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Is the integration of the philosophical perspective and the scientific views possible? The post-Wittgensteinian need for theoretical re-formulations *

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Introduction

My article is going to be traditionally philosophical. I do not have suitable empirical data in hand, I do not use the latest scientific discoveries here, I even find it difficult to have a current overview of the theories in science, simply because there are too many of them, and they are too sophisticated. I do not treat it as an advantage, but I do not think it is a disadvantage, either – especially taking into account the context I want to explore here. I am going to sketch the theoretical background which has to be embedded in philosophy if we want to put the questions about the possibility of the integration between philosophical perspectives and scientific views in a comprehensible form. I am going to consider the role of philosophy in reformulating the basic and important philosophical notions. I argue that we should take some Wittgensteinian methodological advice seriously. We should and could make philosophy the intellectual area in which we can re-reflect upon, re-define and re-formulate the

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assumptions we usually tacitly take for granted in our theories, and in our final vocabularies.

Let me first say something about my own philosophical story. As an undergraduate, I was educated simultaneously in traditional Anglo-Saxon analytic theories, continental German philosophy of Kant and Hegel, French metaphysical tradition of XXth century (including Merleau-Ponty and Lévinas). I was reading Husserl's books and some texts taken from more broad phenomenological perspective. I was trying to understand the increasingly complicated conceptions in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language. I have written my MA and PhD theses in an analytic style, but adding many theoretical insights of late Wittgenstein there, which are still attractive for me. Nevertheless, I was still a bit uncertain regarding what exactly my own position was. In addition, I was permanently fighting to crystallize my own basic views about the right and valid methodology and the role of philosophy in general.

Being in love with philosophy, I was more and more worried that the role of philosophy in shaping our contemporary culture is less and less vivid: both in creating and refreshing ideas and ways of thinking and in commenting and reflecting upon current views which build contemporary knowledge – but also in helping to understand ourselves in our everyday folk culture. While admiring science and its results, I was still uneasy about the role of science and technology nowadays. And I could not shake off the feeling that this situation is the responsibility of philosophy and philosophers themselves. Reading more and more, especially in the analytic tradition, I could not help having the impression that there is nothing which could be somehow connected with my own personal experience in the most sophisticated theories I was exploring. Something was clearly wrong; and it was not the fault of complex terminology, extremely long sentences, or huge number of references to other texts. It was the lack of concrete lessons or bits of advice, or relevance to my own knowledge about myself, even understood in the most wide cognitive way. Frustrated, I have finally reached for books from the embodied and enactive approaches. Philosophically speaking, it was an absolutely refreshing experience. I have found some hope for philosophy again. I have realized that it can be useful in a cognitive sense, like I always believed it was. Wittgenstein's methodology was much of use here for me, and that is why I call the need for theoretical re-formulations in philosophy "post-Wittgensteinian".

With Wittgenstein's help

We all probably know the later Wittgenstein quite well¹, so just to remind you some of his methodological ideas, I put them in a deliberate, specific order. I try to point out how his call for changing our attitudes in the way we do philosophy harmonizes with the basic ideas of an enactive or embodied approach in philosophy of mind. I find both directions to be promising in building a bridge between philosophical and scientific views on the matters we want to consider.

1. Naturalism with a human face, i.e. with a human body. Philosophical attitude towards science

In the "Big Typescript" Wittgenstein writes "Tell yourself over and over (when doing philosophy): that it is a seduction that causes you to see thinking as a mysterious process"². This and similar declarations, easy to find in his writings, I interpret as a persuasion to treat thought, language, subject, self and many other philosophical matters as elements of the natural history of humans. Language as an element of human history includes everything which we would call "material". It is not a magic, ex-corporal, ex-physical medium of thoughts or vehicle of communication. So in order to examine the status and functions of language (which was always Wittgenstein's main problem), we have to take into account the role of human body and its specific features. How should we understand such an approach? Linguistic actions are for Wittgenstein of the same kind as the actions we usually connect with the body, like for example walking, drinking and eating. If we want to explain them, we have to take into account the embodiment and the material conditions of the speakers. They all belong to the same history, which seems to be forgotten in almost all philosophical theories of the West³. At the same time we should not forget that what is corporal and physical is constituted by means of language and vice versa

From what I have just mentioned one can quite easily conclude that the Wittgensteinian approach is a naturalistic one. However, it can be misleading to call it naturalistic without stating further reservations, especially considering the sheer number of different naturalistic theories we can find in contemporary philosophy of language. Let us assume that

¹ I interpret Wittgenstein's ideas from his main book *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford 1998.

