

WITTGENSTEIN, THE BODY, ITS METAPHORS

(Wittgenstein, o corpo, suas metáforas)

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If someone says “I have a body”, he can be asked,
who is speaking here with this mouth?
(On Certainty, 244)

Abstract: *Contemporary theories of metaphor often give the body a foundational status, by claiming that it provides the universal ground upon which imagination engenders figurative thought. This paper goes against this idea, discussing the relationship between the body and metaphor from a non foundationalist point of view. Taking a Wittgensteinian stance on metaphor and on the body, it aims to provide elements to rethink the issue, exploring in particular the path open by the Austrian philosopher in his critique of traditional mental/physical, inner/outer dichotomies.*

Key-words: *metaphor; body; Wittgenstein; inner-outer.*

Resumo: *Teorias contemporâneas da metáfora amiúde incluem o corpo entre seus fundamentos últimos, sustentando que nossa experiência corpórea constitui o solo universal de onde a imaginação faz brotar o pensamento figurativo. Contrapondo-se a essa tese, este trabalho busca discutir a relação entre corpo e metáfora de uma perspectiva não fundacionalista. A partir de um ponto de vista wittgensteiniano quanto aos estatutos do corpo e da metáfora, busca fornecer elementos para repensar a questão, explorando em particular o caminho aberto pelo filósofo austríaco em sua crítica às dicotomias físico/mental, exterior/interior.*

Palavras-chave: *metáfora; corpo; Wittgenstein; interior-exterior.*

1. BODILY METAPHORS

The human body is taken as a privileged vehicle for metaphor within theoretical discourses of the most various persuasions. One early instance of this general line of thought is to be found in the following passage of Giambattista Vico’s *New Science*, published in 1744:

It is noteworthy that in all languages the greater part of the expressions relating to inanimate things are formed by metaphor from the human body and its parts, and from the human senses and passions. Thus the head for top or beginning; the brow and shoulders of a hill; the eyes of needles and potatoes; mouth for any opening; the lip of a cup or pitcher; the teeth of a rake, a saw, a comb; the beard of wheat; the tongue of a shoe; the gorge of a river; a neck of land; an arm of the sea; the hands of a clock; heart for center (the Latins used *umbilicus*, navel, in this sense); the belly of a sail; foot for end or bottom; the flesh of fruits; a vein of rock or mineral; the blood of grapes for wine; the bowels of the earth. Heaven or the sea smiles; the wind whistles; the waves murmur; a body groans under great weight. (...). Innumerable other examples could be collected from all languages. [405]

I chose to begin with this passage because it helps me draw attention to a specific kind of tenor for bodily metaphors: “inanimate things” of nature. Very commonly, the body is recognized as a noble source for metaphors involving more abstract dimensions of experience, say, our spiritual or mental life. Vico himself does so elsewhere in his book: axiom LXIII, for example, states that “the human mind is inclined by the senses to see itself externally in the body, and only with great difficulty does it come to understand itself by means of reflection” (236). From this axiom, he derives a “principle of every etymology in all languages”, the now very familiar principle by which “words are carried over from bodies and from the properties of bodies to signify the institutions of the mind and spirit” (237). The idea that metaphors may help us make sense of our spiritual life – of experiences that are taken to be otherwise hard or impossible to grasp – is perhaps prone to be more consensual these days than the idea that we need metaphor to make sense of the physical world around us.

For many contemporary theories of metaphor indeed argue that, as a rule, metaphor proceeds from the concrete to the abstract, being concrete-to-concrete metaphorical transfers only exceptional.¹ Under this familiar view, in which metaphorical projections are seen as regularly *grounded* on the “carnal” life of the body, our partitions of the physical world are often taken to derive in their core not from imaginative metaphorical transfers

1. This applies notably of course to the so-called Conceptual Theory of Metaphor: one of its most repeated tenets is indeed that *abstract* concepts are largely metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999, Lakoff 2008, my emphasis).

but rather from allegedly direct and universal bodily experiences – perceptual, sensory-motor, etc.²

Now, this kind of view is tied to a foundationalist perspective on language and thought, one which assumes that metaphor is a cognitive principle that builds up abstract meaning upon the firm soil of concrete meaning – in any case, a view that takes metaphor as a means to *comprehend* domains which are taken to exceed a certain territory of fixed, well grasped or given notions.

In some important respects, Vico's theory departs radically from this perspective, aligning itself with other well-known discourses on metaphor, forwarded by such anti-foundationalist authors as Nietzsche and, much later, Derrida, for whom, for different reasons, metaphor arises from and is fated to *ignorance*, not knowledge. "When we talk about trees, snow, and flowers, we believe we know something about the things themselves, and yet we only possess metaphors of the things – metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities", says Nietzsche in much quoted lines of his "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (§1). Our grasp of things is illusory, he states, and amounts to no more than a series of arbitrary metaphorical transpositions between incommensurable spheres: from nervous stimulus to image, from image to articulate sound. In the same spirit, Vico suggests that through metaphor "man in ignorance makes himself the rule of the universe" – he "becomes all things by *not* understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*)" (405).

