Wittgenstein in Art and Creative Imagination: How to Understand 'Genius' as Courage in Talent and Character Manifested Through Talent

**Table of contents**

**Literature**

In this paper I will intend to provide a Wittgensteinian account of creative imagination and the use and context of creative imagination in line with Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument as well as his numerous remarks on the concepts of genius, talent and art stated in Culture and Value. Wittgenstein's philosophical position regarding arts and the artistic creation, has been a topic rather rarely touched upon by philosophers elaborating on his work, since it suggests a peculiar point of view where the incapability of the agent to create and imagine "a world from scratch", in other words "ex nihilo" privately in his mind poses questions about whether that allows enough room for creative imagination and the utter uniqueness of the artist which bear the mark of genius that eventually point to a break with tradition and bring about a revolution in the perception of art throughout the history of art.

There are certain concepts and positions, namely "language games" central to Wittgenstein's philosophy concerning "meaning" in his later period, especially in 'Investigations' which provide the basis for understanding the relation between genus and art, in other words the way creative imagination functions as well as its conditions of possibility of existence which forms the basis of art that has been revolutionary when its historical impacts get to be taken into consideration. Here, I tend to use the rather provocative word "revolutionary" for certain art works primarily in order to draw attention to the link between "genius" and artworks and artists whose work have marked turning points in art history. It should not be taken to mean that art works who have not somehow had a historical impact to bring about a change of meaning in the language games played with the genre of art in question are of lesser artistic or aesthetic value, rather, my emphasis on revolution in artistic discourse brought about by certain artists such as Picasso, Bach, Duchamp and the like, should encourage us to think about the inherent correlation between "genius" and a change of, a break of, i.e. a revolution of artistic meaning and uniqueness employed in the language game concerning art and creative imagination. In this sense, "genius", or the impact of "genius" is precisely bringing about a change of meaning in the language game, in other words, introducing "a new rule" to the language game and waiting until the moment that this rule gets to be understood, i.e. be applicable or possible to follow by the players of the language game considering that genre of art at the setting of the life form where meaning as "making sense" occurs. On genius and how the break with tradition or change of meaning that "genius" brings about will occur, Wittgenstein's statement in Culture and Value: "If someone is merely ahead of his time, it will catch him up one day" (MS 110:11.25.12.1930) is a good example of how he thinks about the double sided effect of saying/creating something utterly new and unique. At the time of manifesting this "ahead of time"ness through an artistic creation, until the time it gets followable and understood by more than one person and more than once in history, it will bear the mark of privacy and hence the uncanniness of incomprehensibility, but through time, the utterly new will also become acquainted with and acquired among the possible life forms and "language games" to be played thereupon.

Wittgenstein, having dedicated much of his later work to demonstrating in various ways how "Understanding is a public phenomenon", the occurrence of which is verifiable through certain publicly accessible signs of successive rule following, where failing to do so would be downright sufficient reason to doubt the occurrence of Understanding, gets to put forward that "Meaning is use" concerning the question of meaning in art and creative imagination, as well as in other discourses. I argue that, all he writes on "genius", "talent" or art works throughout his remarks in Culture and Value should be thought of in accordance with this basic claim "Meaning is use".

We can easily be puzzled by trying to work out the connection that is supposed to exist between this seemingly linguistic claim and Wittgenstein's remarks on creative imagination such as "Genius is courage in talent" or "Genius is talent in which character makes itself heard". In fact, stating that "meaning is use" amounts to be emphasizing the practical conditions of the phenomenon of meaning and hence communication, since meaning is to be understood as practiced through language games being diverse contexts of a life form shared by individuals whose "Weltanschauung" (worldview) is shaped by the same "conceptual scheme". By the same token, when Wittgenstein makes remarks on Genius or the various qualities of a certain piece of art, his first concern is to acquaint himself and the reader with the practical conditions of possibility of the occurrence of Genius, which can be read both as a practical guide to creative imagination and uniqueness for the artist him/herself as a path to be found within, and as a practical guide for the audience, i.e. the consumer of the art to diagnose and value the creative imagination and uniqueness of the artwork or artist.