² L. Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, Blackwell, Oxford 2005, p. 178e.

³ J. Medina, *Wittgenstein's Social Naturalism. The Idea of Second Nature after the Philosophical Investigations*, in: *The Third Wittgenstein. The Post-Investigations Works*, ed. D. Moyal-Sharrock, Aldershot, Ashgate, p. 87.

the most basic thesis of naturalism is that natural is everything which belongs to the world of nature. This general statement will be explanatory only when we specify what 'nature' and 'natural' mean⁴. There are two consequences for philosophical investigations which we can derive from that thesis. First: the Quinean postulate to study everything which we decide is worth studying using scientific, empirical methods. Second: the demand of treating all entities of the human world as natural 'effects' of human history and human development. Taking these consequences for granted, Wittgenstein claims that there are no supernatural entities which philosophy has a privilege to study⁵, and additionally, there is no one proper methodology in philosophy. Philosophy is not the so called first science, and there are no such entities as Plato's ideas, Descartes' *res cogitans* or Kant's noumena. Philosophy is also not a base for natural science, as it has been treated in some philosophical views. Wittgenstein claims that there is a fundamental difference between philosophy and science, hence asking questions, raising problems, and fixing goals are different in both those domains. Consequently, according to him we will not resolve philosophical problems with scientific theories, as it is sometimes hoped today (by pointing to the results in psychology and neurology, for example)⁶.

Wittgenstein's theory can be treated as a naturalistic account only in a certain anti-scientific sense. Wittgenstein opposes scientism in philosophy and he rejects the traditional metaphysics with its requirement of looking for deeply hidden essences. It is important to add that the Wittgensteinian rejection of scientific methods in philosophy should not be interpreted as a call to close the door for philosophical theorizing in general. As I have already stressed, he does not propose one single method in describing language facts, but several, interconnected methods which will make such description possible from different points of view. To make it clear, the Wittgensteinian rejection of making philosophy scientific is not an attack on science per se, but it is rather the consequence of his views about the role of philosophy⁷.

⁴ R. Feldman, *Methodological Naturalism in Epistemology*, in: *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, eds. J. Greco, E. Sosa, Blackwell, Cambridge 1999, p. 170–186; W. van Orman Quine, *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*, "Philosophical Review" 1951, no 60, p. 20–43; C. Cechetto, L. Rizzi, *A Naturalistic Approach to Language*, in: *Naturalism in the Cognitive Sciences and the Philosophy of Mind*, eds. S. Nanini, H.-J. Sandkühler, P. Lang, Berlin 2000, p. 117–130.

⁵ L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Book. Preliminary Studies for the „Philosophical Investigations“*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1969, p. 29.

⁶ M. Williams, *Wittgenstein, Mind and Meaning. Towards a Social Conception of Mind*, Routledge, London 1999, p. 240–259.

⁷ G. D. Conway, *Wittgenstein on Foundations*, Humanities Press International, Atlantic Highlands N. J. 1989, p. 33; *Ludwig Wittgenstein. Critical Assessments*, ed.