The most celebrated problem with such radically anthropomorphic conceptions is of course the dubious status of what is being taken as the source or vehicle for metaphor here: if, as Vico and Nietzsche seemed to have wanted, the human body is somehow a candidate to be this vehicle, does it not after all entail that in the body lies what is grasped beforehand, or is at least somehow *given*? Is it even possible to speak of metaphor without presupposing some original *literal* or *proper* domain where it is to be founded? Derrida has once given us a telling formulation of the predicament:

In its barest and most abstract form the problem would be the following: that metaphor remains in all its essential features a classical philosopheme, a metaphysi-

2. An important notion here is that of *basic level categories*, taken, together with that of *image schemas*, to form the ground of human conceptual systems within the framework of cognitive linguistics (see Lakoff 1987, chapter 17)

cal concept. It is therefore involved in the field which it would be the purpose of a general “metaphorology” to subsume. It is the product of a network of elements of philosophy which themselves correspond to tropes and figures and are coeval with them or systematically bound to them. (1974:15)

From this point of view, anti-foundationalist discourses in which metaphor appears as a sort of omnipresent mark of our ignorance with respect to “the things themselves” invariably lead to an aporia: they are utterly unable to suppress tacit foundationalist assumptions that make up for the very history of the notion of “metaphor” in the West: amongst them, and most important for us here, we shall find, naturally, dualist assumptions about realms of body and mind, interior and exterior, appearances and essences, and so forth. It is worth noting, however, that neither Nietzsche nor Vico seemed to have been insensitive to this problem.

Nietzsche’s perspective on metaphor favors its generalization over whatever is supposed to be “proper” or “literal”: it points indeed to the “loss of the proper”, the loss of boundaries – with the same partaking in the other, actually *being* the other, in ontological unity. However, as Sarah Kofman once observed, Nietzsche seemed to have been aware that “if there is metaphor it is because this unity is already in pieces” (1993: 14). Kofman suggests that metaphor was for the young Nietzsche a strategic notion in the deconstruction of the proper, within his general critique of essentialism – a notion that loses its importance once this task is effected, being replaced in his later works by such terms as ‘text’ and ‘interpretation’, which, “while they still have a ‘metaphysical’ smell about them, at least have the advantage of no longer being the direct opposites of the ‘proper’” (1993: 16).

Vico was equally aware of the potentially embarrassing quality of such words as “metaphor”, and more broadly “tropes” or “figures”. Rather than renouncing them, however, he tended to emphasize their historicity. In his *eternal history of ideas* he more than once stresses that tropes, and metaphors foremost amongst them,

were *necessary* modes of expression of all the first poetic nations, and had originally their full native propriety. But these expressions of the first nations *later became figurative*, when, with the further development of the human mind, words were invented which signified abstract forms or genera comprising their species or relating parts with their wholes. [409, my emphases]

Somewhat paradoxical, Vico's theory both reinforces and undermines the idea of metaphor as a universal human principle: for it is for him at the same time "the most luminous figure, and hence the most basic" in his first or inaugural "poetic logic of the gentiles" (404) – and a historical advent with which we, in the *age of men*, may "read" retrospectively – and anachronically, as best as we can – the remote "ages of gods and heroes", when men were supposedly able to "contemplate the skies with bodily eyes", and languages were "all unambiguous", that is non metaphorical, non analogical (403).

Although both Nietzsche and Vico, through different channels, seem to have acknowledged the historical ties between the concept of metaphor and traditional metaphysics, the fact remains that they do not quite avoid Derrida's predicament: in their uses of the term *metaphor*, they seem still committed to a rhetoric of "origins", separating that which is "indigenous" from that which "migrates", and thus adopting a cast of thought that is itself both metaphorical and foundationalist, metaphysical. In face of their work, thus, Derrida's challenge to metaphor as a viable non aporetic notion remains unaltered.

Should we accept then that *metaphor* is an unavoidably metaphysical word that can only belong in foundationalist discourses on language and thought? Should we renounce it altogether, in face of its allegedly aporetic nature? Or should we perhaps look for its salvation in new foundationalist theories that proclaim a radical departure from their traditional ancestors, such as, for example, contemporary theories of the *embodied mind*? Are these the only alternatives?

For some time now, I have been pursuing a non foundationalist understanding of metaphor, based on the philosophy of the second Wittgenstein (Martins 2005, 2006, 2007). Still in this path, it is my contention here that the Austrian philosopher offers promising ways to deal with the embarrassments briefly described above. In the following pages, I propose a Wittgensteinian reflection on the relationship between metaphor and the body. I shall argue for an angle that is neither open to pessimism with respect to the virtues of the term *metaphor* in explanations of language, nor compatible with foundationalist assumptions of the body as a universal ground, including recent claims about the materialization of metaphor in the brain.

2. METAPHOR, BODY: A WITTGENSTEINIAN ANGLE

As a backdrop to the specific considerations to be developed here, it may prove useful to begin by briefly highlighting a few general aspects of Wittgenstein's unique brand of anti-foundationalism. His critique of the foundationalist enterprise is coeval, as we know, with a critique of the semantic reductionism inherent to the age-old image of language as a system of representation. Under a Wittgensteinian perspective, the essence of language cannot be representation (of reality, of thought), first and foremost because language cannot be not reduced to any essence whatsoever. It is not an instrument endowed with a *telos*, an artifact presided by a rationality, whose operation falls under external control. Rather, it is nothing other than *praxis*: irreducible and heterogeneous socio-cultural verbal practices, in which we are immersed, and into which we are more or less continually being "reinitiated". Thus conceived, language has no *interior* or *exterior*: "it is not contiguous to anything else" (*Lectures* 1930-1932). It remains fragmentary and multiple, just as the human activities from which it cannot be separated. It is of course, however, definitely rule-governed; only its rules are not like those rules of a calculus, of an abstract system that is logically prior to its own application. As Wittgenstein's famous metaphor goes, they are rather more like the rules of games: rules that do not contain in themselves all of its possible applications, that are *entirely* contingent on the actual, historical, playing of the game – when it comes to language, thus, we ultimately "make the rules as we go along" (PI §83).

