A Remark on Conjoining Foundationalism and Logical Pragmatism in the Context of Wittgenstein's On Certainty

Comentários Sobre a Conjugação entre Fundacionalismo e Pragmatismo Lógico no Contexto de Sobre a Certeza, de Wittgenstein

Joose Järvenkylä
University of Tampere - Finland
joose.jarvenkyla@uta.fi

Abstract: In this paper, I will present one argument against the possibility of conjoining Wittgensteinian semantic or logical pragmatism with the traditional (and non-propositional) epistemic foundationalism. The argument is based on the observation that Wittgensteinian logical pragmatism includes a view according to which that what counts as foundational (i.e. certainties) comes as a package with what they are ought to support, and thus it is impossible to draw a line between foundations and that what is founded, which would be essential to any foundationalist doctrine.

Keywords: Wittgenstein. On Certainty. Logical pragmatism. Foundationalism. Danièle Moyal-Sharrock. Avrum Stroll.

Resumo: *Neste artigo, apresentarei um argumento contra a possibilidade de conjugar o pragmatismo wittgensteiniano semântico ou lógico com o fundacionalismo epistêmico tradicional (e não-proposicional). O argumento baseia-se na observação de que o pragmatismo lógico wittgensteiniano inclui uma visão de acordo com a qual o que conta como fundacional (i.e., certezas) vem como um pacote com que o deve-se apoiar, e assim, é impossível delimitar uma linha entre fundações e o que é fundado, o que seria essencial para qualquer doutrina fundacionalista.*

Palavras-chave: *Wittgenstein. Sobre a Certeza. Pragmatismo lógico. Fundacionalismo. Danièle Moyal-Sharrock. Avrum Stroll.*

Wittgenstein scholars have been showing an increasing interest in his latest manuscript notes that are published posthumously under the title *On Certainty*. Some have also gone so far that they think that the work marks a beginning of the third separate phase in Wittgenstein's philosophical career. This account has been expanding during the past ten years, and the most recognizable reader who favors such interpretation is Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, who, as far as I am aware, was the first to introduce the term *Third Wittgenstein* as to referring to those writings that were written after the completion of the first part of *Philosophical Investigations*.[1] One characteristic mark of her interpretation is that she considers (the third) Wittgenstein

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1   MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2004, 1.

as a supporter of the doctrine she calls *logical pragmatism*,[2] a term that is derived from Robert Brandom.

The historical predecessor of her interpretation is presented by Avrum Stroll in his 1994 book *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*. Whereas Moyal-Sharrock emphasizes the pragmatist dimensions of Wittgenstein's work (in relation to the semantic questions concerning certainty), Stroll considers Wittgenstein to support a peculiar form of epistemological foundationalism. Since logical pragmatism is a semantic view and *non-propositional foundationalism* is an epistemological view, endorsing either is independent of endorsing another. It is thus *prima facie* possible to adopt either view separately. Furthermore, it is just as well *prima facie* possible to support both views simultaneously, or be a proponent of neither of the views.

In this paper, I will critically discuss on the possibility of conjoining the epistemic (*non-propositional*) *foundationalism* and semantic *logical pragmatism* in the context of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. My main thesis is that it is impossible to be both Wittgensteinian pragmatist and a foundationalist at the same time. I will follow Moyal-Sharrock's reading according to which Wittgenstein was a logical pragmatist. Yet unlike her, I will explicitly reject the foundationalist approach.[3] I will suggest instead that to some extent Wittgenstein anticipated Susan Haack's *foundherentist* theory of justification. This is also a point Moyal-Sharrock quickly hints to, although it remains open whether this is her final view on the issue, and to which respect she considers *foundherentism* to be a form of *non-propositional foundationalism*.[4]

This paper has two main sections. The first section consists in a brief discussion on the reasons why some interpreters rather surprisingly connect foundationalism with Wittgenstein's work. In the second section, I argue that Wittgensteinian pragmatism, as Moyal-Sharrock has defined it, does not fit with the traditional foundationalist doctrine. At the end of the paper, I will conclude that Wittgenstein's views that are presented in *On Certainty* rather anticipated Haack's foundherentism in at least some respects.

