

*Anna
Laktionova*

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CRITICISM, PERSUASION, RELATIVISM: CHALLENGING RATIONALITY

Philosophical elaborations always appeared to be done on a reflexive level of deliberations. Reflection can be understood as critique, questioning the grounds with the aim to realize what has been reflexively criticized. In such a way critique as a mean to avoid disadvantages of the reflected appears to be persuasive, but the other side of it could remain to be relativistic. On the other hand, rationality is often understood as reasonable capacity to find and maintain the most effective, optimized way of dealing with an issue. Challenges in different context could have supporting or undermining influence on what has been challenged. Criticism is considered as appropriate methodological step to attain rationality and avoid persuasion and relativism. But as the following text demonstrates attitudes of being critical, persuasive, rational, challenging and relative are often viciously confused in mostly hidden, non-reflexive way.

Philosophical elaborations are mostly done in style of critique at least as innocent analyses or as rough refutations of the criticized. There are divergent vectors of understanding of critique, different “voices of critique” [Boer, Sonderegger, 2012: p. 8]. Criticism goes in accordance with skeptical scientific attitude toward results of a research. The latter are to be achieved, presupposed, given as data and become to be verified or falsified, questioned by critique, analyzing etc. In this paper I intend to pick up some sample versions of philosophical criticism in order to establish some correlations with such alternative (or not) methodological attitudes as persuasion and relativism. In general, it seems plausible to maintain the opinion “that criticism and philosophy

can best be understood not as the respective projects of distinct individuals, but as complementary activities, each of which can be carried out from within the normative space occupied by its practitioners” [Amesbury, 2005: p. 166]. Human thinkers are hostages of rationality. But rationality can come in degrees, be insufficient or even mistaken. Critique could be seen as helping to improve rationality, but if it is persuaded, if it appears as distorting or manipulated inclination its value vanishes. Relativism often is treated as vicious due to the possibility to criticize or to neglect it by itself: relativism makes itself relative. Opposite to it, critical investigation is devoted to find valid not relative in this vicious sense grounds or data. But such emphasizing appears to be distorting as the following analysis will show.

The mentioned authors recall external and immanent critique [Boer, Sonderegger, 2012: p. 3]. The last is understood as self-criticism of critique [Boer, Sonderegger, 2012: p. 7]. As its example we could gain the classic legacy of I. Kant. He was elaborating his philosophy in terms of critiques of human capacities, such as reason (pure (theoretical) and practical), judgment, perception, agency etc. His critiques proceed as innocent, but peculiar, analyses of the mentioned human capacities; and as rough refutations of the previous to his philosophical doctrines. Human capacities were treated by Kant in terms of *a priori* conditions of possibilities. They are necessary, so instead of criticizing them, Kant proves them and his own way of understanding of their realization and functioning.

Such evaluating of Kant can be rather disapproving of his position: “Kant is famous for undertaking a critique of reason and for calling two of his most significant works *critiques of reason*. These titles raise suspicions. Does Kant genuinely criticize reason, thereby calling into question the very processes by which any reasoned thought or action — including any criticism of reason — should be conducted? Or does he give these pretentious titles to works that deploy rather than criticize reason? Indeed, could anything really, seriously count either as a *critique* of reason or as a *vindication* of reason? Isn’t the very idea that we could *show* that certain ways of thinking or acting are reasoned or reasonable absurd? After all, the demonstration must either build on assumptions that lack reasoned vindication or be supported by arguments that deploy the very conception of reason supposedly vindicated. So it will be either unreasoned or circular: either way it will fail to vindicate reason. We have grounds for suspecting that no ways of organizing thinking or acting have unconditional authority, and that Kant *cannot* have vindicated reason” [O’Neili, 2004: p. 93].

At the same time shifting attention to Kant’s establishment of *a priori* necessity of conditions of possibilities of knowing, acting, judging etc. appears to play the best role of unconditioned, but synthetic, foundation for any further philosophical reflection and critique (including self-criticism). The latter is valid ground to construct and defend philosophical theory. As P. Horwich approves that *a priori* principles provide for “a complete, systematic, precise, and basic account of some pervasive yet puzzling phenomena... the constituting principles must have a certain generality and depth. They must organize, unify, and explain common-sense commitments —

and have the potential to correct them. And they must be initially controversial — deriving credibility, not from sheer self-evidence, but from their possession of theoretical virtues such as internal coherence, compatibility with what is known, and explanatory power” [Horwich, 2012: p. 21]; and further “*a priori* intuitions at issue here tend to be fairly uncontroversial (outside philosophy at least); nor are they recognizably unfavorable cognitive conditions” [Horwich, 2012: p. 38].

