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Menashe Schwed
Ashkelon Academic College

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MENASHE SCHWED

Philosophy
Ashkelon Academic College
12 Ben Tzvi St., P.O.Box 9071
Ashkelon 78211
Israel
m_schwed@012.net.il

ABSTRACT: The central supposition of the sceptical controversy regarding rationality in the theory of argumentation is that either there are universal standards against which the reasonableness of arguments can be evaluate or, conversely, that there are no determinate standards against which arguments can be evaluated, and hence no methods by which disputes can be rationally resolved. The paper argues that the basic terms of this debate are erroneously defined and that there is a middle path in this sceptical controversy. The paper adopts the later Wittgensteinian approach to language and applies it to the concept of rationality. Furthermore, it maintains that the search for universal standards of reasonableness in theories of argumentation is likely to come to naught, and that, nonetheless, there are discoverable methods by which arguments are evaluated, facts constituted, and disputes resolved.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main topics of this conference is the issue of whether 'argument' and 'argumentation' are culture-laden concepts, since they are practiced differently and have different status in different cultures. However, the concept of 'culture-laden' is notorious for its fuzziness. First of all, there is the anthropological diversity regarding the status and practices of arguments and argumentation across cultures. Different cultures assign a different place to arguments and practices of argumentation. The origin of arguments and argumentation is, to begin with, a cultural one and their existence and practices presuppose some necessary preconditions belongings to epistemology, sociology, politics, ethics and so forth, which are all, again, cultural in origin. Then there is the Western European sub-cultural diversity regarding the various sub-cultures of arguments and argumentation in modern Western European culture, such as the scientific, medical, political, and popular sub-cultures of arguments and argumentation. Last, there is the theoretical diversity regarding the various cultures of theorizing about arguments and argumentation, as argument and argumentation have been studied from a number of viewpoints and defined in a variety of ways (Bruschke 2004, pp. 155-156; Willard 1989). This is, no doubt, one of the reasons why the study of argumentation is in a state of continuous controversy and why a better understanding of argumentation would be from a cross-cultural perspective and carried out with culture awareness.

As early as philosophy itself, the concept of rationality was thought to be the answer to skepticism and, through it, also an answer to the dissolution of the concept of

argument on account of cultural relativism. Rationalism was and still is thought of as a safeguard against the dissolution of correctness, or even truth, into effectiveness, against the dissolution of argumentation into rhetoric. One of the recent attempts to clarify the borderline between argumentation and rhetoric with the help of rationality is Johnson's *Manifest Rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of Argument* (2000):

> [I]f the practice of argumentation is to be understood, it must be understood in terms of rationality (p. 1) […] [However,] argumentation is an extremely powerful and valuable cultural practice that has fallen on hard times […] Because an argument is an exercise in rationality, its status and fate in the wider culture depend on the culture's assumptions about the nature and value of rationality (p. 11).
>
> Argumentation as a practice is intimately connected with rationality. First, argumentation depends on rationality […] [Second,] Not only does argumentation depend on rationality, argumentation exhibits rationality and increases it. Rationality is highly implicated in argumentation […] The thesis […] is that if argumentation is to be properly understood, it must be seen as an exhibition of rationality (pp. 12-13).

However, the concept of rationality was and still is *vainly* thought to be a safeguard against the skeptical and relativistic stances, since it is rather common to argue nowadays that 'rationality' is open to diverse interpretations; that the usage of 'rationality' also differs in different contexts.[1] The traditional idea that rationality has to satisfy the concepts of universalizability or enforceability is no longer defensible and the thesis that rationality is nothing more than the appropriateness of the end-means relationship is no longer satisfactory. While this extreme skeptical and relativist point of view is not necessary or compulsory, there is no escape from accepting that rationality, as it is manifested in practice, has to be culture-sensitive and cultural-laden. But, then, in what sense does this culture-laden meaning of rationality preserve the traditional idea of rationality and its function and, consequently, regain its place in theories of argumentation as a safeguard against extreme skepticism and relativism?

The term "rationality" has been generally used in theories of arguments to identify a focus on the correctness of an argument rather than on its rhetorical features. Emphasizing winning and persuading in the study of argumentation amounts to the de-emphasizing of reasoning and correctness. Argument theorists tend to focus more on rhetorical criticism, interpersonal studies of disagreement behaviour, studies of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary debates and studies of persuasive and quasi-persuasive argumentation (Bruschke 2004, pp. 155-158). Only a small minority of argument theorists, such as Johnson (2000), have focused on the correctness of arguments in the more traditional sense and, consequently, bothered with the concepts of rationality and truth.