The non-propositional foundationalism of *On Certainty*

Presumably, one of the widest spread ideas of *On Certainty* is the division between knowable truths and certainties. According to Wittgenstein, "'Knowledge' and 'certainty' belong to different categories."[5] Since Wittgenstein compares certainties with foundations and states that they are something more subjective than knowledge,

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2   Cf. MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2005a, 171-174.

3   I will also hold that the rejection of foundationalism is the only genuine option as an interpretation of Wittgenstein, since Wittgenstein's analytical pragmatism leads to a form of semantic holism.

4   This is of course due to the fact that, as I see it, Haack's original conception results not only because simple forms of foundationalism and coherentism are problematic, but also from the insight that more advanced forms of those doctrines start to resemble each other.

5   WITTGENSTEIN, 1969, §308; here it should also be noted that not all interpreters think that Wittgenstein really made such a division. Cf. WRIGHT, 2004; PRITCHARD, 2001.

there are grounds for assuming that he committed to some form of foundationalism.[6] This idea is first presented by Avrum Stroll in his 1994 book *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, where his view is that "Wittgenstein is a foundationalist *of sorts*, but not of a traditional sort."[7] It should be evident that the foundationalism Stroll has in mind cannot endorse any typical foundationalist doctrine. Take, for example, Susan Haack's characterization of foundationalism. According to it, every traditional form of epistemological foundationalism takes for granted the following two theses:

> (FD 1) Some justified beliefs are basic; a basic belief is justified independently of the support of any other belief;

And:

> (FD 2) All other justified beliefs are derived; a derived belief is justified via the support, direct or indirect, of a basic belief or beliefs.[8]

In order for a view to count as foundationalism, it has to accept both of these views. According to Haack's definition both the foundations and that which is founded must belong to the same category, i.e. they must both be propositional in a sense that they state a true or false belief. Since Wittgenstein claims that certainty and knowledge do not fit in the same category, his foundationalism cannot fulfill Haack's theses. Stroll's way out is to claim that Wittgenstein rejects the traditional epistemological idea of the so-called *homogenous foundations*, which are foundations that belong to the same category with what is founded, and replaces it with his new idea of the non-propositional (and, as such, supposedly *heterogeneous*) foundations. The name "non-propositional" follows from the insight that while knowledge is propositional, thus belonging to language game, certitude is non-propositional and supports knowledge only indirectly. Certainties do not only stand fast for knowledge but for the whole language-game of which they themselves are not part of.[9] Certainties are rather attitudes or ways of acting, and combining all of them will form a picture of the world which ultimately is the foundation of all language-games.[10] With such preconceptions, let us modify Haack's theses of *traditional foundationalism* to the following theses of *non-propositional foundationalism*:

> (NFD 1) Certainties are basic; a basic certainty is justified independently of the support of any other certainty or belief; a certainty is non-propositional and therefore it is not part of any language-game.

And

> (NFD 2) All justified beliefs are derived; a derived belief is justified via the (indirect) support, of a basic certainty or certainties.

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6   Cf. WITTGENSTEIN, 1969, §§245-246; in addition, it should be noted that contrary to what is here stated, Wittgenstein also characterizes certainties with coherentist imagery, cf. WITTGENSTEIN, 1969, § 102.

7   STROLL, 1994, 141. Emphasis his.

8   HAACK, 1993, 14.

9   STROLL, 1994, 141-143.

10   *Ibid.* 166.

If we now turn to Moyal-Sharrock's reading, it is easy to see that the non-propositional foundationalism, as it is here presented, is compatible with it. First of all, she admits that (objective) certainties are non-propositional since they are logically ineffable.[11] The certainties are logically ineffable because they are presupposed by the language game without being themselves part of it.

