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THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

Wittgenstein and the Problem of Universals

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Introduced by.		PROFESSOR GODFREY VESEY

FILMED IN CAMBRIDGE

WITTGENSTEIN AND THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALS

FADE UP

1. Problems of Philosophy
   A Third Level Arts Course

2. QUESTION MARK ANIMATION

3. Wittgenstein and the Problem
   of Universals

4. Introduced by
   Professor Godfrey Vesey

5. MS VESEY

VESEY: This programme is about the problem of universals, sometimes called the problem of 'the one and the many'. There are many beautiful things, say, but there is one thing, beauty, which they have in common, or share, or manifest, or something. A lot of us call the many things 'particulars' and the one thing they call the 'universal'. How are they, the 'particulars' and the 'universal', how are they related? I call many things beautiful, I use the same one word of many things, what justifies me in doing so? That's the problem or at least one way of putting it. It's a problem that's been with us for a very long time - at least as far back as Plato. But in this programme we're going to consider whether a comparatively recent Philosopher - Ludwig Wittgenstein - whether he said

anything that helps to solve it.
Wittgenstein was Professor of Philosophy
here in Cambridge from 1939 - 1947;
he died in 1951. He was a Philosopher
of very great influence. Even people
who don't agree with him won't deny
that - and there are people who don't
agree with him. One of them is
Stephan Korner, Professor of Philosophy
at the University of Bristol and at
Yale. In this programme Professor
Korner is going to be discussing
Wittgenstein and the problem of
universals with Renford Bambrough,

6. LS St. John's College
   ZOOM IN SLOWLY

Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge.
They'll be debating in Mr. Bambrough's
rooms here in St. John's College.

S/I

7. A discussion between
   Professor Stephan Korner
   University of Bristol
   and
   Renford Bambrough
   Fellow, St. John's College,
                    Cambridge

T/O

8. 3-s. KORNER/VESEY/BAMBROUGH

VESEY: We'll discuss this passage in
the Blue Book: "We're inclined to think
that there must be something in common

9. CU KORNER

to all games, say, and that this common
property is the justification for
applying the general term 'game' to the

10. CU BAMBROUGH

various games, whereas games form a

11. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

12. CU KORNER

13. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH
   ZOOM IN to
    BCU BAMBROUGH

14. CU KORNER

15. BCU BAMBROUGH

family the members of which have
family likenesses.". That passage
in the Blue Book, and then the passages
in the Brown Book around about page 130
where he's talking about different
senses of 'have something in common'.
Let's start with the question as to -
Renford do you agree with what
Wittgenstein says about how you use the
word 'game'?

BAMBROUGH: I do. And I think that to
have pointed that out is an important
achievement in the history of
philosophy because the question to which
Wittgenstein is addressing himself,
though he doesn't say so, is the question
that Socrates was concerned with when he
looked for definitions of familiar terms,
like 'justice', and 'knowledge', and
'courage'. He always assumed in these
searches that the answer would take the
form of finding what the common element,
or essence, or ingredient, is in all the
cases to which the word applied.
Wittgenstein is pointing out that here
is one word, 'games', which has a
perfectly rational, comprehensible,
application to a set of objects that
have no single feature, or ingredient,

or essence, in common. He's therefore giving a new direction to the search for an answer to the ancient problem of universals: the problem of 'the one and the many'. What is the one characteristic that these many 'particular' games, books, acts of justice, have in common? And I think that one might, with pardonable exaggeration, say that Wittgenstein was giving us the road to the solution that the genius of Socrates propounded, in asking: what is it for a lot of things to be of the same kind?

16. CU KORNER

17. BCU BAMBROUGH

   ZOOM OUT to 2-s.
       VESEY/BAMBROUGH

VESEY: Yes. So that if the question is asked: what have chess and football and philosophy in common, all being 'games'? you can't answer that question. Stephan, do you think that this, what applies to the word 'game' applies to other concepts, or do you think there are exceptions to this?

