

Emotions as Embodied Expressions: Wittgenstein on the Inner Life

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I will examine the embodied dimension of emotions, and of inner life more generally, according to Wittgenstein's anti-subjectivistic account of expression. First of all, I will explore Wittgenstein's critique of a Cartesian disembodied account of the inner life, and the related argument against the existence of a private language. Secondly, I will describe the constitution of inner life as the acquisition of embodied ways of expressing oneself and of responding to others within a shared context, against the background of an inherited weave of cultural expressive practices. Here, I will analyze Wittgenstein's embodied account of expression, the 'modified concept of sensing' and 'seeing' which is involved in seeing the emotions of others as their expressions, and consequently Wittgenstein's critique of an epistemological account concerning our 'knowledge' of others' minds. Finally, with reference to Cavell's and Mulhall's readings, I will reflect on the figure of the 'aspect-blind', one who 'just knows' the emotion of others but cannot acknowledge it, and accordingly is not able to see it as the embodied expression of the other's inner life. In this way, I wish to argue that Wittgenstein not only calls into question a disembodied account of the inner life from a theoretical point of view, but also shows the ethical consequences of a disembodied account of self through the figure of the aspect-blind.

1. Introduction

«The face is the soul of the body». ¹ This very dry sentence encapsulates Wittgenstein's embodied account of the inner. Accordingly, sensations, feelings, and emotions, as well as the vast range of psychological concepts which belong to our ordinary inner life, cannot be conceived of as private entities entailed in the mental realm of a disembodied subject. On the contrary, the inner

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¹ Wittgenstein, 1998, p. 26.

life or soul (i.e. *psyche*) is already manifest, since it can be seen in one's face: it is embodied all along in bodily and linguistic expressions within a shared context and weave of practices. Emotions are, therefore, not inward objects hidden in the mental realm of a disembodied self, which are then expressed to the outward world and to others through bodily movements and behaviors. Rather, Wittgenstein calls into question precisely any account of expression which «retains a dualism between the expression and what it expressed, as if what it is expressed lies behind its expression»² as an already constituted entity. In doing so, he criticizes a number of assumptions of that disembodied account of the self and of inner life to which one may briefly refer as Cartesianism.³ From the latter arises a series of metaphysical «bumps»,⁴ i.e. pictures which «h[o]ld us captive»: ⁵ the split between «the inward» and the «outward»⁶, the dualism between “mind” and “body”, as well as the idea that I *know* my own inner life but not that of another, and therefore that there is an *epistemological* gap which separates our inner lives⁷. These “pictures” do not let us see that the inner life from the very beginning is embodied in bodily and linguistic expressions within a shared context and weave of practices and, therefore, that emotions are «neither any inward nor any outward thing[s]». ⁸ In order to examine Wittgenstein's embodied account of emotions and of inner life more generally,⁹ I will first of all recall Wittgenstein's most famous philosophical therapy against Cartesianism and this disembodied account of the inner life, namely his critique

² Lennon, 2017, p. 32.

³ I here use the term Cartesianism following Overgaard, 2005, and further (see here 2.) Mulhall, 1990. As Overgaard argues: «The term is an abbreviation for a number of different positions. Common to these is what Gregory McCulloch calls the “Cartesian Tendency” (cf. McCulloch, 1995, pp. 23, 155). This is the general “assumption that the human mind [...] is self-contained with respect to its material surroundings”, including [...] the human body (McCulloch, 1995, p. 109; cf. p. 47). It is thus the notion that the mind is a *thing*, whether material or non-material, which is cut off, as it were, from the rest of the world [...]. Overgaard 2005, p. 269. Hence, the term Cartesianism does not intend to reflect the full complexity of the position of the historical philosopher Descartes, whose examination lies beyond the purpose of this paper.

⁴ Wittgenstein, 2009, §121.

⁵ Wittgenstein, 2009, §115.

⁶ For a critique of the split between the inward and the outward world, see *The Inner and the Outer*, in Wittgenstein, 1992. On this issue see, for instance, Child, 2017, pp. 465-477.

⁷ See for example Wittgenstein, 2009, §309.

⁸ Wittgenstein, 1967, §478.

⁹ On Wittgenstein's conception of the inner life see the pivotal contributions by Johnston, 1993 and Schulte, 1993.

of the existence of a private language (2). I will then focus on the embodied character of emotions and of inner life in general as bodily and linguistic expressions within a shared context, thereby examining Wittgenstein's embodied account of expression and his concept of "physiognomy". Here, I will analyze the regularity, variations and indeterminacy which mark the weave of cultural expressive practices, i.e. the "patterns" or "rules" of emotions as embodied expressions, as well as the involved "modified concept of *sensing*" (3). Finally, I will reflect on the figure of the aspect-blind, one who "just knows" the emotions of others but cannot acknowledge them, and accordingly is not able *to see them as another's expression*. In this way, I wish to argue that Wittgenstein's aspect-blind represents, from an ethical point of view, the theoretical position of a disembodied self and that it shows the ethical consequences of a disembodied account of the self and of inner life (4).

2. Wittgenstein's Critique Against a Private Disembodied "Inner"

Wittgenstein's first «therapy»¹⁰ for the assumptions of Cartesianism aims to make us realize what kind of picture holds us captive when we consider emotions to be mental entities which are entailed in a self-contained and disembodied inner realm whose meaning is known only by the 'owner'. Wittgenstein's so-called 'private language argument'¹¹ calls into question precisely this private ceremony and therefore this disembodied conception of the inner life, thereby showing the impossibility of defining the meaning of psychological concepts – e.g. sensations, feelings, and emotions – through a private association of the inner "entity" with a name-label, according to the model "object-designation". As Wittgenstein shows, such a private ostensive definition is not a definition at all, since it does not provide the criteria for distinguishing between the correct and incorrect use of psychological concepts and therefore is not able to define their meaning. Let's consider the following experiment of Wittgenstein's:

¹⁰ Cf. «There is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies». Wittgenstein, 2009, §133d.

