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Designing Exercises with a Wittgensteinian streak. Some reflections upon the La Chapelle workshop July 7.–13. 2008

In sessions and workshops with Oscar Brenifier, the Socratic streak is loud and clear. Not only has the art of questioning in a Socratic way a pivotal role, also the demand of abandoning empirical context and focusing on definitions or qualifications in general is obligatory. Are you inclined to *feel* something instead of thinking, and even to tell your life story? Then Oscar points to the psychologist's office a few blocks away. And do you *believe* something rather than thinking it? Then the church is over there. Because, at Oscar's place only thinking counts. So if you want to stay here, you must leave your urges to feel and to believe aside and indulge in pure, context-free reasoning. In line with Socrates, we should focus on a general question that arises from a conversation, and then leave all small-talk aside in order to find the essence of some general concept like courage, friendship, temperance, justice and so on.

But is doing philosophy in a Socratic way really that straightforward? I suspect no, even if Plato apparently says it is. When reading his dialogues, we easily get the impression that the initial conversation at the agora or outside some gym exercise hall is to be disregarded once Socrates has grasped a general question which has underpinned the courteous chatting. Not until then are we in business, philosophically speaking, and the best we can say about the initial chatting is that it shows that general philosophical questions arise from everyday human life, which of course has a context. Or, as Plato might have put it: it shows that the big philosophical truths emanate from the realm of pure, transcendental forms into the impure, empirical world of human beings, where these truths make even trivial chatting on courage and friendship and justice and so on possible, without people realizing this. Thus, the big, educational role of the enlightened philosopher is to make people aware of this crucial emanation which in fact enables them to speak as they do.

But can we really disregard the seemingly trivial chatting or situation that has lead up to a general philosophical question or concept when we (at last!) start the "real" task of conceptualizing and problematizing words like courage, friendship or justice? Qualms about this entered my mind, maybe more forcefully than ever before, during an exercise that was presented by one of the participants of the workshop. I will therefore elaborate on this exercise, which was designed for school-children, as a way of doing philosophy in the classroom.

If I remember correctly, the exercise started with a question like: "What do you desire most, something that would make a difference to the world you live in?" Each of us had to think up an answer and write it down. Then the facilitator randomly picked out some participants to read aloud their wish, which was written on the blackboard (in our instance: a flip-over page). Then the participants were asked to synthesize, in one or a few words, the essence of each listed wish. One suggestion per wish was selected randomly by the facilitator. The chosen suggestions of essence were not commented upon or discussed, as the facilitator proceeded right away with her third step, which was to select one of the wishes by a majority vote. I recall the "winner wish" to be: "I wish to be reborn as a bird." Then, without allowing for comments or discussion, the participants were asked, as a fourth step, to suggest a general concept fitting this wish. Once more some participants were picked at random to put forward their concept, which was written on the blackboard. The fifth step was then to select by majority vote which of these concept to discuss further. The concept selected was "freedom."

As no discussion had taken place up to this point, the steps we had been lead through can at best be described as a quite inventive procedure of choosing a concept for philosophical

inquiry. And when the facilitator plainly asked us to disregard each step until now, erasing everything on the blackboard with the exception of the word “freedom,” I got an urge to protest. What was the use of these inventive steps if the task just was to discuss the concept of freedom in general, free of context, and with no regard of the wish which had prompted “freedom” to be the topic for discussion? If the purpose was to put forward a good old Socratic question like “What is freedom?,” we could have done so right away, without spending twenty minutes at going through procedural steps that were then to be forgotten of.

However, my urge to protest was not so much about having spent too much time on a procedure. It was rather the other way around: that we instantly did away with something both intriguing and odd that we had found through arbitrary choosing, and which could indeed have started an interesting discussion – much more interesting than the good old and frankly quite boring, general, contextless “What is freedom?” question.

I also realized that an inventive use of arbitrariness in procedural steps quickly may produce some constellation of ideas and concepts that neither the facilitator, nor each participant could have thought out in advance, thus making arbitrariness a speedway to a situation where you have to think the unthinkable, as Oscar puts it. In our instance, this amounts to the following question: How can someone possibly relate the concept “freedom” to the idea of being reborn as a bird? This really intrigued me, as I saw it as a possibility that was not at all obvious to me, and therefore had to be explored in order to see if it could or could not make sense. So when this opportunity to think the unthinkable was skipped right away, I was disappointed. And suspected that an eagerness to be “purely Socratic” – that is: to do “real” philosophy instead of just playing around – was what prevented the facilitator from seeing the topic the exercise had produced.