Furthermore, this angle favors the realization that to an important extent the words we use have *no cause*. And this in the following sense: contrary to a recurrent and widespread assumption in the history of linguistic thought, when we learn a language, we do not acquire a *causal* mechanism that, by pairing forms and meanings, allows for coding and decoding operations during verbal interactions. Rather, we are initiated into practices to which we are ultimately expected to adhere, regardless of intellectual approval or understanding: language does not "emerge from some kind of ratiocination" (PI §475). As Nietzsche had put it much earlier but in very much the same spirit, "the genesis of language does not proceed logically", and the uses of words should not be thought of as regular and tangible *effects* of causal abstract entities supposedly held in the mind:

We call a person “honest.” Why did he act so honestly today? we ask. Our answer usually sounds like this: because of his honesty. Honesty! That is to say again: the leaf is the cause of the leaves. After all, we know nothing of an essence-like quality named “honesty”; we know only numerous individualized, and thus unequal actions, which we equate by omitting the unequal and by then calling them honest actions. In the end, we distill from them a *qualitas occulta* with the name of “honesty.” (“On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”, §1)

The use of a word does not presuppose, thus, that we have a concept, Platonic or otherwise, to which it has previously come to correspond. Before using the word “honesty”, one is not required to know *what* this word means over and above the different acts (often outrageous acts) that are accepted as honest in our social environment. Knowledge of language is here *know-how* more than *know-that*: knowing the meaning of a word is no more than knowing how to go about with it, how to estimate, sometimes precariously, what it does within the intricate weave of our public activities. And we can know how to go on with a word into new contexts without having “the formula which determines the fresh occurrence”, as Stanley Cavell has once put it (1979: 122). Augustine’s famous dictum gains metonymic value here: “What, then, is time? If no one asks of me, I know.” (*Confessions*, Book XI, chap XIV, sec 17).

Finally, thus conceived, language does not of course hold a marginal position in human affairs: quite the contrary, it is “the great Lord”, as the sophist Gorgias had already realized so many centuries ago, just as so many philosophers and artists of our time seem to do. Taken as a set of practices in which the verbal and the non verbal maintain mutually constitutive bonds, language is a privileged space for the crystallization (and dislocation) of our tacit agreements – agreements, let us remember, “not in opinions, but in form of life” (PI §241). Nothing other than this sharing of a form of life determines that we should call this *sane*, and that *lunatic*; this *beautiful*, that *ugly*; this *horse*, that *zebra* – this *body*, that *soul*; this *literal*, that *metaphor*. Given the contemporary philosophical scene, this is hardly an extravagant perception.

However, for the purposes of this work it is important to stress that in Wittgenstein’s philosophy such a perception is entirely compatible with a sense of *necessity* – even if a special somewhat oxymoronic form of *contingent* or *anthropological necessity*. This view is of course prone to yield some distrust

or disappointment. As Cavell observes, it is “as if it is not really *necessity* which he [Wittgenstein] has given an anthropological view of”: once we realize that what we take to be necessary in a given period may alter, we may be tempted to view our human activities as the “mere manipulation or exploration of conventions” (1979: 118). Yet, as Cavell aptly puts it, taking a Wittgensteinian angle means accepting that the realization that the “a priori has a history” does not change the fact that it is still “beyond our control”, does not render it mere *convention in disguise* (1979: 119).

It can be said thus that, from this point of view, language has so to speak “demiurgic” powers – its effects are not merely *rhetorical* or *political*; they are *world-effects*, in the sense that anything in the world always offers itself already infused with our language infused activities: each object in the world is less a substance in itself and more a mute inventory of human actions pervaded by words, narratives. Language is not thus an instrument designed for the description of states of affairs; rather, to a certain extent, it institutes them. Our ontological, epistemological and moral partitions are not represented in language, they are forged in it. And the fact that language is not here a *system* – not even a Whorfian one – but rather a multiple, volatile and ultimately ungrounded *form of life* lends these qualities to all these partitions. This does not mean, however, that they are *merely* conventional partitions – they can be and often are quite *necessary* and coercitive.

At this point, we can turn to the more specific topic of this article: how are we to conceive of the relationship between metaphor and the body from a Wittgensteinian angle?

To begin with, it is important to let go of the desire to probe for any essential meanings behind these two *words* – to renounce the wish to find the body in itself behind the word “body”, metaphor in itself behind the word “metaphor”. It may prove useful to ask ourselves here: do we use these words knowing *what* they mean – in themselves? Let us begin with “body” and its satellites.

The very fact that words related to the body are so very often seen as *vehicles* for metaphor may be taken as a sign that their meanings are specially well-known, or in any case sufficiently *given* to function as grounds for figurative projection. As we have seen, this perception appears indeed to be inevitable whenever the body is assumed as a *source* for the metaphori-

cal, be it in discourses that take bodily experiences as the ultimate “literal” ground of knowledge and language, be it in anti-foundationalist discourses that make the case for the ubiquity of metaphor.