As things currently stand, they pose the following dilemma: On the one hand, the goal of mediation of differences or achieving a shared rationale for action was not achieved fully, as no lucid definition of how an evaluation of logical and epistemological correctness is even possible. On the other hand, there has been considerable success with communicative concepts like the dominant reason or common sense of a culture. Willard echoes a sentiment common among researchers when he says that:

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[1] Roy (1992), for instance, shows that epistemic rationality, applicable in natural sciences, has no significance in human sciences.

Thought and emotion are inseparable […] Rationality comes easily in armchairs. But it may not mean much to say that one should be free of prejudice, bias, power, and politics. One never is. (Willard 1990, pp. 224-225).

The question is whether there is some middle path in the form of methods of evaluation that fuse the unattainable concept of rationality on the one hand with the rhetoric of arguments from an audience-centered perspective on the other hand. The answer must lie, as Johnson (2000) rightly argues, in the concept of rationality. Johnson's own solution is not satisfactory since his entire approach to rationality is overly dependent on supplying the right theory of truth so that his concept of rationality may accomplish itself (Bruschke 2004). However, any theory of truth, including Bruschke's (2004) own suggestion for the pragmatic theory of truth, will not stand against the well-known skepticism. Johnson's own suggestion and Bruschke's modifications are traditional in the sense of investigating the concepts of rationality and truth "from the outside," focusing on the objective characteristics of these concepts. Instead, the approach should be "from the inside," focusing on understanding the meaning of the concept of rationality as it is manifested in the practices of a family of more modest concepts, such as 'being rational,' 'giving reasons,' 'reasoning' and so forth. In other words, the later Wittgensteinian approach of understanding, as opposed to the natural sciences approach of causal explanation, suggests a middle path. This Wittgensteinian approach maintains both that the search for general standards of validity, objectivity, reasonableness, and the like, based on the concept of rationality is likely to fail, and that nonetheless there are ascertainable methods by which arguments are evaluated, disputes resolved, fact constituted, and so on.

Three concepts participate here: Argumentation, culture and rationality. On the one hand, argumentation dissolves into a culture-laden practice and loses its traditional decisive role. On the other hand, rationality was thought to be a safeguard against this consequence but this concept also dissolves into an insignificant concept. The later Wittgensteinian philosophy offers a way out with its constitutive concepts of 'language-game' and 'form of life.' It offers a different concept of rationality, which is simultaneously sensitive to culture and yet has a significant and decisive role in argumentation.

2. THE LATER WITTGENSTEINIAN OUTLOOK IN US

It is important to make clear at the outset that Wittgenstein himself did not talk explicitly at all about rationality. But he did talk about language and truth, which are clearly ideas which are closely related to those of reason and rationality.[2] Thus, this paper sketches some thoughts that are drawn from the later Wittgenstein and which are suggested by his approach to language. The thoughts from the later Wittgenstein encourage us to think about rationality and reason along the same lines of the Wittgensteinian view of language and truth. They also encourage us to reject the philosophical tendency towards 'ideal rationality' and to adopt the more modest concepts of the family of 'rational,'

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[2] The paper sketches some thoughts which fit Wittgenstein's later outlook and which are implied by his approach to language and which are lay out in his *Blue and Brown books* (1969) (*BB*), *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) (*PI*) and *On Certainty* (1969) (*OC*).

'rationality,' 'reason' and 'reasoning' and their diversity as part of the variety of language and our uses of it.

The identification and examination of the concept of 'ideal rationality' will not be considered here.[3] However, the known difficulties of the concept of 'ideal rationality' are the truth of the picture of language in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1961). Later, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein argues that these *ideal* concepts of language and reasoning have unacceptable presuppositions, when they set a standard for actual human beings as opposed to *ideal* model of language and thought. Wittgenstein refers to the *Tractatus'* ideas and their consequences as *dogmatic*. He uses this term to designate any conception which allows for a gap between a question (e.g., what is ideal rationality?) and an answer, such that the answer to the question could be found at a later date. However, the answer to such questions cannot be found on principle and, thus, labelled as *dogmatism*. Thus, the move from the realm of formal logic to that of ordinary language and from an emphasis of definition and analysis to 'family resemblance,' 'language-games' and 'forms of life' marks the transition towards anti-dogmatism. In a corresponding manner, the dogmatic concept of 'ideal rationality' should not be taken to be the central concept in the light of which more modest concepts, which do or might actually apply to human beings, are to be described. For this task, one should turn to speculating about the practices which provide the context for any concept in the reason/rational family of concepts. That is, what features of language and forms of life in general ground the use of any concept in the 'reason/rational' family and what can be expected of this family.