Of course our effort to find a valid, undisputable definition of “freedom” broke down, as is the common fate of all Socratic inquiries on general concepts. Such a predictable downbeat ending is not much fun, while the topic missed might have been. What if the facilitator had asked the one who suggested “freedom” to give a reason for why “freedom” is an appropriate concept in this respect, and start the discussion from there? Maybe the participant then backs out, withdrawing her suggestion because she loses faith in its making sense. Then the facilitator might ask the group if some others could prove that it indeed makes sense. Let’s explore this embryo idea together, and see if it can develop into a viable offspring! Maybe this will enhance our understanding of what “freedom” amounts to. Or maybe the word “freedom” used in this respect proves to be too strange to be understood by more than a very few people, maybe hardly by one person? Who knows?

The discussion would then not only have dealt with “freedom” in its general sense, but mostly, maybe exclusively, with if it is appropriate or not to speak of “freedom” related to the idea of being reborn as a bird. Here it is important to note that such a discussion would indeed have been context-ridden, but with a context not stemming from somebody’s personal life in the usual empirical, “psychological” sense. Such a context would instead be what I will call a “language context,” which deals with how the word freedom can or cannot be employed in certain ways of expressing ourselves through a shared language. Such a language context is just as intersubjective as the good old Socratic way of asking general questions like “What is freedom?.” And, I presume, even more revealing than the seemingly “out of any context approach” we tend to label “Socratic.”

If so, we should really appreciate introductory moves in exercises that root philosophical questions in personal, everyday concerns, like a wish. Especially when working with children, it is important to counter the widespread prejudice that philosophy is something purely abstract that resides high up in the intellectual sky, without relevance to practical, everyday life. While good old Socratic questions may confirm such a prejudice when handled indiscriminately, rooting general, philosophical questions in everyday life does the opposite and is what we should strive for. The exercise dwelt with is successful at this, as the wish initially asked for was no trifle, but

about what we really want that would make a difference to the world we live in. Connecting a philosophical exercise to such a wish is to activate what each one of the participants really cares about. And, as Oscar repeatedly states, an initial question put forward in a one-to-one consultation or in a group discussion should be about something that really concerns you, and not be a trifle or a bogus question.

So, having managed to arouse a philosophically-minded personal interest in the participants, a facilitator should stick to this interest and use it for everything it is worth during the whole exercise – and not just expose of it as of something that at a certain point has become irrelevant. Even if philosophy tends to lead the subject from the personal to the general, this does not mean that we should forget about the personal and skyrocket into the general. It rather implies that we should not stay within the personal, but find the *connection* between the personal and the general, and investigate this special connection as well as the general idea or concept arising from the personal. This is, in fact, what Oscar mainly does – something I will say more about at the end of this paper.

As a concluding remark concerning the exercise elaborated upon, and at least two other exercises presented at the workshop, I will encourage facilitators to look more closely into what they already have, in order not to throw their initial steps too quickly away – as one may kick down a ladder once one has entered the roof. If such introductory steps are designed to make philosophy classes more varied and entertaining than just having “real,” hardcore “Socratic” discussions without foreplay, I will say “mighty fine indeed.” But then you must cease to believe that philosophy just *is* hardcore “Socratic” discussions without foreplay, while the interest-building introductory steps have no philosophical interest of their own, and are only there to sugar the pill. The task is instead to fully grasp the philosophical potential of these introductory steps, and to develop and treasure them for what they are worth throughout the exercise. We must have in mind that children rarely are motivated for solving intellectual problems if they get no sense of “what is the use of doing this?”

This last point is, by the way, the core of Margaret Donaldson’s important critique of Jean Piaget’s claim that children under the age of twelve have no sufficiently developed intellectual and moral capacities to engage in abstract thinking. I choose not to elaborate on this highly relevant topic, as that would be too much of a digression from the issues I have in mind for this paper. I just recommend Donaldson’s book *Children’s minds* (1978, paperback ed.: Harper Perennial, London, 2006) to those who want to confirm their belief that children indeed are capable of doing philosophy at a far younger age than twelve, and how we best can accomplish that by taking the “what’s the point?” factor into account.