In such a way criticism does not only need, but appears to be promotion of its own grounds. The promotion means persuasion, in terms of adoption of concepts, to appreciate (and commit yourself) to presuppositions (cf. [Amesbury, 2005: p. 111]). In case of Kant they are *a priori* in the mentioned senses. But in any case while criticizing the persuasion (which leads to adaptation, appreciation and commitment to presuppositions) is unavoidable. Otherwise we cannot get “friction on the slippery ice”: “We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!” [Wittgenstein, 1951: p. 107]. Similar passage from Kant about metaphysicians out of grounds who are like “light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, [who] might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space” [Kant, 1929: p. 8]. At the same time for Kant relying on presuppositions (conditions of possibilities) exhibits force of reason, validity of considerations; and is evident by science and common sense: “common sense must be shown in action by well-considered and reasonable thoughts and words, not by appealing to it as an oracle when no rational justification for one’s position can be advanced” [Kant, 1950: p. 7]. So far critical philosophical methodology leads not to verification or falsification of data, but, to promote presupposed data (or rather conditions of possibilities of data in the case of Kant).

Moving to next example let’s remember Putnam’s criticism of Metaphysical Realism which is done by means of seeing it as relative. Realism needs to be or even to become relevant: “one can learn from a philosopher without believing everything he says, or even believing everything he regards as tremendously important” [Putnam, 2013: p. 96]. This could be correlated with the following interpretation: “in moral no less than in scientific inquiry we need a sense of what is important and what is not, what to pay attention to and what to pass over, what the relevant grounds for one’s judgments are, how much weight they have, and some indication of how they are to be assessed or criticized. In short, we need a sense of realism in all of our inquiries, theoretical or practical” [Macarthur, 2013: p. 137]. But the sense of realism remains to be relevant, thus relative to the context.

Context provides for relevancy and is always relative. Relativism appears to be non-vicious: relativism cannot avoid its own relativity which validates contextual appropriateness, thus relevancy. Relativism and relevancy are different sides of same advantage — to claim for contextual attentiveness. Relativity of relativism is not contradictory in recursive way, but is performative. Relativism as tendency is realized relative (and relevant) to the particular context! Relativism often remains to be taken as even nihilism, then the valid status and role for social sciences as a

proper source of knowledge are shaken and dissolved, as there remains “no possibility of comparison between different societies and no possibility of criticism of an alien society” [Baghrmian, 2004: p. 76].

As Maria Baghrmian (2004) indicates: “All judgments can meaningfully arise only from within the context of a form of life, and there is no possibility of standing outside all forms of life in the hope of making objective, external, comparisons or offering criticisms of the comparative merits of various belief-systems” [Baghrmian, 2004: p. 75]. Such criticism can be done as immanent presentation of context relative “forms of life”. It is presentation and not representation, as there is no need of any external mediation; direct performative realization is taking place.

Even if we speak about conditions of possibility or logic, relativism remain to be relevant and context relative. For example: “Not to see that logic is grounded in a form of life is to fall into the trap of seeing logic as something ‘sublime’, ‘pure’ and ‘crystalline’, a trap that Wittgenstein accuses himself of having fallen into when he wrote the *Tractatus*” [Baghrmian, 2004: p. 75]. And further: “Several lines of thought in Wittgenstein’s approach to language and meaning are conducive to relativism. The emphasis he places on the role of the communal, shared nature of the form of life that informs all conceptual activities finds a sympathetic ear among the cultural relativists. The ensuing contextualisation of meaning and significance also has relativistic overtones. All judgements can meaningfully arise only from within the context of a form of life, and there is no possibility of standing outside all forms of life in the hope of making objective, external, comparisons or offering criticisms of the comparative merits of various belief-systems” [Baghrmian, 2004: p. 75].

Attention to performativity of relativism could provide for its validity and relevancy. Relativism itself appears to be performative: relativism is relative! Such a conceptual conclusion can be traced even via its application to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, as we show by further analyses mainly directed to explain “throwing away the ladder” as its natural contextual performed “folding up”.

Main points of the *Tractatus* can be interpreted as rungs of the ladder which are to be thrown away after the ladder had been climbed up [Tractatus, 6.54]. To climb it up is to understand the elucidatory power of the points (rungs) and their senselessness; and thereby to see the world rightly. J. Conant [Conant, 2007: p. 31-142] elaborates 3 lists of ‘rungs’ by interpreting important (distinguished by different researches) generalized senses in terms of ‘particular lines of “thoughts”’ or approaches of reading Wittgenstein. In the following analysis I try to consider some of the findings about the senses of rungs.

