

Wittgenstein and the Continental Turn

Wittgenstein e a Virada Continental

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1. A long-awaited book

Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality, here is a long-awaited book. This waiting is due to it gathers essential themes which are not commonly intertwined. To understand education from Wittgenstein's work with the depth that the Austro-British philosopher's thought offers and the complexity that the philosophical issue of education presents is a task that needs a qualified, experienced and skilled author. The author of this book demonstrated the necessary expertise for this task. Knowing that this work was present as a PhD thesis for a long time makes me regret that it had to wait for many years to reach a larger audience in book form. Although the book has a particular historical air reflecting more specific philosophical concerns present in the 1970s and 1980s and dialoguing with authors from that context, its reflections are authentic and current.

As a reader of the *Philosophical Investigations*, I was "encouraged" by different colleagues to write something about Wittgenstein and education over the years. I never did it. Not because I thought it was not a theme of the most significant relevance, but precisely because I did not have the clarity of the educational philosophical problems in its deepest narrowness. Eventually, when I came across such issues, I only realised the great possibility of reading them from the Wittgensteinian perspective. Wittgenstein had experienced educational problems as a teacher of children and adults, and several times, his work presents the presupposition of a dialogue between the teacher and his student. But, when thinking about education and Wittgenstein, I had in mind one of the points that heads the title of this book: rationality. I have always perceived educational issues from the idea of rationality present in the later Wittgenstein. Although I had no opportunity to deepen these educational issues, I was convinced that they could be seen more clearly and equated more robustly from a Wittgensteinian perspective. Naturally, I was pleasantly surprised to read *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality*, where these educational philosophical issues are seen through the lens of the Austro-British philosopher with the depth they deserve.

Wittgenstein is undoubtedly an excellent author to think about education, even though this was not his central concern. However, especially in Brazil, the primary reference to think about education is Paulo Freire – who is even quoted by Peters (Peters, 2020, p. 222) – or sometimes another "thinker of the moment", Wittgenstein is considered a complicated author. Supposedly, he is too hermetic to be a reference in the philosophy of education. It seems, therefore, that Wittgenstein's *magnum opus*, the *Philosophical Investigations*, has not

attracted most of the scholars interested in educational philosophical problems. There does not seem to have been a good partnership between the faculties of philosophy and education making this bridge. In other words, philosophers have studied Wittgenstein, but, with rare exceptions, educational philosophers did not the same.

Partly because of the historical tone that *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality* brings, as mentioned above, I could not help recalling my trajectory as a reader of the Wittgensteinian work and these philosophical references of the 1980s. Without knowing this book, I followed a similar path presented in its pages. Rationality in Wittgenstein was also the focus of my doctoral dissertation, defended 20 years ago, and gestated about 10 years before, between my graduation and my post-graduation. Not only the theme of rationality, but many of the quotations chosen to characterise Wittgenstein's thought in this book were the same chosen by me in the writing of my dissertation. Indeed, the affinity with Peters' book was immediate. This affinity was not only concerning Wittgenstein's work but also in a bet on reading the Austro-British thinker distant of the "orthodox" interpretation of analytical philosophy, that is, trying to read Wittgenstein by his work or even, as it is the case of Peters, counterposing him to thinkers from other traditions. To think Wittgenstein outside his analytic heritages was seen as a heresy in my time as a PhD candidate. There was a particular silent pact that some passages written by the later Wittgenstein should be avoided since they went far beyond what was allowed in the behaviour of the good philosopher of the analytic tradition. Even the insinuation (recommendation) was not to read certain interpreters of Wittgenstein, for not being legitimate analytic philosophers, or even for not being philosophers.

Facing this situation, trying to think the work of Wittgenstein by what is presented by itself, I followed my lonely path. My didactic texts about Wittgenstein are still read in philosophy departments, but my doctoral dissertation reached another public. My somewhat alternative view, or perhaps "heretical", in Wittgensteinian terms (Wittgenstein, 1990, § 611), seems to have distanced philosophers, but it made the non-philosopher – or the one not conditioned by such orthodox interpretations – interested in what I had to say about Wittgenstein. In the book published based on my doctoral thesis, these readers found a reflection on Wittgenstein, which seemed to ground the discussion they wanted to have, precisely, to think about education problems. Most of them were readers explicitly interested in science education. It was from the dialogue with this public interested in philosophical educational problems that I encountered some of these crucial issues, to which Wittgenstein, in my view, had something to say.

In effect, Michael A. Peters meant, for me, a reckoning with my journey in which educational philosophical issues, on the one hand, and Wittgenstein, on the other, finally met in a deep and complex way. The book shows the various shades and possibilities of this meeting and establishes a Wittgensteinian reading of educational philosophical problems. To accomplish this purpose, from its title, *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality* is a book that presents a complex architecture, besides being a kaleidoscope of authors from different fields and philosophical traditions.

