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ON WITTGENSTEIN
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It is readily apparent that the motif of the animal affects a number of central motifs in Wittgenstein.¹ As is well known, the considerations on certainty distinguish two groups of motifs: on the one hand, doubt, testing, error, supporting argument, justification, distrust, etc.; and on the other hand, trust, faith, action, conformity, assurance, holding-to-be-true, etc. Wittgenstein asks himself the question of how grounds and groundlessness, how ground and abyss relate. In analogy with the basic difference in his thinking, that between what can be said and what can be shown, the question of ground and groundlessness is reflected in the difference between meaning and truth.²

The ground, which Wittgenstein calls *form of life* or also *language-game*, cannot itself be based on grounds. It floats above the inconsistency of an abyss that cannot become the object of logical propositions. Wittgenstein never says that this abyss does not exist. What he does say is that it makes no sense to articulate it with the means of language. This already approximates thinking to faith: “What I know, I believe.”³ Any certainty is grounded in an element that is itself ungrounded, an element whose contingency is indubitable. More profound than skepticism and doubt is the faith in which they are grounded, the trust the subject puts in its form of life. Now Wittgenstein distinguishes between faith and superstition:

“Religious faith & superstition are quite different. The one springs from *fear* & is a sort of false science. The other is a trusting.”⁴

True faith is identical to trust. It implies a certain fearlessness, the way affirmation does, which is the precondition on which the possibility of negation, doubt, critique, and refutation rests. To put trust in someone—in German: *Vertrauen schenken*, to give the gift of trust—means to give something without being sure of a gift in return. Trust implies the courage that affirms what it does not know. Or knows only as familiar, as something that is trusted but not explained. The same holds of faith, which is an affirmation that gives itself over:

1 I will focus my discussion of animality in Wittgenstein’s thought on his remarks in *On Culture* and *On Certainty*. Wittgenstein wrote the remarks in German between 1949 and 1951 that are collected in the bilingual edition *Über Gewissheit. On Certainty*, posthumously published by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright in 1969. They are among the most beautiful parts of his philosophy. The “mixed remarks” in *Culture and Value* are a hardly less beautiful selection from Wittgenstein’s unpublished papers, edited by G.H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman in 1977 and revised by A. Pichler in 1994.

2 Wittgenstein described the “method” of his “philosophizing” as “leaving the question of *truth* and asking about *sense* instead.” See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen. Culture and Value. A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*, ed. G.H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman, revised ed. Alois Pichler, trans. Peter Winch, Oxford: Blackwell 1998, 3e.

3 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell 1974, 25e.

4 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 82e.

“‘Believing’ means, submitting to an authority. Having once submitted to it, you cannot then, without rebelling against it, first call it in question & then once again find it convincing.”⁵

Even the subject that says of itself that it does not believe has already, and so it believes, submitted to the authority of a form of life; so that to believe and to trust means to affirm what *already* is. Wittgenstein’s late thinking encircles this *already*, whose acknowledgement it affirms. To submit to the authority of what already is also means not to indulge in the phantasm of resistance and rebellion, a phantasm that belies the fact that all resistance against the *already* is in vain:

“I can’t help believing ...” and “I am comfortable that that is how things are.”⁶

The hypothesis of the following remarks is that this comfort at which Wittgenstein’s thinking aims is reached on the back of animality or of the animal as the subject puts its trust in it. A remark in *Culture and Value* helps us understand how the form of life is, “as it were, [...] something animal”⁷:

“I sit astride life like a bad rider on his mount. I owe it solely to the horse’s good nature that I am not thrown off right now.”⁸

What is true of the I of this experience is true of the subject in general. It sits on its life as though on the back of a swaying horse. It is not the possibility that I will be thrown off that Wittgenstein contests (at the very least, he does *not exclude* it!). What he contests is the possibility of an unambiguous determination of whether that happens and even can happen at all: “Why, would it be *unthinkable* that I should stay in the saddle however much the facts bucked?”⁹ The subject cannot but trust. It has no choice but to entrust itself to the animal’s good nature, not knowing whether the latter will remain good-natured. There is obviously no way—at least not while we are alive—of getting off the horse of our own accord. For the horse in this parable designates life and the form of life itself. It is the language-game in which even the subject that distrusts it (by believing it is a good rider) remains embedded:

“You must bear in mind,” Wittgenstein writes, “that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there—like our life.”¹⁰

“Beyond being justified or unjustified,”¹¹ the language-game (life and the form of life) remains groundless because it is itself the ground. There is no further ground beyond the ground. There is nothing but the abyss of contingency or inconsistency.