Some preliminary positions that I advocate are the following. The main problem for Wittgenstein, in all of his philosophy, is the problem of meaning. This topic involves the spheres of Philosophy of Language, Logic and Philosophical Logic, Metaphysics, Meta-Philosophy (for Wittgenstein the task of philosophy (of scientific-like kind) is seen not as to solve the problems but as to dissolve them by clarifications of the meanings of words) etc. Meanings are attributed by speakers to linguistic expressions; they are valid contents (they are in force to mean). Such

validity, opposed to senselessness, is due to two factors: language (its logical and linguistic structure) and the world (metaphysically available states of affairs or (in latter writings) forms of life). Meanings are not existent. We can treat them as entities or propositions, we can believe (or hope) that there are correspondent issues in the world. But the world is scientifically accessible to us only in virtue of linguistic expressions describing our observations. Meaningful linguistic expressions, propositions expressed by words limit or constitute the world for us. So, propositions are not meanings, but could be seen as samples of meanings — contextually valid contents of linguistic expressions; by the used words we can mean (more or less successfully) how the possible states of affairs in the world are or, rather, could be. Language-token expresses a proposition — its meaningful (contextually valid linguistically, logically and empirically) sense (content) via which the world appear.

Let's consider the first four rungs from the Tractatus:

1. The world is everything that is the case.
2. What is the case (a fact) is the existence of states of affairs.
3. A logical picture of facts is a thought.
4. A thought is a proposition with a sense.

While reading them, it is appropriate to have in mind implicitly the final rung:

7. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent —

as each of the previous rung leads by being ordered (as informal argument or set) to the seventh. This last rung is not a proper conclusion; rather it is a description of relevant action — to throw away the ladder. The purpose of the ladder is to overcome the ladder! Such overcoming is performative; throwing up the ladder evidences that the senses of each rung in the ladder have been accommodated and becomes an innocent piece of non-deliberately relied on background; then it is redundant to say about it.

From the lists proposed by J. Conant I pick the points that seem relevant for the taken from the Tractatus rungs, avoiding those which are linked to the topics involving the problem of Truth, truth functions etc. as far as possible (but, for example the 3rd list is taken fully).

J. Connant proposes in the **first** list [Conant, 2007: p. 50-51] such seemed to me correspondent candidate rungs; they are sentences:

1. A proposition is able to represent a state of affairs because it pictures it.
2. A proposition is a logical picture of a state of affairs when the fundamental elements of the proposition, the simple names, are logically combined in a fashion that parallels the manner of combination of the fundamental elements of the state of affairs, the simple objects.
3. Thought and language are able to represent reality because they mirror the logical form of reality.
13. The limits of language are the limits of the (our, my) world.
14. It is the role of a proper theory of language to demarcate these limits.
15. It thereby demarcates the boundary between sense and nonsense.
16. It thereby also demarcates the limits of the (my, our) world.

17. The demarcation of these limits enables one (me) to contemplate from above (outside, sideways on) our (my) language (world) as a bounded totality.

In the **second** lists [Conant, 2007: p. 85-86], which is as well as the **first** is called 'actual', we can meet the following formulations expressing unwitting background:

1. The logical relations of our thoughts to each other can be *completely* shown in an analysis of our propositions.

2. These relations can be displayed through the employment of a logically *absolutely* perspicuous notation.

3. Through the employment of such a notation, it is possible for propositions to be rewritten in such a way that the logical relations are *all* clearly visible.

4. A proposition *must* be complex.

5. *Every* proposition can be analyzed.

8. There is *only one* logical space and everything that can be said or thought forms a part of that space.

9. There is such a thing as *the* logical order of our language.

10. Antecedent to logical analysis, there must be this logical order—one that is *already there* awaiting discovery—and it is the role of logical analysis to uncover it.

11. By rewriting them in such a notation, *what* propositions our propositions are will become clear.

12. By rewriting them in this way, it will also become clear what *all* propositions have in common.

13. There is a general form of proposition and *all* propositions have this form.

14. In its thus becoming clear what propositions are, it will also become clear how misleading their appearances are—how much the outward form *disguises* the real *hidden* logical structure.

15. A logically perspicuous notation is *the* essential tool of philosophical clarification.

16. Through our inability to translate them into *the* notation, despite their resemblance in outward form to genuine propositions, certain strings of signs can be unmasked as nonsense, that is, as strings of signs to which no determinate meaning has been given.

17. *All* philosophical confusions can be clarified in this way.

18. By demonstrating the significance of this tool and its application in the activity of clarification, the problems of philosophy have *in essentials* been finally solved.

Formulations in the **third**, final list [Conant, 2007: p. 105-106] are more general, they are made considering different points from both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* (latter 'main' work of Wittgenstein) as well as the formulated in the previous list relevant unwitting prejudgments:

1. Every sentence in our everyday language is in order as it is.

2. There must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence.

3. A sentence of ordinary language must have *a* definite sense.

4. An indefinite sense would not really be a sense at all.

5. In philosophy, we are driven to seek elsewhere, in the abstract features of an ideal language, what is already to be found in the most concrete features of our everyday language.