Potent insights from a Norwegian fjord

I will now return to the notion of language context and elaborate on its being something different from personal context. As I have already mentioned, language context is something just as intersubjective as the good old Socratic way of asking general questions, and I believe that by notifying the difference between personal context and language context we will see more clearly some well implemented aspects of Oscar’s practice: namely that it is not as devoid of context as we initially may believe it to be. Here I arrive at the Wittgensteinian streak which is announced in the title, and which fully entered my mind during the exercise mentioned, as a possibility that was missed. I realized that Wittgenstein may be very helpful to highlight the potential of such an exercise, thus enabling us to put this potential into use in philosophy classes.

Those who are familiar with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s work will realize that I do not have the author of *Tractatus* in mind, but the “late” Wittgenstein, who in 1936–37 sat in his cabin, located by a branch of a big Norwegian fjord (namely the Sognefjord), and toiled on the first part of what was to be posthumously published as *Philosophical investigations*. It is within the first

hundred paragraphs of this original and revealing work that Wittgenstein launches his notions of “word games” and “family resemblance,” which are relevant to our discussion.

In *Philosophical investigations* Wittgenstein conducts an extensive, intense and quite fatiguing discussion with his alter ego, who apparently holds on to the quest of *Tractatus*, namely to identify a correspondence between language and reality, ensuring that we can be scientific about the matters of fact of the world in a “pure” logical meta-language which also is the foundation of everyday speech. In line with Kant, this “early” Wittgenstein wants to draw a demarcation line between what can be meaningfully spoken about, namely the matters of facts of the world, and what cannot be spoken about in such a direct, meaningful way, namely questions of value, ethics and esthetics. The famous last words of *Tractatus* are: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”

But that is, as most commentators agree upon, not to say that values, ethics and esthetics are unimportant to Wittgenstein. It is rather the other way around; that the most important things in life are not to be spoken of in a direct, scientifically based language. Wittgenstein is here in line with Søren Kierkegaard, and was a devout reader of this existentialist philosopher’s works. He even learned some Danish in order to read Kierkegaard in the original language. That, by the way, enabled him to quickly learn some Norwegian during his sporadic stays in the Sognefjord area, far away from noisy and despicable places like Cambridge. In the “silent seriousness” of the steep mountainsides surrounding his cabin (he had it built in the early 1920’s), he hoped to find the right mental climate to turn his revised philosophical stance, already sketched in numerous fragments, into a new work that he finally could approve of.

Philosophical investigations is said to be one of the most prominent examples of self-criticism in the history of philosophy. Another prominent example is Plato’s *Parmenides*, where the theory of forms that was put forward in *The Republic* is heavily criticized. Whether these two examples imply a break between an early and a late philosophical stance, or if they rather are about a continuation, an attempt to reformulate the original stance in order to make it less open to critique, is a much disputed issue that I will not delve into here.

It is, however, sufficiently clear that *Philosophical investigations* eradicates those essentialist traits that might be found in *Tractatus*, making the difference from any kind of Platonism imminent. Confronted with a good old Socratic question like “What is freedom?,” the “late” Wittgenstein would tend to reply “It depends on how ‘freedom’ is used in your speech.” And this is in line with Oscar’s comment on the standard phrase “It depends”: If someone says “it depends,” she must specify *on what* it depends, and not just say “it depends” in general. While the latter is to escape from the question posed, the former is a justified claim of specifying a condition or circumstance, as concepts like “freedom” do not exist in the sky, unrelated to any social practice.

While the usual difficulty in philosophical counselling is the subject’s reluctance to let go of personal context, one sometimes encounters the opposite extreme: A subject who speaks in very general terms that seemingly do not depend on circumstances. Instead of being a counsellor’s dream, such a subject poses a problem because it is not at all clear what his speech implies, or what his problem might be. Here the counsellor can be equally stuck as when the subject insists on personal context. The counter-move would then be to ask the subject, as Petra von Morstein, the grand old lady of philosophical counselling, does: “Tell me a story.” By this von Morstein does not ask for some extensive narration, but just for a minimum of context, which has to be language context as well as personal context. We can, after all, not express any personal context outside language context, and both are needed in order to have something to work on, if only as a point of departure. If we cannot root general concepts in certain conditions or circumstances, they quickly become devoid of content, and then we must bear Kant’s warning in mind: that concepts without intuition are empty (while intuition without concepts is blind).