In order to demonstrate that the subject and its certainties are (already) embedded in a form of life and a language-game, Wittgenstein employs motifs of groundless life such as that of animality. We might say, it seems, that the logos, both language and reason, requires this embeddedness in a medium that at once indicates its boundary

5 Ibid., 52e.

6 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 36e.

7 Ibid., 47e.

8 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 42e.

9 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 81e.

10 Ibid., 73e.

11 Ibid., 47e.

by being boundary and enablement at once. “Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement,”¹² which is the faith in the good nature, innocence, and integrity of the animal. Of the animal or of life or, as Wittgenstein also says, of nature.

This faith implies more than fearlessness and courage. It implies a (not necessarily religious) passion, an attitude that allows the subject to overcome its skepticism in order to let it seize hold of its form of life by constituting it as equally passive and active:

“It appears to me as though a religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates. Hence although it’s belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life. Passionately taking up *this* interpretation. And so instructing in a religious belief would have to be portraying, describing that system of reference & at the same time appealing to the conscience. And these together would have to result finally in the one under instruction himself, of his own accord, passionately taking up that system of reference. It would be as though someone were on the one hand to let me see my hopeless situation, on the other depict the *rescue-anchor*, until of my own accord, or at any rate not led by the hand by the *instructor*, I were to rush up & seize it.”¹³

The situation is hopeless because there is no alternative to it. To hope means to trust in the existence of an alternative. Yet there is no life without a form of life. The subject already rides on the horse’s back. And so it must decide in favor of the already-decided situation. It must passionately affirm contingency:

“My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things.”¹⁴

With many things, or at least with what cannot be changed, which is to say, with what eludes my control. What is it, then, that Wittgenstein says of the situation of the subject? He says that it is held in suspense between the contingency of its situation and the passion that lets it affirm this situation. It might be objected—correctly—that religious faith is a specific form of life and not the only one. What is decisive, however, is that we cannot but trust or believe in the neutrality and innocence of the language-game, since this trust and belief is what sustains all doubt:

“Doubt itself rests only on what is beyond doubt.”¹⁵

The language-game and the form of life carry the subject an infinitesimal quantum across the abyss of contingency. A subtle distinction obviously becomes necessary between contingency and the form of life above which it remains suspended like a floating architecture. The subject does not stand on the ground. Wittgenstein says: it sits “like a bad rider on a horse.” The animal or the language-game mediates between rider and ground as a sort of safety net that, being itself absolutely contingent, cannot be contingency. What is contingent is not contingency (contingency is necessary!). What is contingent is the porous film that has spread over the abyss of contingency (of the *real* in the Lacanian sense) like a Deleuzian plane of consistency.¹⁶ Žižek on this point:

12 Ibid., 49e.

13 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 73e (emphasis in the original).

14 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 44e.

15 Ibid., 68e.

“Wittgenstein is well aware that life-forms ultimately, so to speak, ‘float in empty space’; that they possess no ‘firm ground under their feet’—or, to use Lacanian terms, that they form self-referring symbolic vicious circles maintaining an unnameable distance from the Real. This distance is empty; we cannot pinpoint any positive, determinative fact that would call [the] ‘objective certainty’ [of the form of life] into question since all such facts always-already appear against the unquestionable background of ‘objective certainty’; yet it attests to the lack of support of the ‘big Other,’ to its ultimate impotence, to the fact that, as Lacan would put it, ‘the big Other doesn’t exist,’ that its status is that of an impostor, of pure pretence. And it is only here that Wittgenstein effectively breaks out of the Cartesian confines: by means of affirming a radical discontinuity between certitude and ‘truth’; of positing a certainty which, although unquestionable, does not guarantee its ‘truth.’”¹⁷

We cannot inquire beyond the ground—the language-game, the form of life. All attempts to go *deeper* end in the impossibility of logicizing the “origin” of the origin (of the logos, of language). But this “origin” is nothing but the unsayable or chaos or the mystical something that resists logicization. It remains closed, for it is closedness itself that acquires in the language-game an initial consistency, a medium and element. The plane of consistency that is both the language-game and the form of life has been wrested from inconsistency and formlessness, not in an utterance but in the performance of an act that generates the space of initial linguistic as well as practical orientation:

“The origin & the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can the more complicated forms grow. Language—I want to say—is a refinement, ‘in the beginning was the deed.’”¹⁸

The transition from chaos to the language-game corresponds to the violent change from formlessness to form. It is only from here on—by recourse to a first consistency and form, to a diagrammatic plane, as Deleuze/Guattari would put it¹⁹—that language

16 In *Après la finitude. Essais sur la nécessité de la contingence* (English translation: *After Finitude. An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier, London: Continuum 2008), Quentin Meillassoux develops the idea “that contingency [the contingency of the natural laws] *alone* is necessary” (ibid., 80), which does not mean that there are no laws. Relating this idea to Wittgenstein’s thought, this means that the language-game and the form of life are the contingent law to which every subject, with all its doubts, remains tied. The contingency on which they are founded—not as their ground but as their groundlessness—is incapable of logical explication. There is only the possibility and the necessity of believing or trusting in the contingent law. To believe, to trust means simply to open oneself to the world in its *how* (in how it is) instead of seeking to explain the miracle of the “existence of the world,” its *that* (that it is), the naked *there is* (Ludwig Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” *Philosophical Review* vol. 74 no. 1 [Jan. 1965], 3–12).

17 Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do. Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 2nd ed., London: Verso 2002, 152.

18 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 36e. (Wittgenstein quotes Goethe’s *Faust*, verse 1237.)

19 Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell, Hugh Tomlinson, London: Verso 1994. On the close proximity between Wittgenstein and Deleuze with respect to the animal see already: Marcus Steinweg, *Behauptungsphilosophie*, Berlin: Merve 2006, 36–89. As is well known, Deleuze, in his *Abécédaire*, associates Wittgenstein with a “philosophical catastrophe” and a “massive regression of all philosophy.” He obviously failed to see the structural homology between his planes of consistency and the concepts of

can grow, can become more refined and complex. In the beginning is the violence and primitiveness and animality the language-game shares with its abyss (“origin”). This is not without consequence for the picture Wittgenstein paints of the human being: “I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.”²⁰ We must distinguish three orders: first, the order of absolute disorder, which I want to call that of the abyss, of formlessness, of chaos—Wittgenstein marks it as the *unsayable*; second, the order of first consistency, which marks that of the primitive language-game and the animal form of life; third, the order of language, which can refine itself into modalities of doubt, of supporting argument and justification, i.e., of ratiocination. The third order (that of arguments) remains embedded in the second (which is the “the element in which arguments have their life”²¹), while the second retains contact with the first: in the language-game survives some of the chaos, the primitiveness and animality, from which it emerges.

That is why Wittgenstein can say that “within all great art there is a WILD animal: tamed,”²² lending art an animal dimension that touches upon its, to use Nietzsche’s word, Dionysian abyss, a dimension in which innocence and indomitability become metaphorical substitutes of each other. It is once again animality in which authenticity is said to express itself, whose adulteration the construction of the language-game introduces. It is not surprising to encounter the allegory of indomitability and wildness within the horizon of a vocabulary that encompasses the words primitiveness, animality, origin, and life. The language-game is there like our life, beyond justified and unjustified, beyond good and evil, as something animal because it marks the contact with Dionysian innocence. Wittgenstein’s ontology turns out to be an ontozoology, one that trusts in the purity and integrity of the animal.²³ And we know that where animals abide, children cannot be far off. The child and the animal share the playful ingenuity of bare life, or so Wittgenstein seems to think:

“Does a child believe that milk exists? Or does it know that milk exists? Does a cat know that a mouse exists?”²⁴

This *directness* of a form of life that unquestioningly—unknowingly—trusts the evidentness of the form of life, that believes in it on the threshold of naturalness, is what we call naïveté, a way of acting and living that needs no reasons. Wittgenstein’s ontozoology is the thinking of this fundamental groundlessness. It teems with children and animals whose naïveté convicts the doubting subject, which conceives of itself as an adult *cogito*, of its own naïveté, the naïveté of believing that knowing is not a

the language-game and the form of life.