¹¹ This argument has given rise to a very intense debate among scholars, and the literature on this topic is enormous. I would like to mention – within the German debate – the overview offered by Candlish, 1997. For a deep historical-philosophical assessment of the argument within the context of the Vienna Circle, see Nielsen 2008. See also the contribution by Kanterian, 2017. For an original interpretation concerning Wittgenstein's remarks on private language in light of Stanley Cavell and the recent debate between resolute and substantial understandings of the related notions of grammar, nonsense and the imagination, see Mulhall, 2007.

But isn't there such a thing as a kind of private ostensive definition for feelings of movement and the like? E. g. I crook a finger and note the sensation. Now someone says to me: "I am going to produce certain sensations in your finger in such and such a way; without its moving; you tell me when it is *that* one that you have now in crooking your finger." Mightn't I now, for my own private use, call this sensation "S", use my memory as criterion of identity and then say: "Yes, that's S again" etc.?¹²

"I had the same sensation three times": that describes a process in my private world. But how does someone else know what I mean? What I call "same" in such a case? He relies upon it that I am using the word here in the same way as usual? But what is in this case the use that is *analogous* to the usual one? [...] ¹³

I named the sensation of movement "S". Now, for others it is the sensation I had when I made this movement. But for me? Does "S" now mean something else? – Well, for me it means *this* sensation. – But which is this? For I pointed to my sensation a minute ago, – how can I now point to *it* again?¹⁴

Wittgenstein presents an experiment in which I associate the sign "S" to the sensation that I feel in my private inner world, thereby pointing to the inner sensation and noting "S". The question that he raises is how I can acknowledge that the sensation that I feel again is precisely "S", thereby acknowledging that the use of "S" is right. The only possible answer seems to be that in order to acknowledge that the sensation that I feel again is precisely "S", I should resort to my memory and therefore remember the first association between the sign "S" and the sensation. Wittgenstein asks: «Mightn't I now, for my own private use, call this sensation "S", use my memory *as criterion of identity* (my italics) and then say: 'Yes, that's S again' etc.?».¹⁵ Indeed, I cannot identify the first name-sensation association in my memory without already knowing the meaning of S, thereby being able to distinguish between correct and incorrect uses of "S": in other words, the task of returning with my memory to this first "association" in order to identify the "meaning" of "S" presupposes, if it is to be accomplished, the very result it aims to gain. Hence, the private association between a sign and the inner mental object cannot provide any criteria in order to identify the meaning of "S", and therefore to distinguish between correct and incorrect uses

¹² Wittgenstein, 1980, §393.

¹³ Wittgenstein, 1980, §396.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein, 1980, §398.

¹⁵ Wittgenstein, 1980, §393.

of “S”. Such criteria emerge only within a shared context, and this means only if the sensation “S” is already *manifest* and, hence, *embodied* in gestures, shades of behaviors, and linguistic expressions. Thus, the criteria to identify the meaning of an emotion arise only if the use of the psychological concept has something «*analogous*»¹⁶ to other uses and has been established and acknowledged within a shared praxis as one of the possible uses and responses to “S”. Accordingly, *only if sensations, feelings and emotions are not something hidden in the inward mental world but, rather, are already manifest and therefore embodied in bodily and linguistic expressions within a shared life-context, can they have a meaning*: Wittgenstein writes:

Only surrounded by certain normal manifestations of life, is there such a thing as an expression of pain. Only surrounded by an even more far-reaching particular manifestation of life, such a thing as the expression of sorrow or affection. And so on.¹⁷

A similar argument against the private character of emotions conceived as inner mental entities has been presented by Wittgenstein with the famous thought experiment which compares emotions or sensations as described in the Cartesian account to beetles in a box, whose content is known only by the box’s owner. Wittgenstein puts his most famous experiment as follows:

Consider everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a “beetle”. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. – But suppose the word “beetle” has a use in these people’s language? – if so it would no be used as the name of thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty.¹⁸

Wittgenstein draws attention to the fact that if we understand emotions as private mental entities contained within the ‘box’ of a disembodied and self-contained subject, we are forced – *ad absurdum* – to negate the very reality of our inner life, e.g. of our pain, joy, and sensations, since the content of the box could also not exist at all, or even be constantly changing, so that our inner life

¹⁶ Wittgenstein, 1980, §396.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein, 1967, §534.

¹⁸ Wittgenstein, 2009, §293.

would be «strangely irrelevant to our talk about [it]». ¹⁹ Hence, «if the word “beetle” [...] has a use in people’s language [...]—[...] it would not be used as the name of thing» ²⁰ contained in the box. In other words, the embodied practice of language, the very same in which the uses of the word ‘beetle’ or even of the word ‘something’ are publicly established within a shared context, cannot take into account an inner mental object X which is ‘known’ just by *one* individual disembodied subject. «That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of “object and designation”, the object [i.e. the inner] drops out of consideration as irrelevant». ²¹ From this perspective, I would argue that Wittgenstein’s experiments allow us to realize that if we do not wish to deny the relevance as well as the reality of emotions and of inner life in general, these cannot be understood as private mental entities according to the Cartesian model. Hence, «emotions and sensation cannot be divorced from their publicly accessible manifestations», ²² and this means from their embodied expressions within a shared context and weave of life-practices.