The Wittgensteinian approach is a call for a change of perspective in the traditional understanding of the concept of rationality, whether dogmatic or skeptical. In an analogous manner to his famous statement about "meaning as use" *(PI §43), the* basic statement is that for a large class of cases in which people employ the concepts in the reason/rational family, the meaning of these concepts is their use in the language. It is first and foremost a change of perspective, which characterizes Wittgenstein's later thought: a change from a conception of rationality as representation to a view which looks to use as the hinge of the investigation. Traditional theories of rationality in the history of philosophy were intent on pointing to something exterior to the practices, which endow it with sense. This anti-dogmatic approach is the following philosophical lesson: "if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its *use*" (*BB*, 4). That is, a move from the exterior of the practices to their interior. Focusing on the use of the idea of rationality will not end in any constructive

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[3] There are some studies on the issue of 'ideal rationality' which fill this gap satisfactorily. John Pollock, in his *Thinking about Acting* (2006), offers a theory of rational decision making for real agents, as contrasted with ideal ones. Real agents have limited cognitive powers, but traditional theories of rationality have applied only to idealized agents that lack such constraints. He further argues that theories of *ideal rationality* are largely irrelevant to the decision making of real agents and, thus, in need for 'real rationality' in its place. A good summery of this issue is given by Reiner (1995), which gives an exposition of the different conceptions of *perfect rationality*, and the various sorts of arguments against them. Then he clarifies which conceptions of *perfect rationality* are targeted by which counter-arguments and, finally, attempts to systematize the results. Cummins, Poirier, & Roth (2004) study the fallow field between the norms of ideal rationality and the practicalities of human limitations and argue for the naturalistic epistemological approach, in which normative assessment is constrained by capacities and the complexity of the saying that *ought implies can*.

theory building. Rather, when investigating rationality, one must "look and see" the variety of uses to which the idea is put, as Wittgenstein insists: "Don't think but look!" (*PI §*66). And looking is done by studying particular cases and not hypothetical generalizations. In this process of constructing the meaning of the concepts in the reason/rational family, any explanatory generalization should be replaced by a description of use. Thus, the traditional idea that rationality houses a kind of monolithic and transcendental meaning gives way to an emphasis on the diversity of uses.

3. LANGUAGE-GAME

However, in order to address the above mentioned countless multiplicity of uses and their looseness, Wittgenstein introduces the key concept of 'language-game.' This theoretical concept is supposed to be more suitable for a more fluid, more diversified, and more activity-oriented perspective on language *(PI §*23*)*. Wittgenstein explicitly includes various concepts of the reason/rational family in the "regular" language-games, which is amazing in itself:

> Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.
> Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples, and in others:
> […]
> Reporting an event —
> Speculating about an event —
> Forming and testing a hypothesis —
> Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams —
> […]
> Solving a problem in practical arithmetic —
> […]
> — It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used […] (*PI §*23).

These activities and many others alike activities constitutes the paradigmatic concepts in the reason/rational family that are woven in language-games and involve not only words but activities. Each of the concepts of the family of 'rational,' 'rationality, 'reason,' 'reasoning' and so forth, is first and foremost an *activity*: "We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm […]" (*PI §*108). Rationality does not existing any longer outside of time and space and, thus, the study of rationality should be fixed in the study of language-games, which shifts the traditional focus from the human being that pretend to be rational to her activities in the framework of a language-game. This is a crucial shift, since when discussing concepts like reasonableness, there is the expected difficulty of committing the fallacy of division (cf. Schagrin 1973): While it is proper to characterize a group of people as reasonable (e.g., a group of scientists), it is not such regarding an individual (e.g., a certain scientist). The mistake here is as follows: One can search for a scientific method in the sense of rules, principles or criteria for use by individual scientists in making reasonable choices of hypotheses and argue that the enterprise of science results in a reasonable selection of hypotheses. Furthermore, one can even continue and argue that the individual behaviour of a scientist is reasonable or not insofar as it coincides with the judgments of the scientific profession. Considered by itself, however, an individual

