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Racism and conceptual analysis: A defense of the Wittgensteinian approach

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RACISM AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS:
A DEFENSE OF THE WITTGENSTEINIAN APPROACH

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Para mi mamá, Elena Urquídez,

y la memoria de mi papá, Elías Urquídez,

con amor

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PREFACE

My dissertation develops a philosophical defense of Ludwig Wittgenstein's purely descriptive (or clarificatory) approach to conceptual analysis within the context of the philosophy of race. Wittgenstein is famous for saying that philosophy leaves everything where it is. By this he means that philosophy describes ordinary usage and does not explain, justify or criticize it, since neither its goal nor its result is a kind of hypothesis or theory. He argues that perspicuous clarification of ordinary usage results in the dissolution of philosophical confusion.[1] The language to be analyzed in this dissertation is philosophical discourse in conjunction with ordinary usage of 'racism' and its cognates (e.g., 'racist,' 'racial disregard,' 'racial disrespect,' and so on).

My defense of Wittgenstein can be helpfully framed as a reply to a common and plausible concern of normative philosophers: "Why should we (normative philosophers) take Wittgenstein's philosophy seriously when our interests are fundamentally at odds with his? He settles for mere description, we do not. He seeks

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[1] The terms *theory* and *analysis* mark a significant conceptual distinction; however, the terms we use to mark it are not as important as the distinction itself. It might be argued, for example, that pure description/clarification is a kind of theory. In that case, I would allow the objector to retain her use of these words. To this I would reply that we must then differentiate two distinct *kinds* of theory, namely, theory that aims at, and results in, the definition of a concept-term and theory that aims at, and results in, the clarification of existing definitions.

clarity for its own sake whereas we think clarity should subserve other ends; further, we believe that it is sometimes important to reform and revise ordinary language for the sake of achieving other, more important, ends. Therefore, a purely descriptive approach to normative concepts is either of little or no value to us."

The objection can also be motivated by observing that an important disanalogy differentiates normative philosophy (moral, social and political philosophy) from philosophy of science and metaphysics. Many if not most philosophers who analyze concepts such as *language*, *understanding*, *knowledge*, *pain*, *necessity*, etc., are interested in understanding them as such. For they want to know what 'pain' *signifies*, not some novel reconstruction of what it could (or should) signify. Thus, it is easy to appreciate the value of pure description in these fields. The same, however, is not true of normative concepts such as *racism*, *sexism*, *pornography*, *justice*, and so on. Normative philosophers are often motivated by practical concerns which they think it important to resolve, and resolution often requires revising the target concept. However, if philosophical analysis should aim at revising ordinary usage, then a philosophical approach that aims at leaving ordinary usage where it is seems to both miss the point and get us nowhere.

A partial reply to this line of objection is that the Wittgensteinian philosopher need not object to revisionist and prescriptive theories; certainly, I have no objection to revisionist definitions of 'racism.' If normative analyses of 'racism' are possible and valuable, it does not follow that clarificatory analyses of 'racism' have no value for normative philosophy. The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate this value; to

show that the philosophy of racism can greatly benefit from Wittgenstein's purely descriptive method, which aims at conceptual clarity for its own sake.

To this it might be objected that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is incompatible with normative approaches that 'do not leave everything as it is.' The objector, however, conflates incompatibility with distinctiveness. 'Philosophy leaves everything as it is' is not a philosophical thesis, a claim about what philosophy *must* be. To dispel with this notion, I argue (in the introduction and chapter 1) that his definition provides a rule for the use of 'philosophy.' As such, it is *one* among many norms for doing philosophy. Consider the rule, 'The king moves one square at a time.' If someone were to introduce the rule 'The king moves exactly as the queen does,' the latter would *not* contradict the former since it would not undermine the game of chess. It would simply introduce a new practice, a new game. For even if we went on to call the alternative practice 'chess,' the former practice would still exist (i.e., could still be played). The same goes for Wittgenstein's explanations of philosophy.

The real question, then, is this: What purpose does his philosophical norm serve? The goal is to achieve conceptual clarity. Since the aim is not to introduce a new practice, but to understand the current one, philosophy *must* leave everything where it is. The idea here is something like this: Understanding of our language-games with 'racism' will not be achieved by revising the rules of current usage, for the need that is addressed by clarifying existing explanations of 'racism' is not addressed by introducing new explanations. *If* one seeks to understand, say, the phenomenon of racism as it actually exists, in its full range of manifestations, and if one seeks to understand the

concept of racism in its full inconsistency and contested state, *then* one's analysis must not alter the rules of existing language-games with 'racism.' In short, pure description of linguistic norms is a necessary condition for understanding them *as they are*.

The next question that arises is whether Wittgensteinian descriptions perform their function well. That is, do they enable us to achieve understanding of existing philosophical practice? At the end of the day, Wittgenstein's account of philosophy is to be vindicated or refuted by its fruits. The issue, in other words, is not whether Wittgenstein's definition of 'philosophy' gets the phenomenon *right*, but whether his philosophy does valuable philosophical *work*. Pragmatic justification is what we are after. I argue that it does the valuable philosophical work of dissolving various conceptual confusions in contemporary theories of racism.

My dissertation's central thesis, then, is this: Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is relevant to the philosophy of racism by virtue of its potential to provide perspicuous clarifications of 'racism.' It is the burden of chapters 2-6 to substantiate this claim.

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ABSTRACT

Urquidez, Alberto G. Ph.D., Purdue University, August 2016. Racism and Conceptual Analysis: A Defense of the Wittgensteinian Approach. Major Professor: Leonard Harris.

This dissertation defends Ludwig Wittgenstein's grammatical approach to philosophy in the context of contemporary theories of racism. Grammatical analysis does not aim at theory-construction, but at conceptual clarity that is free from conceptual confusion. My aim is to dissolve conceptual confusion in contemporary theories of racism. I clarify ordinary uses of 'racism' and its cognates, and key analytical terms (e.g., 'description,' 'correct use,' 'definition,' 'disagreement,' and so on). Whereas contemporary 'descriptive approaches' are explanatory on the model of hypothetico-deductive theories in the natural sciences, the grammatical method is purely descriptive on the model of clarifying the rules of a legal code or game.

Currently, there are few defenses of Wittgenstein's grammatical approach in the normative domain (e.g., moral, social and political philosophy) although that is slowly changing. Most philosophers who seek to extend Wittgenstein to this domain deliberately violate his central commitment to pure description ('philosophy leaves everything as it is'), for it is typical of this field to resolve practical problems. Thus, the so-called quietist objection states that pure description is necessarily conservative, since

it precludes the possibility of criticizing ordinary usage. Most Wittgenstein-inspired approaches concede this point and proceed to reject pure description.

The quietist objection is shown to be misguided (in chapter 1), for it rests on the dubious assumption that pure description is incompatible with critical and revisionist philosophical approaches. The Wittgensteinian need not object to Wittgenstein-inspired philosophers who appropriate elements of his picture of language for their own purposes, including those who revise, criticize and extend grammar. However, Wittgenstein's purely descriptive method is shown to be essential to the achievement of conceptual clarity that is free from conceptual confusion. To abandon it, therefore, is to engage in a different philosophical project by virtue of pursuing some other end.

My argument in defense of Wittgenstein's grammatical method is that clarity about both the concept of racism and conceptual analysis can dispel conceptual confusion in contemporary theories of racism. The main targets of my arguments are Clevis Headley, Joshua Glasgow, Leonard Harris, and Jorge L. A. Garcia. I also engage the work of Lawrence Blum and Charles Mills. My aim is not to offer a grammatical overview of racism's vast conceptual terrain, but to focus on key manifestations of racism to dissolve confusion.

Conceptual clarity does not merely undermine some theories of racism, for the confusions I dissolve are methodological in nature. The positive upshots include:

- Clarity about the difference between a definition of 'racism' and a description of racism (introduction)

- Clarity about the sense in which a definition of 'racism' is 'correct' (chapter 2)

- Clarity about the role of 'adequacy conditions' in descriptive theories of racism (chapter 3)

- Clarity about the nature of 'disagreement about racism' (chapters 4-5)

- Clarity about the distinction between 'descriptive' and 'prescriptive' approaches (chapter 6)

In each case, the dissolution of conceptual confusion is connected with greater clarity. What begins to emerge is a more nuanced understanding of 'theory of racism.' For example, empirical and *a priori* approaches are shown to pursue different goals. As such, these different approaches are not inherently incompatible.

My dissertation makes two substantial contributions to the philosophy of race. First, it dissolves substantial forms of conceptual confusion in contemporary theories and approaches to racism. Second, my heuristic defense of Wittgenstein's grammatical approach establishes its pragmatic value for the philosophy of race.

My dissertation also makes a substantial contribution to Wittgenstein studies. It does four things, which, *taken together*, have not been done in the field: (a) it applies Wittgenstein's method to the normative domain, (b) without rejecting his central claim that philosophy is purely descriptive; (c) without rejecting the possibility of normative approaches; and (d) without falling victim to the objection that his purely descriptive approach is "quiet" on social issues and is therefore politically conservative.

INTRODUCTION:

WITTGENSTEIN, GRAMMAR, AND THE METHOD OF PURE
DESCRIPTION

1. Philosophical Problems as Conceptual Confusions

The 20th century Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, wrote two classic

philosophical texts, both of which revolutionized philosophy. My dissertation takes

its inspiration from the second, *Philosophical Investigations* (PI).[2] It offers the first critical

assessment of contemporary theories of racism from a distinctly Wittgensteinian

perspective. My focus is on the methodological claims and presuppositions of these

theories, for I aim to resolve the following question: What is a descriptive theory of

racism? The positive upshot of my analyses and assessments is a new way of thinking

about the correct definition of 'racism,' descriptive and prescriptive approaches to

racism, and the nature of substantive disagreement about racism, among other things.

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[2] In Wittgenstein studies, there is a division between 'early' and 'later' Wittgenstein, for in his later years, Wittgenstein repudiated many central ideas of his first masterpiece, *Tractatus* (1961). His *magnum opus*, *Philosophical Investigations* (2009), was published posthumously in 1953, although he completed 'Part 1' of the *Investigations* by about 1945. (In the fourth edition of the *Investigations*, 'Part 2' is renamed "Philosophical Psychology – A Fragment" to reflect the fact that the editors believe it to be an independent work. See Hacker's "The Text of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Wittgenstein 2009, xviii-xxiii).) The *Investigations* (previously known as Part 1) should be read alongside *The Big Typescript: TS 213* (2013) and *The Blue and Brown Books* (1958), the book's major precursors. Other 'later' works that both extend Wittgenstein's later philosophy and elucidate remarks in the *Investigations* include his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (1983)*, Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volumes I and II* (1988), and *On Certainty* (1969). These works are the most important, but they do not exhaust Wittgenstein's writing in the later period (see, e.g., 1972; 1974; 1980).

Wittgenstein's philosophy has been appropriated by various philosophers, many of whom manifest incompatible approaches to philosophy. The interpretation I follow here is called the *therapeutic school* of later Wittgenstein interpretation, which is also the dominant interpretation and, in my view, the correct one. The goal of philosophy, according to this reading, is the dissolution of philosophical confusion. This philosophical school acquires its name and inspiration from passages like these: "There is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were" (PI 133), "The philosopher treats a question; like an illness" (PI 255), and others (e.g., PI 309). The principal champions of the therapeutic approach, on the contemporary scene, are, first and foremost, Peter M. S. Hacker, as well as Gordon Baker[3] and Hans-Johann Glock, among others.[4]

Conceptual analysis has always been essential to the practice of philosophical analysis, however its proper method and goal remain controversial. As I use the term, *conceptual analysis* is the attempt to systematically understand a network of closely connected concepts for the purposes of resolving philosophical problems. Some

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[3] I am referring to the early Gordon Baker who co-authored (with Peter Hacker) the first two (of four) volumes of the definitive commentary on Wittgenstein's *magnum opus*, entitled *Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*. In later years the late Baker's understanding of Wittgenstein drastically changed. He defended a unique reading of the *Investigations*. See Baker (2001).

[4] There are other philosophers that I include on this list who have not adopted, and might even reject, the title of 'therapeutic philosophy' as descriptive of their own work. I include them because it seems to me that their work bears substantial and undeniable affinities to the therapeutic reading of later Wittgenstein. Principally, this includes much if not most of the work within the Swansea tradition of Wittgenstein interpretation, including that of Rush Rhees, Dewi Phillips, Howard Mounce, and, to a more or lesser extent, some of their pupils, such as Patrick Horn and Richard Amesbury. Strands of the therapeutic tradition are also found in the work of James Conant, Stanley Cavell, Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, Norman Malcolm, Cora Diamond, Hans Sluga, and many others.

philosophical problems are functions of conceptual confusion. In such cases, conceptual analysis can 'resolve' a philosophical problem by clarifying the relevant regions of our conceptual framework for the purpose of dissolving conceptual confusion. Thus, concepts that are closely related or likely to be conflated are good candidates for clarification. *Descriptive analysis* may be defined as the method of offering perspicuous descriptions of our conceptual framework for the sake of dissolving conceptual confusion. 'Description' here designates clarification of linguistic practice, e.g., usage of 'racism' within a variety of contexts of use.

Conceptual confusion is confusion about a concept, or more commonly, about a network of interconnected concepts. It comes in a variety of forms. Typically, however, it assumes the form of holding a false belief on the basis of believing something else that is false, which is taken for granted. For instance, suppose I believe that the present kind of France is bald. Then my belief in this case is clearly *false*, but it is also *confused*, for my belief assumes that there is a present king of France—which is wrong, since France is no longer a monarchy. Thus, conceptual confusion is distinct from (often it is something in additional to) merely holding a false belief. Although confusion can be expressed in a false belief, it is standardly *predicated* on some additional false belief.

