BOOK REVIEWS

# *Wittgensteins Grammatik des Fremdseelischen* by Jasmin Trächtler

**Anja Weiberg**

Jasmin Trächtler, *Wittgensteins Grammatik des Fremdseelischen*. Berlin: J.B. Metzler, 2022. 273 pp.

Although issues of what Wittgenstein called "philosophy of psychology" interested him in virtually all of his creative periods, he devoted himself to it particularly intensively in the period from 1945 until his death in 1951. A wide variety of topics are discussed in this context: the use of psychological words such as "wish", "think", "pain", "intention", and "pretence" for example; questions concerning the experience of meaning, (not) knowing what is going on in another person, the conception of (un)certainty as a mental state, the difference of logical and psychological impossibility, or the "hurly-burly" of human behaviour (RPP II, 629), and much more.

Given this variety of topics and the large body of the writings (for an overview of the relevant manuscripts and typescripts cf. 5–20), it seems surprising that there are only a few, early published comprehensive studies of Wittgenstein's investigations into the philosophy of psychology (e.g., Schulte 1987, Budd 1989, ter Hark 1990), esp. in comparison to the number of publications on several other Wittgensteinian topics, such as religion or ethics. This already explains the importance of Jasmin Trächtler's published dissertation, in which she undertakes both a precise exegetical analysis and a systematic representation and interpretation of the *Nachlass* in order to deal with Wittgenstein's remarks on the topic of the "other minds problem" in all of its variety and complexity. To this end, Trächtler structures her work as follows:

In her introduction (1–31), she outlines the topic and the methodological approach of conceptual investigations characteristic of late Wittgenstein and provides information on the textual basis as well as the status of Wittgenstein's writings after 1945 and the state of research.

In Chapter 2, "Das Bild der verborgenen Seele" (33–74), the background to the topic is presented, namely the picture of a soul hidden inside the body, which was established very early on in various philosophical positions and is still effective today (not only) in philosophical discourse. This picture is linked to a postulated epistemic difference between one's own mind and other minds. According to this conception, we only have direct access

to (and knowledge about) our own feelings, sensations and mental states, whereas those of others are only conveyed to us through their behaviour, which is why we can never know with certainty what they are thinking and feeling – after all, they could also be pretending and lying to us. Wittgenstein's criticism of this image in the field of philosophy is subsequently explored in detail: first, Trächtler explains Wittgenstein's critique of the "pneumatic conception" (cf. Ms 130, 3) of the soul (ch. 2.1), which is presumably directed primarily against mentalist positions and their "psycho-physical parallelism", based on a "primitive conception of grammar", since the grammar of physiological phenomena is transferred to the realm of the mental, thereby reifying the soul, postulating "a soul-*entity*" (254) as a hidden life-giving principle. In this context, she also points out interesting parallels to Wittgenstein's criticism of the referentialistic concept of meaning in the PI and other writings (cf., e.g., PI 36, LWPP I, 979). In both cases, a relationship is conceived between an inner and an outer (mind – body, meaning – word) and, furthermore, the inner/invisible is conceived as what is actually important "behind" the spoken words or the physical expressions in facial expressions, gestures and behaviour, which gives them life in the first place (46).

While in Ch. 2.1 the reification of the soul was described primarily as a projection into the inner suggested by the surface-grammatical forms, in Ch. 2.2 Trächtler explains those remarks by Wittgenstein that go into more detail on the pictorial itself and what potentially misleads philosophers about it. By analysing the aspects of grammatical (inner processes and mental activities are described according to the model of the temporality of physical processes and activities) and semantic (the inner is seen as mental space in analogy to physical space) transferences, among other things, she shows that talking about the hiddenness of the inner is also based on a reasoning borrowed from talking about physical facts, in that it is assumed that just as one cannot see a physical object in an inaccessible outer space, there is analogously an inner space in which the sensations and feelings of a person are located, which is hidden from other people (53–74). This conception of a hidden inner and Wittgenstein's criticism of it is summarised by Trächtler as follows:

> The inner seems thus to be the reason for its hiddenness qua its innerness and consequently also the reason for a fundamental uncertainty, the 'one can never know…', towards others. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, wants to draw attention to the fact that we rather speak of a 'hidden inner', because we are often insecure with regard to others' minds (255).