For example, imagine a discussion considering the shape or the color of a tree in front of us. This kind of discussion would not be possible if we, who are taking part in it, were not certain that the object in front of us really is a tree. That it is a tree is presupposed in this particular language game. Within this very game it would be logically meaningless to suddenly state "the object in front of me is a tree", for this kind of statement in our discussion would not have any legitimate function whatsoever.[12] From this it follows that Moyal-Sharrock is not neglecting (NFD 1) and (NFD 2): unlike pieces of knowledge, certainties are logically ineffable. From this, it can be derived that certainties cannot belong to the same category of knowledge, and yet somehow certainties are understood as to support the whole language-game.

Let us, in addition, consider Wittgenstein' famous metaphor according to which "some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those [doubts] turn"[13]. Moyal-Sharrock presents a very thorough analysis of what different types of hinges there are and what are the essential features of these hinges. In fact, almost half of her commentary consists in a discussion that directly considers hinges, and the rest of the book is indirectly related to this topic. The way Wittgenstein sees the relation between certainties and hinges is formulated vaguely at best and different readers see their relation differently. Some scholars think that they are virtually the same thing, the "hinge proposition" being after all a metaphor of certainty, others might hold that there are greater differences. For Moyal-Sharrock, they both seem to refer more or less to the same thing in that they are indubitable and thus independent of knowledge.[14] In this respect it is interesting to remark that Moyal-Sharrock explicitly states that hinges are both foundational and ineffable.[15]

The most problematic feature in the former definition is the independence of basic certainties, which of course is vital for non-propositional foundationalism. In the next section, I will argue that the idea according to which *hinges manifest themselves only in action*, which is basically what *logical pragmatism* states, is inconsistent with foundationalism. I will emphasize this point in order to avoid misunderstandings: I hold hinges to be both foundational and manifesting in action. However, I think that even if they are in some sense foundational, they exclude any form of (propositional or non-propositional) foundationalism as those doctrines are described above.

Wittgenstein's analytical pragmatism

In order to understand what is meant by stating that Wittgenstein is a foundationalist of sorts, it was necessary to refer to Wittgenstein's metaphor on hinges which Moyal-

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11   MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2005b, 89-90.

12   Cf. WITTGENSTEIN, 1969, §468.

13   *Ibid.* §341.

14   MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2005a, 72-74.

15   *Ibid.* 75-80; 94-97.

Sharrock compares with certainties in some important respects. In the detailed discussion in her book, she presents six features of hinges in which *foundationality* and their being *in action* are under closer scrutiny here.[16] Before turning back to Foundationalism, we should have a glimpse of what she means on Wittgenstein's pragmatism, and in order to do so, it is necessary to elucidate her conception of (why) *hinges* (can only be) *in action*. Moyal-Sharrock states that:

> What philosophers have traditionally called basic beliefs, and what Wittgenstein alludes to as 'hinge propositions', are merely heuristic, or artificial, verbalizations of certainties that can *only* show themselves – *in* what we say and do.[17]

The hinge proposition "that thing in front of me is a tree", as it was used in the example in the former section, does not bear any meaning in the discussion concerning the shape of the tree. Yet the fact that there is a tree in front of us is nevertheless a necessary condition for the possibility of a meaningful discussion. In this sense, the hinge proposition "that thing there is a tree" is linguistic formulation of a certainty that manifests itself in our act of talking of the tree.