Wittgenstein thinks that philosophical problems are functions of conceptual confusion. One piece of evidence in support of this claim is the fact that philosophical disputes rarely find a *correct* and *final* answer. Philosophical questions like 'Is abortion morally permissible?', 'Does God exist?', 'Are humans free?', and so

on, are characteristically irresolvable, or so it seems. It appears that such disputes are endless. One explanation for why that is so is that humans are *ignorant* about the true nature of things. Hence, one thinks that if one had infinite knowledge or better scientific methods one could settle the philosophical question at hand. The Wittgensteinian, however, rejects this explanation.

Philosophical problems are indeed 'difficult' to resolve. However, for the Wittgensteinian, their difficulty does not reflect human ignorance, lack of evidence, and so on. Rather, their difficulty consists in their unanswerability. Such problems cannot be answered because they have no correct answer. Philosophical questions standardly rest on false presuppositions. In this way, they are analogous to the question: 'Is the present king of France bald?' One cannot properly answer this question 'Yes, he is' or 'No, he is not.' For the question assumes something false, namely, that there is a present king of France. Wittgenstein thinks that philosophical problems are like this; we debate them endlessly, as though there were a right answer, when in fact it is the philosophical question that is the problem. Philosophical problems are not legitimate problems but pseudo-problems.

Wittgenstein famously held that philosophical problems have the form: 'I don't know my way about' (PI 122). If Wittgenstein is correct about their being pseudo-problems, then many characteristic attitudes and behaviors of philosophy are signs or symptoms of conceptual confusion. Philosophical problems, for example, are regularly met with:

- puzzlement about a philosophical dilemma, where both options strike us as impossible (or strike us as the necessarily correct answer)

- having the slightest idea where to begin answering a philosophical question (especially metaphysical questions of the form 'What is X?' or 'What does "X" mean?' and 'Is X real?' E.g., What is time?)

- the inability to articulate one's own views about a philosophical issue in a coherent way or to answer relevant objections

- feeling trapped or unable to make sense of an analysis of explanation (when that analysis or explanation is not confused)

These are simply some examples of common reactions to philosophical problems.

Here is one of Wittgenstein's characterizations of the common feeling one has when

caught up in a web of confusion:

> Here it is difficult to keep our heads above water, as it were, to see that we must stick to matters of everyday thought, and not to get on the wrong track where it seems that we have to describe extreme subtleties, which again we are quite unable to describe with the means at our disposal. We feel as if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers. (PI 106)

If the above features are characteristic marks of a philosophical problem, then

conceptual confusion is the very essence of a philosophical problem. The aim of the

philosopher is to bring about conceptual clarity, which can be hard to come by. Thus,

pseudo-problems cannot be *answered* or *settled*. The only proper approach to them is to

dissolve them, like a block of ice in water. Such problems need to be made to *disappear*,

not answered by means of theory-construction and the construction of philosophical

hypotheses (PI 109). For philosophy is not a kind of science or meta-science, but a

method for dissolving deeply ingrained conceptual confusions.

One of the implications of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is that there can be no theories and theses in philosophy (PI 128). Philosophical theorizing is to be replaced by 'conceptual analysis.' Baker and Hacker elaborate:

> Philosophical problems and difficulties rest on misunderstandings (MS 109 (Vol. V), 298) — conceptual misunderstandings. They do not require new discoveries, but patient unravelling. (The door does open — one need only understand the lock and turn it in the right way.) It is not the task of philosophy to set up a 'system of the world', but only to intervene where conceptual difficulties and confusions emerge (VoW 125). (2005, 277)

Since philosophical confusion is conceptual in nature, I will use 'philosophical confusion' and 'conceptual confusion' synonymously. However, it should be noted that philosophical confusion is only one kind of conceptual confusion, for not all conceptual confusion is philosophical. For instance, if I wrongly think that tomatoes are fruit, then I do not merely hold a false belief. I also suffer from conceptual confusion; specifically, I manifest confusion about the meaning of 'fruit' and 'vegetable.' Yet there is nothing particularly philosophical about my confusion in this case. On the other hand, if I were puzzled about whether God is capable of lifting a rock so heavy that even he cannot lift it, then my confusion is philosophical.

What makes the pursuit of conceptual clarity a philosophical endeavor? After all, is it not the case that conceptual clarity can be sought *outside* of philosophy? And is it not the case that there are non-philosophical disciplines that pursue conceptual clarity for its own sake (e.g., cultural anthropology)? The Wittgensteinian does not deny that conceptual clarity might be pursued for any number of reasons. On the contrary, he points out that his own philosophical method ('grammatical

investigation') might be deployed for other purposes.[5] For example, it might be pursued for the sake of satisfying a human craving for a general overview—which is to say, for its own sake. Clarity becomes a *philosophical* goal when it is pursued within the context of philosophical puzzlement, that is, when the confusion in question arises from the contemplation of some philosophical problem or other.

What makes the *method* of conceptual analysis philosophical is the fact that it *aims* at addressing philosophical concerns, problems and puzzles. For the method of conceptual analysis can achieve conceptual clarity and such clarity is the antidote to many traditional philosophical problems—e.g., the problems of metaphysics, which Wittgenstein argues are mired in conceptual confusion.[6] So conceptual analysis is a way of engaging in the venerable tradition of philosophy, a way of 'resolving' philosophical problems:

> The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer

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[5] As discussed in section 2, below, grammatical investigations involve clarifications of grammar. Baker and Hacker identify three differences in Wittgenstein's use of 'grammar' and the grammarians' use. Here I only state the first two (the third is the block quote on page 15): "1. The important difference between the grammarian's interest in the use of words and the philosopher's lies in their purposes (AWL 31). True enough, grammarians (as opposed to lexicographers) concern themselves relatively little with meaning, focusing on syntax, whereas the philosopher is concerned largely with meaning. But Wittgenstein clearly thought (*infra*) that there was no *essential* boundary between what is called 'syntax' and what is called 'semantics'. It is our interests that make us draw these distinctions, and from some points of view they are highly artificial. In particular, from the point of view of Wittgenstein's concerns, the distinction is unnecessary and obscures aspects of language and its use that need to be highlighted. / 2. Philosophical grammar is concerned with rules for the use of words, *just as ordinary grammar and lexicography are*. In this respect, it is unlike the postulated rules of logical syntax for as yet undiscovered logically proper names." (2009, 60-61)

[6] "The point of striving for an overview *is* to clear up philosophical difficulties, to make the troubles disappear. Where there are none (say in culinary discourse), there is no point in striving for an overview of concepts. For where there are no such troubles, there is nothing to make disappear. The field of philosophy is limited by the field of our philosophical troubles (MS 150, 32)" (Baker and Hacker 2005, 284).

> tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. – Instead, a method is now demonstrated by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off. —— Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. (PI 133)

Wittgenstein believes that the method of describing our conceptual framework is the 'correct' philosophical method, not however in the sense that it finally gets the right answer, for the 'right answer' to a philosophical question is the rejection of the problem it tries to pose. This is why, in Wittgenstein's view, there cannot be true philosophical theses, theories or explanations in philosophy (PI 128). Instead, perspicuous descriptions provide the 'correct' answer to a philosophical problem in the sense that they produce conceptual clarity that dissolves it.

One of the reasons why conceptual clarity is hard won is that conceptual confusions arise upon reflection. Our language evolved for all the practical reasons that language is used for: to represent; to describe; to greet; to condemn; to warn; to threaten; to explain; and so on. These are the things we do with language, but philosophy arises when one steps back from the ordinary usage of language to reflect upon its nature (i.e., the nature of our concepts). Our language did not evolve to satisfy these reflective, philosophical practices. So we do not know our way about our conceptual framework. For instance, many of us know how to use the words 'tiny' and 'small,' but very few of us can *explain* the salient difference in meaning. This nuanced understanding normally makes no difference in ordinary discourse, but it might be significant in special contexts of application. Similarly, the terms 'racism' and 'racial ill' are intelligible enough to competent speakers of the language but confusion about racism might arise for those who are unclear about this distinction.

Another reason why philosophy is hard is that conceptual confusions come in *families*. That is, one confusion is intricately and systematically linked to the other members of the family. A single philosophical problem can be, and typically is, a matter of manifesting—not *one* or even *two* types of confusion—but several confusions, which typically reinforce one another. Furthermore, conceptual confusions are easily multiplied by the philosophical temptation to construct a theory, offer a definition, or construct an argument to resolve the matter. For we might turn our attention to new concepts and connections which might raise their own difficulties. The result is that our investigation can veer off into more dead-ends that make it more difficult (not easier) to dissolve our initial confusion.

To properly dispel conceptual confusion perspicuous understanding of *an entire network of concepts* may be required. Such understanding may take the form of a table or flow chart which marks important conceptual distinctions, but it can also take the form of a philosophical essay (or dissertation!). A conceptual overview is what Wittgenstein refers to as a 'survey' or 'surveyable representation.' The analogy of a roadmap is helpful here. Knowing how to answer a philosophical question, if Wittgenstein is right, is not a matter of knowing the 'correct' answer, but a matter of explaining why the problem is not a legitimate problem to begin with, and being able to answer objections and further questions that are likely to arise.

> A main source of our failure to understand is that we don't have *an overview* of the use of our words. – Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links*. (PI 122)

The skilled Wittgensteinian philosopher is like someone who knows the ins and outs of a complicated map; hence, one knows which words and phrases signal danger up ahead and which ones signal dead-ends or a new family of confusions. To know how to deal with a philosophical problem is to know one's way about the web of connections that constitute a set of closely connected concepts.

In the above passage Wittgenstein says that lack of a conceptual roadmap is one of the sources of conceptual confusion. Take the problem of time. Augustine famously said that he knows what time is, but only if no one asks him to define it. Thus, we wonder what words like 'time' and 'love' refer to, and when we cannot have the kind of answer we expect, we lose our way about. Part of the difficulty here is that our language is *pictorial*. Linguistic pictures often furnish expectations of what a 'correct' answer should like. For example, when we think of time we think of something 'passing by' and this in turn leads us to think that time is *a thing that passes us by*. However, since we do not 'see time' we assume that time must be a bodiless entity, a floating ethereal substance. Something similar applies to our concept of love. These are classic cases of conceptual confusion.

The pictorial nature of language is also evident in Wittgenstein's descriptions of conceptual confusion: 'hitting a dead-end,' 'being lost,' 'having a mental cramp,' and so on. Thus, an important source of conceptual confusion is the fact that language naturally suggests certain pictures to us: "A *picture* held us captive. And we couldn't get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat

it to us inexorably" (PI 115). Baker and Hacker discuss Wittgenstein's helpful

illustration of a philosophical problem, which arises from a certain picture of what it

is to think, in his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*.

> Similarly, one picture we have of thinking is of *Le Penseur* talking to himself
> (RPP I, §549). But we are prone to misapply this picture, to suppose that
> thinking *is* talking to oneself. And then we suppose that the thoughtful tennis-
> player talks to himself (very quickly) while he is playing, and that the
> thoughtful conversationalist talks to himself while he is talking thoughtfully
> aloud! And we are, perhaps, stopped in our tracks only by the reminder that
> one can talk *to oneself* thoughtfully or thoughtlessly; and if the former, does one
> say everything to oneself twice? Here, we don't know our way around in the
> use of our picture, and that in turn just means that we do not know our way
> around our use of the word 'to think' (ibid.). (2005, 280)

Here the source of confusion is a certain picture that is associated with the word

'thinking.' This picture has a perfectly good application in one context of use, but it is

the wrong picture in other contexts of use.

Conceptual confusion can also be construed as *linguistic confusion*. For another

source of confusion is the search for definitions. For instance, the dispute over the

moral viability of abortion quickly turns on the question of whether the fetus is a

person (that is, an agent deserving of rights and entitlements—specifically, the right

to life). We know that autonomous human beings are persons, but we wonder

whether a fetus is entitled to the same rights. So we ask: What is the definition of

'person'? What are the essential conditions for someone's being a person? Is the mark

of a person conscious awareness? Is having independent existence (i.e., not being

physically dependent on someone else) the mark of a person? Is having goals,

intentions and a sense of life the mark of a person? Such conceptual confusion can

lead us to construct a definition, thesis or theory of personhood. This example

reveals something about the relationship between concepts and language. Concepts

are constituted by definitions. Conceptual confusion, therefore, is typically connected

with misunderstanding about definitions and the meanings of words.

One source of linguistic confusion, other than the search for a definition, is

the fact that a particular form of words might be connected with several techniques

of application, relative to different contexts of application. In other words, one and

the same word might be used in different ways in different contexts of use. As Baker

and Hacker helpfully explain:

> A related source of confusion derives from our failure to notice that although
> a fragment of one language-game may be analogous to that of another,
> nevertheless the two are not homologous. So we mistakenly project features
> of one on to the other, and draw inferences and raise questions that fit one
> but not the other. We say, for example, that it is certain that it will rain today,
> that it is certain that $25 \times 25 = 625$, that it is certain that the world has existed
> for a long time, and that it is certain that I have a toothache. We take it for
> granted that these certainties are, if distinct at all, distinct only in degree
> (proven mathematical truths, we think, have the highest degree of certainty).
> But that is quite wrong. These are different kinds of certainty, with different
> kinds of grounds (or none at all) and different kinds of consequences. (2005,
> 278)

For example, if you witness someone being burned alive and screaming and writing in

pain as a result, you can be certain that this person is in pain. The fact that we cannot

'prove' it by means of a mathematical proof does not mean that we are *less* certain

about this individual's poor fate. However, this suggests that our criteria for 'He is

certainly in pain' and '25 times 25 is certainly 625' are not the same. That is, the word

'certainly' in these two contexts acquires a difference sense or meaning. However, the

fact that the word 'certain' means different things in different contexts was not obvious before we asked the question, 'Does this term always mean the same?' The aforementioned sources are just some of the many sources of conceptual confusion.

In light of the confusions characteristic of philosophy, the goal of philosophy is to achieve: freedom from conceptual confusion, conceptual clarity and perspicuous understanding. These ends are justifiably ends in themselves; that is, they are arguably something valuable for their own sake, for the peace they provide. To be free from conceptual confusion just is to have perspicuous understanding of a philosophical topic. Thus, conceptual clarity, perspicuous understanding and freedom from conceptual confusion should be understood, not as distinct philosophical goals, but three aspects of one and the same understanding and philosophical goal. For to achieve one is to achieve the others, and if one has not fully achieved one of our three goals, one has not yet (fully) achieved the philosophical goal sought after.