In Chapter 3, "Der 'primitive Grund' der Seele" (75–128), Wittgenstein's objections to scepticism about other minds are further explored. After a brief discussion of Russell's analogy argument (cf. Russell 1948, 501-505) against this kind of scepticism and Wittgenstein's criticism of it (see, e.g., RPP I, 917), Trächtler works out that Wittgenstein's own concern is not to "respond to' the sceptical challenge (as Russell and other philosophers do). Rather he describes scepticism as the result of a (conceptual) philosophical confusion and thus undermines it. In this context, firstly (ch. 3.1) Trächtler works out Wittgenstein's grammatical argument against the radical form of scepticism about other minds (according to which we cannot know whether others are thinking, feeling and sentient beings at all): we do not have an "opinion" on others as animated

beings but an "attitude towards the soul" (PPF 22) which is presupposed already by our pre-linguistic behaviour (80–85) and which "is constitutive for our concept of 'human'" (256). Hence, the assumption (if one wants to put it that way) of the ensoulment (*Beseeltheit*) of others is not a question of knowing or not knowing at all, since we can only speak of "knowledge" where our assumptions can in principle be justified but also refuted, which is not the case with regard to the "assumption" of the ensoulment of others. Drawing on Wittgenstein's example of the "soulless tribe" (cf. RPP I, 96 f.) and his reflections on animal psychology, her explanations show that the concept of the mental (*des Seelischen*) also includes phenomenal aspects (e.g., "[v]ariability and irregularity" of facial expressions; RPP II, 615) and that we do not attribute or deny certain psychological attributes to animals primarily on the basis of mental abilities but rather (though not only) on the basis of their similarity or dissimilarity to human behaviour. In the following excursus on the (for Wittgenstein conceptual) question of whether machines can think (95–107), Trächtler takes up his scattered remarks on this topic, relates them to current debates on artificial intelligence and considers what consequences it would have for our application of psychological predicates if the behaviour of machines increasingly resembled that of humans. The criterion of being "human-like" is discussed here again, and it is emphasised that it is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for the attribution of psychological predicates. This is because this attribution depends not least on what is important to the speakers, and in the case of machines there additionally seems to be a certain form of "conceptual unease" (cf. 106), since the concept of 'machine' is closely linked to the characteristic of soullessness and thus gives the impression of a contradiction with the attribution of psychological predicates to machines.

Secondly (ch. 3.2), Trächtler discusses Wittgenstein's critical look at the moderate form of scepticism about other minds, according to which we cannot know what others think, feel or sense, while we have an immediate, infallible certainty about our own thoughts, feelings and sensations. Wittgenstein rejects the idea of an epistemic difference between one's own mind and other minds by showing that this idea results from failing to see that there is in fact a grammatical difference, not an epistemic one. In discussing Wittgenstein's rejection of an epistemic difference (110–128), Trächtler shows that the postulated certainty, immediacy and infallibility with regard to our own minds are not based on a metaphysically or epistemically privileged access to our own inner life, but that this impression arises primarily due to grammatical asymmetry between psychological statements in the first and the third person present indicative tense: in our language-games, in most cases statements about my own mind have an expressive function (thus no claim to knowledge is made with them); and there is a "grammatical infallibility" insofar as psychological statements in the first person present indicative tense cannot be corrected by others, and that no error can be meaningfully expressed by them in relation to one's own epistemic mental states and dispositions. Concerning other minds, however, speaking of knowledge or doubt is a regular move in our language-games. These considerations demonstrate that scepticism about other minds is a distortion of the grammar of our common ways of expression (129).