It will be helpful for us at this point to clarify and elaborate on certain remarks of Wittgenstein in Culture and Value on art and genius. Let us first draw our attention to his remark: "Genius is courage in one's talent" (MS 117 152 c: 4.2.1940) This is a remark that addresses the would-be artist on the verge of a creative process. It is basically a remark that talent and genius are two important characteristics of human being. Short idea about this two virtues will be found from this article. Genius and Talent. Every man/woman has some special characteristics that make him/her different from the others. There are no same genetic codes, so there are no exactly same people. Some of the points are placed in a genetic code and are to be developed during a lifetime. About our hidden abilities and talents we to kinder garden or primary school. This is a usual way to discover yourself and your calling, but sometimes a person may find out that he or she is Genius is talent set on fire by courage. Henry VanDyke Courage. Geniuses have dramatic moments of insight where great things and thoughts are bornwhole. Poems are written in dreams. People who are gifted with unusual intellectual ability or creativity - and who work diligently to make those talents a reality - we often call geniuses. Dick Russell, Black Genius Encouraging Poems. To me, a genius is someone with a brilliant mind who has had great accomplishments in a challenging field, and changed the world in some meaningful way. As vague as this definition may seem, the essence of genius is limitless. There appear to be no bounds to what geniuses can accomplish. The genius, on the other hand, lights on genius, on the other hand, lights on
is in accord with the rest of Wittgenstein’s later thought, which does not attempt to refer to anything private and incommunicable in the individual and what is unique to the confines of his mind and the imagination within these confines whatsoever, on the contrary, doubting the very communicability even to one’s own of this private sphere were it to exist, this remark is actually a call for the artist/genius/creative thinker to discover the path to genius. The common feature of talent that is found in many, to the rare feature of genius that is to be found in very few. With this remark, Wittgenstein’s aim is to put forward that there is no mysterious link that inherently lies between talent and genius in the case of genius, however it is an observable act of courage, of basically believing in and acting out of faith, and the effort and investment made thereon that transforms the talented person into a Genius. Among countless instances of talented people, it is only the ones who have courage in this talent, who are courageous enough to base their lives on this talent and do whatever it takes, such as education, training, belief, unconditional dedication, solitude, despair, adventures, a meaningful life which gives them the sufficient emotional stimuli to express it, to put into their art/Invention, devotion of a lot of time and energy to the realization of the particular art/work/Invention in question be it their own personal life turning to a work of art during this process- to reach their very personal, unique expression in the specified art form or scientific activity. Hence, by merely stating that “Genius is courage in talent” Wittgenstein gets to be saying a lot on the publicly accessible pattern of one’s transforming one’s art to a work of genius.

However, he makes it yet clearer that it is not the case that having talent and having likewise courage in that very talent are sufficient for genius to be the case, since “character” is “the ultimately indispensable feature of creative imagination and of genius which is the significantly remarkable bearer of the creative imagination in question and of “revolution-inciting” art, so to speak. In Culture and Value he states: “Genius is talent in which character makes itself heard. For that reason, I would like to say, Kraus has talent, an extraordinary talent, but not genius (…) It is curious that this e.g. is so much greater than anything Kraus ever wrote. Here you see not merely an intellectual skeleton, but a whole human being. That is the reason too why the greatness of what someone writes depends on everything else he writes and does.” (MS 136 59b:4.1.1948.) That is a remark pretty much in line with his writings on the conception of meaning, that is, what there is to be interpreted, that is, what an artwork is, that only in so far as it bears the mark of being the outcome of a certain life experience lived by a certain artist in the form of a common story told in a personal way, it gets to be called a piece of genius, in the sense that it is an utterly unique and revolutionary way to refer to an ordinary life experience that could occur to anyone under the same conditions. In other words, only when the work of art reveals the artist’s personal process- to reach their very personal, unique expression in the specified art form or scientific activity. Hence, by merely stating that “Genius is courage in talent” Wittgenstein gets to be saying a lot on the publicly accessible pattern of one’s transforming one’s art to a work of genius.

In order to put forward the threefold nature of Wittgenstein’s conception of creative imagination and hence the path to genius, as historically significant work with good originality-elsewhere in C&V he states: “It is already a seed of good originally not to want to be what you are not – we should consider the example of an artist, a creative mind who can be thought as a concrete embodiment of manifesting these three necessary conditions in his path to bringing out the genius in him. When I gaze no farther than into my own surroundings, as a philosopher coming from Istanbul, I am tempted to consider the example of Orhan Pamuk, the 2006 Nobel Prize winner in literature and actually his Nobel Prize speech, which later came to be published as a book called: “My father’s suitcase”. There he talks about his own process of becoming a writer putting that in the context of his family, city, surroundings and habits, which we can more or less classify as the forming ingredients, foundations of his character. This speech-book is a particularly good example at hand to observe all three elements of Wittgenstein’s discourse on genius and hence creative thinking. First, his example is that of someone who took courage in writing against all odds. His father, who enjoyed travelling, living to the full extent of life, social gathering, in order to the full extent of life, social gathering, to whose well-regulated capacity to achieve, yet not what is beyond their capacity o
setting to the pre-existing forms of life, is the act of one who has the courage to believe in his talent and who hence takes action on that as a reflection of his courage and through every such act of courage who manifests his own personal interpretation of what is accessible and liveable by everyone and envelops this new form of expressing the common with his personal seal, sent to the rest of the world from his address, namely his personal origin as the basis of his originality. And this seal, which has the mould of his character, no matter how many times sent to how many different targets, bears the mark of always the same sign imprinted on countless different envelopes. It is the seal of genius, namely courage in talent through which artist’s character is heard and felt.

Literature

Pamuk, Orhan 2006, Babamın Bavulu (My Father’s Suitcase), the Nobel Literature Prize Speech of 2006.


Fulya Özlem.


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