3. Emotions as Embodied Expressions

With the exclusion of the Cartesian model, Wittgenstein does not intend to offer a behavioristic account of the inner, thereby arguing that emotions correspond to a well-defined repertoire of bodily behaviors, which are completely and publicly determinable. ²³ In order to examine this point, I wish to consider the way in which we learn to express emotions in our everyday life. Through this examination, I aim to show that emotions correspond neither to inward mental entities nor to outward bodily behaviors, since they are rather *embodied ways of expressing oneself and responding to others within a shared context, against the*

¹⁹ Overgaard, 2005, p. 253. Overgaard has drawn attention to the fact that Wittgenstein’s argument is a *reductio ad absurdum* and therefore that Wittgenstein does not claim that publicly determinable behaviors alone, as opposed to sensations and emotions, are relevant for the way we talk about inner life, i.e. for the grammar of psychological concepts. Hence, I would agree with Overgaard against a behavioristic interpretation of the argument (e.g. Mundle, 1966), according to which sensations corresponds to a well-defined repertoire of behaviors.

²⁰ Wittgenstein, 2009, §293.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Mulhall, 1990, p. 59.

²³ The impossibility of understanding emotions and inner life according both to a Cartesian and behavioristic model has been deeply analyzed i.e. by Lütterfels, 1995; and Gebauer, Stuhldreher, 2012.

background of an inherited weave of cultural expressive practices. Wittgenstein describes the “grammar” of the inner—i.e. *expressions as constitution of the inner life*—as follows:

[...] How does a human being learn the meaning of names of sensations? For example, of the word “pain”. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, natural, expressions of sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behavior. “So you are saying that the word ‘pain’ really means crying?” On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying, it does not describe it.²⁴

A cry is not a description. But there are intermediate cases. And the words “I am afraid” may approximate more, or less, to being a cry. They may come very close to one, and also be very far removed from it.²⁵

A natural *expression* – in this case the cry of pain of the child – is an *embodied manifestation* of pain within a shared context. This natural expression, so long as others (in this case, adults) respond to it within a particular context, allows one to learn and «project»²⁶ more complex ways of expressing pain into further life-contexts, for instance the verbal expression “It hurts!” or the bodily gesture of holding one’s head in one’s hands to express sorrow. The *verbal expression*—and this does not mean the name-label “pain” or the “proposition” but the more complex *embodied way of expressing pain within a life-context*—does not *describe* the cry, thereby *denoting* a “physiological” reaction with a “symbolic” representation. Rather «the verbal expression of pain *replaces* crying»,²⁷ i.e. *substitutes and expands it*. Hence, on the one hand, more complex (bodily and verbal) embodied ways of expressing emotions are based on natural expressions—since, for example, only if the child cries out in pain, can we teach her to verbally express her pain. On the other hand, more complex embodied

²⁴ Wittgenstein, 2009, §244.

²⁵ Wittgenstein, 2009, §83.

²⁶ By “projecting” a word, Cavell spells out the process in which the child learns the meaning of a word, so as to learn to use, i.e. to project it into different life-contexts. In this sense, the very process of learning and the projection are still taking place and concern adults as well. As Cavell writes: «We keep finding new potencies in words and new ways in which objects are disclosed», Cavell, 1979, p. 180. Hence, «every form-of-life and every concept integral to it has an indefinite number of instances and directions of projection: [nonetheless] this variations is not arbitrary», since it is influenced by the inherited uses of the same word. *Ibid.* p. 185.

²⁷ Wittgenstein, 2009, § 244.

ways of expressing pain as gestures, words, and ways of behaving within life-contexts are not pre-determined by some natural expression, and hence biological fixed. Rather, *more complex expressions of pain, by replacing the natural expression, expand it*. This replacement is at an *expansion* since the child learns «new pain-behaviors»²⁸ which «may come very close to [being a cry], and also be very far removed from it»,²⁹ as the verbal expression “I am afraid”, which is far removed from a cry, illustrates. Hence, the replacement and the gradual expansion of the natural expression with the new verbal and bodily expressions within further life-contexts occurs against the background of an inherited weave of cultural expressive practices: «In the case that I have in mind, the people have a word which has a similar purpose (with a similar function) to that of the word “pain”. It would be wrong to say that it “designates” something similar. It enters into their life in a different, and yet similar, way».³⁰ Hence, *inner life constitutes and expands itself through the acquisition of even more complex cultural embodied ways of expressing oneself, which are acknowledged by others within a shared context: through this very embodied expression and others’ responses to it our inner life constitutes itself*. Hence, Wittgenstein’s account of emotions as embodied expressions does not involve any dualism between the expression and what is expressed. I would, therefore, completely agree with Lennon, when she claims that «what is revealed by bodily expressions is our subjectivity – not as an interiority hidden behind the body, but as a mode of being embodied».³¹ I would further add that not only bodily but also verbal expressions constitute our interiority as a mode of being embodied, so as to underline the embodied character of language conceived as a shared weave of practices – as the above example of the replacement/expansion of the cry with the verbal expression “I am afraid” clearly illustrates. Moreover, I would underline that when Wittgenstein states that the child learns «new pain-behaviors»,³² he is not claiming that one acquires a well-defined repertoire of behaviors. Hence, he is not arguing that emotions or sensations correspond to outward bodily behaviors, thereby offering a deterministic, i.e. behavioristic account of emotions, which simply reverses the Cartesian model, without calling into question its very dualistic frame, i.e. the separation between subject and

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Wittgenstein, 2009, §83.

