

... here is what the problem is.

1. One cannot say that "the brain does not behave" or that "a cell cannot behave," merely because the term "behave" arises from an ordinary sort of parlance involving the choices made by the faculties of whole bodies. There are all sorts of examples where terms are applied outside of their ordinary use. This is, in fact, how language grows and how terms like "behave" come to acquire family resemblance. We would never say to Wittgenstein, for example, "you cannot use grammar to mean anything but rules for English-syntax." After Wittgenstein, the term "grammar" comes to take on a very unique addition to its family of senses. And note that it is not merely an extension or a poetry. It isn't just colorful talking. One could not dismiss "cells behaving" as a type of poetry. Rather, it is classic family resemblance. It means that organisms show various patterns in the way they exist in their form of life.

2. If one were to say, "what is my brain doing with this thought?" one would have one of two possible meanings. The first might be the kind that would have gathered Wittgenstein's scorn. But the second would not have. The two ideas are as follows:

THE POOR IDEA:

There is a duplication in my head. There lives a little man in my head. I'm here thinking about what I'm doing inside my brain. This is like saying, "there is a pineapple, and there is the thought of the pineapple." Wittgenstein reminds us: "Nothing is hidden from you." The point is this: the argument Wittgenstein has is not against "mental content" per se, it is an argument against a linguistic DUPLICATION or SUPERFLUOUSNESS. Or perhaps it is best thought of as a warning against reification. The idea is that you come to think that you are both here and inside yourself at the same time. Or that when you see a pineapple you also behold its thought or essence, as if you experienced the world in some kind of stereo.

THE GOOD IDEA:

When I teach kids, I see different kinds of brains. I don't say that I see different "persons," because what I see are patterns of persons (seemingly attributable to relative differences in their faculties). Some kids absorb detail like a sponge and have good memories. The answers they like are the ones they have gathered like the Squirrels gather nuts. They want to say "I can show you the answer," which for them means the stored item. But other kinds of brains like concepts and abstractions better. They like to ask not what is, but why or how come. These students are far better at understanding philosophy. The memory students think the answer is in the dictionary or encyclopedia or something. All that the memory students want to do is play the game of fetch.

And so, let us imagine a situation where a student is insightful and begins to wonder how his faculties affect him. It could be a person wondering about his feeling of "love" for his girlfriend as he contemplates the effect that dopamine and other neurotransmitters have upon his brain chemistry. Instead of imagining something metaphysical -- "the one chosen girl" -- he imagines (and even senses) the effect of the brain chemistry being altered when seeing her. If he says, "my brain really likes this one," he would not be incorrect or even poetic. Nor would he be committing the fallacy of the little man in the head. He'd merely be focusing in upon a different unit of analysis. He would simply be reporting the effect of being insightful about his body, as when one senses, "those peanuts won't agree with me" (believing he has a food allergy based upon a prior experience).

Or when one says, "I can only do philosophy for two hours, because my mind can't do it any longer." I say this all the time. People who think philosophically have quite often remarked that they can do so only in fits and spurts, and in limited (often unpredictable) patterns or durations. It is not nonsense to say, "the mind won't let me think anymore," where that means what it does: the brain is "tired." One can sense this just as one can say, "I think there's something wrong with the digestion." The problem is that before science discovers something that we can see with an MRI and such, we are left with old wives tales about the nature of these things. And once we have better information, we can then turn that tale into the "picture" provided to us by science (e.g., "love is brain chemistry"). But my point is simple: even if we don't have good "pictures" yet of tired brains, insightful people who experience this nonetheless speak about it in only the ways they can. Older intellectuals always remark about their "hardware" not working like it used to. They talk of their lowered capacity to remember, and of their inability to multitask. They talk of the energy being less in the head. This is not nonsense or poetry. It is not reification. Worst case scenario, it's the reporting of a phenomenon packed in a hypothesis of some sort about what is going on in the body.