Intuition resides in the specific, in the rooting, and to disregard this crucial point is like trying to fly in a vacuum.

It was probably an urge to escape such a vacuum that triggered my unwillingness to abandon the initial steps in the exercise discussed earlier on. Besides, I think that my sudden interest in how someone could talk about freedom in connection with the idea of being reborn as a bird was enhanced and made conscious by Wittgenstein popping up in my mind. “How come?” I almost heard Wittgenstein ask. “Does this make any sense, or no? What would such a connection reveal about the speaker’s form of life if the connection is intelligible to us?”

To go further along this line, we can, as Wittgenstein does himself, use the notion of games as a departure point. If you define “game” as making moves with different pieces according to a fixed set of rules, you obviously refer to board games like chess or backgammon, which is perfectly all right, apart from the fact that it does not cover other kinds of games, like card games and ball games or other kinds of games bordering on plays that children indulge in or invent. We can even conceive of persons who play some kind of ball game, but changes the rules as they go along, and thus can be said to alter between different games without demonstrating any clear borders between each game. Here the typical Socratic demand of finding a definition (“What is a game?”) that is neither too narrow, nor too wide, nor impossible (just like Oscar dealt with in an exercise during the workshop) will probably be impossible to satisfy.

Instead of looking for the one and only definition that covers every instance of a game, and excludes everything that is not a game, Wittgenstein invites us to look upon the notion of games as a family of more or less related activities, where the quite loose notion of “family resemblance” is what enables us to see “games” as a unifying concept of lots of diverse activities. Chess has a closer resemblance to backgammon than to football, due to their both being board games, while football (soccer) is a game involving movements of the whole body when handling a ball on a field – more like rugby or American football, which is more closely related to soccer than to chess or bridge. And what about hide-and-seek, why is that activity rather conceived of as a “children’s play” than a game? It involves rules and physical activity like many games, but no competitions in the organized sense of the word. So is institutionalized competition then a criterion for labelling some activity a game? Not really, since there are competitions of milk bucket-throwing and of chasing a rolling cheese down a steep hill and of other local, eccentric activities around the world, which we don’t find appropriate to call “games.”

Exploring a concept according to its use in different settings in everyday life, or in hypothetical situations that border on other, known settings, is what Wittgenstein typically does in *Philosophical investigations*. This is the closest he gets to a methodological grip. With a due sense of empirical, everyday life, Wittgenstein reveals how the borders between e.g. a game and a play, or between an established game and a game where people make up the rules as they go along, tend to be blurred rather than clear-cut. The notion of family resemblance is appropriate, as some members of a human family are recognized as related by having a particular nose, while others rather share the colour of the skin, or long legs, or a hoarse voice, and so on. Each family member may have one or more of such traits, and from one branch of the family to another there is a gradual shift in particular traits, thus allowing some members to share the peculiar nose and others to share the hoarse voice, without having the peculiar nose. But still we are able to group everyone together as members of a certain family. This is so even if we cannot pick out one particular person as *the* essential specimen of the family in question, or discern distinct traits that include every member of that family and exclude everybody else, without exceptions. Such demands would be impossible in this respect. And also in other respects, as when the concepts in question are much more general than “family.” Because, as Wittgenstein implicitly ask over and over again: How could it be otherwise?

This has the disconcerting consequence, at least to trained philosophers, of putting very general concepts like freedom, justice, courage, friendship, temperance and so on, on equal

footing with our game and family examples. There is no way of finding any clear-cut, ever-valid definition of even such general concepts. There is no transcendental realm where pure, Platonic forms (or ideas) of such concepts (or any concepts) reside in eternity. All there is, is the empirical world around us and the way we actually use our language. Understanding a concept or an expression is thus to realize how this concept or expression is used in a certain form of life. Without a sufficient knowledge of this form of life, any understanding or conceptualisation breaks down.