However, Wittgenstein, rationality, and the philosophy of education are effectively the central themes presented and thematised. These three themes are so deep and relevant that each one individually could demand a lifetime of research. In addition, more than knowing each theme, articulating them requires great skill and mastery. We can see these skills in the pages of this book written by the young Peters. Thus, to develop it, it was necessary to show Wittgenstein's thought, elucidating it in the necessary way to give the reader, as pointed out, a particular "libertarian hermeneutics" of the analytical philosophy references, explaining the

holistic rationality of grammar and its language games. Then dive into the authors of the philosophy of education and continue with Wittgenstein in a complex and detailed dialogue with a great profusion of thinkers. In about 250 pages, this book condenses an enormous range of philosophical problems *per se*, besides the philosophical educational problems. In fact, without the adequate division of the issues treated, the book would not have been successful, showing, thus, besides the mastery of the content, the tremendous methodological ability of the author in the exposition of this content.

To think about the philosophy of education, from an interpretation of the later Wittgenstein's work, mainly present in the books *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*, Peters presents us with a historicist and anti-foundationalist conception of rationality. Characterising this notion of rationality, he called "constitutive rationality", the book contrasts it with a traditional notion of universal rationality. The author aims to read the philosophy of education from this constitutive reason, freeing it from the shackles of alleged universal rationality. For Peters, the so-called analytical philosophy of education, although claiming to be based on Wittgenstein's work, has developed a mistaken interpretation of the Austro-British thinker, being much closer to universal and conservative rationality and far away from historicist rationality present in the pages of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

According to Peters, contrary to what Wittgenstein proposes, the analytical philosophy of education tried to establish and justify a notion of absolute, universal, and ahistorical rationality. Thus, it was necessary to reread Wittgenstein in the face of the philosophical educational issues – defended by the analytical philosophy of education – to show a paradoxical reading of the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*, the use of his work to affirm its opposite. It was necessary to highlight the Wittgenstein of the historical contingency instead of the supposed universalistic and ahistorical Wittgenstein of the analytic philosophy of education. In fact, in opposition to this analytic philosophy of education, Peters examines the influence of the later Wittgenstein in another threshold, that is, in the historicist turn in the philosophy of science as the basis for a different notion of rationality namely, non-foundationalist and constitutive. Such a conception of historical and cultural rationality, according to Peters, could be complemented with other contemporary philosophies such as, for instance, the approaches of hermeneutics and social theory. This historical rationality would even allow Peters to think Wittgenstein with these different philosophical traditions.

To sum up, more than showing us this framework in which the philosophy of education found itself in its analytical aspect, Peters sought to understand what would be the philosophical motivations underlying it. Thus, he sought to examine its intellectual foundations to, criticising them, replace this universal conception with the Wittgensteinian model of historical rationality. However, not finding in the Wittgensteinian work sufficient elements to fully carry out this task, Peters, unusually, summons Hegel to perform a "Hegelian interpretation of the later Wittgenstein". After this interpretation, he then turns to Gadamer's hermeneutics to complete his project. This association with Hegel would be intended precisely to emphasise Wittgenstein as an anti-foundationalist and historicist thinker. However, as language games would not sufficiently meet the demands of historical and social approaches as established by hermeneutics, Peters moves in the direction of Gadamer's thought. Thus, Peters has synthesised the movement involving Wittgenstein, Hegel, and Gadamer in his philosophy of education programme.

Part of my purpose also is to produce an interpretation of modern hermeneutics and of Gadamer's brand in particular, which will link with and consolidate the Hegelian interpretation of the later Wittgenstein that I have put forward, and thus provide both

a theoretical and historically documented orientation for a Wittgensteinian-inspired research programme in philosophy of education. (Peters, 2020, p. 179)

Thus, at this point of this complex book about Wittgenstein, rationality, and philosophy of education, I found a point of divergence with Peters' interpretation: the association between Wittgenstein and the continental tradition here represented by Hegel and Gadamer. Assuming the immense cognitive and affective value that Peters' book brought me, I will allow myself to explore this point of divergence with all due respect and admiration. I call this divergence Wittgenstein's "continental turn". In the broader context of Peters' project, my idea is to suggest exchanging Hegel and Gadamer for Wittgenstein himself. More than defending knowledge without an ultimate foundation, the author of *On Certainty* would also allow us to read history and its interpretative possibilities from a systemic and holistic perspective. Of course, from a Wittgensteinian viewpoint, history does not have the metaphysical commitments assumed by a Hegelian outlook (although Peters offers us a Hegel "dehydrated" of his metaphysical foundation). In a sense, this conception of history inspired in Wittgenstein can be quite close to Gadamer, but it is autonomous of the author of *Truth and Method*. In other terms, even if the author of the *Philosophical Investigations* is not a dialectic thinker, I understand that his work allows us to think of history and life itself in a systemic (holistic) way and, thus, we do not need a Hegelian reading and an approximation of Gadamer's hermeneutics to solve the presented problem in the philosophy of education.

