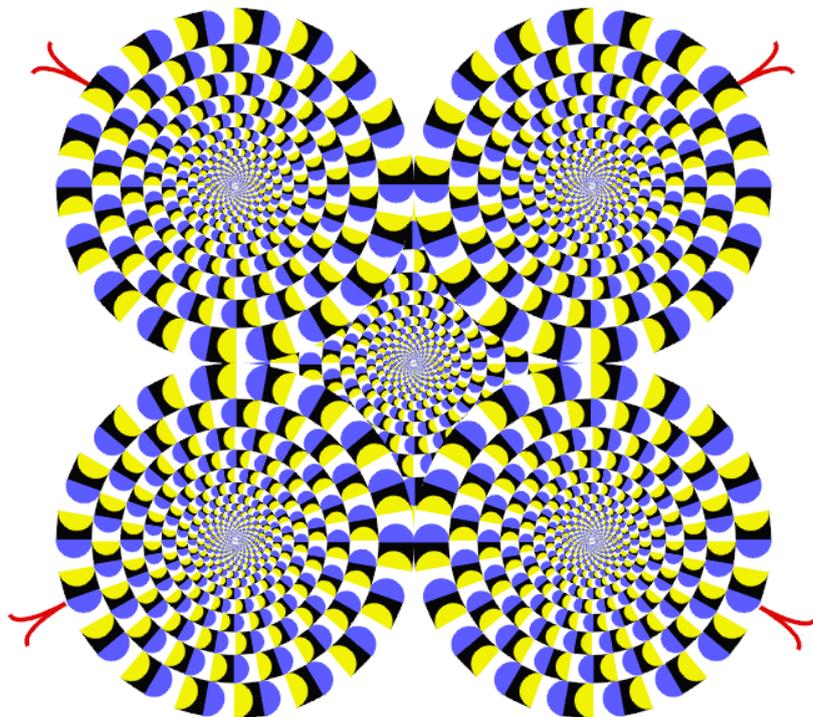
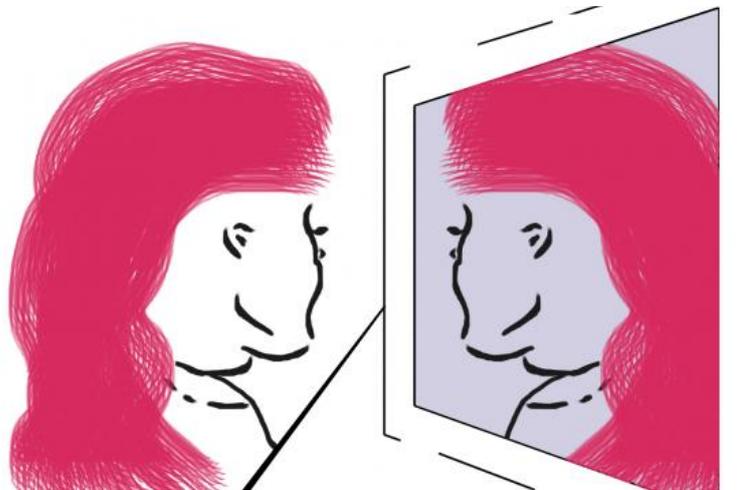
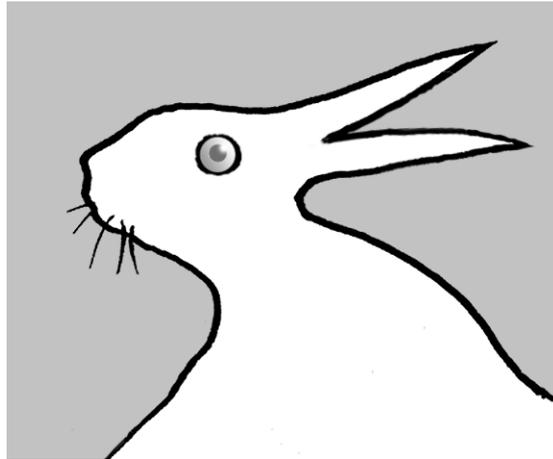


Aspect-Perception & Racism



Some Quotations

Look at a stone and imagine it having sensations.—One says to oneself: How could one so much as get the idea of ascribing a sensation to a thing? One might as well ascribe it to a number!—And now look at a wriggling fly and at once these difficulties vanish and pain seems able to get a foothold here, where before everything was, so to speak, too smooth for it. And so, too, a corpse seems to us quite inaccessible to pain.—Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead, is not the same. All our reactions are different. (Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations* para. 284)

My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul. (Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Part 2, section iv)

Anybody who is in our vicinity exercises a certain power over us by his very presence, and a power that belongs to him alone, that is, the power of halting, repressing, modifying each movement that our body sketches out. If we step aside for a passer-by on the road, it is not the same thing as stepping aside to avoid a billboard; alone in our rooms, we get up, walk about, sit down again quite differently from the way we do when we have a visitor. (Simone Weil – from *The Iliad or The Poem of Force*)

And I must distinguish between the 'continuous seeing' of an aspect and the 'dawning' of an aspect. The picture might have been shewn me, and I never have seen anything but a rabbit in it. Here it is useful to introduce the idea of a picture-object. For instance would be a 'picture-face'. In some respects I stand towards it as I do towards a human face. I can study its expression, can react to it as to the expression of the human face. A child can talk to picture-men or picture-animals, can treat them as it treats dolls. (Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Part 2, section xi)

Some Comments

The attitude towards a soul that Wittgenstein talks about and the difference in responsiveness to human beings (and living things more generally) that Simone Weil refers to are what might be understood as the grammatical foundations of our moral and psychological concepts. In other words, that we react in such ways to events and to the reactions of others to those events conditions the concepts we use in our assessments of others (it is why, for example, we cannot accuse a stone of being sentimental!). Our behaviour towards one another and the external environment more generally, conditions the conceptual space in which we can locate our sense of humanity.

An attitude towards a soul can be understood as a form of continuous aspect-perception. This is required for the possibility of aspect-dawning (we have to take something as a picture without question if there is to be the possibility of aspect-dawning in relation to what it represents; similarly, we have to take what we see as a human being if anything further is to be revealed about them).

Aspect-Blindness is the inability to take something *as* something – one has to learn it instead. This is a characteristic of some forms of autism – its sufferers have to learn when a face is smiling; those without autism just see a smile. Thus, a sufferer of autism who needs to learn which facial configurations amount to a smile will be unable to experience the “dawning of an aspect” (such as suddenly seeing a smile as malicious as opposed to friendly) because they will need to learn the configurations associated with these kinds of expression. If there is no change in the configuration of facial muscles (as there is no change in the picture of the duck-rabbit) then this will be impossible.