My aim in this dissertation is to develop perspicuous clarifications of two kinds: philosophical discourse (e.g., 'correct use,' 'disagreement,' 'definition,' and so on) and racial discourse, i.e., 'racism,' 'racist' and other cognates (henceforth, 'racism'). In both cases the goal is to achieve conceptual clarity—that is, freedom from conceptual confusion about racism and theories of racism. Most of the confusions I address in this dissertation do not arise in 'ordinary language,' if by this

one means disputes that arise in moral, social, and political contexts of application.[7] The confusions I address are pitched at philosophers who have invested much time and acumen thinking about the nature of racism. My claim is that, in reflecting on the nature of racism, they have sometimes expressed serious theoretical confusions (as opposed to practical confusions) in their approaches to racism.

2. Grammatical Propositions and Our Conceptual Scheme

Many aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy will not be discussed in this dissertation; others will be reserved for the specific chapters in which they become relevant. It will be helpful at the outset however to say something about his philosophical method. This section provides a brief sketch of some of the core elements of his philosophical approach. I focus on the key elements that play a central role in many of my reflections and arguments throughout the dissertation. Of course it goes without saying that what follows should be read in connection with the account of philosophy and conceptual confusion detailed in the previous section.

In the previous section I spoke about our 'conceptual framework' and 'conceptual network,' using these terms interchangeably. I will henceforth replace this jargon (for the most part) with Wittgenstein's favorite term for this, which is *grammar*. Grammar, on a broad and everyday definition of the term, consists of the set of rules

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[7] Wittgenstein is sometimes characterized as an ordinary language philosopher. However, this title can be highly misleading, for many philosophers use the term 'ordinary language' to designate 'what ordinary folk say.' This is not how the Wittgensteinian uses the term. Instead, she uses it to refer to a conceptually distinct form of discourse. For instance, I most analyze the language of philosophers. Philosophers are, of course, ordinary folk, but it is not at all clear (and perhaps doubtful) that their opinions and beliefs about racism reflect the views of your average person. I am grateful to Dr. Christopher Yeomans for pushing me to address this point.

that govern the meaningful use of language. When we think of grammar we naturally think of rules for sentence-construction, word-order, word-types, and so on. However, Wittgenstein speaks of 'grammatical propositions.' Grammatical propositions can be understood as statements about our conceptual framework. For instance, 'Red is a color' is a proposition about our concept of *red* (as well as our concept of *color*).

The question thus arises, Why use the odd term 'grammatical proposition' when a more illuminating term like 'conceptual proposition' or 'framework proposition' is available? The reason for the change is both important and helpful. When we think of concepts we are prone to think about some general abstraction which has the properties of transcendence and immateriality. However, when we think about a grammatical proposition we think of a linguistic rule—and that is Wittgenstein is going for. For conceptual propositions just are linguistic rules that govern and orient our behavior, or so Wittgenstein argues. Baker and Hacker explain:

> Wittgenstein was inclined to characterize grammar very generally as all the conditions, the method, necessary for comparing the proposition with reality (PG 88). It incorporates any rules for using expressions that have to be determined antecedently to questions of truth and falsehood. Since explanations of meanings of words are standards for their correct use, all explanations of word meaning fall into grammar. (2009, 61)

The kinds of grammatical rules Wittgenstein is interested in are not syntactical rules, but rules for the use of vocabulary. These rules are expressed in what Wittgensteinian therapists call *explanations of meaning*. This term is shorthand for an explanation of the meaning of a word (i.e., an explanation of what a word means).

Explanations of meaning are identical to *grammatical propositions*. The idea, then, is that syntactical rules do not exhaust grammar, for the lexicon and much more besides (see below) belong to grammar. But what is the point of Wittgenstein's idiosyncratic use of 'grammar'? Why extend the term to denote rules governing the use of words? The reason is that the term suggests an affinity with syntax. Explanations of meaning are analogous to syntax rules, Wittgenstein argues, insofar as both are *linguistic norms* that are laid down as correct—or, rather, laid down as *standards* of correctness and incorrectness. Therefore, as Baker and Hacker observe, rules for the use of words are conditions of sense.[8]

It is important not to confuse a *rule* with the *rule-formulation* (the explanation of meaning) that expresses it.[9] What follows are some examples of rule-formulations (or explanations of meaning):

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[8] Baker and Hacker explain: "Grammarians are prone to distinguish sheer gibberish, such as 'Ab sur ah' from nonsense that consists of significant words jumbled together ungrammatically, such as 'The was it blues no'. This distinction is wholly unobjectionable, but, of course, it is not a distinction between degrees of nonsense – as if the gibberish were more nonsensical than the sequence of English words. For nonsense does not come in degrees. But grammarians are also prone to distinguish the former two kinds of case from such combinations of words as 'Colourless green ideas sleep furiously', the latter allegedly being a 'well-formed' sentence of English (Chomsky), and this in turn from a form of words such as 'This is green all over and yellow all over at the same time', which they would be prone to characterize as false. Wittgenstein disagreed: both word sequences are nonsensical in exactly the same sense; the only difference is in the jingle, the *Satzklang* (AWL 64). Philosophy's concern with grammar lies in detecting well-concealed forms of nonsense. This camouflaged nonsense pervades philosophy, and it is the philosopher's task to bring it to light." (2009, 61)

[9] I adhere to the general distinction between a sentence and what it expresses (namely, a proposition), although it is important to note that sentences only express something in a particular context of use. The word-meanings which are constituents of a sentence do not fully determine the proposition expressed by the sentence. As Putnam (unpublished) observes, 'There is a lot of coffee on the table' can mean a variety of things and which of them is meant depends on context of use. See Conant's (1998) discussion here. I will regularly speak loosely throughout the dissertation. For instance, I might write *'Black is darker than white' is an arbitrary norm* instead of writing *The rule expressed by 'Black is*

1. A bachelor is an unmarried man

2. Black is darker than white

3. This is a chair (as one points to a chair)

4. Racism is like sexism in that it too involves discrimination on the basis of observable traits

5. Chess, checkers and Rush are board games

6. Dogs cannot be racist

(1) is a definition of 'bachelor' and can be looked up in the dictionary. The second, however, does not provide a *definition* of the word 'black.' Nor are you likely to find (3) or (6) in the dictionary. Thus, grammar, according to Wittgenstein, goes far beyond the lexicon. An explanation of meaning is a form of words (e.g., a sentence) that we use to express a rule for the use of a word. These explanations always serve the same general function: to orient behavior in accordance with the expressed rule. At the same time, however, explanations of meaning achieve this general goal by means of more unique and specific functions. Thus, analytic definitions (like (1)) are a special case of explanation of meaning (rather than the paradigm of proper explanation).[10] There are many other kinds, including contrastive explanations (e.g.,

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darker than white' is an arbitrary norm. Similarly, I will say *'He is tall' is either true or false* instead of the more cumbersome *'He is tall' expresses a proposition that is either true or false.*

[10] See Baker and Hacker (2009, 30; 204-205). Elsewhere they write: "Definability by analytic definition is a feature of a concept-word within a given form of representation and relative to its norms of explanation" (221). That is, the criteria for providing a 'correct' analytic definition depends on context of use. A good analytic definition for one purpose might not be a good analytic definition for another. And this is simply to say that the rule that applies in one context may not apply in the other.

(2)), ostensive explanations (e.g., (3)), comparative explanations (e.g., (4), definition by the enumeration of examples (e.g., (5)), exclusionary explanation (e.g., (6)), and so on.

If we look at examples (1)-(6) above and ask 'What is the point of these remarks?' or 'When might we use these sentences?' we are asking for their *function* or *role* in our lives. The role of an explanation of meaning is to facilitate *linguistic understanding*. For to understand any of the above explanations of meaning is to know something about how to use the corresponding word. Earlier, however, we noted that the role of an explanation of meaning is that of *orienting behavior* in accordance with a norm. This means that there is a connection between linguistic understanding and the normative role of the explanation of meaning. The connection is that linguistic understanding (understanding what a word or definition mean, for instance) just *is knowing how to do something*, namely, *knowing how to use words*. Since the point of an explanation of meaning is essentially normative, the above explanations of meaning are *not* descriptions of any kind, but prescriptions of rules for the use of words. Baker and Hacker thus observe that linguistic knowledge consists in three internally related abilities:

> A competent speaker understands the expressions of his language, knows how to use them, can say what he means by their use from context to context. What are the criteria of his understanding? Wittgenstein emphasizes three: correct use of the expression, i.e. use in accordance with the general practice; giving correct explanations of use, i.e. explanations of what the expression as used in a given context mean; and responding appropriately to the use of the expression. (2009, 40)

A competent speaker of the language should, under normal circumstances, have all three abilities.

The preceding paragraphs thus provide an argument for the claim that explanations of meaning are normative propositions (rather than descriptions). To understand the meaning of a word is to have an ability to use language (or rather a wide range of such abilities). Language is therefore a practice, that is, a set of norms. To know a language is not to behave in various ways, but to be able to behave in various ways. Knowledge of language is not knowledge of a set of facts (e.g., that it is raining outside or the height of a mountain), but a set of abilities to *do* various things. It is to be the master of several techniques or skills (PI 150; 199). This is why language is taught and learned by means of *training* rather than *teaching*, where the latter designates communicating a body of facts to a student (PI 5-9). To learn how to use a word is not like learning a set of facts to pass a school test. For the former, unlike the latter, is a matter of being initiated into a practice: being able to *go on* using the word correctly. So linguistic knowledge is knowledge-how rather than knowledge-that, to invoke Ryle's (1949) famous distinction. It is to know how to *react and respond* in the appropriate ways to what others say. *Making sense* of meaningful uses of language is the characteristic mark of a competent speaker of the language. Making sense of what is said is not something that occurs 'in the head' or 'in the mind,' but in practice: for the *ability* to discriminate between correct and incorrect uses of language does not exist in the mind, but in one's rule-governed behavior.

The normative nature of language is further evident in the examination of contexts in which explanations play a characteristic role. Baker and Hacker emphasize two of these contexts. In each case, the point of citing an explanation of meaning is

to facilitate linguistic understanding. The first is a teaching context involving the use of an explanation to teach the meaning of a word. Training, for example, is the basis of language-learning. The role of an explanation of meaning is to get the trainee to acquire the right habits, offer appropriate responses, and so on. Baker and Hacker contrast the learning of a language with learning in other contexts (e.g., reading a college textbook). One does not learn a new language by evaluating arguments and evidence. This is significant because it speaks to the normative role of explanation. What is being learned is a practice, not a set of facts.

The second context is a corrective context involving the use of an explanation of meaning to avert misunderstanding. For we sometimes correct an individual's misapplication of a term by *reminding* her of its proper use. Thus, if someone were to point at a dog and utter 'The dog is racist' we might use explanation (6) to correct this misunderstanding. For correction amounts to *excluding* a form of (linguistic) behavior by setting a limit on the use of 'racist.' This, of course, serves the more general purpose of getting one to conform to the norm in question. Thus, teaching contexts and corrective contexts highlight our *commitment* to linguistic rules. Correction presupposes the *authority* of the definition cited as an objective *standard* for the *correct* use of a word.

Wittgenstein maintains that grammatical propositions are 'arbitrary.' By this he means that linguistic norms are *not* epistemically justifiable (i.e., by reference to reality).

> Grammar does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfil its purpose, in order to have such-and-such an effect on human beings. It only describes, and in no way explains, the use of signs. (PI 496)

> The rules of grammar may be called "arbitrary", if that is to mean that the *purpose* of grammar is nothing but that of language. If someone says, "If our language had not this grammar, it could not express these facts" – it should be asked what "*could*" means here. (PI 497)

The sense in which grammar 'describes' language is that it states the various rules that govern our use of words. For instance, 'Racism is wrong' is a rule that is stated by grammar, but this claim cannot be justified by reference to reality, since it is a norm that we ourselves have stipulated. (We can of course change our norms, but that would not 'refute' it any more than stipulating it would 'vindicate' it.) When he says that grammar is arbitrary he does not mean that it is unimportant or stipulated arbitrarily. He simply means that no epistemic argument can prove it to be true in the sense in which 'He is racist' might be proved (or disproved) to be true. For whereas the latter is an empirical description of reality, the rule 'Racism is wrong' is a norm for description. Norms do not correspond to reality because there is no reality for them to correspond to. (E.g., what fact does 'A bachelor is unmarried' correspond to?)

What, then, makes a grammatical proposition 'true'? It should be evident by now that a true proposition just is one that has been laid down as correct. The proof, then, that a norm is true is given by the fact that we observe it to *be* the norm. That is, a norm is true if and only if it *is* the linguistic norm. For to say that 'Dogs *cannot* be racist' or 'Red *must* be darker than white' is simply to express one's commitment to a certain form (norm) of description. The words 'cannot' and 'must' *express* the

necessity of the norm, which is to say, our unwavering commitment to it *as* a norm. Philosophers, however, are prone to analyze the nature of such necessity in ontological and non-normative terms. We should compare the necessity of an explanation of meaning to 'The king *cannot* move two squares at a time' and 'You *must* not leave me here alone!', which merely express our allegiance to the normative role of the expressed rule, and avoid comparing it to the necessity of a description or prediction, grounded in the laws of nature (e.g., 'The leaves must burn if they are placed in the fire'). The words 'cannot' and 'must' do not *add* to the content of what is said, but to the *force* or *necessity* of what is said (i.e., to the authority of the norm). In other words, the word 'necessity' is capable of misleading us here.