If statements of doubt as well as knowledge claims are regular elements of our language-games about others' minds, the follow-up question arises regarding which evidence we have for, e.g., the feelings of others. This question is addressed in Chapter 4, "Jenseits von Innen und Außen" (129–169), in which Trächtler mainly shows that Wittgenstein undermines the epistemic difference between my mind and other minds in mentalistic conceptions as well as in behaviourist ones. To this end she first draws on Wittgenstein's remark that "[t]he human body is the best picture of the human soul" (PPF 25) to clarify the nature of the relationship between the inner and the outer (ch. 4.1.1). Drawing on further remarks, she shows that the "human body" for Wittgenstein is to be understood in a broad sense, namely including the entire human behaviour of expression in facial expressions, gestures and speech as well as the respective context (132). In speaking of the "best picture", Wittgenstein clearly opposes the presupposition of scepticism about other minds, that the external provides only indirect information about the internal (132). With recourse to his discussion of Wolfgang Köhler's theory of similarity (133–135; cf. Köhler 1933, 152–157), it also becomes clear that Wittgenstein does not, like Köhler, aim at an external, experiential relationship between the inner and the outer, but rather sees an "internal relation" of the inner and the outer which leads to the conclusion that there is no possible separation of expression and the expressed but a logical relation. With this, Wittgenstein does not only refute mentalist positions but also (logical) behaviourism. Descriptions of states of mind cannot be reduced to descriptions of external behaviour: "Indeed, often I can describe his inner, as I perceive it, but not his outer" (LWPP II, 62e). Rather, descriptions of the others' minds, according to Wittgenstein, deal with both the behaviour and the state of mind of others – "not side by side, however, but about the one via the other" (PPF 29). Trächtler draws the following conclusion from this:

> According to Wittgenstein, in psychological concepts there is a thwarting of the references to the 'inner' and the 'outer', insofar as descriptions of others' minds deal with mental states and behaviour *through* each other. For example, the description 'she is out of humour' is a report about the behaviour *by* talking about a state of mind and vice versa […] (259).

In Ch. 4.2, PI 304 is the starting point, where Wittgenstein states that sensation (in this case pain) is "not a Something, but not a Nothing either." He distances himself here from the exclusivity of the alternative between either the mentalist assumption of "something mental" or the behaviourist denial of any inner which in his view are both subject to a "grammatical *fiction*" (PI 307). According to Trächtler, the paradox outlined in PI 304 can only be resolved if we consider the following: Although the grammatical form of the utterance of sensations is transitive ("I have ...") and can thus, together with an introspective approach, give rise to the demand for a grammatical object (a "Something"), nevertheless the use of the utterance of sensations in the language-game has an expressive function and therefore is used intransitively insofar as the means of expression and the expressed are merged (155). Thus here, too, it is important to understand that Wittgenstein carries out conceptual investigations, as Trächtler also emphasises and refers to Ms 124, among others, as evidence: "The proposition: 'Behind the utterance of feeling there is

nothing' is a *grammatical* one – it does not say, therefore, that we feel nothing" (cf. Ms 124, 6).

Referring to the beginning of PI 304, Trächtler subsequently addresses the questions of whether the inner is necessarily bound to an expression in the outer, and how the difference between natural, "real" pain behaviour and pain without pain behaviour or pain behaviour without pain can be determined. Wittgenstein answers the first question negatively, but at the same time points out that we could not speak of sensations "if there were no natural 'expression of sensation'" (cf. Ms 179, 28r). So there is an internal relation between sensation and expression, whereas both the concealment and the feigning of pain are more complicated language-games than the natural expression of sensations. The difference between behaviour of pain with or without pain is therefore not due to the (lack of) reference to a "Something" but to the difference in the language-games.

These more complex language-games, such as those of lies, deception or sham, are addressed by Trächtler in Chapter 5, "Eine praktische Perspektive auf das Problem des Fremdseelischen" (171–242). Language-games like these are of particular interest to Wittgenstein because they too can easily seduce philosophers into the idea of a hidden inner. Trächtler first analyses Wittgenstein's argument that concepts like 'pretence' are used in concrete language-games which are associated with certain patterns of behaviour (instead of our behaviour *per se*), i.e., pretence, too, has some external signs internally related to the inner based on which a person can be exposed as pretending (183–184); if this were not possible, we would not even have a concept of 'pretence' (cf. LWPP II, 42e). In this context Trächtler also presents a very illuminating explanation of Wittgenstein's remark that there seems to be a "deep-seated resemblance" between the problem of pretence and "the relation between Euclidean geometry and visual experience" (RPP II, 634). By following up these references in Wittgenstein's writings (dating back to the 1930s), analysing and relating them to the remarks on "pretence" (175–179), she shows that with this comparison Wittgenstein counters the sceptical objection as follows: statements such as "one can never know what is going on inside him/her" are not used in an absolute sense in our everyday language-games but in a relative sense, in relation to concrete situations. The use of the term "pretence" is thus limited in various respects and denotes a very specific pattern (179). In addition, she carves out that in cases of pretence we are often not concerned with matters of knowledge or ignorance but of trust or distrust (187–199). This leads to the conclusion that the doubt about whether someone pretends or not is in many cases a *practical* one that arises in a concrete situation in which we are usually not interested in what is going on in the other's mind but what we ourselves have to expect in this situation.