Wittgenstein seems to follow a different path here: committed as he was to bringing words “back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (PI §116), it is only natural that he felt disinclined to grant special nobility to the word “body” and its correlates, over and above any other words. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that he did see bodily metaphors as occasionally liable to figure amongst the dangerous “traps” that, according to him, “language sets everyone” (CV 18e).

The pervasiveness of bodily metaphors in (Western?) languages of the world is undeniable, and Wittgenstein was not insensitive to it: indeed, he explicitly recognizes that this is a kind of metaphor that “very naturally suggests itself”, adding that this “is all right *so long as it doesn't mislead us when we are philosophizing*” (BB 41). For the danger lies, for him, in converting these metaphorical projections into, say, *theories of mind* or *language*, by means of one or another subtle “conjuring trick” (PI §308). Such metaphors are indeed prone to be “smuggled” into a considerable number of theoretical discourses that in Wittgenstein’s opinion tend to fall victim of one and the same misguided metaphysical split: the *inner/outer* dichotomy, associated with the dualism of the mental and the physical – the separation between a public physical world of matter, energy and tangible objects (human bodies included), and a private hidden world of the human mind (cf. Glock 1996: 174).

It seems to be Wittgenstein’s contention that, if metaphysically inflated, bodily metaphors for the mental tend to reinforce the inner/outer dualism. Those are for him metaphors that ultimately allow us to leave the nature of their targets “undecided”, thinking that “sometime perhaps we shall know more about them”, but already committed to “a particular way of looking at the matter” (PI §308). Such is already the case when we imagine two different kinds of worlds, “worlds built of different materials; a mental world and a physical world”: we may then be inclined to think of the mental world “as gaseous, or rather, aethereal” (BB, 47). But, Wittgenstein suggests, however gaseous or aethereal we take it to be, we still conceive it as a *world*, a *realm* inhabited by *entities* susceptible to be disposed in *states*, undergo *processes*, participate in *events* – all of them

just like their physical counterparts, only hidden and more mysterious.³ We *grasp* ideas; *see* a point; *bear* the voice of reason; feel the sweet *taste* of revenge; *toy* with a number of possibilities; *give* and *take* advice etc. Yet never in quite the same way as grasping pebbles, hearing thunder, tasting honey, toying with coins, giving and taking food – “where our language suggests a body and there is none”, says Wittgenstein, “there, we should like to say, is a *spirit*” (PI §36).

While leaving the nature of this “spirit” undecided, such bodily metaphors commit us, however, with a particular way of looking at the matter. To begin with, they help drawing what Hans-Johan Glock’s has aptly phrased as an “iron ontological curtain” between the inner and the outer, separating the (literal) exterior domain of concrete objects and bodily activities from the (figurative) interior “land” of their supposed abstract and mental counterparts (1996: 177). Furthermore, these metaphors incline us to think of the mental as a realm of entities and activities that, however gaseous or aethereal, are still *autonomous* – that is to say, *exist* in themselves away and apart from language, culture, history.

Now, we have seen that, from a Wittgensteinian point of view, not even what we call the *physical* world enjoys this sort of autonomy and separateness: for the verbal and the non verbal are for the philosopher mutually constitutive. The perception (to Wittgenstein, misguided) that the physical is *given* without the filters of language and culture is solidary to – even dependent on – the equally misguided idea that language is essentially a system of representation of some *exterior* order. And the traditional perception that the mental is just as autonomous and exterior to language as the physical is supposed to be has certainly something to do with the mental being conceived as no more than a gaseous *version* of the physical thus understood.

So the inner/outer dichotomy is prone to reach simultaneously our perception of language, on the one hand, and of the physical/mental, on the other. This imbrication is made especially noticeable in a passage of the *Philosophical Investigations* where the evocation of a certain metaphor allows

3. So when we think of meaning, we think of it “as a *thing*, of the same kind of the word, but also different from the word” (PI §120, my emphasis; see also BB 64, 70). When we think of “thinking”, we think of it as an *activity*, “different from (bodily) activities” and yet “analogous to them” (BB 7; see also PI §§ 339, 356, 547).

the author to critically expose and explore a common analogical pattern: body is to soul/mind as word/sign is to meaning. I refer to §432:

Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life? – In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there? – Or is the *use* its life?

In the characteristic style of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein enacts a dialogue between alternative views (viewers) of language. As it is also typical, he explores common situations or experiences that may *prima facie* speak for the image of language he means to undermine.

If one comes upon, say, a Chinese ideogram and does not know how to read Chinese, then the sign, by itself, is likely to seem dead to this person. Now this talking of signs as being “dead” or “alive” may lead, or mislead, to different metaphorical projections. One path that Wittgenstein seems to both elicit and discourage is that of taking articulate sounds – or in this case ink marks – as a sort of perceptible *outer*, something like a body, that if alive harbors an invisible *inner*, akin in turn to a soul or mind. From this perspective, meaning may perhaps be conceived as an *accompaniment*, as something that *co-exists* with the material word, just as the soul may be thought to co-exist with the material body. This metaphorical conception of words as bodies may also favor the impression – for Wittgenstein, the wrong impression – that meaning is something that has to be *endowed* to words, “breathed” into them by some sort of autonomous entity, say, a mind, capable of performing internal *acts of meaning* during verbal interactions (PI 188, 507, 592, 673-8; see also Hacker 1996: 76 ff.). With respect to the word, the mind here would have powers that parallel that of God’s with respect to the lifeless body – for just as “He formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (*Genesis* 2:7), so the thinking mind would be responsible for “an incorporeal process which lends life and sense to speaking” (PI § 339).