2. A Wittgenstein à la Hegel: pragmatism and idealism

Not only is Hegel a philosopher of the Continental tradition, but, as Peters acknowledges (Peters, 2020, pp. 31, 235), the author of the *Phenomenology of Mind*, was probably the great motivator of the beginning of analytic philosophy in England. Analytic philosophy would have emerged precisely as a reaction to the Hegelian idealism that was "suffocating" England at that time. Therefore, to associate Wittgenstein's work and Hegel's idealism approximates one of the most outstanding representatives of analytic philosophy to one of the most significant philosophers of the continental tradition. This rapprochement would already be, at first, something a little controversial. In other words, considering the marked differences between these traditions in their purposes and foundations, this association could seem like a marriage between the Montagues and Capulets families. As Shakespeare has shown us, the first attempt to unite these families was unsuccessful.

However, it is unquestionable that influential authors representing these different philosophical sides (of the continent and the island, such as Apel and Rorty) crossed this bridge since the last decades of the 20th century offering surprising results. It is not a question, then, of denying this already consolidated rapprochement between these different traditions. Even after many decades, perhaps, still we have not obtained more solid results from such an approximation. The distancing seems to continue, but one tradition will undoubtedly have something to learn from the other. Approaching, contrasting, associating or evaluating possibilities of the "family resemblances" of these traditions is very healthy. Therefore, the first point to highlight is Peters' hermeneutic legitimacy in seeking a heuristic between these two traditions that could take us forward in understanding the contrasted authors and the philosophical issue of education. My dissent is not against this exercise. I want to point out that, perhaps, in the case at hand, this approach was not necessary. Although Wittgenstein does not belong to the hermeneutic and phenomenological tradition, from his work, we already have enough elements to accomplish the movement towards the philosophy of education proposed by Peters. I understand that Peters completes this movement, and for that, it would

not be necessary the approach to continental philosophy. It would be possible to arrive at the same place without the help of Hegel and Gadamer. The very Wittgensteinian elements necessary for the strengthening of Peters' thesis about historical and anti-foundationalist rationality would already be, if not precisely, hermeneutic, at least interpretative, historical, social and even existential.

Therefore, starting from Hegel, the path towards Gadamer is also not necessary to solve the proposed educational issues. How to solve such problems starting from Wittgenstein has already been pointed out by Peters himself, although he has not invested in this line. Finally, as I will try to point out in the last part, with the Wittgensteinian elements themselves, we can approach rationality and historicity in its holistic and systemic perspective and, with that, solve critical philosophical problems. These points, which Peters well set out throughout the book, if assumed in full, exempt us from using "[...] the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein as a springboard and by emphasising its Hegelian component, to repudiate the traditional notion of philosophy-as-epistemology¹ and its exemplification in the philosophy of education" (Peters, 2020, p. 12). I thus argue that the notions of language games, grammar and form of life constitute the framework of our habits, customs and institutions (Wittgenstein, 2008, §§ 142, 199, 202, 226, 227), establishing therein the contingency of knowledge and the historicity of a form of life. Thus, from them, we can read the problems of the philosophy of education. As I will argue in the last part, in the later Wittgenstein, there is no opposition between the epistemological aspect and the existential or historical (hermeneutic) one. Knowledge already takes place in this historical process in the form of life.

As we know, Peters is not alone in this kind of association or comparison of Wittgenstein's thought with the continental tradition. Since the *Tractatus*, Kant has been the preferred author. However, this comparison with Kant has been extended even to the *Philosophical Investigations*.² Although Wittgenstein's work reaches its centenary, this does not mean that we have already had the possibility of understanding it completely. An affirmation that becomes more dramatic when considering the second phase of his thought, once it presents a disconcerting philosophical innovation, thus confronting more than two thousand years of philosophy. Therefore, more than a work of reference, Wittgenstein's thought constantly offers us new possibilities with each new look that we cast upon it. Indeed, this gives us the dimension of the author's greatness, even though being aware of this greatness does not guarantee a complete understanding of his work. In this direction, Kambartel (1989, p. 148) has already pointed out that one day we will effectively understand Wittgenstein's work and then know why we already value it so much.

Perhaps, one of the great difficulties in understanding the innovative philosophy of the later Wittgenstein is precisely in our lack of references to frame it. Without these parameters, we create the habit of thinking about his philosophy by comparing it to the philosophical tradition, and for sure, Hegel is a central philosopher for this purpose. Thus, in these comparisons, first we mention what Wittgenstein's philosophy is not, and then after – and

¹Peters roughly follows a conception expounded by Rorty (see Rorty, 1980), separating epistemology and hermeneutics.