I guess, however, you could go "south" with this sort of talk if you ever let it be deterministic rather than descriptive. If you said, for example, "I can't be happy because my brain is sad," where you meant that to mean you were held captive or something -- this would be a kind of nonsense. It would be like saying "my organs have kidnapped me." One could be extremely silly with these sorts of constructions. But so long as they are merely reporting states of affairs about bodily conditions, and not subsuming the "I" into the organ, one would treat these sorts of statements as one would any sort of symptomology.

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Here is what I want to say: If you think about what your cognition is doing while you do it -- sort of thinking about thinking -- it is permissible so long as it is not reification. There is nothing wrong with thinking about what chocolate does to your brain (dopamine release) and what the cells of your mouth do instantly when you taste it (cell signalling) -- as you taste it. So you say, "my brain loves chocolate." What this means is "I can feel a dopamine bath," which is not the same as saying "my tongue likes the taste" (which you could also say). Neither of these says "I am prisoner."

Here is what I mean. All that this really talks about is the unit of analysis. One would never say that we can only talk at the level of "person" -- "I like chocolate" -- and never mention subroutines or biological paths associated with this general phenomenon. So long as the sense of the statements are symptomatic (symptomological?), there is no issue.

THAT'S IT! If it is a symptomological statement, it has sense. If it is an identification statement, ("I am my brain"), it is nonsense or poetry. That's the key right there. If you say, "my brain is doing X" you are ok so long as you are not creating two identities but are merely reporting phenomena that you, yourself, experience at a different unit of analysis (or hypothesize the matter being explained this way).

Regards. ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^

^

Dr. Sean Wilson, Esq.

Assistant Professor

Wright State University

Redesigned Website: <http://seanwilson.org/>

SSRN papers: <http://ssrn.com/author=596860>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/seanwilsonorg>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/seanwilsonorg>

New Discussion Group: <http://seanwilson.org/wittgenstein.discussion.html>

Subject: [Wittrs] Re: Wittgenstein and Whether Brains Behave

Posted by [kirby urner](#) on Sat, 29 Aug 2009 19:15:14 GMT

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On Sat, Aug 29, 2009 at 11:27 AM, Sean Wilson<whoooo26505@yahoo.com> wrote:

<< SNIP >>

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> phenomenon packed in a hypothesis of some sort about what is going on in the
> body.
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I think that's the worst case in some ways, like you say, if the clear meaning is occluded by a pseudo-scientific one, i.e. the boy is saying his heart is broken and all the girl can do is take it literally and call 911 (turns out she's a robot, and that's why he's so disappointed).

Why I'm suspicious of brain talk is I have this distrust of literal-minded people who seem proud of having squelched every metaphor. They won't want to talk of "affairs of the heart" because now they know those were the "wrong pictures" i.e. the heart is nothing but a blood pump and no love is in there.

Then you had centuries of "blood talk" (ongoing) in which this ephemeral non-existence "racial substance" accounted for (a) genetic features (b) ethnicity and (c) social class in this bewildering hodge-podge with no basis in today's science. But then before that, the blood was trafficking in "humors"...

It's complicated though, because substances traveling in the blood do affect consciousness and people with broken hearts do use alcohol to self medicate, saturate their brains, try to "take the edge off" (like knives, but where? -- pain is not a behavior, even if pain behavior *is* behavior).

The brain used to be perceived as an organ for cooling the blood, like

an air conditioner. We scoff at that today, but a part of me wants to say that that's true. Hot bloodedness means reacting without thinking, being a jerk, whereas if you actually manage to insert a rational component into your behavior, you'll come off as "cooler", whereas if you're downright calculating (rational to the point of a fault) then you come off as "cold". So in this sense, "blood talk" and "brain talk" still have their allegiance.

Given how mixed up it all is, I think science needs, as a first move, to NOT take any of this stuff for granted i.e. stop believing all your beliefs now and then, step back, create distance. Unless you have this ability to distrust your own thinking, to alienate yourself from your habitual patterns of thought, then you'll never be more than a mediocre scientist.