³⁰ Wittgenstein, 1983, §656.

³¹ Lennon, 2017, p. 40.

³² Wittgenstein, 2009, §244.

object, inner and outward, soul and body. Rather, Wittgenstein draws attention to the fact that I can learn to express pain (and respond to that of someone else), for instance, only against the background of a web of similar ways of expressing pain, i.e. inherited embodied ways of expressing pain, or «patterns»,³³ which recur with variations in the weave of our cultural expressive practices and which stand in contrast, for instance, to inherited ways of expressing joy. As Wittgenstein puts it:

“Grief” describes a pattern, which recurs, with different variations, in the tapestry of life. If a man’s bodily expression of sorrow and of joy alternated, say with the ticking of a clock, here we would not have the characteristic course of the pattern of sorrow or of the pattern of joy.³⁴

This pattern, which recurs with different variations, embodies the background against which I (learn to) express emotions and respond to the emotions of others. This background is what gives every particular emotion its «physiognomy»: ³⁵ i.e. every emotion has its particular ‘identity’ or ‘face’ as *this* embodied expression only against the background of a pattern of similar (and contrasting) ways of expressing emotions, which recurs with different variations within shared life-practices. Hence, our inner lives are based on nothing more (and nothing less) than the ‘projection’ of these inherited expressive patterns into new life-contexts. ³⁶ However, the inherited expressive pattern of an

³³ Wittgenstein, 2009, §2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ The notion of physiognomy is tied first of all to the notion of meaning, since it refers to «[t]he familiar face of a word, the feeling that it has assimilated its meaning into itself». Wittgenstein, 2009, §294. According to Wittgenstein, the particular technique, or the system of rules – which should be conceived of as an established weave of uses within (repeated) life-practices – gives a word its ‘face’, since one senses and sees the meaning of a word against the background of its inherited weave of uses, when one has learned to master its technique, and hence has learned to use it and ‘project’ it into different life-contexts. For example, Wittgenstein writes: «From this you can see how much there is to the physiognomy of what we call “following a rule” in everyday life». Wittgenstein, 2009, §235. On the notion of physiognomy see also e.g. Wittgenstein, 2009, §§38, 235, 238, 294. Furthermore, as Guter has shown, the notion of physiognomy plays a pivotal role both within Wittgenstein’s explication of aspect-seeing and its various similarities with the musical expressions (Wittgenstein, 2009, §536; Wittgenstein, 1980, I §434; Wittgenstein, 1984, p. 52). He underlines the peculiar ‘indeterminacy’ of the pattern or ‘rules’, which are involved in the expressive practices both within psychological and aesthetic contexts. See, Guter, 2017, pp. 217-248. I will consider this peculiar notion of ‘indeterminacy’ in (4).

³⁶ Cf. Lennon, 2017, p. 40.

emotion does not correspond to a fixed repertoire of behaviors. Wittgenstein writes:

[...] What determines our judgment, our concepts and reactions, is not what one man is doing now, an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly of human actions, the background against which we see any action.³⁷

Seeing life as a weave, this pattern [...] is not always complete and is varied in a multiplicity of ways. But we, in our conceptual world, keep on seeing the same, recurring with variations. That is how our concepts take it. For concepts are not for use on a single occasion.³⁸

And one pattern in the weave is interwoven with many others.³⁹

Hence, there is no causal relation between an emotion and a specific repertoire of behaviors. Rather, emotions as embodied expressions are «aspects»⁴⁰ or «shades of behavior»⁴¹ in the situation, which invite others to respond to them against the background of a weave of cultural expressive patterns. The pattern of joy, for instance, is not a fixed repertoire of behaviors, since it is neither complete nor causally determined, but rather involves both «regularity» and «variations»,⁴² as well as «indefiniteness»⁴³ and openness; it requires my ability to «keep on seeing the same, recurring with variations»,⁴⁴ so as to see your joy and respond to it against the background of a particular context: it is a matter of grasping your physiognomy.⁴⁵ From this perspective, Wittgenstein claims that seeing a face in pain or understanding another person's verbal expression of

³⁷ Wittgenstein, 1967, §567.

³⁸ *Ibid.* §568.

³⁹ *Ibid.* §569.

⁴⁰ Cf. Mulhall, 1990, p. 61.

⁴¹ Wittgenstein, 2009, §192.

⁴² *Ibid.* §2; «A facial expression that was completely fixed couldn't be a friendly one. Variability and irregularity are essential to a friendly expression. Irregularity is part of its physiognomy». Wittgenstein, 1983, §615.

⁴³ Cf. Wittgenstein, 2009, §356.

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, 1967, §568.

⁴⁵ As Guter writes: «According to Wittgenstein, enormous variability, irregularity, and unpredictability are an essential part of human physiognomy and the concepts for which human physiognomy serve as a basis (Wittgenstein, 1983, §§614-615, 617, 627). Two important claims are intertwined here. First, human physiognomy is fundamentally, essentially non-mechanical. [...] It introduces an indefiniteness, a certain insufficiency of evidence, into our physiognomic recognition that is constitutive hence not indicative of any deficiency of knowledge. Second, such indeterminate "fine shades of behavior" constitute some of our concepts, most notably our psychological concepts». Guter, 2017, pp. 217-248.

sorrow involves a «modified concept of *sensing*». ⁴⁶ It means seeing an expression in light of a certain background: a *Gestalt* or web of connections, which sheds light on this particular expression, i.e. seeing it under this aspect and responding to it in the specific situation at hand. Wittgenstein describes this modified concept of sensing and seeing as follows:

