on a group of historicist philosophers of science who questioned the supremacy of ‘Western science’ as the global epistemological framework for the adjudication of knowledge claims, a view which has become clearer in relation to the understanding of indigenous holistic frameworks of nature. The Hegelian framework was part of my framework adopted and used to note some similarities with a phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition of language but also to help make sense of the recent history of western philosophy of science and its historicist turn to practice. Like these critics point out almost certainly Wittgenstein wouldn’t agree.

The second point really involves political thought and the use of philosophers like Foucault to problematise and politicise Wittgenstein and to introduce the idea that moves in the discourse are inherently political – an aspect that is missing from Wittgenstein’s analysis. I was hoping to engage in some political grafting onto Wittgensteinian stock. I am reminded of an interesting paper by the economist Amartya Sen (2003) called ‘Sraffa, Wittgenstein, and Gramsci’ which draws attention to the biographical fact that Wittgenstein, coming from one of the richest families in Europe, was strongly conservative even though he did flirt with Russian Communism and ended up by offering us a social (collectivist) view of language and meaning. Sen (2003), speaking of his relationship with the brilliant Italian Communist economist Piero Sraffa, who Wittgenstein credits with having a decisive influence on his thought, reports Piero Sraffa, in conversation with Wittgenstein, as saying ‘I had to stop our regular conversations—I was somewhat bored’ to which Sen (2003: 1244) adds ‘Sraffa might have also been exasperated by Wittgenstein’s political naivete.’ Sen also cites Monk (1991: 487) who records that in May 1946 Sraffa no longer wished to have further conversation with Wittgenstein which greatly upset him. Sraffa was also the basis of the anecdote on making a Neapolitan gesture thumbing his chin at Wittgenstein asks him ‘what’s the logical form of that?’, a similar kind of objection as Ramsey’s. It is the critical counter-example that moved Wittgenstein to the ‘rough ground’.

It is not my role here to talk about paradox and delusion in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy but in my interpretation for a research program, beyond Wittgenstein or, at least, ‘after Wittgenstein’ (Peters, 1995), I wanted to secure a place for politics and critique of the dominant role that western epistemology has played within the forms of western colonialism and imperialism, a hugely difficult process to explain. This is again, part of *my* interpretation and not something I can derive from an exegetical reading of Wittgenstein even though one might be able to sustain the claim concerning *anti-philosophy* similarities in relation to ‘contingency, community, and the ethics of self-cultivation’ (Peters, 2020). The inspired use of the Kadiweu language for the four ‘characters’ who conduct the dialogue - Oninitibeci, Iniwataale, Iniwatadigini, and Gobaagadi (corresponding ‘to the numerals one, two, three and four’)-- struck me as an apt and telling narrative device to draw attention to the plight of the people. On a little research I was not surprised to learn that the Kadiwéu are the last surviving people of the Mbayá (*Eyiguayegis* ‘people of the palm’) ethnic group living on the border of Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil who suffered many attacks by the Spanish authorities from the

mid-16th century onwards.² The Kadiwéu, a linguistic population of about 1000 people, became known as ‘índios cavaleiros’ (‘horsemen Indians’) having adopted the horse after it was introduced into South America by the Conquistadors arguably on the verge of total extinction (Roller, 2018). Claude Lévi-Strauss (1942), the great structuralist anthropologist (1955; 1977) wrote about their ‘body cosmetics’ commenting on the complex geometrical body and face designs that distinguishes Kadiwéu culture that he made famous, images of which have been exploited thereafter. In this connection I am interested in the connection between Lévi-Strauss and the later Wittgenstein that Remotti (2012) articulates in terms of the failure of structuralism and the possibility of anthropology as ‘a transversal (cross-cultural) knowledge’ inspired by Wittgenstein’s idea of family resemblances that describes ‘a flexible approach (open system) that fits the needs and characteristics of anthropological research’ (p. 49).

Building a philosophical research program and an interpretation might take a lifetime, and it may fail through lack of consistency, or through other errors. And the author might embrace different interpretations at different times to make an argument or to gain understanding. In the end it also depends on the willingness of others to read what one has written. On that score I am very grateful to the four critics of *Quid Est Ergo Rationalitas?* and the marvellous Wittgensteinian style in which they address it.

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