² What is present, for instance, in a significant interpreter like Stanley Cavell, for whom the "transcendental" in Kant would be the "grammatical" in Wittgenstein (Cavell 1962, p. 86). This analogy was instructive in the first analyses of the *Philosophical Investigations*, but the Wittgensteinian conception of grammatical supplements the difficulties present in the transcendental notion. They are not, thus, equivalent notions. Only, little by little, we learn how to understand the originality of Wittgenstein's thought and differentiate it from tradition. These comparisons were instructive, but perhaps we need them only as an exercise of the history of philosophy, and we should not delude ourselves with them in the understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

perhaps this is the most dangerous part in our exegesis of his work – we relate it to what it seems to be to us, according to the traditional viewpoint. As if inspired by our author, we look for the “family resemblances” between Wittgensteinian thought and traditional philosophy. This comparison may not be the most fruitful path, although it was necessary. Thus, perhaps, it is high time to abandon such comparisons of Wittgenstein’s thought with tradition and take it up fully without these comparative isms. In other words, to use an analogy found at the end of the *Tractatus*, perhaps we should abandon the ladder which brought us to this level and think of Wittgenstein’s work on its own.

That said, let us take a closer look at the approximation between Wittgenstein and Hegel made by Peters. The author of *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality* warns us that many authors (Lamb, 1978, 1979; Taylor, 1972; Gier, 1981) already made, in different ways and perspectives, this approximation between the author of the *Philosophical Investigations* and Hegel.³ In proposing this comparison, according to him, we could find a similarity between Wittgenstein’s holistic rationality and Hegel’s philosophy. “Wittgenstein, clearly, is suggesting a picture of rationality that approaches a Hegelian view” (Peters, 2021, 10). As a connoisseur of the history of philosophy, indeed, Peters does not seek to assert a Hegelian influence received by Wittgenstein or establish an interpretation that seeks an “organicity” between the two thinkers. However, according to his “programmatic sketch” (Peters, 2020, p. 9), it would be possible to establish a kind of methodological “juxtaposition” between the two thinkers and, thus, to notice some similarities and differences between them. In this search for “family resemblances” between the two philosophers, we could see similarities and differences.⁴ The similarities would stamp the Wittgensteinian passport for the next step towards Gadamer’s hermeneutics. With this move, Peters’ programme in philosophy of education would be achieved. In his words, “the purpose of a Hegelian’s interpretation of the later Wittgenstein is not to suggest that Wittgenstein was influenced by Hegel, but to demonstrate certain striking and instructive similarities in their thinking which have a relevance for modern philosophy in understanding problems of the day” (Peters, 2021, 10).

Many are the possibilities of approximation with Wittgenstein’s work brought by Peters not only concerning Hegel but extensive to Gadamer and continental philosophy. In his “programmatic sketch”, Peters lists familiar and different points. However, part of what Peters understands as a difference between Wittgenstein and hermeneutics is perhaps not a difference at all (as we shall see below). For now, let us begin with what is different between Hegel and Wittgenstein. Naturally, we could enumerate several points, but, perhaps, among those highlighted by Peters, as we could presuppose, for Wittgenstein, there is no universal reason and much less a metaphysical teleology of the march of consciousness towards the absolute spirit as in Hegel.

Wittgenstein is denying the possibility of universally valid or acontextual reasons. Thus, although he does not subscribe to the necessary historical progression or unfolding of rationality in the Absolute as Hegel does, Wittgenstein does suggest a

³And in a way, for Peters, the Hegelian tradition could be afresh in this unusual encounter. “It is an irony of the history of philosophy that the linguistic revolution motivated by the concerns of Wittgenstein, which originally defined itself against Hegelian Idealism in the work of Bradley and McTaggart, should confirm afresh canons of the older Hegelian tradition” (Peters, 2021, p. 10).

⁴ However, I must acknowledge that Peters warns us to be cautious in this approach of the two authors. “While accepting the openness of the Wittgensteinian tradition it is, however, necessary to be careful not to overestimate the similarities by paying close attention to the differences” (Peters, 2020, p. 45)

picture of rationality which is liberated from logicist assumptions and subject to socio-historical conditions. (Peters, 2020, p. 10)

Regarding the common points, I will highlight three, even though they are interconnected. For Peters, they would be: 1) the holistic dimension present in both thinkers; 2) a “pre-theoretical practical life”; 3) internalism in the structuring of knowledge, that is, knowledge as something “internal” to a system without the need of an “external” foundation. Differently from the analytic tradition, the work of the later Wittgenstein presents a holistic perspective which allows Peters to correlate him to Hegel, who also sustains a holistic approach. In effect, when stating that “[...] the later Wittgenstein may be interpreted in Hegelian terms”, Peters has focused,

[...] particularly on Wittgenstein’s holism, his acceptance of internal relations, and his consequent rejection of reductionistic and foundational approaches to both language and knowledge. The Hegelian interpretation of Wittgenstein and the idea that the later Wittgenstein represents a break with the Analytic Tradition, I have presented as mutually consistent and supporting interpretations. (Peters, 2020, p. 43)

For Peters, this holistic perspective would go beyond the realms of philosophy to the perception of social reality. “A Hegelian interpretation of the later Wittgenstein stresses a holistic approach both in philosophy and in the study of social reality, which issues forth in a form of historicism” (Peters, 2020, p. 120).

