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## PRAGMATIC INTERPRETATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN WITTGENSTEIN'S LATER PHILOSOPHY

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**Abstract.** The article shows that Ludwig Wittgenstein used mostly pragmatic analysis to study the problem of knowledge in the later period. Without giving clear definitions of epistemological concepts, he argued that our interpretations of knowledge depend on the context of language-games, ideas of truth, certainty and justification, as well as the level of education and culture that form our way of life. It was found that the ideas of pragmatics were useful to Wittgenstein in order to more clearly define the nature of true knowledge, to outline the specifics of our reflections about certainty, as well as to analyze in detail all aspects of the justification. It is stated that his epistemological researches and discussions around them raised a wide range of not only linguistic but also psychological, cognitive and metaphysical issues, which made our understanding of the nature of knowledge much more comprehensive.

*Keywords:* knowledge; truth; certainty; justification; Wittgenstein

### Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein devoted a lot of attention to the problem of knowledge in the late period of his work, especially in his works “Philosophical Investigations” (1929 – 1945) and “On Certainty” (1950 – 1951). Using a broad research methodology, focused on language analysis, the Austrian philosopher tried to clarify the peculiarities of the usage of the term “knowledge” in various language-games. Although it may seem that he paid attention mainly to the specifics of everyday use of this term, as will be shown below, analysis of ordinary language was only the starting point of philosophizing, which made it possible to more thoroughly investigate psychological, cognitive and even metaphysical issues, as well as the meaning of knowledge-related concepts. In this regard, Wittgenstein explained: “The grammar of the word ‘knows’ is evidently closely related to that of ‘can’, ‘is able to’. But also closely related to that of ‘understands’. (‘Mastery’ of a technique)” (Wittgenstein, 1968: § 150). It follows that in order to understand the meaning of this term, it is important to analyze not only the grammatical aspects of language, but also at least to take into account the specifics of the mental sphere.

According to Wittgenstein, the study of psychological and cognitive aspects of knowledge could help clarify its internal nature and external forms of expression. In this regard, Wittgenstein paid a lot of attention to such issues as: the expression of mental states through language, interpretation of human behavior, psychological preconditions of speech (e. g., memory-images), the correlation between words and feelings, meanings and experiences, status of consciousness and nature of understanding, the dependence of interpretations of the given on aspect seeing, etc. Wittgenstein gradually came to the question of interpreting knowledge as a state of mind or a certain disposition, and also thought about studying the neurophysiological basis of notions. However, he limited himself mostly to language analysis, noting that "...we are not doing natural science..." (Wittgenstein, 1968: ch. XII). Of course, it can be stated that Wittgenstein in no way denied the importance of empirical research; on the contrary, he sought different ways to clarify the specifics of knowledge.

Given such a broad context of analysis, some researchers, including John W. Cook (2006) or Raquel Krempel (2014), suggested that the epistemological study of late Wittgenstein had some inconsistency between how he interpreted philosophy (as a descriptive analysis), on the one hand, and how he actually philosophized (in a normative way), on the other hand. In this article, using the discussion of the nature of knowledge, I will try to prove that the reason for such philosophizing was not so much the inconsistency in Wittgenstein's reasoning as his own interest in pragmatism and his attempt to use a *pragmatic approach* to understand the phenomena of reality. This approach was developed in pragmatism and made it possible to resolve metaphysical disputes by analyzing the respective practical consequences of each debatable question; to interpret truth as dependent on a conceptual scheme and to replace Cartesian skepticism with belief. The methodology of pragmatism was undoubtedly well known to Wittgenstein, for he mentioned William James several times in "Philosophical Investigations" (§ 342, 413, 610 ch. XI) and the term "pragmatism" in "On Certainty" (§ 422). After all, researchers argue that in many cases Wittgenstein has been influenced by this methodology (Putnam, 1995; Boncompagni, 2016; Garrison, 2017; Misak, 2018). To my mind, by appealing to the principles of pragmatism Wittgenstein significantly supplemented the classical (since Plato's time) understanding of knowledge as true, certain and justified belief. He clearly substantiated the idea that any attempt to express knowledge by appealing to the concepts of *truth*, *certainty* and *justification* is too straightforward and requires many clarifications that significantly change the understanding of what is knowledge.

So, let's look at these aspects of knowledge and the possible discussion around that topic in order.