We need that proverbial ten foot pole. This is why any wannabe brain scientist needs to read some Wittgenstein, especially the later stuff. He's giving us tools to become more aware, more enlightened, regarding our principal open source power tool: our shared ordinary public language (a work of the ages).

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> of symptomology.
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This reminds me of the selfish gene talk, where all human behavior is now reduced to DNA "wanting to propagate itself" -- some such imputed motive (those who oppose this kind of anthropomorphism are then branded as sentimentalists, romantics, whereas they're really just questioning the robustness of the grammatical design, i.e. doubting this logic has much of a half-life, is too "radioactive" -- in the sense of leaking sense -- to be worth much investment.

You could have a misanthropic cosmological fairy tale in which the animals were happy, then this viral "language" (a kind of chemistry)

started infecting certain mammals, to where those using it had some advantages, meaning natural selection resulted in more and bigger brains -- what we call "the fall" in that now the animals are mostly miserable and the planet is reeling from the effects of too much unbridled inventiveness (sin), a kind of pigging out that will eventually spell disaster for these brutish "brain clods" (i.e. humans, freaks of nature, unable to self-manage effectively).

In other words, once you admit of extraordinary uses of language, the sky's the limit as to where you might go with it.

When men do this, it's considered a sign of genius. When women do it, they get to be "old wives" or (worse) "witches" (they bewitch, whereas males enthrall -- not such a nice word if hooked to thralldom). Patriarchy involves males controlling the stories (history). Partly why I'm glad computer science belongs to women (more than men) is it disrupts patriarchy, makes it a back seat driver, often safe to ignore.

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> (which you could also say). Neither of these says "I am prisoner."
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I like that you're fighting the "I am a prisoner" meme, as I think a number one job of an ego is to portray itself as trapped in some way, the victim of circumstances at the very least. In a democratic society, we seek to engender a powerful first person, an "I tense" that's not all about being at the effect of this or that. Some egos have a hard time making the adjustment.

Does this put democracy at odds with deism, including polytheism (e.g. Jungian archetypes language?). I don't think so, not necessarily.

Just so long as your ego is heroic, a fighter, you have a chance of not falling for one of these spammer namespaces, one of these imprisoning mindsets that forces you into disempowering relationships.

Once trapped in a cage of that kind, your impulse is then to bring everybody down to your level i.e. if I'm not powerful, then nobody is.

A lot of pseudo-scientific spam is about sucking any choice, volition, free will, decision-making powers out of the picture, lest average ordinary people get "too uppity for their own good".

In other words, as someone paying attention to "the music of authority" (power relations), I monitor brain talk as a possible source of anti-democratic memes. I am vigilant and distrustful, suspicious of motives, when the brain starts getting what I consider "too much focus" (i.e. I ask myself "what are they really up to here, in the name of science?").

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> Regards.

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>
> Dr. Sean Wilson, Esq.

I'm a tad leery of linking nonsense with poetry as what to dismiss, as that puts metaphorical thinking on the side of what to downplay, making the forces of literalness the "good guys" again. I don't think literal mindedness is intrinsically "good" or that the scientific posture always "makes the most sense". On the contrary, "scientifically true" and "dogmatically true" are too close for comfort much of the time, are simply code for "prevailing orthodoxy" i.e. some faddish "house of cards" that people want to believe in as an excuse for not thinking on their own.

Kirby

Subject: [Wittrs] Re: Wittgenstein and Whether Brains Behave
Posted by [Sean Wilson](#) on Sat, 29 Aug 2009 19:46:23 GMT
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.. Just to be clear, I would never equate the two. Poetry is never nonsense. Always, it is a rescue for it. But the thing with poetry is that it must be treated as such (or translated into what it would say if it were not poetry). So the expression, "I am my brain," where it only offers poetry is perfectly permissible. That's the thing about poetry: it can never be nonsense. But where the expression is NOT meant as poetry, one would have to ask whether it reports something symptomological or whether it is trying to subsume the person into the organ. It would not make sense to subsume the person into the organ because it would affect the conditions of assertability for all of one's other remarks (or in a lexicon generally). Or it would introduce a new sense of "person," like Star Trek's Data does "machine."