We react to a facial expression differently from someone who does not recognize it as timid (in the full sense of the word). But I do not want to say here that we feel this reaction in our muscles and joints, and that this is the “sensing”. No, what we have here is a modified concept of *sensing*.⁴⁷

One might say of someone that he was blind to the *expression* of a face. Would his eyesight on that account be defective?⁴⁸

Hence, seeing a timid face does not mean seeing, via eyesight, a physiological reaction (or perceiving a bodily behavior by means of the senses) and inferring the emotion from it: «We see emotion [...] we do not see facial contortions and make inferences from them [...] to joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features». ⁴⁹ Thus, seeing emotions as expressions – as Borutti puts this crucial point – means «seeing the physiognomy, the form, the aspect [...]. “Seeing the aspect” [...] is not seeing properties but seeing through the aspect, the *eidōs*, the new light that certain [...] connections shed on the whole». ⁵⁰ Hence, seeing an expression of shiness *in the full sense of the word* means seeing the «internal relation» ⁵¹ of this particular expression to similar and contrasting embodied ways of expressing timidity, i.e. seeing this expression against the background of a particular context, in which the timidity of the face «lights up», thereby responding to it in the situation with a certain attitude. This ‘modified concept of *sensing*’ is neither a matter of non-cognitive perception by means of the senses, nor of inference, and therefore of cognitive, i.e. epistemological knowledge, ⁵² since it rather involves a peculiar «modified

⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, 2009, §231.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* §232.

⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, 1983, §570.

⁵⁰ Borutti, 2013, p. 55-66.

⁵¹ Wittgenstein, 2009, §247.

⁵² On Wittgenstein’s account of the ‘knowledge’ of other’s minds and in particular on the similarities between his approach and a phenomenological understanding of intersubjectivity,

concept of *sensing*.⁵³ *It requires sensitivity, «experience», or «Menschenkenntnis»: ⁵⁴ a sensible know-how, which develops through the ability to master the rules of psychological concepts, i.e. through the acquisition of those expressive cultural «pattern[s] which recur with different variations»⁵⁵ and against the background of which one responds to and expresses an emotion in the appropriate way in a given situation.*⁵⁶ This sensitivity means being acquainted with the «fine shades of behavior»,⁵⁷ i.e. knowing one's way around the ways one expresses oneself and responds to others, and therefore being able to «draw the right connections»,⁵⁸ so as to see the expression of another against a background which sheds light on it. *This modified concept of sensing points to the ability to see the expressions of another as her expressions so as to respond to it with a certain attitude.* Hence, as Wittgenstein in his very dry style puts it: «In general I do not surmise fear in him – I see it».⁵⁹ «My attitude toward him is an attitude toward a soul – I am not in the *opinion* that he has a soul».⁶⁰ In conclusion, I would argue that it is precisely this attitude, i.e. this «modified concept of *sensing* (*modifizierter Empfindungsbegriff*)»⁶¹, which distinguishes an embodied self – one who expresses oneself and responds to others within a shared life-context, and therefore masters the rules of psychological concepts, possessing a *sensible know-how* of the inherited expressive patterns, so as to project them into further contexts – from a disembodied and isolated subject, who *infers* from the outward bodily behaviors or the physiological features of the body the other's inward realm, and therefore is 'in the *opinion*' that the other has a soul.

according to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, see the important contribution by Overgaard, 2006, in particular pp. 63 and 67.

⁵³ Wittgenstein, 2009, §231.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* §355.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* §2.

⁵⁶ On this 'modified concept of *sensing*' and the peculiar status of a sensible experience which is founded upon the acquisition of language, i.e. a sensibility which emerges *after* having been learnt to master the rules which inform the linguistic practices, see the important contribution by Mazzeo and Virno, 2002, pp. 119-155.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* §210.

⁵⁸ Cavell 1979, pp. 368-369.

⁵⁹ Wittgenstein, 1983, §170.

⁶⁰ Wittgenstein, 2009, IV.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* §231.

4. The Aspect-blind as a Disembodied Self: An Ethical Reflection

In this last section, I wish to examine more closely the difference of attitude which marks one who sees the expression of another as her expression and one who is «blind to the *expression* of a face». ⁶² With reference to Cavell's and Mulhall's readings, I wish to argue that the «aspect-blind», ⁶³ i.e. one who is blind to the expression of a face, exemplifies from an ethical point of view the theoretical position of the disembodied self, so as to show the ethical consequences of this position. I wish to show, first of all, that the aspect-blind cannot see and therefore «acknowledge» ⁶⁴ the expressions of another as her expression, thereby seeing the *human* expression and responding to *a person in this particular context*; rather the aspect-blind can «just know it», ⁶⁵ inferring it from the outward and behaving like an «automaton». ⁶⁶ Second, I will argue that this is so because the aspect-blind does not *accept* the constitutive «uncertainty» ⁶⁷, «indefiniteness» ⁶⁸, «indeterminacy» ⁶⁹, and «imponderable evidence» ⁷⁰ which belong to psychological concepts; hence, he cannot sense and contribute to *the expressiveness* of human embodied practices. Toward this end, I will first of all briefly refer to the parallel drawn by Cavell between Wittgenstein's reflection on aspect-seeing and the “modified concept of sensing” which is involved in the ability to see the expressions of another as her expressions. I will then follow Mulhall's reading, ⁷¹ in order to claim that the aspect-blind—one who infers the emotion of others from their behavior and hence just knows it, but cannot see the expressions of another as her expressions—represents from an ethical point of view the position of a disembodied self. Stanley Cavell has underlined the ethical relevance of

⁶² Wittgenstein, 2009, §231.