The impossibility of understanding, or giving sense to, words in isolation, is what makes Wittgenstein speak of language games, which are how words are used in an actual social practice. The departing point of *Philosophical investigations* is a traditional reflection of language, written by Augustine in his *Confessions*, where the church father remembers how he learned to speak in his infancy. He recalls how the grown ups pointed at objects and spoke their names, and by noticing this and filling out with the little words in between, he apparently learned his native language. But, as Wittgenstein elaborates on in paragraph after paragraph, this view of how a language is learnt is too crude, and misses the central point of how language and social practice are intertwined in an entire life form. Even Augustine's basic example would take the form of a language game, as when a mason at a building site shouts orders to his assistant: "Brick," "limestone," "mortar" and so on, prompting the assistant to hand him the object shouted for. In order to make this arrangement work, there must be a common understanding between the mason and the assistant that the latter is to hand over the object mentioned by the former – which does not go without saying in the general sense of Augustine's. Instead, a certain language game is going on, and not only a display of how words supposedly, in isolation, refer to objects in the empirical world.

Besides, how can we know that it is the object itself that is referred to when somebody utters a word when making a pointing gesture? If we do not know the language, we have no way of telling whether this person rather refers to the object's form or its colour or its texture and so on, than to what this object is called in a dictionary. As long as we are cut off from the life form of the speaker(s), we have no clue. Thus, to understand and to master a language is to understand and master how this language allows for numerous language games employed in different social practices in a certain life form. This implies that we do not learn to speak in the crude way suggested by Augustine, at least not our native language. Only when learning a second language might the traditional Augustinian view have some relevance – but that is because we already are familiar with language games in our native language, and then know how to look for and identify related language games in the new language.

A criticism of Socrates?

Does the "late" Wittgensteinian approach to language imply a criticism of the good old Socratic way of asking general questions like "What is freedom?"? Apparently it does, as we here tend to disregard any notion of language game and instead seek the holy grail of Platonic eternal truths, where the form (or idea) of freedom supposedly resides as pure essence, in complete isolation from any empirically tainted use of the word.

However, when we take a closer look on the Platonic dialogues, we realize that Socrates indeed implies the notion of language games in his typical counter-examples aimed at problematizing the interlocutor's statements. Socrates' counter-examples are often eloquent elaborations of imagined situations, well framed within his and his interlocutor's own culture, where the concept in question is employed in a certain, justified way that makes the interlocutor's definition either too narrow or too wide. The same goes with Socrates' frequent references to Homer and other revered sages who have set the standard of proper conduct or how to look upon

different aspects of life. Compared with Oscar, Socrates is much more inclined to elaborate on these matters, he may even indulge in speeches and digressions that Oscar would not allow for.

I think it is not too far-fetched to state that Socrates quite often explores the use of certain concepts within his own life form in a way that has lots of similarities to the philosophical investigations of Wittgenstein. Although any notion like language game is absent in Socrates, his counter-examples go along similar lines. But since Socrates' philosophical focus is directed towards the transcendental realm beyond the empirical world, he refrains from seeing what he does when investigating different uses of a certain word. A Wittgensteinian remark might be that Socrates does not find what he is looking for, even if it is just in front of his nose, because he cannot conceive of finding it in such a lowly place as the actual use of the words within certain social practices. Socrates is heavily biased in a way not too different from that of the "early" Wittgenstein, who also, in his own manner, looked for the essence of words, supposedly residing in a pure form of logical structure corresponding to the world of empirical facts.

Socrates' eagerness to problematize definitions and statements proposed to him by way of envisaging social practices where the actual definition does not fit, I find to be a sound trait that makes his philosophical investigations both revealing and entertaining. Much has been said of Socrates' mastery of logic (informal logics that is), and that is well deserved (even if his use of logics sometimes may be dubious). But this other aspect of his way of investigation, namely his use of counter-examples with an implicit Wittgensteinian streak, has received much less attention – undeservedly so. That might also be because the well-established reading of Plato has acquired the same bias as that of Socrates (and Plato), prompting us to look upwards instead of straight ahead.

Much has also been said about the seemingly destructive outcome of Platonic dialectics, where the participants fail to establish a valid definition of the concept in question, leaving them with a sense of despair and frustration. From an initial state of dogmatic knowledge we are brought to realize that we in fact do not know what we thought we knew. Socrates may then point out that: "Who knows the most: the one who believes that he knows, or the one who has questioned what he thought he knew?" This might be well-founded as a pedagogical device to deprive people of their shallow knowledge, which according to Plato is no knowledge at all, and guide them into a genuine search for real knowledge, in the hope that such real knowledge can be found. But from a Wittgensteinian stance we could criticise Socrates for imposing an impossible demand on his interlocutor, namely to produce a completely general, "an Sich" definition of a certain concept that is neither too narrow, nor too wide, but fits exactly in every conceivable instance. As this cannot be done, indulging in such an enterprise is to search for a holy grail that is no more than a *fata morgana* of some aspects of the empirical world we live in.