We can see that Wittgenstein emphasizes the difference between scientific and philosophical approaches. Does it still leave any hope, if not for an integration, then at least for a dialogue between science and philosophy? My answer is yes, if we are ready not to take all of Wittgenstein's ideas at their face value, but rather read them selectively in order to get the best for future philosophical considerations. It is important to realize that the Quinean postulate of naturalizing epistemology has several consequences for doing philosophy. Quine claims, for example, that while doing ontology, we should inspect the idea of widespread acceptance of the domain of physical objects in all areas of studies. We should do that in order to examine the implicit underlying assumptions which are taken for granted with the abovementioned idea. Philosophers are interested in the ontological status of language, in the way we treat such expressions like *x exists* and in all the consequences that follow. Scientists do not openly deal with such problems, but they tacitly employ ontological and metaphysical assumptions in their theories. Philosophers' task is to analyze these assumptions and make them explicit. We can develop a naturalistic account without excluding the importance of philosophical questions and philosophical answers to them. So, in order to be a naturalist, we do not have to exchange all philosophical matters for scientific ones⁸; rather, we have to be more careful about the explanatory power of some notions (which has been pointed out by Wittgenstein in his rejection of scientism).

Let me digress from the main subject for a while and ask about the status of empirical results in embodied approaches. Sometimes one can have an impression that they count exclusively on so called empirical answers. They are supposed to be found in commonsense experience and in science, such as biology and neuroscience. We should be aware that if "the empirical" is a metaphor, there are certain assumptions hidden in that notion and its interpretation. We shall ask what kind of "the empirical" do we refer to? Is the empirical understood in the same way in biology, in psychology, in neuroscience? What counts as empirical in our everyday experience? I suppose these are quite different things, and only when we reflect upon them we can see this. In particular, should we be more careful about the way the data from neuroscience are treated in the approach we are talking about? Can we uncritically treat them as pointing certainly at precisely such conclusions (and not others) – especially realizing all of the limitations on neuroscientific research? What happens when we realize that all experiments in neuroscience are highly

S. Shanker, vol. IV: *From Theology to Sociology: Wittgenstein's Impact on Contemporary Thought*, Routledge, London 1997, p. 9.

⁸ W. van Orman Quine, *Epistemology Naturalized*, in: *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, Columbia University Press, New York 1969, p. 69–90.

restricted by legal, ethical, technological and financial considerations? In one of the recent books devoted to methodological problems in neuroscience one can read: “The difficulty is that in order to form a simple generalization about how, say, the brain can reshape itself following insult or injury, scientists must retreat to such a broad level of abstraction that their assertions become almost meaningless empirically”⁹. Given the above, what can count as the empirical in neuroscience? The answers to these and similar questions can build a specific area where philosophy can bring some help to scientific doubts.

2. Metaphilosophy and metaphysics as interconnected

The therapeutic character of Wittgensteinian philosophy can be understood as a postulate to do critical metatheoretical considerations in philosophy (metaphilosophy). It would mean that as philosophers, we are trying to show what kind of reasoning shapes the theories which already exist, what kind of questions – and why – we raise in those theories, what kind of methods we are ready to employ. Such an attitude would result for Wittgenstein in gaining theoretical peace, a state in which we stop raising questions, not because they are solved, but because we have realized they are not real ones. From such a perspective, however, one has to be careful about its own assumptions, about the status of the object of studies and the methods which one uses. As a result of such an attitude, we can raise the most important matters, such as the problem of what philosophy is, what kind of problems should be called philosophical ones, and what kind of philosophical notions are the proper ones¹⁰.

I find correlations between meta-theoretical perspective in philosophy and its meta-physical roots. Let me take the affix “meta-“ in both those notions to mean “situated behind”. Metaphysics is then understood as an approach in which one tries to be aware of the assumptions and presuppositions of his own approach. Of course metaphysics cannot be traditionally treated here. So we do not look for the so called essence and we do not reach one correct description or one possible theory. It was Wittgenstein who persuaded us to introduce a certain kind of order in our way of treating language, but he did not believe that it can be given once and for all. As a result, we will have many theories and many answers to the question of what language, cognition, mind, body etc. are; answers which are initially determined by the assumptions we have

⁹ V. Gray Hardcastle, C. Matthew Stewart, *Theory Structure in the Neurosciences*, in: *Theory and Method in the Neurosciences*, ed. P. K. Machamer, R. Grush, P. McLaughlin, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2001, p. 30.