⁶³ For a discussion of the figure of the aspect-blind as well as critical assessment of Cavell's and Mulhall's interpretations of this figure, see Baz, 2000, pp. 227-248. See, also, for a more general reflection on aspect- and meaning-blindness Day, 2010, pp. 204-224. See also De Carolis, 1999, in particular pp. 179-217.

⁶⁴ Cavell, 1976, p. 263.

⁶⁵ Wittgenstein, 2009, §192.

⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, 1980, §198.

⁶⁷ e.g. Wittgenstein, 1967, §§555-556.

⁶⁸ e.g. Wittgenstein, 1983, §§622-624

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* § §625.

⁷⁰ Wittgenstein, 2009, §§358-363.

⁷¹ Mulhall, 1990, pp. 78-90.

Wittgenstein's reflection on the grammar of emotions, as well as of Wittgenstein's *Investigations* as a whole.⁷² Cavell writes:

To know another minds is to interpret a physiognomy, and the message of the *Investigations* is that this is not a matter of 'mere-knowing'. I have to read the physiognomy, and see the creature according to my reading, and treat it according to my seeing. The human body is the best picture of the human soul—*not*, I feel like adding, primarily because it represents the soul but because it expresses it. The body is the field of expression of the soul.⁷³

[This means]: Your suffering makes a claim upon me. It is not enough that I know (am certain) that you suffer – I must do or reveal something (whatever can be done). In a word I must acknowledge it, otherwise I do not know what (your or his) being in pain means.⁷⁴

I would argue that the difference between, on the one hand, "seeing the expression of another as her expression", thereby acknowledging it, and, on the other hand, 'just knowing' it indicates more than simply a difference between two theoretical accounts of the inner life. Rather, with reference to Cavell's distinction between 'knowing' and 'acknowledging', I would argue that the aspect-blind exemplifies from an ethical point of view the theoretical position of a 'disembodied self'—one who 'knows' the other's mind by inferring it from the outward realm—*since it points to an inexpressive mode of living, in which one does not acknowledge others, nor the expressiveness of human embodied practices*. We should recall that Wittgenstein describes the aspect-blind by comparing this person to an automaton: «If someone were what we called 'meaning-blind', we should picture him as making a less lively impression than we do, behaving more 'like an automaton'». ⁷⁵ According to this comparison – and with reference to the difference that Wittgenstein draws between seeing a picture as a picture – thereby seeing it against the background of a certain context and grasping its meaning – and just "knowing it", so as to read its lines like a blueprint and in this way infer the 'meaning'—Mulhall describes the individual blind to the expression of a face as one who «infers the psychological

⁷² On the ethical relevance of the *Investigations* according to Cavell's reading, see Sparti 2000; see also Mulhall 1994, in particular pp. 108-141, Norris, 2017, in particular pp. 15-48, and Falomi 2009.

⁷³ Cavell, 1979, p. 356.

⁷⁴ Cavell, 1976, p. 263.

⁷⁵ Wittgenstein, 1980, §198.

significance of a piece of behavior from an immediate perception of its constituent elements». ⁷⁶ The aspect-blind—according to Mulhall—cannot see

the friendliness of a glance, but infers from the shape, color and movement of the perceived glance that it must have been friendly. The aspect-blind thus manifest an orientation toward human behavior in which it is treated as human *behavior* rather than as *human* behavior. ⁷⁷

The aspect-blind does not see and grasp the *humanity* of the behavior, since he is not able to see the «*fine shades* of behavior»; ⁷⁸ hence, he cannot see the face of a person against the background of a particular context, i.e. through those «pattern[s] which recur with variation» ⁷⁹ and against which the expressive face “lights up” in its unrepeatable individuality. By ‘just knowing’ the behavior without seeing its *shades*, he therefore fails to perceive «the very individuality of the [human] person» ⁸⁰, i.e. her particular embodied expression in this situation. From this perspective, I would contend that Wittgenstein not only criticizes a theoretical account of a disembodied self and the related conception concerning the knowledge of others’ minds, but also shows—through the figure of the aspect-blind—the ethical consequences of this position. As is the case with someone «who is blind to the *expression* of face» ⁸¹, thereby being in the «*opinion* that [another person] ha[s] a soul», instead of «having an attitude toward [her] soul» ⁸², *what is at issue here is not only an inconsistent theoretical account concerning the inner life and the knowledge of other minds, but also a life-attitude, an ethos, i.e. an embodied mode of living, whereby one cannot see and grasp the very individual embodied character of the other person in a specific situation.* Moreover, the aspect-blind cannot sense and grasp the peculiar “imponderable evidence”, which belongs to psychological concepts. This evidence is imponderable, as in the case of acknowledging the pain of another, or being sure that one is in pain, since it is not related to the evidence concerning epistemological «principle[s] of knowledge». ⁸³ Rather, it is a matter of sensitivity comparable to «learn[ing]

⁷⁶ Mulhall, 1990, p. 73.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Wittgenstein, 2009, §192.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* §2.

⁸⁰ Mulhall, 1990, p. 87.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* §232.

⁸² *Ibid.* IV.