Having previously analysed the practical dimension of the other minds problem, in Ch. 5.2, Trächtler turns to the epistemic difficulties by discussing Wittgenstein's remarks on the "imponderable evidence" (e.g., LWPP I, 922, 924, 936; PPF 358–360) of our statements about other minds. Wittgenstein explains this expression with an example: "That an actor can represent grief shows the uncertainty of evidence, but that he can represent *grief* also shows the reality of evidence" (LWPP II, 67e). On the one hand, we

are far from constantly being uncertain about what the other person feels, whether s/he is honest, etc., otherwise we would not have concepts such as 'grief'; on the other hand, our language-games with psychological concepts are characterised by the fact that "[w]e are playing with elastic, indeed even flexible concepts" (which does not mean, however, that they "can be deformed *at will* and without offering resistance, and are therefore *unusable*") (LWPP II, 24e). This elasticity leads, not least, to the fact that occasionally – given the same evidence – there are differences of judgement as to whether, e.g., someone is in pain or only pretending, without there being an objective verification as in the case of mathematical proofs. In some places, Wittgenstein links this fundamental uncertainty (even if it only occurs in some concrete situations) and the lack of definite and objective criteria for examination characterising our use of psychological terms also to "general (seldom mentioned) facts of nature" (RPP I, 46). These show "the complex nature and the variety of human contingencies" (RPP II, 614) and the "endless multiplicity of expression" (LWPP II, 65e), which – despite characteristic features – is evident, e.g., in the "countless configurations of smiling" (LWPP II, 81e) but also in its embeddedness in a situational context rendering a smile friendly, embarrassed or malicious (cf., e.g., PI 539).

Trächtler's book is an impressive piece of scholarship in several respects. Firstly, this work demonstrates a profound knowledge of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* in philological terms in that she presents the genesis of the texts and, where necessary, also investigates the numerous variations, omissions and transformations of Wittgenstein's remarks. Secondly, as the previous summary should show, her knowledge of the *Nachlass* is also evident in terms of content, enabling her not only to collect and analyse all the topically relevant remarks but also to relate them to other remarks to provide an illuminating analysis of Wittgenstein's thoughts. In this way, she establishes connections both to Wittgenstein's reflections on other topics from the same period (e.g., to remarks published as *On Certainty*) and to earlier reflections, making comprehensible the development of his thoughts. Thirdly, it is helpful for future interpretations that she takes up topics that are rarely discussed in the secondary literature on Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology, such as the pneumatic conception of the soul, internal relations, etc. The occasional references to current debates show, fourthly, that and how Wittgenstein's reflections can be made fruitful for current topics, independently of, e.g., technological developments. Finally, the work also provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of research. However, the way in which the secondary literature is presented and discussed will irritate some readers, as it only takes place in the footnotes. What thereby tends to fade into the background is whether there are some common lines of interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks on the other minds problem and whether the author follows or distances herself from them. In Chapter 1, however, Trächtler reviews the existing literature (32–36), and she gives some general hints which interpretations she appreciates and from which (aspects of) interpretation she dissociates herself. Furthermore, this structure has the advantage that the reader can follow Wittgenstein's remarks ordered and interpreted by her in a focused and "undisturbed" way. If desired, in the footnotes s/he finds numerous additional explanations and comments concerning, e.g., the concepts used by

Wittgenstein, different interpretations in the secondary literature as well as Trächtler's evaluation of them.

University of Vienna
anja.weiberg@univie.ac.at

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