¹⁰ See for example Tim Thornton, *Wittgenstein on Language and Thought. The Philosophy of Content*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1998.

already taken. Studying the assumptions of our theories is the most important part of the metaphysical approach as I, following Wittgenstein, understand it.

I think that such an antifundamentalist pluralism comes from a Wittgensteinian analysis of the notion of meaning. Let me explain. When he states the dictum according to which „meaning is use“, he does not make a simple theoretical maneuver of replacing the category of meaning with the category of use, but he changes his investigative perspective in a fundamental way. The notion of meaning does not equal the notion of use. He is not looking for an answer to the question *what is meaning (the idea, the concept, the mental state?)*, but to the question *how is it possible that expressions of language are meaningful for humans*. It involves certain ontological commitments to accept claims according to which there is no such entity as meaning, and there is no such thing as language in itself. We should rather speak about multiplicity of language games and about a variety of functions of the language games which make language elements meaningful. Treating the category of use as crucial lets him describe the complexity of language functions because he is not trying to single out its essential, substantial function (the most fundamental and pivotal property which makes language language). Let us replace the term language with the term ‘cognition, subject, mind’, etc. The result will be similar. The embodied approach is pluralistic due to its own assumptions. If in order to study human cognition we have to do that in an embodied perspective, we must acknowledge also that a body is historically (being in a certain time) and culturally (dealing with a certain environment) situated, hence inconstant. We have to be prepared for different domains of human knowledge approaching it from various points of view. Also, we have to leave the possibility of changing the answers while developing new ideas¹¹.

It seems to me that the metaphilosophical perspective has for a while been the distinctive feature of analytic philosophy¹², but somehow it has been forgotten. We develop such branches of philosophy as philosophy of psychology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, sometimes copying the methods of science in the process. And like in science, there is no place for critical thoughts about the status of the theories themselves. Philosophers have started answering the questions about the world itself (about natural language, mental processes, cognitive processes etc.) but they have stopped investigating the assumptions which

¹¹ See for example M. Luntley, *Wittgenstein. Meaning and Judgment*, Blackwell, Oxford 2003.

¹² P. M. P. Hacker, *Analytic Philosophy: What, Whence and Whither?*, in: *The Story of Analytic Philosophy. Plots and Heroes*, eds. A. Biletzki, A. Matar, Routledge, London, New York 1998, p. 3–34.

have to be taken in order to raise those questions. I claim that we can be meta-philosophically careful and develop theories in philosophy at the same time. We do not have to take for granted the Wittgensteinian requirement of not building philosophical theories. It is enough to agree with him about their special status. I think that philosophical solutions cannot be treated as absolute, timeless, totally autonomous. In opposition to Wittgenstein, we can do philosophy in which descriptions help to answer the questions we have raised, descriptions which are not only tools for challenging these questions.

Again, let me finish this part of my article with some reflections on the embodied perspective. We all know that in philosophical theories one can find metaphysical positions. When Mark Johnson writes: "Our reason is an ongoing developing activity by which we understand things and this activity emerges for organism of the sort we are"¹³ he assumes a lot about what an activity is. There is nothing wrong in that as a matter of course, as long we remember that we elaborate the notions in a way we do, here in an embodied way. So in a sense the idea of embodiment is both our point of arrival and our point of departure, which is a metaphysical idea. The philosophers from the embodied tradition seem to be aware of it. Johnson and Lakoff write: "we also need to avoid all assumptions that circumscribe what is to count as data in such a way as to predetermine the outcome"¹⁴. We are not able to avoid all such assumptions of course. If there is something in our bodily equipment which can determine once and for all the way we perceive and cognize the world, and if we can describe what it is, we will be able to show, that there are some crucial systems of categories without which we cannot cognize anything at all. If our basic perception is always conceptualized (and our concepts are always filtered by bodily perception), there is no way in which we can take the point of view from nowhere. It builds a philosophical stance which is not only foundationless, but also requires a view where the objective/subjective division is not valid. In that sense meta-philosophical analysis shapes metaphysical approach as well.

What about the integration?