Should we then reject the good old Socratic way of posing general questions because it leads us astray on an ontological level? Not necessarily, as this way of questioning proves to be useful at least as a pedagogical device. If Socrates' main object is to drag people out of their dogmatic certainties, which is not to think, and bring them into a state of thinking, such general questions prove to be a good exercise, as Oscar would have said. Whether Socrates was aware of the impossibility of attaining water-proof, exactly fitting definitions of general concepts, and thus consciously treated general questions as mere exercises, we cannot know. Even if this possibility is not the most obvious one, at least not according to the predominant way of reading Plato, we cannot rule it out. Shrewdness was after all a major trait in Socrates, so we should beware of ascribing a too naïve, boy scout Platonic attitude to this old master of questioning.

We must also beware of attaining such a naïve, boy (and girl) scout Platonism ourselves as philosophy teachers and facilitators of philosophical group discussions. Then we must know what we are doing – like treating good old Socratic questions as exercises rather than profound, ontological inquests. We must, as I believe Socrates did, regard what happens along the course of the discussion as the important outcome, even more than the inevitable negative result. If our

object (as was Socrates') is to make people think, to make them indulge in a philosophical activity, we should demand conceptualization and see where this leads to. In line with Oscar, the most revealing issues will be how the interlocutor reasons and in other ways handles the challenges put in front of her. That tells a lot about who she is, or rather who she has become, probably even more (as Oscar states) than listening to her life story, which is rehearsed and altered to the point of becoming a lie.

What Wittgenstein in addition to this reminds us of, is not to lose sight of the language context during philosophical exercises – especially not if such a context is introduced as some initial step(s), like in the exercise dwelt upon earlier on. Attaining a conscious Wittgensteinian approach to the use of counter-examples in the classical Socratic way would surely make the discussions more revealing and varied and interesting than just sticking to the seemingly Platonic context-lessness of general concepts. Designing exercises with this insight in mind will then be a path to a richer and less repetitive repertoire of tasks for students to do.

Oscar and language context

Unlike Socrates, Oscar is not ambiguous when posing general questions about concepts. In Oscar's practice, this clearly is an exercise where the main purpose is to explore the subject's way of reasoning, either in a group discussion or in a one-to-one consultation. Oscar also typically focuses on how the subject uses the concept in question, and why this concept and not other, alternative concepts, enters the subject's mind. Here we can speak of a language context that bears the subject's personal mark, namely her propensities and peculiarities, even if these also make sense to people in general within the same culture.

Should it not make sense in this general respect, Oscar's standard move is to envisage a visit to the marketplace or the shopping mall where the peculiar statement is announced to people who pass by: "Hey, people, this person means so and so! Do you agree, or not?" Then Oscar invites the subject to surmise what those people are likely to say: Would it be "Yes, we agree!" or would they find the statement odd and not really know what the subject is talking about? Often the subject will admit that most people would find her statement odd – and then she has become aware of the oddness of her speech. Which in Wittgenstein's terminology amounts to her being aware of the discrepancy between her statement and the possible language games it is bordering on.

Besides, later on in *Philosophical investigations* (he probably had left Norway by then) Wittgenstein demonstrates the impossibility of having a "private language" – or for that matter of having a certain way to assure that the pain I felt yesterday is exactly like the pain I feel today, or that the colour I had in mind at a previous moment is the very same colour I have in mind now at this moment, and so on. Because: where is the criterion for comparing such things? What could be a valid criterion for upholding a private language, in contrast to an intersubjective language where the use of this language by members of the shared life form – the language games – is what enables us to learn it and preserve it by way of a meaningful communication? Finding a criterion untainted by this, which is the Platonic essentialist's dream, is, according to Wittgenstein, not feasible.