Similarly, we can consider the act of someone riding to university on a bicycle, and note that the following hinge propositions would characterize the setting: "bicycles can be used to move forward" or "bicycles have shape and color" etc. As Moyal-Sharrock herself puts it, "hinge certainty takes the form of a spontaneous *acting in a certainty of* […]"[18] As one can imagine, there are of course many passages in *On Certainty* that support this reading, and of those which Moyal-Sharrock emphasizes, the next two are perhaps the most illustrative[19]:

> Children do not learn that books exist, that armchair exist, etc. etc., - they learn to fetch books, sit in armchairs, etc. etc.[20]

And

> That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are in *deed* [in der Tat] not doubted.[21]

Both of these quotes seem to support some form of pragmatism albeit it is to be noted that Wittgenstein rejects pragmatism as a theory of truth.[22] Moyal-Sharrock follows Robert Brandom and divides between the broad and narrow sense of pragmatism. The narrow sense of pragmatism focuses on the relation of belief to utility and success whereas the broad sense of pragmatism is "a movement centered on the

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16   Other features are *indubitability, nonempiricality, grammaticality* and *ineffability*.

17   MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2005a, 67.

18   *Ibid.* 99, emphasis hers.

19   For MOYAL-SHARROCK's reference, see *ibid*.

20   WITTGENSTEIN, 1969, §476.

21   *Ibid.* §342, his emphasis.

22   WITTGENSTEIN, 1980, §266.

primacy of the practical".[23] According to Moyal-Sharrock, Wittgenstein's pragmatism is a new form of pragmatism, pragmatism *with foundations*, and it belongs to the scope of the broader concept.[24]

Moyal Sharrock defines *logical pragmatism* as a view according to which "basic beliefs [i.e. certainties] are a know-how, and that this know-how is *logical*— that is, that it is necessary to our making sense".[25] Moreover, basic certainties are "logical, logically ineffable and enacted."[26] The Ineffability of basic certainties follows from the insight that the utterance of such a sentence that is used to mediate hinge certainty contains much more than just a reference to a person's know-how, and the meaning of such a sentence cannot be fixed without knowing the context in which it is used. Since the context, on the other hand, cannot be described without reference to hinge propositions, knowing the certainties comes together with knowing the conversational context. Yet uttering hinges in a conversation in which they are presupposed would be useless and, because of this, hinges are *meaningless*.

This leads Moyal-Sharrock to talk of the *doppelgängers* of hinges. The notion *doppelgänger* should illustrate that hinge proposition may have the form of empirical proposition and that the very same sentence may have different uses depending on the context it is uttered.[27] Now, it should be possible to have heuristic uses for hinges, that is, to speak of them in a *heuristic context*, which enables both Moyal-Sharrock and Wittgenstein himself to speak of hinges in the philosophical or grammatical contexts. It is to be noted, however, that also hinge propositions in these heuristic contexts are, strictly speaking, the propositional doppelgängers of the *actual hinges* or certainties, which still remain ineffable. Nevertheless, in a heuristic context we are trying to elucidate the ineffable, that is, we are trying to show how all our activities rely on some things being certain.

Wittgenstein stresses that it is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language-game and that acting is where the chain of justification ends.[28] It is precisely this point which is crucial to both non propositional foundationalism and logical pragmatism: on the one hand, there is something *foundational* at the bottom of our language-game and on the other hand, the foundational element is the very *action* occurring whenever the language-game is played. In other words, playing the language game is engaging in some action, and engaging in that action is to play the language game.

Now, if we take any single action from some hypothetical context under scrutiny, we can note that grasping the various certainties manifesting in the context can take the form of numerous different sentences. For the sake of simplicity, let the example once more be the discussion concerning the shape of the tree. The certainties taken for granted are at least the following: "the tree exists", "the participants of the conversation exist", "the tree has a shape and color", "people

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23   BRANDOM, 2002, 40-41. MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2005, 171-172.

24   MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2005, 172.

25   MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2003, 128.

26   *Ibid.*

27   MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2005: 140–143.

28   WITTGENSTEIN, 1969 §204.

taking part in conversation have all access to knowledge concerning the tree" etc. There are a number of possibilities to formulate what is certain in a particular context. Yet not one of the hinges listed here will grasp the totality of the certainties that manifest themselves in our actions.