Unlike the necessity of a true empirical prediction, the necessity of a norm does not guarantee that we will *always* follow the rule or that we will *never* transgress it. Linguistic norms are (generally) social conventions, and like all social conventions, they are violable. However, to violate a linguistic rule is to violate a rule for *saying something*, which is to say, for *speaking meaningfully*. Therefore, to violate a linguistic norm is to *fail to say something* with one's words. For instance, 'The chair is racist' says nothing since the sentence fails to conform to rules for the use of 'racist' and 'chair.' It is *meaningless* or *ungrammatical*, not of course by virtue of violating syntax rules for sentence-construction, but in the sense that this form of words is *useless*. There is no standard for the correct use of this form of words and the rules we have for each of the individual words of this sentence do not license this combination of signs. As we will see, grammatical rules are *transformation rules* for empirical propositions.

Grammatical rules are constitutive of our descriptive practices, for describing the world is one of the things we do with words. There is an analogy here with chess. Just as the rules of chess—e.g., 'The king moves one square at a time'—constitute the game of chess, so too do the rules for using words constitute our descriptive practices. For descriptions are expressed in sentences that are constituted by words (e.g., 'My dog is black'), and insofar as these words are meaningful they are governed by grammatical rules. Intelligible descriptions thus presuppose linguistic norms (e.g., rules governing the use of 'dog' and 'black'). Descriptions can be true or false because there are rules that determine what counts as legitimate description; that is, intelligible descriptions conform to the rules we have laid down.

Given that the constituents of our linguistic practices are norms, they are prescriptions rather than descriptions. That is, if explanations of meaning are norms, then they are not descriptions. For as we have said, a norm of description (explanation of meaning) is true if and only if it *is* a norm (for us), not if corresponds to a fact. The implication is that 'Red is a color' does not describe the ontological nature of a certain color and that the concept *color* is not an ontological category but a normative one. One reason why explanations of meaning are not descriptions is that it is characteristic of a norm (but not of a description) that it be possible to transgress it (as when we speak nonsense, e.g., 'Red is not a color'). What is more, to analyze explanations of meaning as descriptions mischaracterizes their function, for "they do not describe, for example, how people speak, but rather define what it is to speak correctly or meaningfully" (Glock 1996b, 324). Defining what it is to speak correctly

is a matter of laying down standards. Standards of correct use determine what can

and cannot be said, i.e., what it is correct (meaningful) and incorrect (meaningless) to

say. So they are conditions of sense and meaning, as Hans-Johann Glock explains:

> The role of necessary propositions is normative, not descriptive. They function as or are linked to "norms of description" or of "description" (see PI, 122, 50, 104, 158; AWL, p. 16; OC, 167, 321). It is this special, nondescriptive role and not the abstract nature of their alleged referents which accounts for their nonempirical character. As norms of description, grammatical rules "antecede" experience in an innocuous sense (RFM, I-156; cf. PR, 143; LWL, p. 12; AWL, p. 90). They can neither be confirmed nor confuted by experience. These norms lay down what counts as intelligible description of reality, establish internal relations between concepts ("bachelor" and "unmarried"), and license transformations of empirical propositions (from "Wittgenstein was a bachelor" to "Wittgenstein was unmarried"). A grammatical proposition like "All bachelors are unmarried" cannot be overthrown by the putative statement "This bachelor is married," since the latter incorporates a nonsensical combination of signs. This antecedence to experience renders intelligible the apparently mysterious "hardness" of necessary propositions and conceptual relations (PI 437; RFM, I-121). It is logically impossible for bachelors to be unmarried, simply because we would not call anybody both "married" and "bachelor." Given our linguistic rules, it makes no sense to apply both terms to one and the same person. Thus Wittgenstein explains logical necessity by reference to the distinction between sense and nonsense which we draw by means of our norms of description. (1996, 202)

To illustrate Glock's point, it will be helpful to contrast the following two

arguments:

(1)	*(2)*
1. Joel is an unmarried man.	1. If Joel is an unmarried man, then Joel is a bachelor.
2. So, Joel is a bachelor.	2. Joel is an unmarried man.
	3. So Joel is a bachelor.

One might be inclined to say that argument (1) is either invalid or an enthymeme that can be reconstructed as (2). It is obviously true that (1) can be restated as (2), but I maintain that (1) is logically *valid* as it stands and that is *not* an enthymeme. For it is impossible to understand an argument if one does not understand the propositions that comprise it (just as it is impossible to understand a sentence if one does not understand the words that comprise it). Now, if one knows or understands the meaning of the term 'unmarried man' in premise 1 of argument (1), then one *thereby* knows or understands the meaning of the term 'bachelor' in conclusion 2 of argument (1). The same goes for knowing the truth of propositions 1 and 2 of argument (1): If one knows that premise 1 of argument (1) is true, then one *thereby* knows that conclusion 2 of argument (1) is true. Therefore, there is an inference rule that guarantees the validity of moving from the truth of 1 to the truth of 2. This inference rule is provided by our vocabulary ('unmarred man' and 'bachelor'). The rule is therefore forged in grammar (i.e., rules for the use of words). Because the validity of argument (1) is forged in grammar, it cannot be undermined by experience. In other words, the inference is *a priori* and does not depend on the inference rule known as *modus ponens*, the operative rule of argument (2).

Argument (2) is a way of making the inference rule that is *implicit* in argument (2) *explicit*. For premise (1) of argument (2) presupposes exactly the same grammatical rule. One way to see this is to ask, What exactly makes premise 1 of argument (2) true? Notice that it is not true on the basis of evidence, for it is knowable *a priori*. Its truth is guaranteed by grammar (i.e., the rules governing the use of its constituent

words). This shows us something about *a priori* truth. To say that a proposition (like

premise 1 of argument (2)) is true *a priori* is simply to say that the *stipulation* or *laying*

down of word-meanings for the proposition's constituent words *guarantees* its truth.

The fact that certain linguistic norms have been *stipulated* or *laid down* as correct

guarantees the truth of an *a priori* truth by virtue of determining the relevant standards

of correctness. For the *a priori* role of our definition of 'bachelor' just is the normative

role it has for us as a grammatical rule (in both arguments (1) and (2)).[11]

Consequently, grammatical propositions (which provide rules for the use of words)

are inference tickets, analogous to formal rules of logic insofar as both kinds of rules

are guarantors of logical validity. Brandom thus distinguishes between *material validity*

which applies to inferences of the form of argument (1) and *formal validity* which

applies to inferences of the form of argument (2).[12] The more basic of the two, the

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[11] According to Brandom, there is a language-game of challenging other people's definitions (or of
critically reflecting and examining on one's own). He calls this practice the language-game of giving
and asking for reasons. This language-game was not analyzed by Wittgenstein, and Wittgensteinians
in general have not given much thought to it (with some exceptions, e.g., Amesbury (2005)).
However, this language-game is consistent with Wittgenstein's account of grammar, and extends it to
critical domains. Brandom's key observation is that explanations of meaning (e.g., definitions) can be
used to *evaluate* other people's commitments, as when we say: 'Institutions *cannot* be racist, so you are
wrong to think otherwise.' The explanation 'Institutions cannot be racist' commits one to a norm of
description, just as 'Institutions can be racist' commits one to an incompatible norm of description.
Philosophy can offer *reasons* in support of one or the other of these explanations of meaning. In this
way, one's *implicit* commitments (norms), once they have been made *explicit*, are open to criticism. As
Brandom writes: "Intentional states and acts have contents in virtue of which they are essentially
liable to evaluations of the 'force of the better reason.' …This 'force of the better reason' is a
normative force. It concerns what further beliefs one is *committed* to acknowledge, what one *ought* to
conclude, what one is *committed* or *entitled* to say or do. Talk of what is a reason for what has to do in
the first instance not with how people do or *would* act but with how they *should* act, what they should
acknowledge" (1994, 17). It is worth noting that Brandom credits Wittgenstein above all, but also
Sellars and Kant, for this normative-pragmatic move.
[12] The truth of the conditional 'If Joel is an unmarried man, then Joel is a bachelor' presupposes the
rule 'A bachelor is an unmarried man.' This grammatical proposition is an inference rule for material

Wittgensteinian argues, is material validity which lays down conditions of sense that are presupposed by all meaningful uses of language.

We have now seen that explanations of meaning are conditions of sense and meaning, on the one hand, and conditions of truth and falsity, on the other. For they antecede questions of truth and falsity by stipulating the criteria for truth and falsity. We have also seen that explanations of meaning are conditions of possibility of experience. For again, they antecede experience as given in descriptions of reality (e.g., descriptions of experience). Explanations of meaning provide conditions of understanding and so logically antecede experiential sentences which deploy the signs that our explanations of meaning explain.[13] The *a priority* of grammar is not a mystery, but is connected with understanding what a word means. For one must first understand a proposition before one can know whether it is true or false; therefore, one must know the rules governing the use of the relevant linguistic terms.

The preceding arguments presuppose the distinction between *empirical truth* and *conceptual truth*, as fundamentally distinct kinds of truth. Whereas the former is a

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validity. Material validity is so-called because it is a function of the material content of a proposition, rather than of the form of an argument. The presentation of an argument's validity in the form of formal validity, as in argument (2), can be misleading. For, following Brandom, argument (2) at best helps to make *explicit* what is already *implicit* in practice (i.e., we normally reason in the form of argument (1), not argument (2)). Philosophical inquiry is aided by explicitly stating definitions and explanations of meaning, since this explication serves to make inferential commitments explicit. It forces us to unpack our commitments and to defend them vis-à-vis what Brandom (2004) calls 'the language-game of giving and asking for reasons.' Thus, I am not suggesting that argument (2) is 'incorrectly' or 'improperly' stated, though one might be misled into thinking that (2) is the *paradigm* of logical validity, in which case (1) will be taken to be an *improper* representation of (2). See Amesbury (2005) for a helpful exposition of Brandom's analysis for Wittgensteinian purposes.
[13] See Conant (1998) for an illuminating discussion of the distinction between meaning and truth, from a Wittgensteinian perspective.

matter of the relation known as fact-correspondence (i.e., the correspondence of *fact* and *description*), the latter is not a matter of correspondence at all, but a normative matter: that is, the connection of a *rule* to its *application*. Thus, the *conceptual framework* the Wittgensteinian seeks to describe is essentially a *normative framework*, for it is constituted by explanations of meaning (i.e., inference rules for material validity). To describe grammar is therefore to describe our conceptual scheme, that is, to describe our normative commitments which are presupposed in our everyday lives.

An important caveat is that grammatical rules governing a single expression can vary across contexts of use. For one word might be used differently (to say different things) in different contexts of application. For example, 'shut up' might express a command to be quiet or the attitude of 'friendly surprise' to a joke. What it expresses, of course, will depend on the context of application. That is, the use of 'shut up' will accord with one set of rules in the first context and a different set of rules in the second. The rules are partly constitutive of each of these practices, just as the rules for the use of the word 'chess' are partly constitutive of the game of chess (i.e., the practice of chess). A rule like 'The king moves one square at a time' provides a rule for the use of 'king.' But it only provides this rule within the context of the game of chess. So the rule is a rule *for playing the game of chess*. In a different context, 'king' can be used to describe a person. Thus, what a word means in any given contexts depends on that context's rules of application. For if the word in question *makes sense* (i.e., is intelligible) then its intelligibility is made possible by the set of norms with which it accords (and not by some other set of norms). Given that use

changes from one context and situation to the next, Wittgenstein's "functional conception of grammatical rules, according to which an expression is a rule if it is employed as a standard of correct use, implies that the logical status of sentences can change according to our way of using them" (Glock 1996b, 133).

With that, we can now say that a *concept*, for Wittgenstein, is a complex of rules (or norms) which *orient* and *govern* our practices. We can also define *language* as a complex of rule-governed practices. Wittgenstein referred to linguistic practices as *language-games*. The term 'language-game' is a philosophical tool that is used to isolate a segment of language (a rule-governed practice) for the purposes of analysis. The term 'language-game' establishes a resemblance between language and game (PI 7, 23), namely, that both are rule-governed activities. In actuality, language-games are not isolatable because they are inextricably and multifariously intertwined with one another and with broader forms of life. As Wittgenstein puts it, they are interwoven with our non-linguistic practices: "I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a 'language-game'" (PI 7). Nonetheless, they are conceptually distinguishable in ways that are helpful for descriptive analysis.

Language, for Wittgenstein, is goal-directed. Terms are coined, explained and used to accomplish various things. And these ends are what give our language-games their point. Wittgenstein elucidates this notion by suggesting that words are akin to

tools.[14] By this he means that language is a means to an end. For "[l]anguage is an

instrument. Its concepts are instruments" (PI 569). Linguistic rules are not followed

for their own sake but for the sake of doing something with language. For example,

language is used to express imperatives, ask questions, describe reality, tell stories,

make jokes, etc. Insofar as words are used to achieve ends, language is goal-directed.

As such, he holds a *pragmatic conception of language*. Units of language are justifiable by

virtue of the ends they enable us to achieve. For, as Wittgenstein reminds us:

> I say, however: if you talk about essence—, you are merely noting a
> convention. But here one would like to retort: there is no greater difference
> than that between a proposition about the depth of the essence and one
> about—a mere convention. But what if I reply: to the *depth* that we see in the
> essence there corresponds the *deep* need for the convention. (Wittgenstein
> 1983, 65)

So Wittgenstein's conception of language, meaning and definition commits him to

conventionalism, the view that explanations of meaning are expressions of

conventions.[15] "To follow a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of

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[14] See PI 11-12 for Wittgenstein's tool analogy, which he uses to stress the diversity of word-functions. In PI 8-9, he argues that two distinct uses of number-words treat them as distinct kinds of tool. He distinguishes between using number-words to count and using them to refer to groups.
[15] Importantly, however, Wittgenstein's conventionalism and that of the logical positivists is significantly different. Glock helpfully explains some of the differences by developing a critique of the positivist's analytic/synthetic distinction: "Wittgenstein's distinction between grammatical and empirical propositions deviates from the logical positivists' analytic/synthetic distinction in four respects. (a) Many of his grammatical propositions do not fit into even the most generous list of analytical truths. The reason is that Wittgenstein had realized that there are non-truth-functional logical relations (PR 105-6), and hence necessary propositions like (1) [i.e., 'Black is darker than white'] which are not analytic in the sense of the *Tractatus* or Vienna Circle. (b) The analytic/synthetic distinction is set up in terms of the forms and constituents of type-sentences. But whether an utterance expresses a grammatical proposition, that is, is used to express a linguistic rule, depends on its role on an occasion of utterance, on whether in the particular case it is used as a standard of correctness. For example, 'War is war' is not typically used to express the law of identity (PI II 221; WVC 153-4; PR 59; AWL 64-5; BT 241). (c) The distinction involves the idea that the truth of

chess, are *customs* (usages, institutions). To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to have mastered a technique" (PI 199; also see PI 355).