Concerning the “pre-theoretical life”, according to Peters, “there are echoes of Hegel in Wittgenstein’s appeal to a pre-theoretical practical life and his emphasis on the whole, both of which are reflected in the fundamental notion of a form of life” (Peters, 2020, p. 10). The Wittgensteinian maxim that one should not do theory – “we may not advance any kind of theory” (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 109), but only describe (Wittgenstein, 2008, §§ 66, 126), because our parameters of judgment would be in the form of life (and not in external standards) –, is something that would bring the author of the *Philosophical Investigations* closer to Hegel. For both, “this orientation is expressed in the notion that philosophy cannot explain, it can only describe” (Peters, 2020, p. 42). And this leads us to the third point highlighted, that is, the internalism of knowledge. For Wittgenstein, knowledge takes place in the language games and grammar of a form of life (internalism) and not as something “outside” this “system of reference” (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 206). According to Peters, this Wittgensteinian position resembles that of the author of the *Phenomenology of Mind*, because “Hegel’s ‘immanent critique’ of knowledge, where standards of reason – the norms of rationality – are seen to be internal to particular forms of life” (Peters, 2020, p. 9). Points out the author of *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality*,

By “internalist” I simply mean an immanent historical critique which seeks not some set of external standards to evaluate the status of a system of philosophical beliefs, but attempts to trace the evolution and development of an interrelated complex of notions that form a philosophical tradition and to assess it on its own terms. This is where Hegel and Wittgenstein coincide. Just as there are no external foundations to language or systems of scientific knowledge, so there are no external foundations to philosophical knowledge. (Peters, 2020, p. 12)

To narrow this similarity between the two authors’ conceptions of knowledge, Peters starts from Hegel’s well-known critique of Kant, according to which, for the author of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the prior understanding and structuring of what knowledge is, paradoxically, would be a process before knowledge itself. Hegel’s critique states that just as one cannot learn to swim before entering the water, knowledge is constituted in the process of knowledge itself (Peters, 2020, p. 28).

The formulation of Hegel’s objection can be made in the following terms: any allegedly ultimate principle which attempts to specify the criterion of knowledge – of what counts as authentic knowledge – must itself either appeal to that criterion and therefore face the problem of a vicious circularity, or appeal to some other criterion and therefore face the problem of an infinite regress. This is so because any such principle is itself a claim to knowledge. While Hegel, like Wittgenstein, subscribes to the notion that there is no external standard available in which to ground philosophical systems – no external foundations of philosophical knowledge, just as there are no external foundations to language or scientific knowledge he, nevertheless, resists that such a conclusion involves an ultimate scepticism and subjectivity. (Peters, 2020, 28)

Finally, Peters concludes that the approach to Hegel seeks to demonstrate what it would be like to abandon the idea of starting point and presuppositions for philosophy (Peters, 2020, 130). In other terms, for Peters, both philosophers abandon the ultimate foundation of knowledge or the postulate of philosophy-as-epistemology (Peters, 2020, p. 28). According to Peters, this means that we should turn to hermeneutics. So, let us see how Gadamer enters this story.

3. Wittgenstein and Gadamer: from epistemology to hermeneutics or epistemology and interpretation?

Once his association between Hegel and Wittgenstein has been made explicit, Peters departs towards Gadamer to complement his proposal. In his words, “The Hegelian interpretation of the later Wittgenstein is the core of a programme that seeks to draw [...] lines of convergence between aspects of the later Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language and that of Gadamer’s hermeneutics” (Peters, 2020, p. 16). The critique of the ultimate foundation of knowledge would not be enough, and it becomes necessary to expand it towards a historical hermeneutical perspective. “The confluence of Gadamer’s and Wittgenstein’s thought is heightened through a Hegelian-inspired phenomenology of language which stresses the historicity of understanding, and a Hegelian critique of Kant in the realm of epistemology” (Peters, 2020, p. 190).