scientist's judgment is neither reasonable nor unreasonable. The scientific community might be rational since it makes rational decisions. But it makes no sense to say of an individual scientist of that community that *she* makes her decisions in a rational way. This point is part of Wittgenstein's insistency in his *On* Certainty (1969, pp. 336, 559) and part of the complex meaning of the notion of language-game. Accordingly, a person is not rational but her behaviour is rational due to her participating in a specific language-game, which involves the concepts in the reason/rational family. It is the language-game that manifests a rational behaviour and not the person herself.

4. RULE-FOLLOWING

These argumentative uses of language in the above citation (*PI §*23) and their descriptions are language-games since they are rule-governed. This does not entail strict and definite systems of rules for those language-games regarding argumentation in general and the concepts in the reason/rational family in particular. Instead, these more specific language-games point to the conventional nature of the reasoned and rational sort of human activity.

Rationality cannot be constituted out from abstract rules that transcend all of the particular applications of the concept. It is not the case where knowing the rules that constitute the concept of rationality involve grasping some abstract entity and thereby knowing how to use it. This is exactly the dogmatic stance that Wittgenstein opposed to in *Philosophical Investigations*. In a series of paragraphs (*PI §*185-243) Wittgenstein wants to liberate us from the need to posit any sort of external or internal authority to the authorship of the rules beyond the actual applications of the rules. Questions, such as: How do we learn the rules? How do we follow them? Wherefrom the standards which decide if a rule is followed correctly? and so forth, are questionable themselves. There is no fact of the matter here regarding a rigid definition of what it means to act in accordance with a rule or in conflict with it and Wittgenstein insists on obfuscating the whole issue of rule following (*PI §*201).

5. FORM OF LIFE

Those argumentative uses of language in the above citation (*PI §*23) and their descriptions are a part of a broader context termed by Wittgenstein as *form of life*. This is where the later Wittgenstein's thoughts play the more considerable role in their application to the concept of rationality. It begins with the celebrated 'private-language argument,' which follows naturally the above rule-following discussion. It may be argued accordingly that any act or use of the concepts in the reason/rational family and any such utterance are meaningful if and only if it is possible in principle to subject them to public standards and criteria of correctness. For this reason, 'truth,' 'reasons' and 'acting rationally' cannot have individual meaning and be known and have a specific sense only to the person or specific group of persons speaking (*PI §*243), since such uses are not a genuine, meaningful, rule-governed language. These concepts in the reason/rational family, as specific language-games, can only function when there is a possibility of judging the correctness of their use: "So the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands" (*PI §*261). For the meaning of this 'social

understanding and acceptance,' Wittgenstein offers his other celebrated notion of 'grammar.' Here again, Wittgenstein offers a more wider and more elusive meaning of grammar then is usually understood and describes it as a network of rules which determine what linguistic move is allowed as making sense, and what is not. Instead of a formal meaning of grammar, Wittgenstein describes the "rules" of grammar as expressing the norms for meaningful language: they describe how we use words in order to both justify and criticize our particular utterances and are part of the regular activity with which language-games are closely linked and, thus, "[…] the term 'language-*game*' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (*PI §*23). The concept of 'form of life,' although used by Wittgenstein only five times in the *Philosophical Investigations* (19, 23, 241, pp. 174, 226), is an intriguing and fruitful concept in general and with regards to the question of rationality in particular:

> "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?"—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (*PI §*241).

The essence of the term 'language-game' is that "the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (*PI §*23). Wittgenstein stresses that speaking is a rule-guided activity but he goes further by holding that our language-games are interwoven with non-linguistic activities, and must be understood within this context. This holds not only for actual language-games but also to fictitious language-games. Those fictitious ones can be properly assessed and understood only if the non-linguistic context of fictitious language-games is taken into the overall account. The non-linguistic context is essential to understanding fictitious linguistic activities and their understanding is possible only when they fit in with the overall practice of the fictitious community, which uses these language-games: "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (*PI §*7, §19; cf., *BB §* 134). Thus, it is necessary ultimately to deal with the general notion of form of life that encompasses those linguistic and non-linguistic activities, either actual or fictitious.