The provocative question with which Wittgenstein ends §432 – “Or is the *use* its life?” –, disturbs the peace of these common enough analogical inclinations. For it urges us to consider the possibility that the reason why a sign by itself “seems dead” is precisely its consideration away and apart from the stream of life where it belongs and from which it remains inseparable. Accepting Wittgenstein’s invitation here, we may perhaps be inclined to acknowledge that what one needs to “revive” the Chinese ideogram is not

access to any abstract entity that it supposedly accommodates, say, the “breath of life” within it. What is lacking rather is the ability to use it; and use here *is itself* the sign’s whole and only possible life: in use, so to speak, the sign breathes, lives, but without *having* life or breath within itself. In other words, the sign is used without standing for anything, without being a perceptible surface to an imperceptible depth.

Now what is noteworthy in this deconstruction of the metaphor through which language appears as *exterior material body* coupled with *interior immaterial life* is that it seems to go hand in hand, in Wittgenstein’s thought, with the deconstruction of precisely those already mentioned bodily metaphors for the so-called inner life itself.

At a certain point in the second part of his *Investigations*, Wittgenstein states that “the human body is the best picture of the human soul” (II 178). In what strikes me as a very insightful reading of this passage, Stanley Cavell renders it as an attempt to replace or reinterpret “the myth of the body as a veil”, a myth that “expresses our sense that there is something we cannot see” (1979: 368). And whatever it is that we supposedly cannot see is often taken to be *hidden within* the body, or else *by* the body. When Wittgenstein says that the human body is the best picture of the human soul, he is thus undermining or at least shifting the veil mythology: the body no longer conceals, but rather reveals. As Cavell aptly points out, though, it does this revealing “not primarily because it *represents* the soul but because it *expresses* it” (1979: 357, my emphases). The difference is difficult and subtle, and there are many occasions where Wittgenstein grapples with it. A notable example is found in his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (vol. II, §170):

(...) In general I do not surmise fear in him – I *see* it. I do not feel that I am deducing the probable existence of something inside from something outside; rather it is as if the human face were in a way translucent and that I were seeing it not in reflective light but rather in its own.

In what sense is the human body the best picture of the human soul here? Not in the sense that it represents it – rather, it expresses it. The human face is not an “outside” reflecting light from an “inside” – it glows, so to speak, with its own light. Wittgenstein urges us to acknowledge that what we *see* is not some outer bodily configuration that, *once recognized*, leads

us to surmise something going on inside, in the mind or soul. We already see a face in fear – a living human face is never *mere* body (without soul), it is never “expressionless”. As Cavell puts it, the body is “condemned to expression, to meaning” (Cavell 1979: 357). So, under this perspective, whatever the mind or soul are, they are not contiguous to and hence not separable from its bodily manifestations – they are in this sense open to view.

How do we know or recognize that someone is in fear, or pain, or pleasure? Well, from a Wittgensteinian point of view, a central part of this ability will have to do with the place of the words “fear”, “pain”, and “pleasure” within our practices; it will have to do with our ability to use these words. That particular sort of facial expression is part of what we *call* “fear”. But, one might object, is that all? Isn’t the use of such words, the ability to assign them to a physiognomy, based on something else, something prior? Isn’t our knowledge of what fear *is*, as a private experience, precisely that which enables and determines the uses of the word “fear”? How can *this* possibly be open to view?

Aware that when we think of personal experiences such as sensations we may be especially inclined to believe that they mark a territory where culture, and history, and language are ultimately suspended, Wittgenstein elaborates his ultra sophisticated and well-known “private language argument” (PI §§ 235-315). With this argument he sets up to show that *even there* the filters of our language infused public and cultural practices remain necessitating. Let us consider one of his favorite examples, the case of “pain”:

For how can I go so far as to try to use language to get between pain and its expression? (PI §245)

What seems to be challenged in this passage is, to begin with, the assumption that language serves as an instrument to mediate between an experience and its manifestation. If we conceive of language as such an instrument, we may be inclined to think that the experience, say the sensation of pain, has to be converted into an autonomous representation before it can be the object of linguistic manifestation: this frame of mind indeed favors the belief that “one has to get the sensation apart from its expression” (Cavell 1979: 341). Underlying this perception is of course

the tacit assumption that the function of language is to represent: a cry would be an inarticulate non linguistic expression of pain; language, on the other hand, could only come about once this experience had already been somehow “domesticated” into an internal representation of some sort – the meaning of the word “pain” must then be independent of the expression of pain (Hacker 1999: 28ff). It must be a notion that is built upon supposedly direct experiences that make themselves present to our cognitive equipment without the interference of language and culture.

Wittgenstein questions this supposition: do we in fact domesticate the experience of pain? Is this a precondition to the use of the word “pain”? Wouldn’t it be plausible that language were here just another way to behave in face of the non negotiable experience of pain, another way to express it? Why should *representing* or *describing* be the nuclear impulse for the emergence of language? Could it not be simply the impulse to express a condition, a *pathos*, not a *logos*?