²⁰ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* 62e. Cf.: “Instinct comes first, reasoning second. Not until there is a language-game are there reasons.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 2, ed. G.H. von Wright and H. Nyman, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988, 117.

²¹ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 16e.

²² Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 43e.

²³ At one point, for instance, Wittgenstein asks: “Why can’t a dog simulate pain? Is it too honest?” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Blackwell 2009, 96e.

²⁴ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 63e.

form of belief. The child and the animal exemplify the naturalness of a praxis situated *before* thought. We can call this praxis belief, faith, or trust. In any case, it is an almost blind pre-philosophical attitude toward the child's, the animal's world: "A trained child or animal is not acquainted with any problems of philosophy."²⁵ This attitude implies tacit affirmation. It acts instead of thinking. It practices evidentness:

"Might we say: A child must of course learn to speak a particular language, but doesn't have to learn to think [...]?"²⁶

We might well say that there is, *before* thinking, action and learning. The use of what I do not necessarily think or understand. A use that rests on trust rather than distrust. On a trust in the world or primal trust that seems to come more easily to children and animals than to the adult subject (the reflective animal). Once again we encounter the thought that the aim is not an intervention into the grammar of what happens in the world, but a trusting acceptance of what is given. The forms of life and the "everyday language-game," Wittgenstein says, are "to be *accepted*,"²⁷ like something natural that appeals to my trust and my belief.

The child and the animal believe.²⁸ They question neither the language-game nor the form of life, so unquestionably do they experience themselves amid their culture. Wittgenstein speaks of a *system of reference* that serves as the referential frame of primary orientation in the world because we trust it, which does not mean that we "can rely on"²⁹ it. At the moment when he proposes that a subtle difference exists between culture and (the European and American) civilization (of his time)—"Culture is like a great organization which assigns each of its members his place, at which he can work in the spirit of the whole, and his strength can with a certain justice be measured by his success as understood within that whole"; whereas civilization lends expression to the "value of the individual"—Wittgenstein draws on the Nietzschean phrase of the "genuine & strong characters," in whom he recognizes the bearers of culture.³⁰ What is decisive about this paradigm is that the close approximation of culture and nature permits to distance both from civilization. This approximation clearly correlates to the *undecidability* of the language-game. In the language-game, as in the form of life, nature and culture, animality and humanity, we might say: interfere.³¹ What makes the "spirit" of civilization unappealing to Wittgenstein is its

25 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Anthony Kenny, Oxford: Blackwell 1974, 191. Joachim Schulte writes on this point: "The idea, to exaggerate a little, is to get the philosophical problems out of the way by leading one who is obsessed with them to the insight that he is at bottom nothing other than a 'trained child or animal.'" (Joachim Schulte, *Wittgenstein. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart: Reclam 1989, 114 [note]). Must we not conclude that the subject turns out to be an animal that puts its trust in an animal (the animality of the form of life), or a child that relies on its innocence?

26 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Raymond Hargreaves, Roger White, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1975, 53.

27 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2009, 177 (emphasis in original).

28 "The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes *after* belief." (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 23e)

29 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 66e.

30 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 8e–9e.

31 That the "word 'undecidable' belongs to the description of the language-game" also implies that it demonstrates the undecidable interference between nature and culture. See Anthony Kenny (ed.), *The Wittgenstein Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell 1994, 207. What is

distinction from the evidentness of the animal: civilization equals culture without nature.

undecidable about the language-game and the form of life is their immediate adjacency to the dimension of boundlessness, which is the mystical, that which can only be shown, the unsayable. By contesting the possibility of logical access to this dimension, Wittgenstein does not deny, but in fact confirms *ex negativo*, its efficacy (for everything that is the case). The language-game and the form of life stand in for the mystical groundlessness by taking on the role of origin instead of being absolute origin. By sharing the boundary that permits us to distinguish them, the mystical and the language-game as much as the form of life are fused almost to the point of undecidability. That is why Badiou is quite right to approximate the “real remainder” that is the “mystical element” to Kant’s *noumenon*, as the problematic (undecidable) concept *par excellence*. It is the regrettable aspect of Badiou’s book about Wittgenstein that he entirely fails to recognize the significance of the late philosophy, according it “the status of [mere] immanent gloss, a personal Talmud” in relation to the *Tractatus*. Cf. Alain Badiou, *L’antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, Paris: Nous 2009, 22 and 18.