What I am trying to say is that if you adopt a way of speaking that subsumes the person into any organ, you will be introducing new rules for this sort of speaking convention, in which case one of two things will happen. (1) what you will end up saying will be only local to its new use (truly a matter of expression only); or (2) after being conjugated (by others), it will become the equivalent of other expressions in the lexicon that do not subsume the person into the organ (you've simply re-arranged words as one does furniture in the room).

Of course, the reason for (2) could be ideological. You speak in a re-arranged way because there is a certain metaphysical posture with which you want to adorn your expressions. People who speak of embryos as "persons" do this all of the time. To talk with them about anything that they are actually saying, you might have to use expressions like "post-embryonic" persons or "birthed persons" just to make certain differentiations in their lexicon. But this is the equivalent in the lexicon of others as "person, period." And so you have a language game inside of a language game going on amid a cultural and ideological struggle. My point is very simple: no matter what the dogma, it will need translated. ^ ^ ^ ^

Regards.

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Dr. Sean Wilson, Esq.

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Wright State University

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From: kirby urner <kirby.urner@gmail.com>
To: Wittrs@yahoo.com
Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2009 3:15:14 PM
Subject: [Wittrs] Re: Wittgenstein and Whether Brains Behave

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Subject: [Wittrs] Re: Wittgenstein and Whether Brains Behave
Posted by [jrstern](#) on Sat, 29 Aug 2009 20:04:31 GMT
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--- In Wittrs@yahoo.com, Sean Wilson <whoooo26505@...> wrote:
>[snip]
>Or perhaps it is best thought of as a warning againstÂ reification.

>[snip]

Yes.

But not (just) the reification of the pineapple, but the reification of propositional content separate from whatever you have in your head (brain) that allows it to deal with the pineapple. Because, yes, even in an LW grammar, you are allowed to have some kind of ... linguistic ... thing ... in your head that has some relationship, per a language game, to the distal pineapple. And that is not a reification, it is, perhaps, a representation, a token that plays a role ... and the details of that are exactly where LW leaves off providing clear answers.

Josh

Subject: [Wittrs] Re: Wittgenstein and Whether Brains Behave
Posted by [SWMirsky](#) on Sun, 30 Aug 2009 06:06:09 GMT
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Rather elaborately stated but I think you get at the crux of the matter here, Sean. It's just a different way of speaking about things, different perspectives and, at its most extreme, perhaps those different language games. Now if only Bruce can be convinced! Or not. -- SWM

Subject: [Wittrs] Re: Wittgenstein and Whether Brains Behave
Posted by [kirby urner](#) on Sun, 30 Aug 2009 15:08:03 GMT
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On Sat, Aug 29, 2009 at 12:46 PM, Sean Wilson<whoooo26505@yahoo.com> wrote:

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> assertability for all of one's other remarks (or in a lexicon generally). Or
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This is interesting grammar Sean. I actually like definite propositions like "Poetry is never nonsense" because if you really manage to operate by a rule this simple, then I have a prayer of understanding you over time. It's not that I don't understand you now, i.e. you don't come across as writing nonsense, being nonsensical. I feel we're in the fine tuning phase, but that's never a phase you're done with (why it's called that), provided the parties have an evolving aspect as well as a static aspect.