Earlier we pointed out that grammatical propositions like 'Racism is the belief that some races are inferior to others' provide rules for the use of words (e.g., 'racism') and therefore cannot be justified by reference to reality. That is, their truth is not a matter of fact-correspondence, for they are not descriptions of reality. It follows from this argument that grammatical propositions are 'arbitrary' in Wittgenstein's sense: they are stipulated as correct, not justified epistemically (PI 371-373). Therefore, grammar cannot be justified on epistemic grounds. However, the preceding arguments are consistent with a certain kind of justification. For, as the preceding quote emphasizes, grammar is a response to human needs—what Wittgenstein calls 'the deep need for the convention.' As such, grammar is open to pragmatic justification. For if a rule for the use of 'racism' is introduced for the purposes of satisfying human need *n*, then it can be criticized or justified by determining whether (and how well) it fulfills its intended function. The deep need for the linguistic norm is our reason for laying it down in the first place.

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necessary propositions is a *consequence* of the meaning of their constituents. According to Wittgenstein, necessary propositions *determine* rather than follow from the meaning of words, since they are partly constitutive of the meaning of the constituent terms (*see* MEANING-BODY). (d) By explaining the status of necessary propositions by reference to their normative rather than descriptive employment, Wittgenstein rejects the view that they are a special kind of truths, one whose source is meaning or convention instead of experience. Notably, if tautologies are degenerate propositions which do not say anything, a point the logical positivists accepted, in what sense could they be true?" (1996b, 131-2)

Grammar is also revisable. This follows from the fact that norms are laid down as correct rather than made true by the facts. For if we can stipulate that *x* is a norm, then we can revoke this norm and introduce a new norm, *y*. Hence, the revisability of norms is connected with their arbitrariness (i.e., unjustifiability by reference to reality). The revisability of our linguistic norms does not contradict the fact that they are necessary. For as we have seen, the sense in which they are necessary is not that they are true in all possible words, but that we *cling* to them and manifest our *commitment* to them as norms (for example, when we insist, 'No you *must* not use the word that way! A woman *can't* be a bachelor'). That grammar has the necessity of a norm is perfectly consistent with its being a norm, for that is partly what is entailed by its being a norm. What begins to emerge, therefore, is a picture of language as a norm. Wittgenstein essentially clarifies the meaning of 'language' and 'norm' for purposes of dissolving confusion about our conceptual scheme.

3. Conclusion

Section 2 of this introduction has been an exercise in grammatical investigation. We have essentially elucidated the following concepts: *language, grammar, explanation of a word, practice, understanding a word, knowing a word, being able to speak, a priori nature of language, the necessity of grammar, the arbitrariness of grammar, the revisability of grammar,* and perhaps most importantly of all, *norm/convention/rule.* What is more, the goal of our analysis was to do so for the purposes of dissolving conceptual confusion. For although I did not explicitly use these clarifications to target specific philosophers and their confusions, my clarifications undermine some standard philosophical

positions, as well as some common philosophical presuppositions (such as the claim that definitions are epistemically justifiable). Therefore, we have engaged in what Strawson calls *connective analysis*.[16]

Although I will often use 'grammatical analysis' and 'grammatical investigation,' I will sometimes use the term *the method of pure description*, or simply *pure description*, for short. I take this method to be the same as Wittgenstein and Hacker's method, although the emphasis is on the descriptive aspect of the method (i.e., leaving grammar where it is). The main reason for adopting a new term is that the vast majority of criticisms I raise against philosophers of race are of a methodological nature. Specifically, my deepest criticisms get to the heart of the distinction between 'descriptive' and 'prescriptive' theories of racism. My most basic criticism of so-called descriptive theories of racism is that they are not really descriptive, but prescriptive. Hence, my method illustrates what a purely descriptive analysis should look like.

Pure description is the practice of offering perspicuous descriptions (i.e., clarifications) of the ordinary use of words for the purpose of achieving conceptual clarity that is free from conceptual confusion. The method of clarification is unclear to the extent that 'clarification' is vague. It is intentionally so, for there are several such methods: comparing or

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[16] This is how Strawson (1992, 19) characterizes Wittgenstein's concept of grammatical analysis. Hacker explains it nicely: "What is needed is not such a *definitional analysis* of knowledge, but a *connective analysis* that displays the place of knowledge in the network of epistemic concepts. An examination of the needs met and purposes satisfied by the uses of 'know' and 'believe' reinforces the connective analysis" (2013, 4). "In place of these misconceptions, I shall advance a comprehensive *connective analysis* of this *multi-focal concept*. Connective analysis (see Appendix) consists in describing the manifold logical connections between a given expression (and its cognates) and other expressions with which it is associated, or with which it is likely to be confounded." (2013, 2)

contrasting the meaning of two terms (closely related and not closely related);

comparing or contrasting two or more uses of the same word; offering analogies or

pictures to elucidate a specific term, sentence, etc.; stating examples to illustrate the

use of a word; stating reminders of how words are used and what norms they

comport with; and so on. All of these elements will be used in the context of

grammatical arguments, which in turn target the authors of philosophical theories of

racism. For the point of a grammatical argument is to expose conceptual confusion.

Thus, I will regularly make ascriptions of falsity and conceptual confusion to the

theories and arguments of the philosophers I discuss.

Chapter Summaries

- Chapter 1 defends the method of pure description against the claim that it is irrelevant to normative philosophy (i.e., the charge of social quietism).

- Chapter 2 considers and rejects Clevis Headley's objections to *a priori* approaches to racism; clarity of the meaning of 'definition' undermines his defense of institutionalist-empirical approaches to the definition of 'racism' (as 'correct').

- Chapter 3 clarifies one of Joshua Glasgow's adequacy conditions for descriptive theories of racism (viz. the moral condition); once clarity is achieved it becomes clear why the moral condition lacks universal applicability.

- Chapter 4 analyzes the nature of philosophical disagreement and argues that disagreement about 'what racism is' is prescriptive disagreement (about a norm).

- Chapter 5 defends the claim that disputes about the nature of racism are resolvable; my argument rejects the ontological component of Harris' argument but vindicates his more important pragmatic component.

- Chapter 6 considers Jorge Garcia's volitional theory of racism as racial disregard and rejects its essential components (his infection model and his theory of characteristic racism).

CHAPTER 1

WITTGENSTEIN'S RELEVANCE TO MORAL PHILOSOPHY:
A REPLY TO CHARLES MILLS AND HERBERT MARCUSE

§1.1. Introduction

The central question of this dissertation is, Does the therapeutic tradition offer anything of value to the philosophy of racism? One philosopher of race, Charles Mills, rejects this possibility. He dismisses the therapeutic approach and goal on the grounds that they are incompatible with the aspirations of black philosophy, underscoring the latter's 'practical' emphasis:

> Finally, it should be emphasized that for African-American philosophers, all these problems [pertaining to personhood and the black experience], and many others I have no space to address, are by no means scholastic riddles to occupy an idle hour but burningly *practical* issues, problems that really are deeply troubling. There are many conceptions of philosophy, arising in part from the existence of many different philosophies, but certainly African-American/black philosophy would see itself as antipodal to a philosophy that, in one famous formulation, "leaves everything as it is." Insofar as this is a philosophy that develops out of the resistance to oppression, it is a practical and politically oriented philosophy that, long before Marx was born, sought to interpret the world correctly so as better to change it. (1998, 17)

According to Mills, therapeutic philosophy and black philosophy are on completely opposite ends of a spectrum; presumably he thinks this because they aspire to different goals. Further, he thinks that therapeutic philosophy is an armchair activity that has little connection to the burning practical issues that drive black philosophy.

This dissertation defends the Wittgensteinian approach in part by showing that its method of *a priori* philosophizing *is* burningly practical and in part by showing that the space it occupies is not limited to the ivory tower, that is, to scholastic riddles to occupy an idle hour. I hope to begin addressing Mills' worry in this first chapter by defending those painful words that ring hollow in Mills' ears. Although Mills' worries are not entirely without merit (as I discuss below), I will show that his legitimate concerns can be properly addressed. Wittgenstein famously wrote:

> Philosophy must not interfere in any way with the actual use of language, so it can in the end only describe it.
> For it cannot justify it either.
> It leaves everything as it is.
> It also leaves mathematics as it is, and no mathematical discovery can advance it. A "leading problem of mathematical logic" is for us a problem of mathematics like any other. (PI 124)

> It is not the business of philosophy to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to render surveyable the state of mathematics that troubles us – the state of affairs before the contradiction is resolved. (And in doing this one is not sidestepping a difficulty.)
> Here the fundamental fact is that we lay down rules, a technique, for playing a game, and that then, when we follow the rules, things don't turn out as we had assumed. So that we are, as it were, entangled in our own rules.
> This entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand: that is, to survey. … (PI 125)

> Philosophy just puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain. For whatever may be hidden is of no interest to us.
> The name "philosophy" might also be given to what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions. (PI 126)

> The work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections for a particular purpose. (PI 127)

When Wittgenstein says that philosophy leaves 'everything' where it is, he means that *grammar* is left where it is. So, definitions and other explanations of meaning are left where they are. The sense in which they are 'left alone' is that philosophical analysis does not reform, revise or criticize them. This is connected with philosophy's 'particular purpose' mentioned here (the dissolution of confusion):

> We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not the order. For this purpose we shall again and again emphasize distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook. This may make it appear as if we saw it as our task to reform language.
>
> Such a reform for particular practical purposes, an improvement in our terminology designed to prevent misunderstandings in practice, may well be possible. But these are not the cases we are dealing with. The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work. (PI 132)

Notice that the second paragraph acknowledges the possibility of "reforming" ordinary usage "for particular practical purposes." However, Wittgenstein's reaction to this possibility is dismissive, claiming that "these are not the cases we are dealing with." For the problems we deal with in philosophy are "confusions" which "arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work." Wittgenstein thus writes as if *all* philosophical problems are functions of conceptual confusion, a view that is common to Wittgensteinian therapists. Given Wittgenstein's belief that all philosophical problems are functions of conceptual confusion, it is natural for him to think that the philosophical method of pure description is the only viable method. But this thought entails three connected problems for Wittgenstein's philosophy.

> *The exclusionary objection*: His conception of philosophy is objectionably revisionist, for it excludes legitimate philosophical problems and methods.

The pragmatic objection: His conception of philosophy is useless, for pure description does not address a host of philosophical problems of a distinctly normative nature.

The quietist objection: His conception of philosophy is socially and politically conservative, for it prevents philosophers from criticizing and reforming ordinary usage.

These objections, I take it, are the source of Mills' objections to pure description. So my aim in this chapter is to address each one of them in turn.

§1.2 The Exclusionary Objection

Wittgenstein's claim that all philosophical problems have the form 'I don't know my way about' (PI 123) seems to overlook a variety of philosophical problems that are not functions of confusion. On the one hand, Wittgenstein acknowledges the practice of reforming language for particular practical purposes. On the other hand, he seems to suggest that this practice is *not* philosophical, that is, can never serve a philosophical purpose. This implication strikes me as highly problematic, for it effectively *excludes* practical philosophy from the realm of philosophy! That is, it essentially *restricts* philosophy's domain to one particular kind of philosophical problem: conceptual confusion. Restricting the use of 'philosophy' to one kind of philosophical practice sets a limit on the use of 'philosophy.' So he effectively *revises* the ordinary use of the term in a way that seems objectionable.

For example, existential and moral problems are problems about how to live and I see no reason to think that they are grounded in conceptual confusion. If practical concerns and ethical dilemmas were grounded in confusion, conceptual

clarity alone should always succeed in dissolving them. But consider scenarios of the form: Should I act or refrain from acting in such-and-such circumstances? Is practice Y morally permissible or not? Notice that if these problems are resolvable, they are not so in the sense that they are dissolvable, i.e., made to disappear so that answering them is unnecessary (even impossible). To the extent that problems of this sort are resolvable, they are resolved by *settling* the corresponding question. That is, by making a choice. A practical decision, however, is not always the rejection of a philosophical question. Therefore, conceptual clarity is not always sufficient to resolve practical problems, for it sometimes leaves our ethical choices underdetermined. Unless we are prepared to say that practical questions cannot be philosophical, it must be admitted that some philosophical problems are not functions of conceptual confusion.

His revisionist picture of philosophy, I take it, is supposed to be justified by the fact that it replaces the old way of doing philosophy which on his view fails to give the philosopher peace because it cannot put an end to the philosophical problems she is trying to resolve. However, it is possible to grant that Wittgenstein's use of 'philosophy' rightly addresses such problems while simultaneously maintaining that there are other *kinds* of philosophical problems (e.g., ethical issues that *do* require philosophical reformation of language for particular practical purposes). Thus, Wittgenstein's restrictive use of 'philosophy' is unwarranted. When push comes to shove most Wittgensteinian therapists acknowledge the possibility of philosophical problems that are not conceptually confused. Consider Peter Hacker's admission:

Von Wright voice a different qualm. Having abandoned his early view that [sic] task of philosophy is logical reconstruction, he came to see it as the explication of conceptual intuitions. Philosophers are characteristically interested in a network of concepts, which are, in different respects, problematic, unclear or in need of systematization. Having described elements of the network, we may find lacunae, or indeterminacies—strands that leave threads dangling. Our task can then be characterized as filling in such gaps in existing usage. Here we cannot consult usage, but only our own 'conceptual intuitions' about the expressions concerned—that is, about how and why we think the rules for their use can be fruitfully or illuminatingly extended. In so doing, the philosopher should not tamper with existing usage, since violation of usage would mean a distortion of the conceptual situation. His task of explicating his conceptual intuition is a matter of invention or creation, and its touchstone is the light shed upon the problems at hand. In *The Varieties of Goodness*, von Wright exemplified this conception with great power and persuasiveness. Many of the expressions that belong to this ramifying network of normative, axiological and anthropological expressions are, he argued, words in search of a meaning' and of connections of meaning. The philosopher's role in the domain of ethics, political and legal philosophy, and aesthetics (in contradistinction to his role in 'theoretical philosophy', e.g. metaphysics and epistemology) is to mould or shape the meanings of problematic expressions. (1996, 242-243)

This passage illustrates that even the staunchest Wittgensteinian therapist has, on rare occasions, admitted that *some* philosophical problems are *not* functions of conceptual confusion. (For sometimes "we cannot consult usage" but must "fruitfully or illuminatingly extend" usage.) To be consistent, then, he ought to admit that Wittgenstein was wrong to claim otherwise. That is, we should reject Wittgenstein's univocal account of 'philosophy' and 'philosophical problem.'

