

Third International Klagenfurt Wittgenstein Workshop

The Logical Priority of Life Over Death: Sign and Symbol / Expression and Feeling

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Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What gives it life?*

Philosophical Investigations, §432

In this year's Klagenfurt Workshop, we will focus on two topics with an eye to exploring how Wittgenstein's treatments of them are related. As the title of the workshop indicates, the first of these is the relation between sign and symbol—the material expression of thought in spoken or written linguistic signs and what is thereby expressed. The second has to do with what many philosophers (including many Wittgenstein commentators) regard as a different topic: namely, the expression of (what they call) “non-discursive psychological states”—such as sensation, desire, and emotion.

After a first session in which we briefly discuss sign and symbol in Frege and the *Tractatus*, the remainder of the workshop will be devoted to a close reading of portions of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and some of the commentary on those sections of the text. Here are the main questions that will concern us throughout the workshop:

1. Is the structure of the written or spoken linguistic sign merely *arbitrary*?
2. What is the relation between “natural” and “conventional” expressions of, e.g., pain, fear, or anger?
3. To what extent must the signs of a language constitute an *interrelated system of signs*?
4. How do aspects of such a system *limit* or *enable* the power of expression and thought?
5. To what extent can questions parallel to (3) and (4) be posed about adult human expressions of, e.g., pain, fear, or anger?
6. What is involved in the capacity to *recognize* a sign *as* a *sign*? What kind of a *repeatable* is a linguistic sign? Is it a mere mark or noise?
7. What is involved in the capacity to *recognize* a bit of human behavior *as* an *expression* of feeling? What kind of a *repeatable* is such an expression? Is it a mere bodily movement or vocal emission?

8. How does the capacity to recognize a sign differ from the capacity that contemporary philosophers of language often focus on: the capacity to recognize and understand a *meaningful* expression? To what extent do these capacities *depend* on each other?
9. To what extent does a capacity for linguistic expression and communication depend on a capacity for (so-called) “non-linguistic” expression and communication, and vice versa?
10. To what extent do our capacities to express thoughts and judgements depend upon our capacities to express sensations and feelings, and vice versa?
11. What is the difference between a *mere sign* and a *sign in use*?
12. What is the difference between, e.g., a muscle twitch and wince of pain?
13. Are acts of *linguistic recognition* simply acts of *conceptual* recognition? Does seeing a sign differ from apprehending that something particular falls under a general concept?
14. How do acts of recognition of the expression of, e.g., pain, fear, or anger resemble or differ from acts of linguistic recognition?
15. What is the role of *perception* in acts of *linguistic apprehension* and how is it unlike other forms of perception?
16. To what extent can a question parallel to (15) be posed about the apprehension of expressions, e.g., of pain, fear, or anger?
17. Must understanding what someone says always involve two acts—one of perceiving the sign and one of interpreting its meaning?
18. Must understanding expressions of, e.g., pain, fear, or anger always involve two acts—one of perceiving the expression and one of interpreting its meaning?
19. Does successful linguistic verbal communication always involve distinct sets of acts on the part of at least two subjects—those performed by the one who speaks and those performed by the one who understands?
20. Does knowledge of other minds necessarily involve distinct sets of acts on the part of at least two subjects—those manifested by the one who expresses and those registered by the one who comprehends what is expressed?

In exploring these questions, the sections of Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* on which we will concentrate will include some stretches that are amongst the most famous in the book—for example, those on the so-called “rule-following considerations” and on the possibility of a so-called “private language”. But we will also focus on some stretches that have been relatively neglected in the commentary but that allow one to see more clearly how Wittgenstein’s treatments of these various topics are interconnected. Where helpful and appropriate, we will supplement our readings from the *Investigations* with brief excerpts from the *Blue and Brown Books*, *Zettel*, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, and *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* as well as from authors whose views are under discussion in Wittgenstein’s texts—such as Frege, Hilbert, William James, Russell, and Schlick.