It is not simply the case that certainties or hinges *only* manifest themselves in actions, but it is only within some particular context where a hinge can be called certain. Learning the certainties of a language game is not independent of learning the language game, and *vice versa*. As I have already pointed out, according to Wittgenstein "Children do not learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc. etc.,— they learn to fetch books, sit in armchairs, etc. etc."[29] The praxis comes first and although the language game can be characterized with hinges to some extent, it is impossible to reduce the whole language game simply to a list of hinges since neither is independent of each other.

Therefore, such a form of *logical pragmatism* cannot be conjoined with traditional foundationalism: If logical pragmatism is the view that certainties and understanding of a conversational context always comes as a single package, then there cannot be a clear cut distinction between foundations (certainties) and that what is founded (the context of a language game). But does the option of foundationalism need to be traditional coherentism?

Moyal-Sharrock's book includes a brief discussion on the possibility that Wittgenstein anticipates Haack's idea of foundherentism. Unlike Haack's characterisation, the Wittgensteinian modification of foundherentism is not interested in a subject's experience,[30] but as Haack's original doctrine it also holds that "there need be no privileged class of *empirical* beliefs justified […] independently of the support of other beliefs" [31] and, which is even more important, "justification is not one-directional, but involves pervasive relations of mutual support."[32] Indeed, there is no privileged class of empirical beliefs since uttered hinges or certainties do not have any role in the actual language-game (of justification), and when such a hinge as "I am N.N." is said as a response to the question "what is your name" it is not a hinge anymore but merely a regular speech act within the language-game, a doppelgänger of a hinge. Moreover, hinges definitely do have a foundational status, yet the particular set of hinges which stand fast to one game can only be manifested when this game already exists. Thus, despite the fact the hinges are foundational (with respect to some language game), there are no hinges that would be independent of the context of some language game.

Moyal-Sharrock observes that the traditional foundationalism and coherentism do not draw a categorical line between basic beliefs and more sophisticated ones. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, apparently rejects the idea of the basic beliefs and replaces the foundations with the non-propositional items. Hinges are both foundational and coherent as is suggested by the following quotes from *On*

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29   WITTGENSTEIN, 1969, §476.

30   Moyal-Sharrock notes that Wittgenstein's foundherentism is not a theory of epistemic justification (MOYAL SHARROCK, 2005, 216). It might be possible to suggest that Wittgensteinian foundeherentism is essentially the same thing as logical pragmatism.

31   HAACK, 1993, 19, my emphasis.

32   *Ibid.*

Certainty that Moyal-Sharrock also stresses: "certain propositions seem to underlie all questions and all thinking"[33] and "what stands fast […] is held fast by what lies around it"[34].[35] Therefore, if Wittgenstein is read as a pragmatist he can be neither foundationalist nor coherentist in a traditional sense.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that taking Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* seriously, it is impossible to support both *logical pragmatism* and traditional foundationalism simultaneously. It was suggested rather that such pragmatist readings will result in an original form of *foundherentism*. Wittgenstein's foundherentism would be rather characterized as *semantic* or *logical*, or following Moyal-Sharrock, *pragmatism with foundations*,[36] but not non-propositional foundationalism in Stroll's sense.

　　Despite the fact that this paper has only studied the relationship between (non-propositinal) foundationalism and (logical) pragmatism in the area of Wittgenstein scholarship, I hope that it will have wider relevance. For instance, it might be possible to argue that there is no such variation of semantic pragmatism which is consistent with epistemic foundationalism. Also, the view that foundherentism can be viewed as pragmatism with foundations might have interesting implications for our understanding about the relation between classical epistemology and semantics.

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33　WITTGENSTEIN, 1969, §415.

34　*Ibid.* §144.

35　MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2005, 78.

36　*Ibid.* 172.

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Endereço / Address

Joose Järvenkylä
School of Social Sciences and Humanities/Philosophy
University of Tampere, 33014
Finland