18. CU KORNER

KORNER: No. I would say, I would agree with you that Wittgenstein may have shown us the road towards the solution, but if I had to judge what he said I would have two objections. I would first of all say that Wittgenstein seems to think that all concepts - or

sometimes talks as if all concepts -
bear family resemblance concepts. That
is, that as if in all cases, what connects
the instances of a concept with each
other, by reason of which connection we
say that they are instances of these

19.   2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

20.   CU KORNER

concepts, is always family resemblance.
Whereas, in fact, there are lots and
lots of systematic connections which
are not like family resemblance. Let ..
give you examples: If I say that one,
seven, three hundred and ninety nine, a
all the integers, fall under the concept
'integer' because they have family
resemblance we something, which is just
as empty, or I would say, more empty,
than to say that there's something in

21.   VBCU BAMBROUGH
       ZOOM OUT to BCU BAMBROUGH

common. Because I think we'd find it
much more illuminating if the answer were

22.   CU KORNER

'an integer is one or any number derived
from one by a single or iterated edition
of one'. Another example: If somebody
said to me that 'to the left of' and
'greater than' show family resemblances,
I would say, "Well, that's very
unilluminating". Whereas I would regard
it as very illuminating if the person
said to me, "Look, they are both
transitive, that there is, that they ar.
both relations such that for any three
objects, x, y, z, if x bears the relation
to y, and y to z, then x bears the relatic
to z.". So that's one objection which

I have towards what Wittgenstein says, or seems to say. And the other objection is that even his analysis of family resemblances, family resemblance concepts, is not complete - that there's much more to be said.

VESEY: What more would you want to say

23. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

24. CU KORNER

KORNER: Well I would first of all like to say that family resemblance concepts unlike other concepts, have, are inexact in the sense that they are borderline cases. That for any family resemblance concepts or any current concepts with which he's concerned, like 'red', they're always in their cases, or positive cases outer cases, or negative cases, and borderline cases. That's one thing which I think should be emphasised. And it should be emphasised for that. For example, integers are not like that. There are no borderline cases between 'integer' and 'non-integer' as there is between 'red' and 'not red', or between 'prime numbers' and 'not prime numbers'.

25. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

VESEY: So there's in fact two points we have. The one about it being possible to define some concepts, 'not gain', 'not red', but perhaps 'integer'. And this second point about there being some concepts, the family resemblance concepts as you call them, which have borderline cases.

25. BCU KORNER

KORNER: Yes. And there is more to it, if I may continue. And that is, you see, if we attempt with the borderline cases we attempt to relate to a very important fact, namely that the instances of these concepts, family resemblance concepts, and 'red', whether it is a family resemblance concept or not, are continuously connected. Let me take for instance the 'red', then between 'red' and 'not red' there are common borderline cases. Every species, every shade of red, like 'light red' has common borderline cases with its compliment 'not light red', like 'light red'. And that in terms of these common borderline cases we can define different types of continuar, empirical continuar, you see, and we would have for instance multi-dimensional and one-dimensional. You see 'game' seems to be multi-dimensional continuous, whereas 'red', well, if you like, not less than two-dimensionally continuous. Do you see what I mean?

26. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

VESEY: I think, I mean I think that whist and bridge are on one continuar, and I, I.....

27. BCU KORNER

KORNER:

Well you see it would of course, one
would have to develop as some people
including myself, Brentano for instance,
including myself also, have tried to do,
One would have to develop this theory
of continuous connection which is not
dealt with in Wittgenstein and which i
think is very important to an
understanding/family resemblanc concep
of

VESEY:

28. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH   Do you have to disagree with this though,
ZOOM IN to BCU BAMBROUGH   Renford?

BAMBROUGH:

I agree that the work on empirical
continuity that Stephan Korner has done
is a very important addition to what
Wittgenstein did. Where I disagree is
in Stephan's earlier remarks about family
29. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH   resemblances because I think there are
many dimensions in which games can be
compared one with another and this is
a point that Wittgenstein himself makes.
I think that what Stephan Korner is
30. CU KORNER   engaged in in his enquiry into empirical
continuities, is a branch of philosophical
research related to what Wittgenstein
31. CU BAMBROUGH   was concerned with and that can quite
properly be carried on as a supplement

to what Wittgenstein said.