At the same time, I think it would be gravely mistaken to conclude from this concession that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is not apt to dissolve these philosophical problems. Conceding this would seem to imply that we should abandon his philosophy altogether as opposed to reforming his account and restricting its

application to the appropriate domain. A careful look at the above passage (PI 132) underlines a second component of Wittgenstein's philosophy, for it is clear that his picture of language is pragmatic.[17] His claims about what philosophy 'must' be are themselves relative to the goal of dissolving conceptual confusion. Philosophy *must* be descriptive and *must not* be prescriptive or critical of ordinary language, for otherwise it will not achieve its intended aim. As he writes in the very next passage:

> We don't want to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways.
> For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear. (PI 133)

Wittgenstein is here arguing that, g*iven* that philosophy's goal is to address problems of conceptual confusion that arise when language is idling, philosophy must leave everything where it is. Notice that Wittgenstein's pragmatic conception of philosophy—his position that what counts as 'correct method' in philosophy depends on the particular goal of analysis—provides a way out for him, a way of reforming his account of philosophy in the light of the exclusionary objection. I have argued that a serious problem for his conception of philosophy is that it is too restrictive, for it excludes much of what is called 'philosophy.' The goal-oriented nature of his philosophy suggests the following emendation: Given that 'correct philosophical

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[17] Language, for Wittgenstein, is a set of distinct goal-directed practices. He thus stresses the diversity of linguistic practices and the distinctive ends they serve. Distinct uses of language correspond to distinct human needs. See, e.g., PI 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 17, 23, 25, 27 and 33. In PI 23 he writes: "The word 'language-*game*' is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life."

method' is relative to the specific philosophical goal, other conceptions of philosophy and their corresponding methods are possible to the extent that they pursue other goals. Other philosophers can offer their own remarks about what philosophy is or must be and these too might be correct relative to *their* aims and purposes. In this way, definitions of 'philosophy' are relativized to particular aims or goals. This in turn implies that several conceptions of philosophy might all be 'correct' relative to their respective ends.

The above argument makes conceptual room for two kinds of philosophical problems. There are *legitimate problems* (which are functions of confusion) and *illegitimate problems* (which are not functions of confusion). The relevant issue for me, then, is not whether *all* philosophical problems are mired in conceptual confusion, but whether *some* of them are. Connected with this is the question of whether the philosophy of racism is mired in illegitimate philosophical problems and whether, if it is, pure description can adequately address them. I will argue that pure description is indispensable for the philosophy of racism, because some legitimate philosophical problems in this subfield are embedded in webs of confusion (illegitimate problems). The method can help philosophers differentiate these problems.

§1.3 The Pragmatic Objection

With that, I turn to the pragmatic objection. Plenty non-Wittgensteinians, who are interested in normative philosophy, have objected that *pure* description is normatively useless. As we have seen, Mills wonders what good it can do for black philosophy. The pragmatic objection can therefore be framed as a question: Of what

value is the method of pure description? What good can it do for normative philosophy?

The Wittgenstein answer, of course, is that pure description is valuable for dissolving conceptual confusion in the normative domain. My thesis is that philosophical analyses of racism are mired in conceptual confusion and that the method of pure description can dissolve substantial forms of such confusion. As such, it must be shown that Wittgenstein's therapeutic method can address the particular kind of philosophical problem he claims it can. And the problem must be addressed by dissolving it. For he maintains that mere clarifications of grammar are sufficient to dissolve substantial forms of conceptual confusion.

Since the bulk of my dissertation is an attempt to demonstrate this fact, I will not spend much time trying to demonstrate it here. Instead I will provide a rather crude example of conceptual confusion for the purposes of illustration. The example is unsophisticated compared to the conceptual confusions that I claim are prevalent in contemporary theories of racism. The example is provided from the perspective of the Wittgensteinian philosopher who uses grammatical reminders for the purposes of achieving conceptual clarification:

> "The following argument is sometimes used to suggest that the concept of a racist institution is incoherent: 'Institutions do not behave or have mental states, such as intention, belief, and so on. Racism, however, is a matter of intention, belief, etc. Therefore, institutions cannot be racist.' The argument rests on confusion, for it assumes that ascriptions of racism are always made on the basis of individualistic criteria. It thus overlooks the fact that institutions are called 'racist' for different kinds of reasons. For instance, 'The criminal justice system is racist' would not be defended on the grounds that it harbors racist beliefs or desires. Common criteria for ascribing racism to

institutions focus on institutional norms and outcomes. For example, institutional norms that are supposed to be racially blind and treat everyone the same can result in disproportional harm for some racial groups and disproportional benefit for others (e.g., racial profiling). Similarly, an institution might fail to take necessary steps to stop or prevent systemic abuses of its policies which result in disproportional racial harm. For instance, black and brown people are regularly and systematically excluded from serving on juries solely on the basis of race (Alexander 2010, 119-123). These and similar considerations are the kind that serve as a basis for properly deploying the term 'institutional racism.' Therefore, the claim that institutions cannot be racist because institutions are not persons is conceptually confused."

The above grammatical argument invokes rules for the use of 'institutional racism' and uses these reminders to dissolve conceptual confusion. One possible source for the confusion might be that racism often gets associated with the picture of a *racist person*, for example, a white supremacist or simply a bigot who manifests racial disregard. To dispel such confusion, the philosopher can offer the reminder that 'racism' can be used in other contexts of application.

To be sure, the objector might reply that individualistic criteria are the *correct* criteria for making ascriptions of racism, that is, that criteria relating to the individual (behavior, character and mental states, etc.) *should* be the only standards. In that case, the reminder that 'institutional racism' has a different grammar than 'individual racism' will not resolve the normative dispute, for it is a legitimate philosophical problem. In the above example, grammatical clarification was meant to dispel a confusion which helps to achieve perspicuous clarification of the true nature of the problem. For the legitimate problem is not about whether 'institutional racism' has a use in our language, but whether it should and to what extent. Some of the relevant considerations in this regard are these: What need/s are met by insisting on the use of

'racism' in institutional contexts? What are the salient analogies and disanalogies that institutional and individual racial ills have? What analogies and disanalogies do paradigmatic cases of 'institutional racism' have to paradigm cases of racism (e.g., African slavery, Jim Crow segregation, etc.)? The focus, in other words, should be normative: what is the point of calling something 'institutional racism,' what needs does it meet, and what are the consequences of revoking this term from discourse?

We have now illustrated the potential normative and philosophical value of the method of pure description for black philosophy.

§1.4 The Quietist Objection: An Initial Reply

That leaves us with the quietist objection. On this objection, the method of pure description is charged with being committed to the *status quo*. For a philosophy that *only* describes ordinary usage is one that will *never* participate in criticizing and correcting ordinary usage. Consequently, the practical function of this method is the *de facto* silencing of normative analysis; in other words, the method is committed to conservative values. The quietist objection seems particularly damning in the domains of moral, social and political philosophy. In the remainder of this first chapter, I defend Wittgenstein's philosophy against this line of objection. I argue that pure description does not entail conservatism.

The version of the objection I consider was initially articulated by Marcuse. He accuses Wittgenstein of proffering an ideology in the classical Marxian sense of the term. An ideology is a worldview or network of beliefs that legitimizes one set of social practices while delegitimizing others. In effect, ideologies provide the rationale

and arguments needed to promote a certain form of life and its corresponding values and ideals. Marcuse chides Wittgenstein for championing a philosophical method that values understanding for its own sake: "such statements exhibit, to my mind, academic sado-masochism, self-humiliation, and self-denunciation of the intellectual whose labor does not issue in scientific, technical or like achievements" (1964, 173). The heart of his criticism is the charge that Wittgenstein's conservativism performs an dangerous social function.

Marcuse believes that Wittgenstein promotes a philosophy that attempts to delegitimize critical philosophy. Wittgenstein's delegitimization process has three crucial steps. The first step is to insist that there are no legitimate philosophical problems, for all of them are functions of conceptual confusion. Second, Wittgenstein accuses the social critic (i.e., the 'metaphysician') of speaking metaphysical nonsense; as such, the social critic's unorthodox language is dismissed and her voice silenced. Third, Wittgenstein claims to have found the correct philosophical method for dissolving all philosophical problems, so he effectively turns attention away from social criticism toward 'real philosophical problems' which turn out to be linguistic-intellectualist puzzles, paradoxes, and the like. Wittgenstein's philosophy is, therefore, an ideology for intellectuals—for it is philosophers who are the primary targets of his accusations. The social function of this ideology is that philosophical criticism will be avoided and the status quo preserved.

What is the reply to Marcuse's worry? The source of his objection is Wittgenstein's claims to the effect that *philosophy is purely descriptive*. For this claim in

particular is what allows Marcuse to frame the dialectic in terms of antipodal and oppositional philosophies: Wittgensteinian philosophy and metaphysics (i.e., critical philosophy) are fundamentally opposed philosophies. Marcuse is right to think that Wittgenstein's philosophy eschews a certain understanding of 'metaphysics,' but as the term is heavily loaded I do not find it helpful. I will argue that philosophical attempts to revise or criticize ordinary usage are compatible with Wittgenstein's account of philosophy. What matters for Marcuse's objection is whether his philosophy is compatible with the possibility of *philosophical criticism* of ordinary usage. I will argue that these approaches are compatible.

Wittgenstein's dictum that philosophy should only describe ordinary usage can be read in one of two ways, both of which are compatible with therapeutic philosophy.

1. Philosophy, in its very essence, is merely therapeutic; that is, it dissolves conceptual confusion without revising ordinary usage. Therefore, *any* philosophical practice that claims to discover or produce knowledge (i.e., go beyond conceptual clarity) is either conceptually confused or is not philosophical.

2. Philosophy, insofar as conceptual clarity is its goal, is merely therapeutic; that is, it dissolves conceptual confusion without revising ordinary usage. Therefore, any philosophical practice that claims to discover or produce knowledge (i.e., go beyond conceptual clarity) is not engaged in pure description. (However, it might be engaged in some other philosophical practice).

There are three issues that need to be disentangled:

- *The philosophical question.* Which, if any, of the above views is philosophically correct?

- *The compatibility question.* Is either (1) or (2) compatible with the core of Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy?

- *The interpretive question.* Which of the above views, if any, did Wittgenstein accept?

Philosophically, I think that (2) is correct and that (1) is indefensible. More importantly, I think that (2) is compatible with the core of Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy. That is, the essential elements of Wittgenstein's later philosophy—and indeed of the therapeutic tradition—are preserved in (2). Finally, with respect to the interpretive question, (1) seems to correspond to Wittgenstein's own position, for he would have likely rejected (2). With that said, I will argue that the proponent of Wittgensteinian therapy should not accept the first reading even if that means disagreeing with Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein does not seem to think that revisionist, critical, and non-descriptive philosophical practices are possible. When he talks about philosophy he does not distinguish between different kinds of philosophy or between different approaches to philosophy. Or rather, when he does makes such distinctions, it is usually to criticize non-grammatical approaches. So, it is fair to criticize *him* for rejecting these alternatives without argumentation. Instead of looking at a variety of philosophical conceptions, he provides a general line of argumentation against one common metaphysical approach, which is the target of his conception. This general line of argumentation, however, failed to take many other alternatives seriously.

The problem is not merely that Wittgenstein does not recognize and address these approaches—as if he overlooks the need to clarify his narrow use of 'philosophy' or as if he writes in a careless and misleading manner—for the solution to *these* problems is easy: simply substitute the term 'conceptual analysis,' 'descriptive analysis,' or some other such term for 'philosophy.' Unfortunately, the criticism is more damaging: If the therapeutic interpretation of Wittgenstein is correct, then it seems that Wittgenstein's failure to consider these alternatives seems to reflect a general attitude of *rejection* of the possibility of alternative conceptions of philosophy. As a result, his conception of philosophy is overly simplistic and arguably dogmatic.[18]

In addition, given the discussion below, Wittgenstein's narrow conception of philosophy is incompatible with his own philosophical method, for he endorses a method of paying close attention to ordinary usage. However, instead of 'looking and

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[18] In the light of Wittgenstein's essentialism about philosophy, we should conclude that he held a dogmatic conception of philosophy according to Hacker's account of Wittgenstein's view of dogmatism: "From time to time, Wittgenstein worried about whether he was not being dogmatic, and in his notebooks, he made some remarks about what he meant by 'dogmatism.' He gave various related explanations. Dogmatism consists of ascribing to an object represented features of the prototype in terms of which one represents it (BT 260). This is manifest outside philosophy in Spengler (BT 260), who insisted that cultures must have features of the prototype in term of which he described them (a life cycle). In particular, it is a characteristic of misguided philosophy to insist that things must be thus-and-so because this is how one has resolved to represent them. Indeed, the *Tractatus* was guilty of this sin – for he had argued that there must be independent elementary propositions, even though he had not yet found any, or that every proposition must have a determinate sense, no matter how vague it was – since he committed himself to representing vague propositions by means of disjunctions of propositions with a determinate sense. What is the nature of a dogma in philosophy? – he queried in the *Big Typescript*. Is it not the assertion that there is an objective necessity in nature for every possible rule (BT 196)? – that rules of grammar (e.g. that nothing can be red and green all over) are answerable to necessities in reality – as he had once thought (RLF 168f.)." (2012, 16) To be sure, there is nothing dogmatic about stating grammatical propositions, as Hacker goes on to do. Wittgenstein's account of philosophy is not dogmatic because his definitions of 'philosophy' are general theses, but because he sometimes seems to have understood his grammatical remarks to be general theses. The evidence for this is the absence of any acknowledgment that non-grammatical and non-confused conceptions of philosophy are possible.

seeing' whether everything that is called 'philosophy' always falls into one of his two categories (it is either pure description or conceptual confusion), he mistakenly and uncritically assumes this to be the case. That is, he fails to carefully look at the whole of what is called 'philosophy.' As I read him, therefore, his conception of philosophy is monistic and essentialist—a conception that we have pointed out is unwarranted in the face of the plurality of practices that are called 'philosophy.' Since he dismisses non-descriptive approaches as conceptually confused, his philosophical method is inconsistent with his philosophical practice.