In effect, Peters assumes that although Wittgenstein presents a new possibility for structuring knowledge, he would still lack a hermeneutic approach. His conception of language would not reach the hermeneutic dimension established by Gadamer’s conception of language in *Truth and Method*. In this book, for Gadamer, “language is the medium of the hermeneutical experience. It determines the hermeneutical object and the hermeneutical act” (Peters, 2020, p. 188). However, even though Wittgenstein is not an author of this hermeneutic tradition, Peters understands that there are essential elements in his work that connect him with such tradition. There are “family resemblances” of the Wittgensteinian work with hermeneutics. Thus, following Apel’s reading (1980), Peters stresses that, in the later Wittgenstein, we find the

Priority of “life” over abstract questions of logic. As soon as the emphasis moves from a single calculus of logic to a diversity of language games embedded in human life the hermeneutical problem emerges. We cannot use language “outside” a given language game for all language is part of a whole. In this sense, then, we can understand that there is no such thing as presuppositionless exegesis, or understanding without preunderstanding. (Peters, 2020, p. 192).

According to Peters, Wittgenstein’s concern with the practical aspects of human life in which language games are based on a form of life emphasises the priority of life. These aspects would demonstrate a hermeneutic interest of the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*. However, following Habermas and Apel, Peters recognises that, although

Wittgenstein had this “opening” for a hermeneutic perspective, he would have other purposes with his language games by belonging to the other tradition. In effect, he would be limited to reach the fullness of a hermeneutic approach. This reading of Peters’ later Wittgenstein is based on Apel for whom,

It seems to have been for him (Wittgenstein) somewhat satisfactory to reduce the validity of his statements to language games which function factually in space and time and whose rules themselves – like the meanings of words – have no preponderant (transcendental) validity. On the contrary, they must be finite like the corresponding forms of life [...] One could characterise the self-destructive one-sidedness of the Wittgensteinian critique of metaphysics as ‘forgetfulness of the logos’ (*logosvergessenheit*). (Apel, 1973, pp. 272-273)

Therefore, in Apel’s viewpoint, although Wittgenstein presents the “opening” for hermeneutics with his language games and form of life, he would have limited his philosophy by not assuming transcendental rules for the language game, thus falling into relativism. Starting from this limitation pointed out by Apel, Peters seeks to complement Wittgenstein’s philosophy with the reflections of Gadamer. Only in a hermeneutic approach, for Peters, “a dialectical social science, then, recognises that social existence is not only characterised by the meanings and intentions of those acting within it, but also by a material socio-historical context that enables as well as curtails the expression and realisation of intentions” (Peters, 2020, p. 194).

In effect, because Peters believed that Wittgenstein’s work would not be enough to support a project of analysis of the philosophy of education, he moves towards Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Although the Wittgensteinian work had a particular limitation, it would work well in association with Gadamer (via Hegel). “Wittgenstein’s philosophy converges with Gadamer’s thought in a Hegelian interpretation of the historicity of all thought and understanding” (Peters, 2020, p. 16). In other terms, language as an “autonomous system” as presented by Wittgenstein, which could meet the demands of the historical philosophy of science of authors such as Winch, Kuhn and Feyerabend, would not meet a hermeneutic approach. Indeed, Gadamer’s hermeneutic should complement Wittgenstein’s language conception.

Perhaps, most fundamentally I embrace a hermeneutic understanding of the social sciences and of philosophy, which in conjunction with a Hegelian interpretation of the later Wittgenstein, opposes both the pluralist reading of Wittgenstein and of Wittgensteinians in the sciences (Winch, Kuhn and Feyerabend) which tends to render language games, theories and cultures as wholly independent systems. Rather, I emphasise a historical interpretation of the significance of these language systems, and by reference to Gadamer, attempt to demonstrate the historicity of understanding where the focus falls on the mediational character of the language in understanding an epoch, a text, a culture or a theory. (Peters, 2020, p. 122)

Despite the discrepancies between the purposes of Wittgenstein and Gadamer, Peters understands that it would be possible to overcome these differences based on some similarities. “Both Gadamer and Wittgenstein stress the historicity of all understanding in a phenomenology of language which applies to philosophy as much as any other field of intellectual endeavour” (Peters, 2020, p. 191). With this association, it would be possible to “refine a historicist theory of rationality and knowledge” (Peters, 2020, p. 217).

Gadamer is also the author to whom Rorty turns after understanding, like Apel, that Wittgenstein’s philosophy leads to relativism (Rorty, 1980, pp. 317, 367). More than this, for Rorty, the overcoming of epistemological dilemmas is found in hermeneutics. “Hermeneutics, rather, is what we get when we are no longer epistemological” (Rorty, 1980, p. 325). In a

similar vein to Peters, for Rorty, the path to hermeneutics would be necessary because there is in language games and forms of life a differentiation in terms of the familiar (epistemology) and the unfamiliar (hermeneutics) (Rorty, 1980, 360).

