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'My foundations': Wittgenstein on Normativity of Language

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It is well-known that the later Wittgenstein turns from a representational view of language to one that conceives language as embedded in a web of practices in life. This paper aims to bring to light a crucial yet widely neglected point in his notion of normativity, which, I contend, is implicit in his practical conception of language. On the grounding of rule-following, in particular, in the Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, he reaches that significant point: I let a rule compel me; acting in this way is 'one of my foundations'; I adopt the rule, and decide (not merely make judgments) from time to time in a normative practice. Such a spontaneous kind of authenticity is inherent in Wittgenstein's view of rule-governed practices. I shall take the route of reviewing Robert Fogelin's and Alice Crary's readings of Wittgenstein in order to show that these interesting accounts are inadequate in fully capturing Wittgenstein's insight on normativity as a phenomenon in human lives. For the part about 'my foundations' is missing in their accounts.

Both Fogelin and Crary are focused on the scenario in PI §183, where a student seems to have mastered the right way to continue a numerical series 2, 4, 6, 8 ..., but after 1000, he goes on with 1004, 1008 and so on. Only then is it realized that he grasps the rule '+2' incorrectly. I contend that this scenario indicates important features of the continuity, regularity or stability dimension of normativity but that it is too simple to reveal the dynamic dimension, where the point on 'my foundations' is saliently relevant. In Wittgenstein's view, speaking a language is to be understood from a plain view of how we regularly do, as Fogelin highlights. Moreover, as Crary indicates, to learn a language or master a concept, a person is practically oriented towards the world with a 'moral outlook'; subjective sensibilities and visions of life should not be abstracted away from objectivity. Yet, further, the language that I practice is part of my life. Ultimately, I cannot give justification anymore but say: this is the way I do. The 'must' here is a matter of my life's imperative. The fact that my life is finite explains my 'leaps' at moments of radical uncertainty. Any interpretation of Wittgenstein's notion of language would be incomplete if such groundwork is not given its deserved considerations.