I think however that Wittgenstein's
concern in the passages that we are
dealing with was with the ancient
problem of 'the one and the many'. And th...
his example of 'game', and his treatment
of the example of 'red' for that matte...,
brings to light a substantial point
about that old controversy, namely that

32. CU KORNER

the instances that fall under a general
term don't need to have any factor or
ingredient in common. And though it's

33. CU BAMBROUGH

quite true that there are fundamental
differences between the property of bein...
'game' and the property of being 'red'
they're not ones that unfit either of
those properties as being a good example
   Wittgenstein's
for/   purpose since in the Brown

34. CU KORNER

Book he asks what is in common between

35. CU BAMBROUGH

a 'light red' and a 'dark red' and clearly
expects the answer either that there's
nothing in common   or, and I think
it's the same point though put rather
differently, that the only thing that
they have in common is that they are
'red'. And that Socrates' ambition for
finding something distinct from there
both being 'red' which would somehow underli...
and account for the fact of their both
being 'red' is a wild goose chase.

KORNER:

36. CU KORNER

KORNER:

I agree with this but I also agree, very whole heartedly, with your saying that what I'm trying to do is to supplement this sketchy account of Wittgensteins. And I think that it is relevant to the problem of universals to show the kind of systematic connection between the instances of a concept and the concept. This really is to fulfill what he says the request of not falling victim to generalisations, you see, so I'm here a good Wittgensteinian and I think Wittgenstein in concentrating on one kind probably was a bad Wittgensteinian there.

BAMBROUGH:

37. CU BAMBROUGH

BAMBROUGH:

Yes, so you are endorsing the point I made earlier when I suggested that what Wittgenstein was showing, among other things, is that the notion of having something in common is itself one to which Wittgensteins account of what it is for things to 'have something in common' has a clear application.

VESEY:

38. 3-s. KORNER/VESEY/BAMBROUGH

I think that that point about different senses of 'have something in common' is one of the most important points that Wittgenstein makes in this part of the Brown Book.

KORNER:

39. CU KORNER

Well I think that having something in common doesn't tell us much, that it just indicated a general direction in which we should go, that it indicated best that we should look for systematic connections.

BAMBROUGH:

40. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

Yes, but suppose I were to ask What do these three objects have in common? and I point to three objects, now there's a very obvious answer, that they're all books.

KORNER:

41. BCU KORNER

Yes I was thinking they are all coloured objects you see. But I think, I agree that they are all books and now we would say this and then we would, you would say, What have all integers in common and
what
/have all chairs in common and you, we would say that they have, they belong to different systematic connections.

		BAMBROUGH:
42.	2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH	Yes but suppose I were to go on with my books for a minute, suppose I were now to ask, What do all these books have in common?

KORNER:

Yes.

BAMBROUGH:

Now this time it's no good your saying that they're books.

KORNER:

43. CU KORNER   No.

BAMBROUGH:

Because I've already said that they're books, you must look for something else.

44. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH   Now it happens that they're all philosophical books.

KORNER:

45. CU KORNER   Good.

BAMBROUGH:

46. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH   So there is a property that they all have in common.

KORNER:

47. CU KORNER   Surely...Surely.

48. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

BAMBROUGH:

Now suppose we extend that question,
just extend its range, suppose we now
ask what do all books have in common?

49. CU KORNER

KORNER:

Well the answer is all, the, they ha
a family resemblance in common because
books I think is very much, a book is
very much the concept which falls, wh
to which Wittgenstein's analysis fits s
well. There are some such concepts a
there are others to which it is wholly
unilluminating.

50. CU BAMBROUGH

BAMBROUGH:

Yes but I think the importance of this
observation ,we've just made about
books is this: that Socrates and his
followers, including nearly all of us
at all times, thought that the question,
What do all books have in common? was to

51. CU KORNER

be answered on lines analogous to those
on which we answer the question, What do

52. CU BAMBROUGH

these three books have in common?.. He
thought there were interesting features
that could be found which would specify
the character of all books in which, in
in
the way/which I specified the character
of these three by saying that they were
all philosophical, or all belong to me, or
something of that kind.