The philosopher invites us to entertain the possibility that the very identity of *pain* – the very possibility that the word “pain” makes sense to us – depends on its place within the complex fabric of a form of life: the identity of pain, any meaning the word might have, depends less on the “brute” sensation (and what would that be?) and more on its connexions with public and intersubjective situations, such as those of empathy, sadness, worry, attention, care, compassion, sometimes brutality, indifference, oppression, even pleasure, sometimes a ritual, and so on and so forth. The list of possibilities here cannot be reduced, but the fact remains that “pain has *this* position in our life; it has *these* connexions. (That is to say we only call “pain” what has *this* position, *these* connexions) (Zettel §533)”.

Someone might object: “And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a *nothing*.”; and to this Wittgenstein replies: “– Not at all. It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either!” (PI §304). The Wittgensteinian approach does not deny, thus, the sensation *per se*, but just the idea that it has to be converted into a *something*, a stable cognitive result, a notion belonging to an immaterial, or in any case, language independent realm. Whatever pain is it is what we call *pain* – “there is no assignable end to the depth in us to which language reaches” (Cavell 1979: 369).

What Wittgenstein seems to metonymically suggest with these thoughts about pain and other sensations is that the *body* does not offer

itself to cognition in the position of a founding and unmediated reality: its identity is given, rather, by its position in the complex and volatile web of a form of life, which is culturally and linguistically determined. The body cannot *found* this web, when it has itself a position within it.

So the fact that our language is fraught with bodily metaphors does *not* correspond to our actual capacity to perceive or grasp the body *in itself*, as a given. We can and do say things such as “I have a body”, and “I have a soul” – and the language of ownership may mislead us to think that “having” signifies here a relationship between two substances – but, as Peter Hacker observes, “*my* body” does not signify a relation of ownership between *me* and my body”, no more, we should add, than “*my* soul”, signifies a relation of ownership between *me* and my soul (1990: 95, see PI §283). We do not say sentences like these out of knowledge of *what* such words as “body”, and “soul”, and “me” mean *in themselves*. If the body is the *outer*, and the mind or soul, the *inner*, then, as Stanley Cavell puts it, “nothing is closer than the inner and the outer (...); there is no *room* between them” (1979: 341). And this goes for the relationship between words and meanings too – from a Wittgensteinian point of view, there is no room between a word and what it means, that is to say, between a word and its *uses* in the stream of life where it belongs.

So if it might prove fruitful to conceive of language as having no interior or exterior – to acknowledge that “it is not contiguous with anything else” –, it might be just as promising to renounce thinking of body and mind as “neighbors”, as dimensions that are in some sense contiguous to one another.

Now the question is: where does this leave us with respect to the notion metaphor and its place within explanations of language?

3. NEITHER (NEO)FOUNDATIONALISM, NOR PESSIMISM

As it should be clear by now, under the viewpoint explored so far, the autonomy of thought and experience with respect to language is radically denied. Metaphors are thus *neither* mere linguistic ornaments with no impact in thought and action, as tradition has it, *nor* occult thought operations that are merely represented in the tangible surface of language, as some contemporary theories seem to hold. What is it then?

From a Wittgensteinian perspective, metaphor cannot be a super-concept, a philosophical superlative; what it is will ultimately have to do with what we *call* metaphor. We should begin by acknowledging then that the distinction between what we call “metaphor” and what we call “literal” enjoys an important position in the stream of our (Western?) practices. And we should accept further that the identity of the metaphorical, as well as that of the literal, will also be given by their position and by their connexions within these practices.

Suppose we are confronted with the following statements: (a) life is the period of time between birth and death; and (b) “life is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing”. If asked which one tell us what life *literally* is, we shall feel inclined – even coerced – to answer (a); in (b), we should recognize (perhaps admire) Shakespeare’s metaphor. Our choice here shall not, however, be *caused* by an unmediated access to the real intrinsic meaning of (the word) life – it will have much more to do with the position held by what we call “literal” and “metaphorical” in our form of life, with their connexions to the relative positions occupied by what we call “science”, and “art”, and “fact”, and “value”, and “understand”, and “interpret”, and so on and so forth. But we should also acknowledge that these relative positions are not *logically necessary* in the traditional sense – however beyond our control they may be felt to be, however *anthropologically necessary* they indeed are for us.

No matter how inevitable such oppositional pairs are in our life, nothing prevents us from imagining with Nietzsche, for example, that their internal hierarchy might be subverted or inverted, as was perhaps the case in “ancient Greece, [where] the intuitive man handles his weapons more authoritatively and victoriously than his opponent (...) and art’s mastery over life can be established” (1873, §2). Or even to imagine with Vico, a civilization that lacks the very distinction or opposition between the literal and the metaphorical.⁴ It is of course enormously difficult to steal even a

4. Amerindian tribes whose thought and action seem to be based on a radically relational, variable and non-substantialist ontology might give us a contemporary example of this possibility: for if they say something like “human blood is the jaguar’s beer”, it will not do well to say that the word “beer” is here used metaphorically: for, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro points out, what happens in Amerindian cosmologies is that “human blood is the jaguar’s beer in exactly the same way as my sister is my brother-in-law’s wife, and for the same reasons” (2002: 385) – in each case, so to speak, “literally”.

glimpse at the possibility of such *alien* modes of being in the world. From our perspective, the literal/metaphorical divide is in a sense inescapable – just as the paradigmatic series of oppositions to which it systematically connects: fact/value, science/art; nature/culture, and so on and so forth.