⁸³ Cf. Mulhall, 1990, pp. 82-83.

to get an ‘eye’ for something». ⁸⁴ Wittgenstein describes this peculiar form of evidence as follows:

Imponderable evidence includes subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone. I may recognize a genuine loving look, distinguish it from a pretended one (and here there can, of course, be a ‘ponderable’ confirmation of my judgment). But I may be quite incapable of describing the difference. And this not because the languages I know have no words for it. ⁸⁵

The imponderable evidence of psychological concepts as embodied expressions, which involves precisely the ability to see the expression in a certain light or Gestalt, is what the aspect-blind cannot sense and grasp. Since he knows the emotions from outward behavior without *seeing them* in light of the particular context, the aspect-blind can just focus on and react to a single behavior, but cannot respond to the “subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone”, since he does not have “the eye for it”. By lacking this capacity—which is «*akin to the lack of a ‘musical ear’*»⁸⁶—*not only does the aspect-blind not recognize the individuality of another, i.e. the embodied expression of this individual person within this particular situation, but he does not participate of the very dimension which makes embodied expressions human as such.* («Fine shades of behavior. – Why are they *important*? They have important consequences»).⁸⁷ From this perspective, the aspect-blind is more like an «*automaton*»⁸⁸ than a human being. Hence, I would argue that the aspect-blind shows a further ethical consequence of a disembodied account of the self and of inner life, since this figure points to an inexpressive mode of living, i.e. an incapacity to express oneself and respond to others so as to contribute to those ‘fine shades’ which mark the *expressiveness* of human embodied practices. Thus, it is precisely this expressiveness and the related imponderable evidence which distinguishes human expressions within the embodied praxis of language from the inexpressiveness and complete determinability of a disembodied code, in which there is a casual, automatic, and rigid relation between the instruction (input) and its implementation (output).⁸⁹ Furthermore, the aspect-blind does not sense

⁸⁴ Cf. Wittgenstein, 2009, §261.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* §360.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* §260.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* §192.

⁸⁸ Wittgenstein, 1980, §198.

⁸⁹ Cf. De Carolis, 1999, pp. 216-217, and Guidi, forthcoming, 2019.

the peculiar “uncertainty” which belongs to human embodied expressions. By this Wittgenstein does not mean that I am always in doubt whether another is in pain or not; rather he underlines that the uncertainty belongs to the very asymmetry between expressing my pain (and therefore *being in pain* from a first-person perspective) and seeing the pain of another from a second- or third-person perspective.⁹⁰ This uncertainty belongs to the grammar of emotions as embodied expressions, i.e. to the ‘imponderable’, i.e. non-epistemological character of their evidence. Hence, this uncertainty does not correspond to the lack of certain epistemological grounds for *knowing* others. Rather this uncertainty is a constitutive one, since understanding the emotions of others is not a matter of having certain (or uncertain) grounds or principles of *knowledge*, according to which one knows and therefore infers the other’s inner world; rather, it is a matter of seeing an expression *as an expression* against the background of a particular context, thereby mastering the rules, i.e. those inherited patterns which recur with variations and mark emotions as embodied cultural expressions. Hence, this uncertainty points to the constitutive dimension, i.e. the grammar of psychological concepts:

The ‘uncertainty’ relates not to the particular case, but to the method, to the rules of evidence.⁹¹

The uncertainty is not founded on the fact that he does not wear his pain on his sleeve. And there is not an uncertainty in each particular case. If the frontier between two counties were in dispute, would it follow that the country to which any individual resident belonged was dubious?⁹²

Insofar as he just “knows” the expressions of others, inferring them from a rigid behavior without any shades, the aspect-blind does not sense this uncertainty: *he makes a matter of knowledge the very ethical task of acknowledging others*. The aspect-blind does not accept the uncertainty which marks human embodied expressions. He does not accept that in ‘knowing’ others there are neither ‘theoretical certain grounds’ nor the very absence of them; rather, what is at the stake is *the task to see and acknowledge others (a task one can always fail to achieve)*: «Not to explain, but to accept the psychological phenomenon – that is

⁹⁰ Cf. Overgaard, 2005, p. 265.

⁹¹ Wittgenstein, 1967, §555.

⁹² *Ibid.* §556.

what is difficult».⁹³ From this perspective, I would argue that the aspect-blind shows a further ethical consequence of a disembodied account of the self: the avoidance both of engaging oneself in the task of *acknowledging* others as well as of facing the very difficulty and possibility of failure, which this task constitutively involves. Wittgenstein writes:

We also say of a person that he is transparent to us. It is, however, important as regards our considerations that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. One learns this when one comes into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even though one has mastered the country's language. One does not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.)⁹⁴

Furthermore, this uncertainty, which belongs to embodied human expressions, goes together with the peculiar indefiniteness of psychological concepts. This indefiniteness points to the very blurred character of the inherited expressive patterns according to which one expresses oneself and responds to the emotions of others. Such indefiniteness cannot be eliminated in favor of a more suitable clear definition, since it is precisely this indefiniteness which constitutes and marks the *expressiveness* of psychological concepts as embodied human expressions. Hence, this constitutive indefiniteness neither can nor should be eliminated. Rather, its constitutive role in relation to psychological concepts is comparable to the indefiniteness belonging to the concept of «[h]eap of sand, [which] is a concept without sharp boundaries But why isn't one with sharp boundaries used instead of it? [...]».⁹⁵ As the concept of heap of sand emerges as such *through* and *thanks to its blurred boundaries*, since if one could count and give a discrete definition of the elements which compose a heap of sand, the latter would no longer be a 'heap', in a comparable way, *it is thanks to the indefiniteness that marks inherited expressive practices—which «are not [...] complete and [are] varied in a multiplicity of ways»⁹⁶—that we can express ourselves and respond to others, so as to expand our embodied inner life as well as the expressive possibilities of a culture.* Hence, the very same blurred and indefinite character of the psychological concepts as embodied expressions

⁹³ Wittgenstein, 1980, §509.

⁹⁴ Wittgenstein, 2009, §325.