Now this can't be done this is what
Wittgenstein ...

KORNER:

53. CU KORNER

No I agree, I agree.

BAMBROUGH:

54. CU BAMBROUGH

But the only point that connects all
books together, the only true remark
that can be made about what all books
have in common, is that they're books.
And that's so fatuous and boring that
philosophers are always saying more
interesting things such as that they're
all related to the form of book in
Heaven or that they all have an
ingredient 'bookness'. Now these more
interesting things are all false;
Wittgenstein showed us the one true
thing, the very boring thing, that they
are related to each other in that way
that makes them all books.

KORNER:

55. CU KORNER

But if somebody, say a student - not you,
came along and tried to use this
Wittgenstein approach to numbers, and
said that one, three, three hundred and
seventy five, have a family resemblance
in common - that would be also fatuous.

BAMBROUGH:

Yes.

KORNER:

And this is, you see, and my point real?

and I don't think we disagree - was

say there are family resemblance

56. BCU BAMBROUGH

57. CU KORNER

concepts, there are non-family

resemblance concepts, and family

resemblance concepts like the others

can still do with much more analysis

than Wittgenstein gave them in these

remarks.

BAMBROUGH:

58. BCU BAMBROUGH

59. CU KORNER

60. BCU BAMBROUGH

And I think from the point of view of

our concern with the ancient 'one and

many' problem, the important fact is that

even in these other cases of systematic

connection that you're pointing out,

the systematic connection doesn't take

61. BCU KORNER

the form that Socrates thought it would

take of there being a single ingredient
                                    all
that was common to/the instances.

KORNER:

Quite, I quite agree.

VESEY:

62. BCU VESEY

I think we should put some emphasis
on this expression, 'have something in
common' or 'common ingredient'. I mean
it seems to me that there are literal
senses of 'have something in common', and
that by drawing attention to them we
see something about the rather more

63. BCU KORNER

metaphorical sense of   'that has
something in common' where we say the
two main things have something in common

KORNER:

Yes, doesn't it bring us to the other
passage,   we're there already!

VESEY:

We are there already, yes, I mean what
I have in mind is well if, if, let, let
allow me to make a sort of demonstration

64. DEMONSTRATION OF
    KEYS, GLASSES AND COINS

here. On the Brown Book: keys, glasses
and coins. One display, now another one -
and I ask, What have the two displays
in common? Answer: the glasses That's
one perfectly absolutely literal

65. CU KORNER

sense of 'have something in common'. Now
if you remember that and then say that

66. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

these three objects have something in
common in that they're all books or
three red things, tulips and calendars
and something else have something in

common in that they're all red, then you

67. BCU KORNER

realise that the expression 'have something

in common' is being used in different

68. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

senses. Whether you call one literal and

one metaphorical I don't mind but they're

being used in different senses. And this

on the sort of explanation

casts some light/that is offered of

our applying the same word, the same

general word, to the number of different

things which consists in saying that

69. BCU KORNER

we do so because they 'have something in

common', or because we see that they 'have

70. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

something in common'. And it seems to me

that this is one of the main points which

71. BCU KORNER

Wittgenstein was making in the Brown

Book anyway.

BAMBROUGH:

72. CU BAMBROUGH

Well as with many of the expressions

that it's natural to use in talking

about this problem, and I feel drawn in

two opposed ways. One can put the

point, as Wittgenstein sometimes puts it,

73. CU KORNER

by saying that we don't need a

justification for applying a word, and

74. CU BAMBROUGH

mean by that that we don't need the

sort of justification that Socrates

thought we always needed.

KORNER:

Yes.

BAMBROUGH:

But one could equally put the same point, and this is what makes the presentation of philosophy so confusing, by saying that of course we need justification and we have it but it
that
doesn't take the form/Socrates thought it had to take. And I think this is quite characteristic of philosophical problems: that the things we are naturally inclined to say always need a corrective from something else that we're naturally inclined to say. The problem arises from there being a conflict between one thing it's natural to say and
it
another thing that/is equally natural
that
to say. So/we identify here three different things and yet the very use of the word 'identify' suggests that we
them
relate/in a way. Now there are three distinct objects, and three objects of the same kind, so there we have what Plato talked about, 'the one and the many' - 'the same and the different'. And philosophers have been at war with each other because both sides in these wars have thought that either the identity must win the day or the differenc

either the plurality or the unity.
Wittgenstein perhaps more than any other
philosopher of recent centuries has
helped us to see that we can combine
the emphasis on the 'unity' that impresses
some philosophers with an emphasis on
the 'plurality' that impresses others.