6. Philosophical misunderstandings are often caused by superficial analogies between forms of expression drawn from different regions of language.

7. Such misunderstandings can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another.

8. What does not get expressed in the signs (words) themselves comes out in their application (use): what the signs (words) fail to express their application (use) declares.

9. In order to gather the logic (grammar) of what is said, we must consult the context of significant use.

10. In philosophy the question, “Why do we actually use this word or this proposition?” repeatedly leads to valuable insights.

11. The object of philosophy is the logical (grammatical) clarification of thought(s).

12. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity.

13. The result of philosophy is not a number of “philosophical propositions,” but to make propositions clear.

14. Anyone who understands me eventually recognizes certain of my sentences as nonsensical.

15. We cannot give a sign the wrong sense.

16. Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed.

17. If a sentence has no sense, this can only be because we have given no meaning to it.

18. Logic (grammar) must take care of itself.

19. We cannot draw a limit to thought. That would require that we could think both what can be thought and what cannot be thought.

20. Strictly thought through, idealism can be seen to collapse into pure realism.

21. Doubt can exist only where there is a question; a question — only where there is an answer; and this — only where something *can* be said.

22. The solution of the problem lies in the vanishing of the problem.

I see the correspondence and coherence between the following sets of items from the given lists:

Wittgenstein	1 st list	2 nd list	3 rd list
1		4, 5, 12, 13, 17	
2		1, 9	
3	14, 15, 16	2, 3, 14	15, 16, 17, 18, 19,
4	1, 2, 3, 13,	8, 10, 11, 15	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14
7	17		10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22

My fillings in the above table might be mistaken, I cannot prove and analyze it here. My putting the correspondent points only shows coincidences of using same or similar words or expressions in the mentioned points from the different lists.

It happened that the first two rungs are left without any correlating points in the first and third lists. The first two rungs contain no explicit connotations with language and logic; they are about the way a world exists. At the same time the way the world exists is accessible only via thoughts or propositions with appropriate logical structures and senses. The following third and fourth rungs indicate the latter. What is the case or state of affairs or fact (or form of life) is everything we can access or discover in the world. This does not mean that the world is limited to what is the case or state of affairs or fact, but our access to the world is limited in such a way. Let's be aware about it!

What is the case or state of affairs or fact (or form of life) rather presents than represents the world, how the latter appear to us. What is the case or state of affairs or fact is inseparable from being expressed linguistically (we cannot know a fact, it is not the case unless we catch it with words) in accord with logical and linguistic (for example) grammatical rules. But the formulation is never final, it is always contextual. The formulation commits us to accept its sense, but does not commit the world to be the only way as it has been described. Nevertheless, I argue that we get rather presentation of the world than its representation; because out of linguistic, logical and perceptual tools (involved differently, in varying degrees in different contexts) the world is not accessible at all.

So far, the third and fourth Wittgensteinian rungs involving such issues as thought, proposition, logical picture and sense are also about what is the case or state of affairs or fact. In such a way, the rungs are not simply supporting each other, but appear about the same, folded up therefore thrown away! Ladder was just schematic, grasping and accommodating each of its rung destroy the ladder as redundant, being folded up we unwittingly admit an actual relevant background of appropriate prejudgments for further valid utterances in different contexts.

The analyzed interpretation of Wittgenstein appeared to be critical, persuasive and relative. At the same time it is another attempt to rationalize his views, their coherence and significance; and to use critical analysis of them to support and illustrate my own positions (thus to persuade). Critics, persuasion and relativism (in terms of relativity and relevancy) are not obstacles in processes of rationalization, but unavoidable means that supply rationality. At the same time they are challenging rationality due to 'smell' of inclining or engaging rather than ideal scientific orientations toward unbiased neutral (even objective) reasonableness.

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Criticism in philosophy goes in accordance with general skeptical scientific attitude toward results of a research. The latter are to be achieved, presupposed, given as data and become to be verified or falsified, questioned by critique, analyzing etc. Criticism is improved mean to avoid persuasion and relativism, but (as selected sample versions of philosophical criticism will illustrate, in particular critical legacy of I. Kant, H. Putnam and L. Wittgenstein, especially via resolute interpretation of his views by J. Conant) all three methodological attitudes are mutually correlated, sometimes even viciously. Relativism appears to be less vicious, because it could be treated as performative: relativism is relative. Attention to performativity of relativism can provide for its contextual validity and relativity.

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Laktionova, Anna — Associate Professor, Doctor of Science (Philosophy), Department of Theoretical and Practical Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.