> What I am trying to say is that if you adopt a way of speaking that subsumes
> the person into any organ, you will be introducing new rules for this sort
> of speaking convention, in which case one of two things will happen.
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These seem like well thought out predictions. A fascinating title might be The Politics of the Organs wherein the author or authors go back and sample leading "organ talks" against a time axis, give us some back story. Like the spleen used to be a lot more talked about right? I'm talking about common vernacular, wherein people are wont to communicate, sometimes behind the back of another, about so-and-so's splenetic demeanor (not saying I know what it means, but I know there's a lot of need for organ talk, secretions, endorphins all manner of gland (pineal gland: used to be in philosophy a lot more,

now almost forgotten)).

The brain talk I've sampled on this list has phased over into computer talk a lot more i.e. there's really not a huge amount of brain anatomy on the table, no sense of dissections, lab science, pickled specimens.

There's a future oriented sheen, of experiments untried, and they'd be with electronics, assuming the biologists give us stuff we can work with -- and they already have, our imaginations are fertile.

How the brain and computer go together is, in a literal mindset, some question about how to fit a human being with borg like devices, creating a cyborg, or maybe it's just a literal notion that neurons firing over here correspond to another picture in the guts of a device, except made out of metals, a machine, now certifiable to have the same thoughts and feelings as a human being because of some isomorphism we're happy with, i.e. we've negotiated a relationship between the complex anatomy we need as human beings, and a target anatomy we actually haven't built yet, mostly just write about (the just around the corner flavor is there, but faint).

> Of course, the reason for (2) could be ideological. You speak in a re-arranged way because there is a certain metaphysical posture with which you want to adorn your expressions. People who speak of embryos as "persons" do this all of the time. To talk with them about anything that they are actually saying, you might have to use expressions like "post-embryonic" persons or "birthed persons" just to make certain differentiations in their lexicon. But this is the equivalent in the lexicon of others as "person, period." And so you have a language game inside of a language game going on amid a cultural and ideological struggle. My point is very simple: no matter what the dogma, it will need translated.
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There may never be global agreement on what a person is or is not although to say this sounds threatening within an imperial mindset as in "my god, how will I administer them then?". Wittgenstein asks us what's so wrong with encountering contradiction, which we (or they) sometimes fend off not as logically untrue i.e. not as a cogent argument in need of precise and deliberate countering, but as "vaguely threatening" meaning we ignore, adopt little bits of, try on for size.

The role of western philosophy in many ways has been to police a perimeter, within which are the certifiably legitimate philosophical

problems it's OK to haggle and nitpick about, and outside of which, beyond the fringe even, are these alien tribal life forms, perhaps not suitable for polite discussion, let alone notice in academia. However, with the advent of anthropology and to some extent psychology (The Rise of the Ologies would nicely complement The Politics of the Organs), we got new brands of philosophy that are friendlier to aliens (deliberate ambiguity here: "alien" means ET too, not just that Tribe of Snake Worshipers Over the Mountain).

Yes, brain talk is affected by alien talk. These mindsets connect. For one thing, aliens may have different rules around how to self manage pharmaceuticals i.e. don't go to stethoscope people in sky towers for permission to use Xanax (don't use Xanax at all -- a threat, whereas Prozac is big in Baghdad i.e. "winning the war" there (from that point of view)).

Obviously, given my doctrine of mindsets, I'm not supposing I'm bossing them around (too big, like uber-blimps -- me just a concerned passenger, have ideas for steering sometimes). I do tend to focus on diplomacy and advertising respectively though, as the former is about "worlds in collision" i.e. what to do about nonsense speakers camped out really close to the village, and the latter is about manipulating the memplexes that are, after all, the molecular components of belief systems. At one time Michael Jackson was the choice of a new generation (Pepsi). Later, we veered off into spoofing Rome a lot more, in our fight against tyranny (doesn't mean we don't keep coming back to Jackson though, a top talent I've never said otherwise).

<http://mybizmo.blogspot.com/2008/05/defending-homeland.html>

Kirby

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> Dr. Sean Wilson, Esq.
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> Assistant Professor
>
> Wright State University
>
> Redesigned Website: <http://seanwilson.org>

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> Sent: Saturday, August 29, 2009 3:15:14 PM
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