The most natural reading of 'form of life' is as a changing and contingent notion, which is dependent on history, context, etc. such that the notion has to be an essential part of the concept of culture. Accordingly, the notion of rationality as the concepts in the reason/rational family are part of forms of life, patterns of behaviour and systems of reference by which people engaging in these forms of life think and speak. This does not contradict the relativistic aura of Wittgenstein, since these forms of life are still changing and contingent, historical, sensitive to context and, thus, dependent on culture.

6. "RATIONALITY AS USE"

How does this construction of rationality according to the Wittgensteinian approach can cope with the assumption that any of the argumentative language-games and their respective form of life cannot be compatible with the concept of 'ideal rationality'? One possible answer, which the paper adopts, is that the word 'rationality' expresses a family of related concepts rather than one sharply defined notion. To begin with, this family of concepts is not a random collection, but a family of concepts in the sense of the

Wittgensteinian notion of *family resemblance*. These concepts, as 'rational,' 'rationality,' 'reason,' and 'reasoning,' which constitute a family of concepts, are connected by a series of overlapping similarities, where no one feature is common to all: "I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"" (*PI §67*).[4] One of the lessons Wittgenstein teaches us in this respect is that when coming to study such an important feature of human life as rationality, one should reject general explanations and definitions based on sufficient and necessary conditions. There is no reason to look, as philosophers done traditionally—and dogmatically—for one, essential core in which the meaning of the concept of rationality is located and which is, therefore, common to all uses of that concept. One should, instead, explore the concept's uses through "a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing" (*PI §66*). The more useful Wittgensteinian way will be to appeal to similarity of a kind with family resemblance between the concepts of the family of 'rational,' 'rationality,' 'reason,' 'reasoning' and so forth. 'Reasoning' and 'rationality' "has not the formal unity that I imagined [in the *Tractatus*], but is the family of structures more or less related to one another." (*PI §108*).

People use language in various ways and give birth to various language-games. The place to look for the use of the concepts of the rational/reason family is where the use of the language has to do with utterances occurring in the setting of reasoning and giving reasons and the like. The paradigms of reasoning and exercising rationality are those linguistic exchanges that have to do with linguistic situations of acceptance, dissent, inference, investigation, doubt, debate, persuasion and so forth.

But where do the study of argumentation and not its uses comes in? The need for the concepts of the family of 'reason,' 'reasoning' or 'rational' arises when people reflect about these language-games and seek to describe them and asses them. The linguistic practices, including those of 'debate,' 'discussion,' 'proving,' 'argument,' 'persuasion' and the like, invite not only their use but also their study. Thus, along with these practices, there will be also attempts to study, systematize, improve, and elaborate these practices. Just as people go to conferences on argumentation, people have developed a rich variety of ideas about reasoning and being rational. Some of them did an extraordinary work, like Aristotle, Kant, Frege, Wittgenstein and many more. However, these speculations did not end up in one best language-game or concept. Even Wittgenstein himself rejected his own *Tractatus* and its ideal language and way of reasoning. On the contrary, the later Wittgenstein shows that the meaning of 'reasoning' or 'being rational' is divergent and depends on forms of life; it is divergent because of contrasts between groups of people and historical periods, between different social structures and so forth, and in short, because of *culture*. According to later Wittgenstein, the elaborations of concepts and tools for debating and reasoning are corollaries of changes in language-games and in forms of life of those who employ these language-games. According to this line of thought, it is expected that these various language-games are shaped as a result of cultural changes and developments in the course of time and over cross-cultures in a specific time.

The *rationality* family of concepts is subject to a continuous evolution not only in how many language-games there are that contains each of these concepts, but evolution

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[4] The Wittgensteinian idea of *family resemblance* is mainly an anti-essentialist approach in philosophy. For critical expositions of this idea, see: Bangu (2005) and Tessin (1996).

as to the kind of language-games there are. This is the result of the fact that the rules of language-games are not unchangeable laws (*PI §*23): "language is part of an activity or of a form of life." The various argumentative language-games, which contain the rationality family of concepts is woven into culture and the words/concepts are woven into activities, which are all forms of life: "And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life." (*PI §*19).