(This summary sounds, alas, much too solid to make justice to Wittgenstein, and this is the recurring difficulty for those who try to account for his thoughts in brief. The "late" Wittgenstein never claimed a once and for all victory on other philosophical stances, but continued to ponder on them, being unable to stop investigating his current position. Even if his "private language argument" looks quite convincing in *Philosophical investigations*, he kept on toiling on this and related question, often in never-ending discussions with the English philosopher and friend G. E. Moore, who was so worn out by Wittgenstein's intensity that his wife refused him to encounter this Austrian more than one hour a day.)

Returning to Oscar, the thought experiment of taking the subject to the marketplace is all about bringing language context into the inquiry, thus making the subject aware of the intersubjectivity of language. Or, as Oscar sometimes has phrased it: It is about making the subject realize that she is not God, that not everything she says is necessarily clear and accurate to everybody else. This approach is, as we have seen, much more Wittgensteinian than Socratic, and that is a point we should let sink in and appreciate. It may well be so that Plato says, as Oscar likes to quote, that “words are real” in the sense that they are a fact in the world after they have been uttered, and that we must relate to the spoken words in such a way. But taking people to the marketplace is to bring the notion of intersubjectivity a lot further than what Plato and Socrates do. Here the language context is brought into play, and rightly so. What we also should note, is that the subject often wants to rephrase her statement when confronted with people on the marketplace, in order to make it more intelligible to those people. This amounts to a concession, made on reflex, to Wittgenstein’s claim that a private language is no possibility.

What the notion of language context also may account for, is a notable tension in Oscar’s practice. On the one hand Oscar wants to explore how concepts and so on are used in the subject’s mental universe, as when he tells the subject: “Never mind how the dictionary defines this concept, I want to know what it means in the Morten universe.” But on the other hand he can tell the subject: “You must un-Morten yourself in order to be with us, and not only with yourself.” These seemingly contradictory instructions highlight the tolerance of movement a language context allows for. It is within this tolerance of movement we find idiosyncrasies in speech that still are intelligible to others in the shared life form. Such idiosyncrasies are revealing to the counsellor, and eventually to the subject when he becomes fully aware of them. And it is by dragging the subject from his own, often too peculiar universe into the shared language context we may deprive him of his usual mental hiding places and rehearsed speech that belong to the personal context that, when not challenged, can be quite impenetrable indeed. Yes, Oscar demonstrates, there is a tolerance of movement in our language, but if you try to push this tolerance too far, we must drag you back to a common, shared ground.

To the counsellor and facilitator it is important to realize that language context and personal context are two different coins, where the first is philosophically sound while the latter rather belongs to the psychologist’s office. When Oscar makes the subject abandon her empirical self in order to be brought up to the transcendental realm where concepts and ideas are discussed “without context,” the context here referred to is the personal, empirical context, and not the language context. This is because the language context is not empirical in the narrow, personal sense, but in the wide, intersubjective sense (within a certain life form) that also works in the transcendental realm. It has to be like this, as the language context is the only currency there is, also in the transcendental realm. We must, in the spirit of Wittgenstein, not fool ourselves to think otherwise. Or, to use one of Wittgenstein’s metaphors: If you peel the leaves off an artichoke, you will not find a core, as the leaves are all there is.

Several Oscar-quotations from the workshop illustrate how language context is a predominant foundation for his moves. Here is one example: “For one who is unsatisfied, is ‘but’ a common word in his mouth?” We tend to reply “yes,” and why? Because Oscar points to the use of the word “but” by taking evaluative factors plus how words are used into consideration – which is completely in line with a Wittgensteinian exploration of a language game.

Another example: A participant asks Oscar: “What is the border between the philosophical and the psychological in a consultation?” Oscar’s move is a counter-question: “Do you like borders?” The participant answers “I don’t know,” and when pressed admits that “No, I don’t like borders.” Here, too, Oscar exposes how the participant values the word “borders,” rightly suspecting that the valuation is in the negative, due to how the question was phrased. That is because people with a negative view on borders (or whatever it may be) tend to express

themselves in such a way – something that is common knowledge to those familiar with this kind of language game.

The other's tone of voice and body language is also something that Oscar may focus on, even more than the statement uttered. Oscar: "Ask me if I will marry you!" The subject: "Eh ... Oscar, will you marry me?" Oscar (in a very unenthusiastic tone of voice): "Maybe." And then: "What do you think I am most inclined to: to accept your proposal, or not accept it?"