### **Truth**

When any researchers state that knowledge is true, they must understand in advance what is true, and therefore have a certain verification procedure on the

basis of which it could be reached. In the “Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus” (see, for example, § 5.101), Wittgenstein interpreted truth as a function of a proposition (or set of atomic propositions). However, such an interpretation would be relevant only in the case of formal languages. The analysis of natural language is much more complicated. In this case, researchers can not ignore the human factor in the formation and organization of knowledge. Truth ceases to be a static formation (as in the correspondence theory of truth) and acquires a dynamic dimension. Under such conditions, the concept of truth can be applied to various extensional thought objects, in particular, expressions of language (sentences, theories), abstract objects (concepts, ideas), mental experiences (feelings, ideas), moral patterns (norms, rules), etc. (Synytsia, 2017: 135). The analytic thinker, of course, seeks to reduce each of these subjects to the expressions of language. But how far is it possible in general? Wittgenstein seems to have been well aware that in the process of such a reduction something essential could be lost, namely, everything that distinguishes the realm of the mental from its verbal form of expression and the appropriate behavioral reactions that we observe and call certain terms.

The reason for the impossibility of this reduction is that our knowledge is *a priori* broader than language, since the latter is limited by the logical space of thought. According to Wittgenstein’s early considerations, the logical form makes it possible to grasp in language the connections between real things. By reducing epistemological problems to logico-syntactic ones, the scientist will analyze not the facts of reality, but sentences as logical constructions, which consist of elementary signs (names) that are in a certain relations with each other. These relations vary from sentence to sentence and thus determine their internal dynamics. They describe reality, not name it. On the one hand, indeed, as Wittgenstein remarked: “The propositions *show* the logical form of reality” (Wittgenstein, 1922: § 4.121). But on the other hand, not everything we know is captured in the propositions.

For instance, people may know what is happening, but they can not properly formulate their opinion and describe what they observe (Wittgenstein, 1968: § 75). The inability to identify and properly explain a particular process is not yet a basis for acknowledging the fact that a person does not know what is happening. Having a certain understanding, a person will have a certain knowledge. It is possible that the more thoroughly a person comprehends it, the more clearly they will be able to express their opinion later. However, this does not apply to unspeakable (mystical) knowledge. Such inexpressible knowledge only complements logical knowledge and just “*shows* itself” (Wittgenstein, 1922: § 6.522). It would be more correct to even say that people manifest (understand and experience) this knowledge, but they cannot express it due to its lack of logical form. However, mystical knowledge seems to us no less true than that expressed in language.

On the other hand, what we believe to be true is not necessarily true. We can always interpret a fact in a way we want. As Wittgenstein explained: “no course of

action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule” (Wittgenstein, 1968: § 201). Accordingly, if a person engages in the interpretation of any rules or observations alone, he or she will not have clear criteria for which knowledge is considered true. Only within the *linguistic community* can one hope for an adequate interpretation of propositions. Thus, in defining the decision of the linguistic community as a criterion for the truth of knowledge, Wittgenstein pragmatically made truth an intersubjective phenomenon that does not depend on the interpretations of the individual. It should be noted that Charles Sanders Peirce did the same when he defined the *community of inquirers* as the guarantor of the truth of knowledge. It is clear that both in the case of the linguistic community and in the case of the community of inquirers, the possibility of forming intersubjective relativism will remain plausible. That is, there may be a situation in which different groups of scholars will evaluate the truth of a proposition differently. To avoid such a situation, from the pragmatism standpoint, it is efficient to introduce the criterion of *practical certainty* (Peirce, 1932: 2.664). According to it, the resolution of various theoretical disputes could take place given the practical prospects of a particular research approach. Propositions that can be practically confirmed, it would be appropriate to consider as true knowledge. However, even in this case, it would be necessary to understand that not all of the true propositions could be verified in practice. Much in theory will simply have to be taken for granted.

It follows that the truth of the propositions is hardly possible as something completely objective. The very fact that S knows P indicates the interpretation of the truth, given the personality of the subject and the involvement of P in the structure of language-games. And this makes it quite probable that the interpretation of true knowledge depends on the language-game which we use it in. This interpretation of the truth is quite pragmatic, because it takes into account the internal dynamism of both the knowledge itself and our ideas about its truth.