The studies in argumentation are in one sense studies of various language-games, in which reason-giving discussion is prominent. These studies concentrate on linguistic situations, such as dialogue in which the conversers hope to reach agreement or understanding, or monologue in which a person engages on his own in reflection about issues which concern him. These linguistic situations and other alike call for various kinds of evaluations, judgments, assessments and so forth, since such notions are intrinsic part of making claims and offering support for them. However, as the studies show, there is a cultural variety of these practices and, above all, the Western tradition in which Greece had a major part, seem to have been gripped very early by one sort of reasoning. This sort of reasoning is shaped by the paradigms of arithmetic and geometry as a conclusive and context independent process of proof. But other cultures have developed different sorts of reasoning and constituted different argumentative language-games.[5] Thus, in defining 'rational' or 'rationality' one should avoid any sign of essentialism and any trait of *form* or *abstraction*. This last point is a well known Wittgensteinian insistency that no final and essential definition of the 'rational language-game' can be given:

> what is common to all these activities and what makes them into language or parts of language […] these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,— but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language." (*PI §*65).

7. CONCLUSION

The starting point of the paper is the widespread skeptical and relativistic assumption that it is impossible to recover general standards for the validity or correctness of argumentation, which leads inevitably to the conclusion that there are no standards (of intelligibility, cogency, reasonableness, and so forth) to which arguments can be held answerable *in situ*. Consequently, there are no methods by which disputes between competing claims can reasonably be resolved. The acceptance of this idea forces a choice between the alternatives of continuing the search for universally justified standards for rationality and truth on the one hand, and the subscription to the doctrine that there are no legitimate rules and standards for rationality and truth and hence no hope for any sense for the concepts of rationality and truth on the other hand. This is but only one way to describe in general terms the modernist/postmodernist or the enlightenment/anti-enlightenment debates in contemporary Western culture. They are the terms within which Habermas argues for the need to complete the unfinished project of modernity (Habermas 1977).

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[5] Ian Hacking argues in his *Historical Ontology* (2002) that historical perspective in philosophy clearly emphasizes the contingency and variety of ways of thinking.

The later Wittgensteinian thoughts on language suggest a middle path, which maintains both that the search for general standards of validity, objectivity, reasonableness, and the like, is likely to end in disappointment, and that nonetheless there are ascertainable methods by which arguments are evaluated, disputes resolved, fact constituted, and so on. This Wittgensteinian middle path regarding these ascertainable methods rejects the traditional debates between rationalism and nihilism. In doing so, this middle path follows Wittgenstein's (1958) remarks on the relativity of rules or standards of validity, objectivity, reasonableness, and the like, and apply them to argumentative practices in the sense that nothing regarding the rational properties of argumentative practices is obtained outside tangible settings of these practices within which such properties are recognized, used, produced and discussed.

A Wittgensteinian approach will begin with the phenomena of our ability to engage in discursive and persuasive linguistic exchanges. The need for the concepts of 'reason' and 'rationality' are rooted in these uses and are defined according to them. But, as Wittgenstein emphasizes on many occasions, these linguistic exchanges are various and, thus, the concepts of 'reason' and 'rationality' cannot be monolithic concepts, but are expected to come in many versions, which are formed by history and culture. This diversity and its historical and cultural roots in Western culture and history are in opposition to the traditional philosophical temptation to conceptualize a kind of 'ideal rationality.' Giving this line of thoughts, rationality—in the meaning of some 'ideal rationality'—loses its traditional place and meaning. However, abandoning the concept of rationality all together is not the only way of action left, since another way of action is still open according to the Wittgensteinian approach: Instead of conceptualizing about some concept of 'ideal rationality,' one can turn around and look at those practices and uses of discursive and persuasive linguistic exchanges, which manifest reasoning and rationality. 'Rationality' is a word with many uses in many kinds of situations and, thus, expresses a tangle of related concepts rather than one sharply defined concept, like its associates 'reason,' 'rational,' 'reasoning' and more.

This Wittgensteinian middle path is no doubt anthropocentric and hence, sensitive to cultural diversity, although not necessarily adopting the questionable multiculturalism stance. Accordingly, there are no independent, objective points of support outside human action, thought and speech, and meaning and necessity are preserved only in the linguistic practices which embody them. They are reliable only because the practices gain certain stability from rules. But even the rules do not provide a fixed point of reference, because they always allow divergent interpretations. What really gives the practices their stability is that people agree in their interpretations of the rules. It is what gives people the ability to think and speak in the first place.

Link to commentary

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