And what does all this tell us about the nature of the studies of metaphor and of its relationship with thought and body? Does this non-foundationalist take on metaphor render these studies void or uninteresting? Not at all.

To accept Wittgenstein's offer surely implies that the focus is kept on language, taken not as a system but as an irreducible and multiple set of socio-historical practices. It recommends, further, the adoption of a *descriptive* attitude, a deflation of *explanatory* ambitions – of the wish to answer essentialist questions such as *What is language? What is thought? What is metaphor? What is the body?* The potentialities of such “deflated” descriptive studies are to my view extremely auspicious, all the more auspicious if generalizing metaphysical aspirations are kept under control. The often so very telling descriptive results achieved within the framework of the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor ever since its inception in the 80's speak very loudly for themselves.

This theory is, as we know, part of a broader epistemological enterprise – variously termed *experientialism*, *embodied realism*, and, more recently, *second generation cognitive science*⁵. And this intellectual movement is, as we know, centered on a programmatic and vigorous rejection of traditional versions of foundationalism – a rejection that is indeed so comprehensive that one might think it is, in many respects, hardly different from the Wittgensteinian critical path just described above. Indeed, Wittgenstein is explicitly acknowledged among the authors that inform and inspire experientialism (cf. Lakoff 1987).

There are however a number of irreconcilable differences, some of which are more or less blatant, other less conspicuous and yet equally consequential. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that experientialism is after all a foundationalist framework – even though it claims to be and,

5. Aware that the path opened by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) has, ever since, been pursued in a wide range of often substantially different directions, I chose to concentrate here on the more strictly Johnsonian and Lakoffian views, as represented today in, for instance, Lakoff & Johnson 1999 and Lakoff 2008.

in many respects is indeed, a radically new and improved version of foundationalism. Whatever the case, the rhetoric of discovery and unveiling so often adopted by authors of this persuasion leaves no doubt of their foundational commitments:

The mind is inherently embodied.

Thought is mostly unconscious.

Abstract thought is largely metaphorical.

These are three major findings of cognitive science. More than two millennia of philosophical a priori speculation about these aspects of reason are over. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 4)

The demolishing inflection of these last words could actually be taken as yet another point in common with Wittgenstein, the philosopher who, in an even more violent and immodest note, wrote in his Diary of 1931 that his name would pass on to history as “the name of him who burnt the library of Alexandria” (*apud* Hacker 2001: 36). Yet nothing could be further from a Wittgensteinian spirit than the question Lakoff and Johnson set out to answer in *Philosophy in the Flesh* – “what would happen if we started with these empirical discoveries about the nature of mind and *constructed philosophy anew?*” – nothing less Wittgensteinian than their ambition to build up what they called “empirically responsible philosophy” (1999: 4). For let us appreciate the contrast between such professed ambitions and Wittgenstein’s own critical discourse:

All that philosophy can do is to destroy idols. And that means not creating a new one – “say in the absence of an idol” (*Big Typescript*, 88)

Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand (PI §118)

While experientialists destroy a metaphysical building in order to erect another one – while they let go of traditional answers but still cling on to traditional questions – Wittgenstein’s efforts (as well as those of a significant strand in contemporary philosophy) are directed at denouncing the inadequacy of the edifying enterprise itself, at showing how unlikely it is that, thus oriented, it should result in anything more solid than the houses of cards previously torn down.

From a Wittgensteinian point of view, experientialists can only be so confident in the soundness of their foundational, allegedly empirical, discoveries because their theory is still blind to the “ground of language” on which it inevitably stands. It is because language is still after all taken by them as a system of representation of some exterior order, that they can speak of mind, body, thought, and metaphor as if their very identities were somehow fixed and language independent. This is how indeed they can affirm, with Lakoff, that “metaphors are mental structures that are independent of language but that can be expressed through language” (2008: 82).

Now, experientialists are of course not deaf to contemporary voices that oppose their essentialist quests; there are many occasions indeed where they reply directly to them. An example:

There is no post-structuralist person – no completely decentered subject for whom all meaning is arbitrary, totally relative and purely historically contingent, unconstrained by body and brain. The mind is not merely embodied, but embodied in such a way that our conceptual systems draw largely upon the commonalities of our bodies and of the environments we live in. The result is that much of a person’s conceptual system is either universal or widespread across languages and cultures. Our conceptual systems are not merely a matter of historical contingency, even though a degree of conceptual relativity does exist and even though historical contingency does matter a great deal. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 6-7)

Setting aside what strikes me as a misreading of the post-structuralist perspective, what is suggested here is that a non foundationalist stance necessarily leads to an “anything goes” type of relativism, where human activities are perceived as unconstrained, as the mere manipulation of conventions. This perception is incompatible with the path followed here, blocked away, as we have seen, by the Wittgensteinian notion of *anthropological necessity*. What seems to separate Wittgenstein and the experientialist here is the locus and nature of the constraints: historical and ultimately ungrounded verbal practices in the first case; universal “body and brain” performances, in the second.