Oscar of course does not stop by having identified a language game. This he only does implicitly, moving right ahead to his next move – which in the example of liking borders or not was: "Why would someone look for something he does not like?" This question not only takes the actual language game into account (again implicitly), but also explores the border in question (between philosophy and psychology). And the answer was: "Because man has a capacity to make himself miserable by complicating his life."

A final related example: Oscar asks a participant to answer his own question (this is a routine initial move). The participant does this, whereas Oscar asks: "Did the answer make you happy?" The participant: "No." Taking the person's attitude into account, this answer surprised no one.

Besides, Oscar also asks the following routine initial questions to a subject who has stated her initial question: "Why would anyone ask that question?" And: "What is the most ambiguous word in your question?" Here Oscar points directly towards motivations and the use of words that are inseparable from a certain life form with its numerous language games, and not at all towards some transcendental haven above. He then discerns the rooting of those concepts which are to be discussed seemingly free of context later on, but which nevertheless remain rooted in their departing point of conditions and circumstances.

Also the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance turns out to be in line with the Oscanian approach, as was demonstrated during the workshop when Oscar answered a question from a participant, and then asked back: "Have I answered your question?" The participant: "Not completely." Oscar: "Is it possible to answer a question completely?" This is a very Wittgensteinian question which prompted the participant to admit "No," as the demand of answering a question completely would be just as impossible as giving an all-inclusive, non-exclusive definition of a general concept – compare the discussion earlier on in this paper. To recognize this impossibility by having the notion of family resemblance in mind should prevent a counsellor and facilitator from succumbing to the already mentioned naïve Platonism that only narrows the scope of exercises and makes the eventual frustration of not finding the just right definition bigger than it has to be. Both the notion of language game and family resemblance are potent reminders that we must value what we discover along the path of inquiry more than the final result.

Doing philosophy with a psychological impact

When it comes to Oscar, the identification of some major Wittgensteinian traits is useful because it makes us see more clearly that Oscar is not the kind of "Socratic only" practitioner that his attitude easily makes us believe. Yes, he encourages general questions like Socrates do, and yes, he is very helpful in suggesting solutions that the subject does not like, in order to make her statements more precise, and yes, he problematizes through giving counter-examples – just like Sokrates does, to mention the basic Socratic moves. But Oscar also indulges in language context inquiries to an extent that by far surpasses Socrates' range, and he focuses on the subject as a person in a way Socrates hardly ever does, something that indeed borders on psychology.

Oscar typically refers to a complaint he often gets from the subject, namely that "You should talk to my speech, and not to me." But, as Oscar explains, a philosophical counsellor *must* talk to the person, and not only to her speech, he must have bad manners and go uninvited to the

other's kitchen, metaphorically speaking, and look into the fridge and otherwise check the situation. Far more than Socrates, Oscar treats the initial question as a pretext for exploring the subject's personal propensities and ideas that were not supposed to surface, because they reveal too much about the subject as a person, and not so much about the issue in question. Oscar may even, as he more than once did during his late night one-to-one consultations during the workshop, look into the fridge right from the start and discern some traits in the subject that never were meant to be discussed, before finally having the subject's question presented – and then throw it away as not very interesting in the light of what has been brought out of the fridge. Even a “Lacanian cut,” by saying “Stop! What do you want?” and, if deemed necessary, end the session abruptly, is a device Oscar employs, as he told us (and has demonstrated in Oslo some years ago).

A philosophical way of questioning which does have a psychological impact is then what Oscar's work may be said to amount to. And this is quite another matter than the good old Socratic one. But, as Oscar reminds us of, psychology was a department of philosophy in more than two thousand years, until the late 1800's when psychology was established as a science of its own. Even if Sigmund Freud pulled this new science in a rather dubious direction, judged from a philosophical stance, psychology can be much more, and very otherwise, than this.

What Oscar shows, in a way related to Wittgenstein's, is that the border between philosophy and psychology can be explored along other lines than by asking the subject to strip mentally on the psychologist's coach and “let it all hang out” – your childhood or your sex-life or whatever private matters this might be. Looking instead at how we think about personal matters, expressed generally in a non-private language where our use of concepts and ideas appears in certain language contexts, can be astonishingly revealing and say much more about the subject than hours of tell-tale indiscretions. This is in the end about growing up, as Oscar repeatedly stated – which surely is what we as human beings can and should do.

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