The above critique of Wittgenstein—the charge that his narrow monistic conception of philosophy is false and inconsistent with his philosophical method—is damaging. But is it devastating? I will suggest that the damage can be repaired by patching up Wittgenstein's remarks concerning the nature of philosophy. Marcuse's objection seems to require that pure description and normative analysis be incompatible. He needs for these approaches to be necessarily in competition with one another. So the objection trades on a notion of *incompatibility* that corresponds to the following presupposition: *If pure description is a legitimate philosophical method, then no other philosophical method is legitimate.*

However, I conceded earlier that Wittgenstein's pragmatic conception of philosophy recognizes that its own validity is context-relative and goal-oriented. That is, he recognizes that philosophical conceptions are justifiable on pragmatic grounds. Therefore, other conceptions of philosophy might justified relative to a different set of aims and purposes. In this way, it is possible to conceive of his philosophy as *one*

of many legitimate conceptions. Given this pragmatic move, we can now explain the sense in which pure description and normative-critical analysis are incompatible approaches. *No philosopher can participate in normative analysis while simultaneously participating in pure description.* This form of incompatibility is analogous to the incompatibility in the following statement: One cannot both go to the movies *and* stay home and eat dinner. These practices are incompatible in an innocuous sense, for one might *first* go to the movies and *then* go home and eat dinner (or vice versa). Similarly, one might engage in pure description *now*, *later* in normative analysis.

The upshot is that pure description and normative analysis are not incompatible in a damaging sense. That is, the incompatibility is not of this form: If the practice of pure description is a *legitimate approach*, then normative-critical analysis must be *illegitimate*. My suggestion for Wittgensteinian therapists is that they ought to reconceptualize Wittgenstein's account of philosophy as *one* legitimate approach to philosophy—rather than *the* legitimate approach. I am suggesting that this is possible in light of Wittgenstein's pragmatic conception of philosophy. Doing so requires only that we commit ourselves to a broad and pluralistic conception of 'philosophy.'

The above emendation of Wittgenstein's picture of philosophy might seem to open it up to a new objection. Does 'repairing' Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy in this way undermine his philosophical approach by virtue of *fundamentally* revising it? I will argue that it does not. To defend this claim I will argue that Wittgenstein's conception of grammar demands that his own remarks about the nature of philosophy be analyzed as grammatical remarks, which in turn means that

they are rules for one kind of philosophical practice. Having made this move, it will become evident that other conceptions of philosophy are possible.

Wittgenstein famously states that there are no theses in philosophy (PI 128; 599). What he means by this, according to Hacker's "Wittgenstein, Theses and Dogmatism," is that grammatical reminders (explanations of meaning) are not descriptions of any kind; consequently, they are not confirmable or refutable on the basis of evidence or argument in the way that descriptions are. For grammatical remarks are norms, laid down by language-users, rather than propositions that correspond or fail to correspond to reality. Hence, the only kind of justification they can have is pragmatic; epistemic justification is entirely inappropriate (i.e., conceptually confused). As Hacker explains: "Rules of grammar, in Wittgenstein's sense of the term, do not describe necessities in the world; they are expressions of rules for the use of words. But philosophers commonly take their shadows to be *de re* necessities – and so fall into confusion and misconceived mythologising" (2012, 16).

In his paper, Hacker provides several examples of grammatical propositions:

> A grammatical proposition is no more a thesis than is the proposition that the chess king is the piece that gets checked. That is a rule of chess, not a thesis. So, too, it is not thesis that red is darker than pink, or that nothing can be red and green all over. Nor is it a thesis that knowledge is not a mental state, that meaning something is not an activity of the mind, or that understanding is akin to an ability. These are grammatical remarks. (2012, 15)

He goes on to provide philosophical examples:

> Clearly, it is not a theory, let alone a hypothesis, that red is a colour, that red is darker than pink, or that nothing can be red and green all over – any more than it is a theory, let alone a hypothesis, that bachelors are unmarried men. Nor is it a theory or hypothesis that there can be no such thing as a private

language or a private ostensive definition – even though it is not immediately obvious (just as it is not immediately obvious that one cannot trisect an angle with a compass and rule). These are exclusionary rules – and what they exclude is a meaningless form of words. But of course, it has to be shown, step by step, why such forms of words are meaningless – for they do not look meaningless. They are constructed on the model of perfectly meaningful forms of words – and that is why they take us in. They can be shown to be meaningless by assembling and marshalling a select array of familiar rules for the use of words. (2012, 15)

He concludes: "it is obvious that his diverse grammatical remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* are no more theses, doctrines, theories, hypotheses or opinions than is the proposition 'a bachelor is an unmarried man' (2012, 17).

If it is obvious that Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Investigations* are grammatical, then his explanations of 'philosophy' must be grammatical also. So they too are not descriptions of necessities or how things must be, but rules for the use of 'philosophy.' Given that they are rules, they serve a particular function and purpose. Thus, Wittgenstein does not prescribe a categorical imperative (*Never revise, criticize or abandon grammar!*), nor does he offer a transhistorical description of the essence of philosophy or what it must be. Both readings are misguided on account of Wittgenstein's conception of grammar. Wittgenstein's explanations of philosophy are linguistic conventions that are laid down for the purpose of dissolving conceptual confusion. Since they presuppose a certain interest in philosophy, the proper way to recast them is as hypothetical imperatives: *The philosopher who has an interest in clarifying, illuminating and understanding grammar should not revise or criticize grammar*. Or again: *Where the goal of philosophy is merely to understand, the philosopher should not revise or criticize grammar*. Thus, a consistent reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on philosophy requires that we

read them as grammatical rules. This, in turn, requires that we do not attribute theses to him. His definitions are partly constitutive of one philosophical practice, which is consistent with the existence of multiple philosophical practice each of which is constituted by different rules.

Suppose then that on some conceptions of philosophy it is not the case that philosophy leaves everything where it is. Would this undermine Wittgenstein's account of philosophy? Surely not. For definitions of 'philosophy' are *norms* (i.e., rule-governed practices), not descriptions of reality. Thus, if one starts from an alternative definition of 'philosophy,' this does not undermine the Wittgensteinian approach to descriptive analysis. What an alternative definition does is determine—which is to say, constitute—a distinct philosophical practice. After all, to provide a definition of 'philosophy' is to provide a rule for the use of this term for some particular purpose or other. Hence, it would correspond to a different goal and interest. Wittgenstein's conception of grammar is thus compatible with alternative approaches to philosophy. To recognize the possibility of alternative explanations of philosophy is to recognize a plurality of language-games with the word 'philosophy.'

We have resolved one crucial component of Marcuse's worry, namely, his contention that the Wittgensteinian approach to 'ordinary language philosophy' renders social criticism impossible. We saw that this is not so, for the project of pure description is a means to an end. His conception of philosophy can coexist with a variety of philosophical conceptions, within a pluralistic conception of philosophy. The salient move in my argument involves the reflexive strategy of applying

Wittgenstein's account of grammar to his grammatical remarks about philosophy.

When conceived as expressions of grammatical rules governing *one of several uses* of the

word 'philosophy'—as opposed to conceiving of them as substantive metaphysical

theses describing the essence of philosophy—one important element of the quietest

objection dissolves. The Wittgensteinian is not committed to the thesis that grammar

cannot or *should not* be revised, as Marcuse thinks. (There may be good reason to revise

the grammar of 'racism,' as Blum maintains (2002; 2004).) A necessary condition of

descriptive analysis is that the meaning of a target-term be left where it is—for this

makes it possible for one to understand it *as it is*. Revising the target-term is

tantamount to abandoning the descriptive project.

§1.5 A Second Reply—Critical Extensions of Grammar

I now consider the ideological aspect of Marcuse's criticism, that is, his charge

that ordinary language philosophy has an ideological function. This might be

understood to mean that Wittgenstein's picture of language as conservative. To

answer this objection, I will argue that Wittgenstein's conception of grammar is

capable of being combined with other approaches. When this occurs, the new

approach will no longer be purely descriptive, for it would be confused to say that

'pure description' is a method of prescriptive, revisionist, or critical analysis—

approaches that clearly go beyond *pure* description (e.g., they serve some explanatory

or moral-political end or agenda).[19] Such approaches would *not* leave everything where it is, so they would not be purely descriptive. My argument however is as follows: The method of clarifying grammar cannot be conservative because clarification can serve a critical function.

My strategy will be to show that there is nothing intrinsic to the Wittgensteinian approach that commits the philosopher to conservatism. For the Wittgensteinian therapist need not deny or reject critical approaches to philosophy (as we saw above), but also because elements of Wittgenstein's account of philosophy can be put to critical and revisionist purposes. There is a further question of interest here which gets back to Mills' initial worry: Does a Wittgensteinian approach have anything to offer the philosopher and critical theorist interested in normative analysis? I will now argue that grammar and its clarification can be put in the service of normative ideals.

To develop this argument, I will adopt part of Wisnewski's reply to Marcuse. Wisnewski contends that a conceptual problem is a problem with our own selves. For "to investigate our concepts is to investigate ourselves—it is to examine the sorts of beings we are, and the form of life we have" (2007, 92). If this is correct, Wittgenstein's charge that metaphysical questions are confused is not an attempt to

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[19] Root's (1993) descriptive analyses of social scientific practice provide a helpful example of description in the service of an ideal. He argues that the social sciences are essentially value-laden and that it is, therefore, important that they be self-consciously and explicitly directed at the ideals of liberalism. His descriptions thus serve the purpose of *defending* the goal-directed nature of the social sciences. On his view, a philosophy of social science *ought* to defend liberal ideals and develop methods and criticisms that will enable the social sciences to achieve these ends.

dissolve the metaphysical question so that the problem disappears, but to see it aright. When one treats a metaphysical question as a factual question one mistakes a deep and pressing existential problem for a true or false proposition—that is, something to be settled by comparing a description to a mind-independent reality. Or so argues Wisnewski:

> To think that all of the questions of metaphysics could be answered solely by looking at the world, without regard for the manner in which our being-in-the-world reveals things to us, is to make a mistake with (possibly) disastrous consequences. It is to excise the human from the world, and hence to fail to understand the basic conditions under which things are experienced as having the meaning they do. (2007, 92)

Conceptual problems are inextricably correlated with normative problems and concerns. Wisnewski's point is that in order to properly address a normative problem, one must do so at the level of practice—at the prescriptive level rather than the descriptive level. The notion that a matter-of-fact comparison of language to reality might resolve a substantive prescriptive problem is conceptually confused.

He goes on to argue that Wittgenstein's emphasis on clarity does not entail, "as so many suppose, that we are stuck with the practices we have, and that all that we can do is clarify those commitments that are embedded in our extant practices" (2007, 93). Everyone admits that philosophy can dissolve conceptual confusion within a language-game, but therapeutic Wittgensteinians deny that philosophy can criticize language-games. Wisnewski rejects the therapeutic approach on two grounds.

> First, practices themselves are neither completely consistent nor inert. They are living, evolving things, sometimes riddled with inconsistency, and these facts make practices capable of self-motivating criticism. Our investigations

into practices enable us to see that elements of our practices conflict with other things which we take for granted. (2007, 94)

For example, philosophy can point out that "the practice of participatory democracy quickly (but, certainly, not quickly enough) conflicted with the significant limitations imposed upon who could participate" (2007, 94). He seems to be referring to excluded groups (such as racial and gender groups). Philosophy helps us "understand how certain latent tensions within social practices could produce criticism and change retrospectively. I do not contend that these changes had to happen. I only contend (with thinkers like Foucault) that the possibility of such rifts are often built into the very structure of our practices" (2007, 94).

Second, it sometimes transpires that "multiple clarifications of any practice are possible. These clarifications, moreover, might very well be mutually exclusive. This entails that deciding between divergent clarifications will demand some type of critical appraisal of the descriptions in question" (2007, 94). He continues:

> deciding between divergent descriptions of a practice does not simply amount to determining which of some set of possible descriptions actually matches that practice. On my (Wittgensteinian) view, there will be multiple correct characterizations of any practice, and this will stem from the fact that (1) all descriptions necessarily privilege a particular point of view, and (2) practices themselves are sufficiently multi-faceted to prevent deciding between these points of views without appeal to pragmatics. (2007, 94)

If this is the case, he continues, "we cannot avoid raising critical questions about all descriptions of practices, and this is because no single description will ever completely capture the nuances embedded in our complicated goings-on together" (2007, 94). If the openness and interpretive character of our practices is a salient

feature of language-games, such determinations cannot be settled by factual considerations alone.

Wisnewski illustrates this point by turning to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). Fanon says that speaking a language is taking on a world, a culture. Wisnewski proposes to illuminate this remark by contrasting two sentences, 'Cornel West is a prominent black philosopher and activist' and 'John Searle is a prominent Caucasian philosopher.' He notes that the former sounds 'natural' whereas the latter sounds unnatural. One might try explaining this difference by noting that, since most philosophers are white, there is no point in highlighting Searle's Caucasian race/heritage. Wisnewski, however, seems to think that a more plausible explanation is that the concept 'human being' is racialized (i.e., tainted by race).