I would like to conclude this paper by suggesting that the experientialist’s contention here testifies to a residual loyalty to the inner/outer dichotomy. This is bound to be controversial, since a crucial claim of this model is precisely that it *overcomes* one of the most central manifestations of this dichotomy, namely the *mind/body* dualism.

Indeed, experientialists insist that the *body is in the mind*, that the mind is not “without” the body; they systematically point out that “there is no true separation” here, that “these are not two independent entities that come together as a couple” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 266). They claim further that “our understanding of what mental acts are is fashioned metaphorically in terms of physical acts like moving, seeing, manipulating objects, and eating” – and, in much convergence with Wittgenstein, they assert that these metaphors misguide us to “conceptualize the mind metaphorically in terms of a container (...) defining a space that is inside the body and separate from it”. According to them, and to Wittgenstein, “via metaphor the mind is [wrongly] given an inside and an outside”. However, while granting that there is “no rich, purely literal understanding of mind in itself”, they still seem to think that there *is* a purely literal understanding of the *body in itself* (1999: 266). The fact remains that the body is still seen as *given*, as an independent *source* for metaphors, however misguiding these metaphors may turn out to be.

Now, a Wittgensteinian more radical departure from the inner/outer split would imply acknowledging that if the body is in the mind, *the mind is just as much in the body*. As we have seen, our bodily metaphors for the inner do not entail that the body is ever a given, ever present to us in some “purely” corporeal state. Rather, it is always already *meaningful, expressive* – which, in Wittgensteinian terms, amounts to say, as we have seen, that its very identity is dependent on its position and its connexions in our language infused and public forms of life. So, while claiming to unveil the a priori speculation that made all philosophical theories in the West to date “empirically irresponsible”, Lakoff and Johnson seem to preserve the equally aprioristic theses that the body is *directly* understood, or grasped, or accessed, while the mind, only indirectly; and that language is a causal mechanism of representation that plays no significant part in either forms of understanding or grasping. But isn’t that still a dichotomical approach? If Wittgenstein is right, a real departure from the inner/outer picture should involve avoiding it not only when thinking of body and mind, but also when thinking of words and meanings, of the words “body” and “mind” and their meanings. Whatever mind and body are, they are together *in language*, and are hence irreducible to *any* metaphysical split, however minimal. For, as Wittgenstein has once put it, “the danger sets in when we notice the old model is inadequate, but then we don’t change it, but only sublimate it, as it were” (*Big Typescript*, 93).

The inner/outer picture finds, of course, hyperbolic expression in Cartesian dualism, but can be said to underlie a significant number of historical developments in philosophy. As Hans-Johann Glock observes, it is discernible not only in rationalism, but also in empiricism and Kantianism; and idealism and phenomenism, which turn away from the physical world, still picture the mind as an incorporeal inner theatre to which its “owner” is supposed to have a privileged access (Glock 1996: 174-179). It is important to note here, however, that, from a Wittgensteinian point of view, contemporary materialist theories which flatly reject Cartesian dualism will also seem to be informed by the inner/outer picture, though perhaps under the guise of the brain/body dualism (see Baker & Hacker 1980: 341ff).

The experientialist theory of metaphor, in its most recent developments as a part of the so-called “second generation cognitive science”, seems to be heading in the direction of this latter version of the inner/outer split. “Language”, as Lakoff now often claims, “is a mediating system in the brain; it consists of circuits linking meaningful embodied ideas to physical linguistic form – speech, writing, gestures, and signs in signed languages” (2008: 232). Meaningful embodied ideas are “concepts instantiated in the synapses of the brain” (178). Metaphor, in turn, or at least *primary metaphor*, is ultimately “neural mapping” that “exists just like gravity exists and species exist” (89). Though no longer seen as immaterial accompaniments to words, *inner* meanings are still thought to *co-exist* with *outer* words via causal links, links that are presumably as exceptionless as, say, the laws of gravity. Granting of course that, as Lakoff’s neuroscientific motto goes, “no brain, no concepts”, Wittgenstein would perhaps suggest here that brain patterns and activities that make up for the necessary *pre-conditions* of human concepts and understanding are never *by themselves* the concepts or the understanding. For, as Peter Hacker observes in Wittgensteinian spirit,

brains can no more know, or ‘cognize’, or understand and follow rules, than brains can hope, or fear, or fall in love, feel remorse, or guilt, or undertake obligations. For these are properties of living creatures and not of their constituent parts. (2001:61)

Here lies an extremely difficult and controversial aspect of Wittgenstein’s thought – namely the notion that understanding is not something that *happens* in the mind or brain during (verbal) interactions; that it is ultimately not an event, or state, or process or any distinctive experience at all, but

rather an *abiding condition* (PI §143-84), having to do with our ability to take part in public, language infused cultural practices (I have explored this idea in connexion to metaphor elsewhere; see Martins 2007). How the very important findings of neuroscience (Lakoffian “neural mappings” there included) can be reinterpreted within a Wittgensteinian perspective on language and understanding is, in my opinion, far from clear and still in much need of investigation.

Whatever the case, however, this is a point of view that recommends a departure from the inner/outer picture that is even more radical than the one that has already been responsible for so many valuable insights and descriptive achievements within the frameworks of experientialism and the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor.

Recebido em julho de 2009
Aprovado em janeiro de 2010
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