The issue that arises here is to what extent would this Wittgensteinian conversion to Gadamer be necessary? Many of the aspects defended by Gadamer’s hermeneutics are present in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, which could lead us not to the approximation but to questioning the necessity of this approximation. As an example of similarity, for Wittgenstein, also our knowledge never “sees” things as they are; or that hermeneutics makes the connection (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 206) “between our own culture and some exotic culture or historical period, or between our own discipline and another discipline” (Rorty, 1980, p. 360). We might also add that, for Wittgensteinian philosophy, our views are not derived from “truth” (Peters, 2020, p. 23) or “moral law” but are merely a way of conceiving our “form of life”.

According to Rorty’s viewpoint, hermeneutics had the merit of abandoning false distinctions between forms of knowledge, that is, between science, arts, humanities, etc., which were given by the idea of knowledge as a “mirror of nature”. On this point, Rorty is only partially correct. The dismissal of modern epistemology abolished the idea of the supremacy of one form of knowledge over the others, but this does not mean we no longer need epistemological criteria in the relationship between different forms of knowledge or cultures (grammars and forms of life). As linguistic beings, we are interlocutors inserted in complex networks of language games and not exactly hermeneutic beings, as postulated by Rorty. The hermeneutics he describes – not necessarily that of Gadamer – only emphasises the rationality intrinsic to a system, driven to a position, without offering useful references for the dialogue between different forms of life. Thus, Rorty is no different from the tradition he criticises.

However, although Rorty and Peters find Gadamer’s hermeneutics as a potential solution to philosophical problems, Peters has a more favourable view of Wittgenstein than Rorty. For Rorty, there is a separation between the two authors, but Peters sees a bridge between them. Moreover, according to Peters, the author of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* did not sufficiently advance Gadamer’s thought (Peters, 2020, p. 213).⁵ Finally, for the author of *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality*, there would be much more complementation between Wittgenstein and Gadamer than an abandonment of the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

4. The Grammar of history and the language game of hermeneutics

Despite the reduced space to explain my purpose in detail, let us see how we can understand issues traditionally approached by the continental tradition from a Wittgenstein viewpoint. The Wittgensteinian philosophy provides us with a key for reading to understand, for example, our history and social insertion in our form of life as a kind of hermeneutics. This possibility is already demonstrated from the aspects pointed out by Peters to correlate it with Hegel and Gadamer. However, the point is to understand important philosophical issues by

⁵ For a more extensive critique of Rorty’s appropriation of Gadamer (see Warnke, 1987). For Warnke, when Gadamer criticizes the Natural Sciences, he is not destroying “the” knowledge (epistemology), but a type of knowledge, a specific form of epistemology. It is not epistemology that has died, but the epistemology of ultimate foundations (Warnke, 1987, p. 160). Warnke’s criticism is important because it reinforces my argument that, even if Wittgenstein criticizes traditional rationality (epistemology), he does not eliminate epistemology but extends its boundaries by including, more than the natural, the cultural. In effect, one can see a kind of hermeneutic step inside his work.

the Wittgensteinian work itself without establishing its connection with continental philosophy.

Much of what Peters or Rorty intend to do by taking a step towards hermeneutics is possible to do exclusively in Wittgenstein's work. Philosophical tools supposedly present only in Gadamer's hermeneutics are also found in Wittgenstein, although in another philosophical register. As a general conception, we could say that to interpret or do hermeneutics is a language game like any other. Although Wittgenstein's work is not hermeneutical, in the sense of following this philosophical tradition, his philosophy allows us to understand the rules of the language game of doing hermeneutics. We could establish language games similar to hermeneutics without resorting to the presuppositions and foundations of the hermeneutic tradition. Wittgenstein provides us with bases for "historical" rationality much more than merely "epistemological" one. From Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, especially from his notions of grammar and language games, we can conceive a type of "grammar of history", which enables us an interpretative or hermeneutic dimension as beings inserted in hermeneutic language games. This possibility of a grammar of history is established by the Wittgensteinian notion of grammar in many areas (grammar of colours, uses etc.) and of the association of grammar with the notion of institutions – institutions of money (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 584); of writing and reading (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 156); of the system of measures (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 50) etc. Indeed, we can think of the very institution of "history" as a "grammar". In other words, we can think of history as an institution as a set of rules and practices that enclose in itself its rationality, even if it is open to connecting with other grammars. Therefore, from the language games and their grammar in the form of life, we can understand our language, knowledge, and historical insertion. To interpret our language in grammar is to understand our historical insertion and its unfolding.

When we think about a concept typically treated by the hermeneutic tradition, like, for example, time, we can also understand this concept from Wittgenstein's work. To the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*, when analysing time, we do not reflect on the phenomenon of time itself. We reflect on the "possibilities" of the phenomenon of time, that is, about the way we qualify it from our language, social and historical insertion (Grammar).