⁹⁵ Wittgenstein, 1983, §622. Cf. Wittgenstein, 1967, §392.

⁹⁶ Wittgenstein, 1967, §568.

belongs to human language as such: i.e. to those embodied cultural practices that Wittgenstein calls language-*games*. He writes:

One can say that the concept of a game is a concept with blurred edges. “But is a blurred concept a concept at all?” Is a photograph that is not sharp a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace a picture that is not sharp by one that is? Isn’t one that isn’t sharp often just what we need?⁹⁷

Indeed, with reference both to inner life as embodied expressions as well as to the embodied practices of language, indefiniteness is precisely what we need, and «[w]hat is most difficult here is to express this indefiniteness correctly, and without distortion». ⁹⁸ The indefiniteness further refers to the peculiar indeterminacy of the “rules” or “patterns” belonging both to embodied expressions as well as to the embodied practices of language. Hence, *indeterminacy entails the immanent (and always open) possibilities of projecting inherited expressive practices into an indefinite plurality of new contexts, so as to expand the expressiveness both of one’s own embodied inner life and of the embodied practices of language.* («The concept of a living being has the same indeterminacy as that of a language». ⁹⁹) Indefiniteness and indeterminacy are the dimensions which the aspect-blind cannot see and sense, since he infers the other’s inner life as well as the ‘meaning’ of a language-game from a defined and rigid behavior, without being able to see its shades and background. The aspect-blind cannot see an «action according to its background within human life», since «this background is not monochrome, but [...] it [is] a very complicated filigree pattern, which, to be sure, we can’t copy, but which we can recognize from the general impression it makes». ¹⁰⁰ The aspect-blind can just ‘copy’, i.e. know and infer, but cannot *see* this background; hence, he does not ‘have the eye’ for «the background [which] is the bustle of life». ¹⁰¹ [...] «And it is the very concept ‘bustle’ that brings about this indeterminacy [*Unbestimmtheit*]. For a bustle comes about only through constant repetition. And there is no definite starting point for ‘constant repetition’». ¹⁰² Thus, *the aspect-blind is detached from the embodied background of human expressions and of human language practices more generally: he does not contribute to that ‘constant repetition’*

⁹⁷ Wittgenstein, 2009, §71.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* §356.

⁹⁹ Wittgenstein, 1967, §326.

¹⁰⁰ Wittgenstein, 1983, §624.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* §625.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* §626.

through which the expressiveness of our embodied (form of) life constitutes and expands.

In conclusion, the aspect-blind, one who just knows and infers others' inner world from their outward behavior, represents, from an ethical point of view, the theoretical position of a disembodied self and shows the ethical consequences of this disembodied account of the self and of inner life. Against this disembodied account, Wittgenstein helps us realize the importance of the "fine shades of behavior", the very shades which inform the "complicated filigree pattern", i.e. the embodied background which constitutes the "bustle" of life. Therefore, through the figure of the aspect-blind Wittgenstein draws attention to the pivotal ethical tasks of acknowledging others and of engaging with the *expressiveness* which marks human embodied practices—the very dimensions that a disembodied conception of the self and of inner life does not take into account from both a theoretical and ethical point of view.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the embodied dimension of emotions and of the inner life more generally according to Wittgenstein's account of expression. As I have attempted to show, Wittgenstein's conception calls into question a subjectivistic conception of expression, which retains the dualism between the expression and the expressed. His aim is to criticize a number of assumptions involved in a disembodied, i.e. Cartesian, account of the self and of inner life, and to free us from a series of metaphysical "bumps", such as the split between the "inward" and the "outward", the dualism between "mind" and "body", and the conception according to which understanding the emotions and inner lives of others is a matter of epistemological knowledge. Moreover, I have described the constitution of the self and of inner life as an acquisition of embodied ways of expressing oneself and of responding to others within a shared context, against the background of inherited cultural expressive practices. From this perspective, I have claimed that expressing one's own emotions involves a peculiar notion of sensitivity, i.e. a sensible know-how, which develops through the ability to master the rules of psychological concepts: through the ability to project inherited expressive cultural "patterns" into new life-contexts, so as to express and therefore expand one's own inner life. I have further shown that this 'modified concept of sensing' is involved in the process of seeing the expressions of others as expressions of their embodied inner lives, and that it

points to the ability to see an expression against a background which sheds light on it, so as to respond to it in the situation at hand through an appropriate attitude. I have argued that this sensitivity, i.e. this ‘modified concept of sensing and seeing’ is what distinguishes an embodied account of the self and of inner life from a disembodied conception of the inner, which presupposes an isolated subject, who *knows* his own inner life through a private ostensive definition of his own “emotions”, and *infers* the other’s inward realm from outward bodily behaviors. Finally, I have outlined how Wittgenstein’s figure of the aspect-blind, one who just knows and infers the other’s inner from his outward behavior but cannot *see* and therefore *acknowledge* the expressions of others, when responding to a human being within a particular context, represents – from an ethical point of view – the theoretical position of a disembodied self, and shows the ethical consequences of this disembodied account of the self and of inner life. With reference to Cavell’s and Mulhall’s readings, I have claimed, therefore, that through the figure of the aspect-blind Wittgenstein draws attention to the pivotal ethical task of acknowledging others, and further allows us to realize the importance of those fine shades of behaviors, glances and tones which mark the uncertainty, indefiniteness and indeterminacy–i.e. the *expressiveness*–of human embodied practices. In conclusion, I have claimed that Wittgenstein not only criticizes a disembodied account of the self and of inner life from a theoretical point of view, but also, through the figure of the aspect-blind, shows us the ethical consequences of this theoretical position.

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