### **Certainty**

The situation with the concept of certainty seems no less confusing than with the concept of truth. When a person is convinced of something, it definitely deserves his or her trust, and therefore should not be subject to any doubt. But how to achieve such a belief, which will eventually give us a reason to call something knowledge? First of all, as Wittgenstein thought: “It needs to be shown that no mistake was possible. Giving the assurance ‘I know’ doesn’t suffice. For it is after all only an assurance that I can’t be making a mistake, and it needs to be objectively established that I am not making a mistake about that” (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 15). This aspect of the analysis does not seem to have been taken into account by either Alfred J. Ayer and Roderick Chisolm or Edmund Gettier, who criticized them and questioned the assertion that justified true belief is knowledge. In fact, if Gettier

has already shown some difficulty in interpreting knowledge, it must also be considered as a partial case of complete induction. Wittgenstein clearly explained that the list was complete it should be ended with the words “nothing other than that” (McGuinness, 2001: 38). Each partial case is only one of the elements of proof. And it must be taken into account every time to be sure that propositions are certain.

However, Descartes, as we know, argued that in principle, under certain circumstances, we can doubt everything, except that we currently doubt. Despite the probability of such a state of affairs, Wittgenstein was convinced that this should not be a difficulty in the process of finding reliable knowledge. Instead of doubting everything, he pragmatically preferred to ask himself the question of how well-founded this doubt itself would be and whether its expediency could be doubted. It follows that “the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty” (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 115). After all, the assertion that one can doubt everything is already an expression of confidence. In other words, where there is doubt there should be certainty.

Certainty is used in language-games both as a characteristic of knowledge (in the truth of which we are sure) and as a characteristic of belief (in which we are also sure), although, of course, they will be different: knowledge will need some evidence, but belief can do without them. In “Culture and Value”, he, considering religious beliefs, even stated: “... the historical accounts in the Gospels might, historically speaking, be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this...” (Wittgenstein, 2006: 32). Human in his or her belief will be steadfast for a long time, because the mechanisms of its formation are different from the mechanisms of knowledge formation. Although if you consider only the certainty itself, it is nothing more than a tone of voice that does not prove anything. As a result, both what we consider to be knowledge and what we have defined as an object of belief may be wrong. Only certainty is not enough for something to be considered knowledge. Certainty as a special *form of life* (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 358) is necessary for a person just to act.

In general, language-games in the case of certainty in the subject of belief and in the case of certainty in the truths of science are quite different. Certainty in these language-games should not be equated. In addition, as Wittgenstein remarked: “‘Knowledge’ and ‘certainty’ belong to different categories” (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 308). Therefore, we cannot find out a clear correlation between them. Each of these categories is rather a set of specific characteristics. Knowledge and certainty are in many ways similar (but not in all of them), which can be defined as family resemblances. But what is the difference between knowing something and being sure of something? When we interpret something as knowledge, we are looking for ways to get rid of the subjective component that is clearly present in the statements “I believe”, “I’m sure”. Without a subjective component, the truth of the proposition can be verified by anyone else. When we are sure of something, it does not

mean that we are trying to get rid of the subjective component. Also, in this case, we cannot always answer the question of what exactly is the source of our confidence, because it can also be the result of belief (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 550). In this way we express our attitude to a certain situation and our view of things.

Knowledge itself should rather be understood not as a mental state in the usual sense of the term, but as a dispositional state that we actualize in certain situations. It can be argued that knowledge influences our behavior and decision-making, forms our experience and serves as the basis for language-games. Without certainty in the truth of our knowledge, language-games would be impossible. As Wittgenstein explained: "... a language-game is only possible if one trusts something (I did not say 'can trust something')" (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 509). It can be assumed that belief is the core of knowledge. Therefore, it would be impractical to draw clear demarcation lines between them. Belief is an important element in affirming common, obvious truths, such as that there are other people who are normally conscious; that there are other settlements; that the history of mankind did not begin a few minutes ago; that we are surrounded by various objects, etc. Doubts about anything like that call into question everything at once. However, in order to be able to move forward, it is important to have a set of truths that seem indisputable and form a kind of basis for what should not be questioned. As Wittgenstein remarked: "... some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn" (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 341). Such statements-hinges form the basis for all other propositions that are not so obvious. Of course, the question arises where is the boundary between these types of propositions. This boundary seems vague and only a pragmatic analysis could help identify it.