KORNER:

75. CU KORNER

What I would say is that when I call
a book a book, an integer an integer,
a chair a chair, I have a reason-and it
is my task as a philosopher to make
this reason explicit. I may not know
the reason but I think the problem of
universals and philosophical problems
in general are concerned with making
explicit assumptions which are implicit.
If somebody said to me that you are
calling this book a book without any
explicit or implicit reason, then I
would say this clearly is not my
opinion.

VESEY:

76. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH

And Wittgenstein, I think, would say that
we must discuss what the difference is
between an explicit reason and an
implicit reason.

77. CU KORNER	The sort of reason a person cannot have without knowing he has it, and the sort of reason which he can have without knowing it.
	KORNER: That is a very interesting question and his, his problem is not incompatible with mine. I am more interested in the first than in the second, which I think is largely psychological.
	BAMBROUGH:
78. 2-s. VESEY/BAMBROUGH ZOOM IN to BCU BAMBROUGH	I think we can get clearer about the technique here if we think of a passage in the Investigations where he talks about family resemblances and again
79. BCU KORNER	about games, and says: don't insist that there's something in common, don't think about the matter and conclude that there's something in common, look and see whether
80. BCU BAMBROUGH	there is. Now one can imagine somebody parodying this remark. Here is Wittgenstein, the great obscurantist philosopher, telling his pupils not to think, whereas what he's doing by saying 'don't think' is opposing the assumption one is liable to make about what is the appropriate form of thought here. And one might take a parallel from a perfectly

non-philosophical context. Suppose the golf professional advising the poor amateur says,"You're trying too hard,- don't try so hard". Now he doesn't want that golfer to give up making an effort-he wants him to make a better directed effort, an effort fitter for the task in hand. Now when Wittgenstein says 'don't think' he means, even if he's not aware of the fact, 'think in a manner more appropriate for this kind of problem'.And when he says, 'there is no justification' he at least sometimes means, 'there isn't anything of the only kind that you the reader or Socrates will count as a justification'. But that doesn't mean that we are not justified, as he says in one place, 'to use a word without justification is not to use it without right,it's not to be unjustified in using it'.

81. CU KORNER
82. CU BAMBROUGH

83. CU KORNER

KORNER:

I agree if you say without explicit justification, and to come back to your golf example, and I don't play golf but if I did play golf I would as a philosopher be very interested in making explicit the rules of golf.

You see in making explicit/the reasons for

my beautiful play, doing this stroke,

in showing what the rules of golf are

to which this beautiful stroke without

my knowing conforms.

BAMBROUGH:

So long as you were willing to recognise

that the professional, who wasn't as

good as you are at making things

explicit, was better at golf.

KORNER:

Oh sure.

BAMBROUGH:

But equally we don't have to be as

explicit and articulate, as Socrates

hoped we might become, in order to be

extremely efficient users of our

language and our concepts.

KORNER:

Oh, I entirely agree.

VESEY:

On that note of agreement that philosopher,

may at least succeed in making explicit

the rules of golf, Stephan Korner, Renford

Bambrough, thank you.

84. CU BAMBROUGH

85. CU KORNER

86. CU BAMBROUGH

87. CU KORNER

88. 3-s. KORNER/VESEY/BAMBROUGH

89. CU KORNER

90. 3-s. KORNER/VESEY/BAMBROUGH

91. Taking part were
Professor Stephan Korner
and Renford Bambrough

92. with
Professor Godfrey Vesey

93. Lighting Cameraman   A.A. Englander
Sound Recordist   Malcolm Campbell
Film Editor   Adam Dawson

94. Production
Mary Hoskins

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