It is high time to try to answer the question which has been raised in the title of my article. Let me do it indirectly. Firstly, it is worth looking at it in a meta-philosophical way. Why the difference between science

¹³ M. Johnson, *Embodied Reason*, in: *Perspectives on Embodiment. The Intersection of Nature and Culture*, eds. G. Weiss, H. F. Haber, Routledge, New York 1999, p. 82.

¹⁴ G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, Basic Books, New York 1999, p. 79.

and philosophy is so obviously recognizable nowadays? What has happened during the long history of human knowledge that we have started to think about philosophy and science as two different fields with different methodologies and different goals. We all know that such questions would be bizarre for the contemporaries of e.g. Isaac Newton. So, the very status of science and philosophy is a historical fact and as such can change again. Maybe the initial step in investigating these matters is careful consideration of the content of the question itself. What do we mean by “science” and by “philosophy”? Do we mean certain theories and methodologies, or rather the most important goals, or maybe the representatives of the communities of scientists and philosophers? Do we have in mind today’s science and philosophy, or some historical aspects of them as well? Getting more detailed helps us to see that the answer to the question I have asked here depends on the way in which we understand the terms we use (which is a Wittgensteinian hint again). Let me treat philosophy and science in a bit sociological way, as very sophisticated institutions with their own special regulations, explicit and implicit goals, interrelations between people, and connections with financial and political matters. Is their integration possible then? I claim that it is possible on the methodological level, where philosophers and scientists can achieve the same goals (to do research work on human cognition for example), and where philosophers can build notional foundations for experiments which are done by scientists. Such an attitude requires defining common interests which can be shared by both fields, hence requires many changes in understanding the role and the status of philosophy and science. In other words, it requires both the philosopher and the scientist to see their own positions differently. However, I do not believe that the integration on the level of domains is possible. Science and philosophy have common and different elements in their historical background, but the trend to underline the differences between them is still very strong now. In my opinion, the institutionalization of knowledge, among others things, is responsible for re-producing the difference we are talking about. The idea of usefulness which is central in contemporary culture has to be mentioned here as well. Possible scientific results seem to be more ‘useful’ for technology for example than the results of philosophical debates. Being used in that way, science is more manifestly present, hence it is easier to make the needed space for scientific activities in all possible areas (including their financial and political dimensions). Philosophy has worse public relations so to speak, and on the scale of what is and what is not useful, is situated quite low.

We all know that apart from many deeply historically grounded stereotypes about the differences between science and philosophy, philosophical ideas influence science and vice versa. In my view, philosophy is a kind of – so to speak – notional work, or re-working of the terms

structured in a language we use (understood in a wide Wittgenstein's sense) in various traditions (including the common sense tradition). We all know that the very crucial part of science is to build the system of terms and the method of doing research in order to get the best results. If so, even initially there are a lot of things in common in these two areas of the development of human thought. And what is more, a lot of ideas from both fields influence what we call common sense¹⁵. If science is foundationless and contingent as Francisco Varela, among others, has pointed out, and it does not need foundations in order to be a reliable source of knowledge for humans, we can make it more friendly for daily, embodied human experience, which, being subjective in a sense, is not treated as epistemologically useless anymore¹⁶. However, in order to agree with that we have to change our philosophical standpoint in the direction of the pluralist, meta-philosophical, historically and materially situated position of the Wittgensteinian kind that I was sketching here.

There is a long tradition in philosophy of science coming from hermeneutics stating that science is a kingdom of *Erklärung* and philosophy (or more generally the humanities) is the kingdom of *verstehen*. In order to make room for methodological integration between science and philosophy, as I have mentioned earlier, we have to give up this division. I do not believe that there is a fundamental difference between *explanation* and *understanding*, because to me, they are both kinds of interpretation. I could not agree more with professor Gallagher when he writes: "Explanation is no less interpretation than understanding. The interpretation of quantitative data, for example, relies on certain developments in the history of science and on *qualitative* judgements among scientists, including judgements that the way they interpret their data is important and valuable for the community of scientists and the funding agencies that constitute part of their audience"¹⁷.

