

Philosophy as the Synopsis of Trivialities:

On the Non-Trivial Relationship of Wittgenstein with 20th-century Philosophy

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Ian Hacking once sarcastically remarked that when around 1960 philosophers finally appreciated that our concept of science must be historicized, "they created for themselves a crisis of rationality." (Hacking 1983: 1). The main issue is that when one takes science to be a culturally and conceptually dynamic practice, one is committed to a certain form of fallibilism. That, among other things, reconfigures our conception of knowledge, as the very concept of epistemic certainty is substantially relaxed. If there are any certainties, there are historically accumulated and acknowledged assumptions, i.e. beliefs. Such "certainties" are not simply found or given to us. As also Wittgenstein remarks in *On Certainty*: "If experience is the ground of our certainty, then naturally it is past experience." (Wittgenstein 1969: 275).

In my talk, I put the selected written considerations of "later Wittgenstein" in the historical context of the gradual demise of (logical) positivism qua a theory of knowledge; qua a philosophy of science. Having said that, I am not particularly interested in searching for dramatic shifts and discontinuities in Wittgenstein's own thought development. I am instead interested in seeing his continuous struggles to articulate the purpose(s) of philosophizing against the background of larger cultural and intellectual transformations in the West.

For instance, already in 1912, Wittgenstein thought that: "Philosophy [could be] defined as all those primitive propositions which are assumed as true without proof by the various sciences." (Monk 1991 [eBook]: 68). A statement that would, perhaps after a fashion, endorse even later Wittgenstein. I thus conclude that it is almost impossible to fit Wittgenstein's thoughts on philosophizing into the textbook dichotomy of positivism and post-positivism or, perhaps better said, of ahistorical and historical modes of thinking. Moreover, I claim that Wittgenstein realized very quickly that philosophy is essentially a human (linguistic) activity, ipso facto an activity entrenched in (cultural) history. This realization blooms in full flower in later Wittgenstein. The most representative quote in this respect would be the following one: "Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one's own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)." (Wittgenstein 1998).