### **Justification**

What we call knowledge can be confirmed by certain evidence. To know means to have proof, the truth of which neither you nor others would doubt. What can be such proof? People use as evidence their feeling or the results of logical, rational conclusions. However, Wittgenstein made some remarks about each of these cases. To substantiate this view, in the first case, Wittgenstein offered a thought experiment in which a person in a laboratory is exposed to an electric current. As a result, this person may get the impression that they are now moving their hand, because they have special feeling (proof in the style of Moore). However, this feeling is only signals in the brain. In reality, the hand does not move. There is only some feeling (Wittgenstein, 1968: § 624). Therefore, we cannot say that there is a direct connection between what a person knows and what is real. In other words, from the proposition "S knows P" does not follow P.

In the second case, when P is derived from the set of premises, the question arises as to what these premises are based on, and the premises for these premises, and so on. We are always looking for new evidence. Each piece of evidence can



be interpreted as the reason of P. So, in justifying something, we look for a reason. However, the very justification we will use has a number of pragmatic points. Firstly, what justification will be sufficient for a person to have confidence that everything is exactly as it is? As Wittgenstein explained: "What people accept as a justification – is shewn by how they think and live" (Wittgenstein, 1968: § 325). Given that a person determines for themselves whether the justification is reliable, it means that what is justified for some people will not be the same for others. This will be influenced by both human experience and other people's experiences, as well as their culture and education. It is no coincidence that Wittgenstein in "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*" (Wittgenstein, 1993) drew attention to the fact that for primitive cultures, any attempts to explain the causes of natural phenomena from a scientific point of view do not correspond to their worldviews and therefore are unacceptable to them. However, this state of affairs does not mean that one culture and its inherent ways of explanation are worse than others; it is generally inappropriate to compare them. Secondly, since, as Wittgenstein argued, "the chain of reasons has an end" (Wittgenstein, 1968: § 326), it is clear that each person will determine for themselves where its limit will be. Thirdly, since the facts in nature, as Wittgenstein argued (Wittgenstein, 1922: § 6.3631), are not logically necessary, we find a connection between them inductively. And if so, certainty is based on inductive assumptions and has a psychological justification. Fourthly, our justification will depend on which system of hypotheses and laws of nature we appeal to in the process of verifying a proposition (Wittgenstein, 1968: § 325). Finally, fifthly, the basic principles in the process of justification are the most obvious, general propositions – they are not justified, but based on belief. It can be argued that belief in their truth is an important element of cognitive systems. No matter how well-developed a system of argumentation is, "at the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded" (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 253)". Thus, the foundations of knowledge are only an unfounded object of belief – a set of unproven propositions.

However, a logico-pragmatic justification can be found for such propositions. According to Wittgenstein, belief is one of the most important ways for a person to gain life experience. Moreover, "learning is based on believing" (Wittgenstein, 1969: § 170). The fact is that through belief, people can quickly acquire knowledge. If doubts arose earlier than belief, the training would not be as effective, as it would take a lot of time to verify the information. Belief is also present in the situation of acquaintance with the facts (geographical, mathematical, historical, chemical, etc.), which scientists report in their treatises. Their truth has been obtained experimentally before and can be verified if necessary. Sometimes the status of truth is obtained by those hypotheses that are confirmed by the facts available in science, and at the same time there are no counter-facts. Another thing is that it is not entirely clear how to deal with the possibility of such counter-facts. If such counter-facts appear, we will

have to admit that the status of truth was attributed to the proposition incorrectly. However, such a situation should not affect our belief, because all human activity is based on it. And as long as people act, they believe and intend to get rid of doubts in order to strengthen their belief and to expand the limits of their knowledge. This Wittgenstein's position also seems to be quite justified and pragmatic.

### Conclusions

Thus, in the late period, Wittgenstein carefully analyzed the problem of knowledge. Interestingly, he did not give clear definitions of key epistemological terms, but on the contrary, showed that their meaning depends on which language-games they are used in. The Austrian philosopher has clearly demonstrated that our knowledge depends both on our ideas of truth, certainty and justification, and on our education and culture in general. In a pragmatic way, Wittgenstein proved that the core of knowledge is determined by belief, which allows one to get rid of doubts; the truth of certain propositions depends on the criteria defined by the linguistic community; certainty is only a form of life and one of reasons of our practical activity; the justification of propositions in certain situations depends on our experience. Wittgenstein's pragmatic analysis in epistemology confirmed that by appealing to different contexts of the use of certain linguistic expressions and not neglecting a variety of methodological tools (such as linguistic analysis, psychological and cognitive ideas, thought experiments, etc.), it is possible to determine the truth of propositions, clarify various philosophical issues and more thoroughly understand the nature of knowledge.

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