We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena. [...] Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 90)

Accordingly, to think about temporality is not only to think about the physical phenomenon of time. Fundamentally, it is to think what, in a Wittgensteinian perspective, we could understand as a "grammar of time" or of the processes that happen in time, i.e., a "grammar of history". In a sense, language games can be more than an "autonomous system of language". They can also be seen as a "hermeneutic system" in which we think of the phenomenon of temporality or historicity.

Naturally, Wittgenstein's philosophy of language as a tool to understand history imposes on us a minimalist and dynamic ontology that opposes the traditional philosophical theses about history *à la* Hegel. This minimalist ontology (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 371) signals much more the aspect of the punctual contingency of a given historical time, though with its complex pragmatic and grammatical networks and ramifications, no present in the great metaphysical syntheses or the affirmation of metanarratives (as developed by Hegel, for example).

Thus, it is not a matter of capturing the metaphysical essence of a historical time from a Wittgensteinian perspective. The point is to understand its grammatical scope or extension (habits, traditions and customs). Historical processes are associated with a long and comprehensive chain of interactions of their multiple events. Facing phenomena with such a degree of complexity, we lack the “panoramic view” (*Übersichtlichkeit*) (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 122), as explained by Wittgenstein. And it is, in this sense, that when analysing the grammar of history, it is not exactly a matter of establishing a depth; of searching for an essence that is very far from the surface. Rather, it is about understanding a complex network of historical and social interactions that extend too far for us to have an immediate comprehension of it. We are swallowed up by the amplitude of the historical process, for we lack the “panoramic view” to reach every corner of our historical experiences and memories. If there is a hermeneutic, it is given by the possibilities of the grammar of history. To understand it is to play a type of hermeneutic language game.

As a language system, grammar itself is already something eminently historical because its constitution in the form of life – with its multiple social and cultural interactions – is a process in time. Grammar is essentially historical since, as a dynamic and open mechanism, it is constantly changing.

Contrary to theories of history that affirmed the description of facts or metaphysical worldviews, it is a matter of finding the intelligibility of the grammatical dynamics in a Wittgensteinian perspective. As observed, it is not about interpreting the phenomenon of (historical) time in itself, but the grammatical “possibilities” of the phenomenon of (historical) time. These grammatical possibilities are not metaphysical presuppositions but are the result of social and historical interactions.

The grammar of history situates us in space and time. Consequently, it establishes the contours of all our interpretative (hermeneutical) possibilities. In other terms, the grammar of history is the historical apparatus or the “system of reference” (*Bezugssystem*) (Wittgenstein, 2008, § 206) that situates us historically. Social and linguistic behaviours structure our cognitive and interpretative practices in the particular context of a “form of life”, from where we deal with social and natural events constituting in that process our historicity. Through the grammar of history, we can establish approximations, comparisons, confrontations, etc., with other historical grammars or forms of life; in short, we can play the hermeneutic language game.

To understand the historicity of man, most of the questions posed by traditional philosophies of history since Saint Augustine times are, in reality, questions that sought a metaphysical and teleological “why” and not a grammatical “how”. This metaphysical why is an empty system without an effective explanatory commitment of our insertions in the historical processes. A grammar of history does not seek a why. It seeks a “how” the grammatical rules of such a historical process were constituted in its political, social, economic circumstances, etc., in short, in the context in which the events took place and how we can, through the reference of grammar, interpret them. Thus here, one has the hermeneutic language game.

Throughout his book, Peters holds similar positions with the grammar of history. However, he believes that to substantiate such positions, the association between Wittgenstein, Hegel and Gadamer would be necessary. In Peters’ words, Wittgenstein would be a “springboard” (Peters, 2020, p. 12) that would lead us to hermeneutics. However, this might not be necessary if we look at the possibility of a grammar of history. The panoramic character of grammar gives us the presuppositions for all hermeneutical understandings. It is

not necessary the road to Gadamer. If there is any hermeneutic pre-understanding, it is given by the panoramic character of the grammar. Therefore, regardless of the hermeneutic tradition, for Wittgenstein, the path is also towards culture. Peters acknowledges that “Wittgenstein and others who follow him have shown that our rationality is governed by the fact that we are social, gendered and linguistic animals based on language-games and cultural practices” (Peters, 2020, p. 239). Without much effort, such cultural practices can be understood as hermeneutical practices.

Although I presented this point of disagreement regarding the approximation between Wittgenstein and continental philosophy, I fully endorse Peters’s book. We have much more points in common than disagreements. In addition, of course, one can learn in this complex and erudite book so many other philosophical aspects. Finally, I apologise, dear reader, for the slightly personal tone with which I started this review because I could not help expressing the affective memories that Peters’s book awoke in me, in addition to all the valuable cognitive aspects. May all readers of *Wittgenstein, Education and the Problem of Rationality* have a pleasant and vivid reading experience like the one I had.

5. References

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