As we have seen, the integration between scientific and philosophical views is possible only when our attitude towards the role and status of both science and philosophy has changed: both in common sense knowledge, in so called pop-cultural opinions and in philosophy of science (there is still a lot of work to be done there). As it has been mentioned before, both science in its diversity and philosophy with its many different theories, are areas of human intellectual activity. They are both historically, culturally and materially (bodily) situated, and although we can point out their specific features, there is nothing fundamentally and

¹⁵ F. Varela, E. Thompson, E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1991, p. 44.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

¹⁷ S. Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and the Cognitive Sciences*, "Journal of Consciousness Studies" 2004, no 10–11, p. 3.

essentially impassable which would block the integration between these fields. This is especially so if we want to get useful knowledge, compatible with personal experience about ourselves, our minds, bodies, and cognitive apparatuses. And there is still a lot to be done to make the integration in question visible. Let me finish with an example. As a mother of a seventeen-month-old daughter, I have a lot books about children's health and children's development. They are based on scientific research and the authors are basically scientists or medical doctors themselves. My daughter has had cold recently. I have read a very detailed description of this illness, of parents' feelings and a child's condition in those books, and it has turned out to have nothing to do with the experience the we as parents went through with our baby being ill. It is disappointing that it is impossible to make a description of the illness compatible with personal experience having all informative scientific results in hand. Maybe the easiest thing in order to change this is to add the perspective of a philosopher here who is a mother or a father at the same time.

Streszczenie

Czy można zintegrować perspektywę filozoficzną z poglądami naukowymi? Po-Wittgensteinowska próba przeformułowań teoretycznych

Zauważając, że istnieje wyraźne napięcie między różnorodnymi doświadczeniami osobistymi a sposobem, w jaki traktuje je nauka, możemy również przyjąć, że życzylibyśmy sobie wypracowania perspektywy, która łączyłaby to, co indywidualne, z metodami naukowymi i wynikami badań. Jeśli ponadto zgodzimy się z twierdzeniem, że konieczne są zmiany w sposobie opisywania i analizowania ludzkiego podmiotu, jako filozofowie musimy stawić czoła następującemu pytaniu: Jaka jest rola filozofii w poszukiwaniu wspólnej metodologii, dzięki której będzie możliwe połączenie osobistych doświadczeń ludzi z opisami naukowymi tych doświadczeń?

W artykule zarysowuję teoretyczne tło, na którym należałoby osadzić filozofię, jeśli chcemy wyższą metodologię dookreślić w zrozumiałej formie. Przekonuję, że korzystając z pewnych wskazówek Ludwiga Wittgensteina i podążając śladami wybranych współczesnych ucieleśnionych teorii podmiotu poznającego formułowanych w naukach kognitywnych, można stworzyć przestrzeń intelektualną, w której da się przemyśleć i ponownie sformułować założenia, które zwykle milcząco przyjmujemy za pewnik, myśląc o kształcie nauki i zadaniach filozofii.

Słowa kluczowe: Wittgenstein, naturalizm, ucieleśnienie, metafizyka

Summary

Is the integration of the philosophical perspective and the scientific views possible?

The post-Wittgensteinian need for theoretical re-formulations

If we agree that there is a visible tension between various personal experiences and the way in which science treats them, we can also assume that we would like to find a perspective which would link what is first-personally individual with scientific methods and the results of research. If we additionally consent to the claim that vital changes are needed to the mode in which we describe and analyse the human subject, as philosophers we have to face the following question: What is the role of philosophy in looking for a common methodology capable of uniting both human personal experience and scientific descriptions? I am going to sketch the theoretical background which has to be embedded in philosophy if we want to put it in a comprehensible form. I argue that following some Wittgensteinian hints and traces from the contemporary embodied theories of knowing subjects in the cognitive science we could construct the intellectual area in which we can reflect upon and re-formulate the assumptions we usually tacitly take for granted while thinking about the shape of science and tasks of philosophy.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, naturalism, embodiment, metaphilosophy