> The problem with these assertions has nothing to do with their truth-value. The problem, rather, is the view that the mention of race appears to be a natural adjective when that race is non-white. It is precisely this type of occurrence that reveals the world we occupy, and the way this world regards race. The very language we speak suggests that being a human presupposes being white. When we refer to people, we mention race only when they are other-than-white. (2007, 95)

He goes on to comment on Andre Breton's statement about Cesaire:

> 'Here is a black man who handles the French language as no white man today can' carries with it a conception of what black men are supposed to sound like in speech. As Fanon remarks, 'these ready-made phrases, which seem in a commonsense way to fill a need…have a hidden subtlety, a permanent rub.' Are those who descend from Africa supposed to speak French poorly? We need only remind ourselves that we all descend from Africa. (2007, 95)

Wisnewski is alluding to what he takes to be the correct explanation which is simultaneously a normative analysis: *Blacks speak French poorly compared to whites, because*

they are less capable and less intelligent than whites. I take it that this statement is connected with some telling grammatical remarks (see below).

The point of Wisnewski's example is that philosophical description serves a critical purpose or end. By paying attention to grammar we can notice subtleties, implications and corresponding forms of privilege, social status, etc. As Wisnewski observes (crediting Pleasants (2002) on this point), Wittgensteinian clarifications can "change the way people see their relations with their fellow creatures and their environment. And with that change of seeing comes change in acting" (2007, 97). Wittgensteinian investigations can bring about non-theoretical changes in our Gestalt (or conceptual scheme). In the present example, two grammatical truths (i.e., rules for the use of 'human being') seem to have been uncovered:

> (i) The concept of *human being* is whitewashed (i.e., takes whiteness as normative).

> (ii) The concept of *human being* is internally inconsistent. Specifically, the value of whiteness is inconsistent with the widespread norm that nonwhites are equally as valuable as whites.

Recognizing the inconsistent nature of these propositions might prompt us to criticize and revise our conceptual scheme. This revisionist aim, however, implies that the analysis is guided by values other than mere understanding of our conceptual scheme. (Grammatical descriptions of this sort might be combined with sociohistorical descriptions of the origins, practices and social conditions which form the material basis for grammar.) Hence, it is not purely descriptive.

This is a clear example of how grammatical clarification is able to prompt social criticism. By exploring the grammar of our conceptual framework we can uncover problematic norms that are inconsistencies with other norms. We can see

> that these schemes (partially) conflict with other value commitments that are part and parcel of our form of life, or that the way we conceive of our practices has missed something crucial about those practices. And we should investigate these things. Any philosophy that fails to do this, as Marcuse reminds us, will fail to be worthy of the name. (2007, 97)

The upshot of Wisnewski's critical extension of Wittgenstein is that we must reject the therapeutic notion that conceptual clarification merely involves what he calls a 'cataloguing enterprise.' He writes:

> To think that this is what a Wittgensteinian approach would demand—the simple cataloguing of types of speech acts—is to misunderstand both Wittgenstein and the institution of language-use. When we investigate the grammar of a term, or a set of terms, we are also investigating the way in which we experience a thing—and hence, what a thing phenomenologically is. (2007, 95-6)

I do not know of Wittgensteinians who say that the point of conceptual analysis is to catalogue speech acts. For one thing, classical-therapeutic Wittgensteinians agree with Wittgenstein that language-games are interwoven with forms of life. Thus, language-games are broader in scope than mere speech acts. For another, the goal of philosophy is not to catalogue for its own sake. (What would be philosophical about that?) Conceptual clarity and the dissolution of conceptual confusion is the end of philosophical analysis on the classical-therapeutic approach. The value of 'cataloguing' consists in this: Conceptual confusion can be dissolved by

rearranging what is already known (PI 109)—namely, grammatical propositions. Thus, classificatory ends are means to more important philosophical ends.[20]

This brings me to my objection to Wisnewski's rejection of Wittgensteinian therapy. As we have seen, he argues that (i) practices are not completely consistent or inert and that (ii) they are variously describable. These observations are correct, as far as they go. But Wisnewski concludes, following Marcuse, that any approach to grammatical analysis which is purely descriptive is unworthy of the name 'philosophy.' This is where I think he is mistaken. The correctness of (i) and (ii) does not undermine Wittgensteinian therapy, for the Wittgensteinian need not deny these claims. And what is more, therapy is justified by its aims and results. Therapy aims at conceptual clarity and a necessary condition for this type of inquiry is that philosophy leave everything where it is. Nonetheless, Wisnewski's observations demonstrate potential routes for taking Wittgenstein into new directions. Wisnewski emphasizes anthropological elements in Wittgenstein's picture of language that are significant for social criticism. In particular, he emphasizes the sociohistorical contingencies of grammar which shape our conceptual scheme.

For example, Wisnewski observes that although Wittgenstein asserts that essence is expressed by grammar, he also acknowledges that "grammar is contingent"

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[20] The term 'cataloguing' is misleading here. It is more helpful to speak of 'surveying' and 'providing an overview' of grammar. "A main source of our failure to understand is that we don't have *an overview* of the use of our words. Our grammar is deficient in surveyability. A surveyable representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'" (PI 122).

(2007, 96). He is right about this. Wittgenstein was a conventionalist and, as such, defended the arbitrariness of grammar. That is, he defended the claim that grammar is not epistemically justifiable by reference to any language-independent reality. Precisely because grammar is a matter of convention (rather than a matter of correspondence to a fact), it is essentially contingent. Likewise, Wittgenstein acknowledges the anthropological ramifications of this position—e.g., that grammar is essentially revisable, part of human culture, and constantly evolving. Wisnewski cites some of the relevant passages that speak to these points. The problem is that concludes from these passages that "critique becomes more than merely possible—it becomes inevitable. To inquire into the legitimacy or illegitimacy of our phenomenology, given the values we have, is inevitably to ask questions that we did not initially intend to ask" (2007, 96). He also adds that "the acceptance of our form of life amounts to accepting a certain philosophical anthropology—one that makes the critique of social practices not only possible, but also inevitable" (2007, 96).

I think Wisnewski's conclusion goes too far. His overall argument shows that grammar is essentially contingent, changing and revisable. It also shows that these features of grammar can form the basis of a critical Wittgensteinian approach. However, since Wittgenstein says close to nothing about moral and social philosophy, there is no evidence that he thought about philosophy as a 'critical practice' in the tradition of sociopolitical criticism. Furthermore, the anthropological character of grammar, including its contingency, does not make social criticism 'inevitable.' If one can describe the game of chess without criticizing or defending it, then one can

describe grammar without revising or defending it. One's grammatical description will have a point. For if one engages in grammatical description, this is done with some particular purpose in mind. On the classical-therapeutic approach the goal of grammatical description is understanding (PI 133) which is internally related to *seeing things aright*, that is, in a way that is free from misunderstanding.

Wisnewski's claim might be understood as the normative proposal that Wittgensteinian therapy (grammatical analysis), properly understood, *ought* to have a critical edge. But this simply begs the question against the classical Wittgensteinian. It seems that whether grammatical analysis should or should not criticize grammar depends on the goal of the analysis. This in turn depends on one's interests. Wisnewski's interest in grammar is very different from the classical-therapeutic interest, as we have seen. He is troubled by problems that are typical of normative discourse, but that are not typical of mathematical and psychological discourse. In the case of racism, the method of pure description (and its corresponding goal of perspicuous understanding) will not resolve many of the normative (philosophical) problems that arise in respect to this concept. For the major philosophical problem of racism is the problem of how to get rid of it. Resolving this problem requires a conception of how things should be. Arguably, then, a Wittgenstein-inspired grammatical inquiry into the nature of ethical-social-political-legal concepts *does* require a critical edge. But it does so largely because the *goal* of conceptual analysis has shifted. Conceptual problems relating to racism seem to require that we go *beyond* mere understanding.

A Wittgensteinian might reject Wisnewski's claim that Wittgensteinian clarifications *should* involve revisions and criticisms of grammar. Such rejection, however, does not amount to an objection to Wisnewski's deliberate *extension* or *novel application* of Wittgenstein's conception of grammar within the normative domain. For as we have seen, altering Wittgenstein's definition of 'philosophy' does not undermine his philosophical practice. All it does is institute a different practice. The critical project for which Wisnewski utilizes Wittgenstein's method is legitimate. It may not have been Wittgenstein's project, but it remains Wittgenstein-inspired. The plausibility of this extension is rooted in the conventional and anthropological nature of grammar, and in the critical goal. Given a pluralistic conception of philosophy, the method of pure description and Wisnewski's critical method can exist side by side.

§1.6 Conclusion

My position may be summed up in four claims. First, I have criticized Wittgenstein for imposing his preferred definition of 'philosophy' on every practice that goes by that name. He wanted to combat a traditional conception of metaphysics which he thought was conceptually confused. He intended for his new conception of philosophy to replace the traditional one, since his conception, he argued, removes the obstacles that grow out of the latter. Philosophy, thusly conceived, aims at clearing up conceptual muddles and perspicuous understanding. The problem for Wittgenstein is that, even if his assessment of traditional metaphysics is correct, there remain other conceptions of philosophy which are not conceptually confused. He did

not adequately consider the possibility that social criticism might be conceived as essential to certain forms of philosophizing.

Second, I have argued that Wittgenstein's definition of 'philosophy' remains *a* definition. The proposition *philosophy can only describe* is a norm of philosophical description, not a description of philosophy as such. It is a grammatical remark. As such, it is partly constitutive of one particular practice: the practice of pure description. The burden of this dissertation is to demonstrate that this practice is a legitimate approach to conceptual analysis in the racial domain.

Third, I have argued that Wisnewski misreads—or, rather, misapplies— passages in Wittgenstein's texts to give the misleading impression that Wittgenstein endorses a view of philosophy as social criticism. Fourth, from the mere fact that Wittgenstein did not acknowledge alternative conceptions of philosophy, it does not follow that philosopher should not criticize grammar or propose recommendations and revisionist analyses of grammar. Wittgenstein, *qua* philosopher, might have been a classical therapist rather than a social critic, but it is also true that Wittgensteinian therapy, in some instances at least, can pave the way for social criticism.[21] Consequently, I ultimately concur with Wisnewski's critique of Marcuse:

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[21] To this it might be objected that Wittgenstein conceives of conceptual investigations as purely linguistic. Wisnewski thinks that some philosophers think of the Wittgensteinian method as if "[o]ur investigation into our concepts" were "merely dry investigations concerning dead things." But he rejects this reading on the ground that it "likely presupposes the view that language is fundamentally distinct from what it expresses, whether 'what language expresses' is a propositional content or a thing in the world. This sort of distinction masks the sense in which language brings things into focus: it enables us to see what we could not see; it gathers the world, displaying things perspicuously" (2007, 92). As evidence for this view, Wisnewski observes that a language-game for

> This, I think, is sufficient for showing what Marcuse gets wrong about Wittgenstein, but also what he gets right about philosophy. … [Philosophy] is linguistic phenomenology steeped in value; it is descriptive analysis with a sharp, critical edge. It is precisely this critical edge that will enable us to understand what ethical theory can accomplish in Wittgensteinian hands, even when we have rejected the view that ethics is assertoric. (2007, 97)

Marcuse's claim that Wittgensteinian therapy is ideological is misguided because (i) the therapeutic method of pure description is compatible with alternative approaches to philosophy (it can exist alongside them on a pluralistic conception of philosophy), and because (ii) the Wittgensteinian conception of grammar can be extended so as to provide normative analyses and social-grammatical critiques.[22]

Wittgenstein "is not merely linguistic. Rather, it is 'the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven,' (PI 7). The fact that we can speak a language, moreover, captures something essential about us. 'To imagine a language,' Wittgenstein says, 'is to imagine a form of life.' … To imagine a language is thus to imagine something that we do—an activity which partially constitutes the sort of life we lead" (2007, 93). Because Wittgenstein's conception of linguistic meaning presupposes "certain facts of philosophical anthropology," conceptual analysis "of the language we speak is thus anything but merely conceptual. It cuts to the very heart of the way we understand ourselves and each other. Wittgensteinian descriptions are meant to remind us of the common context in which terms have significance, and to get us to see that this common context must be our point of departure for an investigation into the world" (2007, 93).

[22] Bowden's *Caring: Gender-Sensitive Ethics* provides an example of this approach. Her book is partly an attempt to deploy the Wittgensteinian method for the purposes of motivating a normative critique of contemporary moral philosophy's gender insensitivity. One of the primary aims of her critical project is to undermine the "impartialist pretensions" of grand theorizing: "The focus of discontent is the assumption that moral philosophy attains truths whose veracity is unbiased by the specific cultural and socio-historical conditions that shape their authors' interests" (1997, 4). Rejecting this assumption, Bowden argues that "unmasking the illusion of atemporal, impartial moral truth reveals how deeply moral philosophy is intricated in other, more empirically oriented fields like psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, history and politics" (1997, 4). Hence, "moral philosophy demands attentiveness to the cultural conditions in which that philosophy is envisaged" (1997, 4-5). The Wittgensteinian method can thus be used to clarify "one of the most fundamental social processes regularly ignored by impartialist theories," namely, "the gendered ascription of distinctive social roles and concerns to different groups. Recognition that ethical understanding involves attentiveness to the social conditions of life, therefore demands sensitivity to the ways in which gender impacts on the possibilities of values… Currently the dominant tradition is focused primarily on the obligations owed universally and impartially in the kinds of relations that are typically associated with men. Given this focus, gender sensitivity requires an equal stress on the ethical implications of the special and 'partial' relations in which women are characteristically involved" (1997, 5).

CHAPTER 2

EMPIRICAL AND *A PRIORI* APPROACHES:
A CRITIQUE OF CLEVIS HEADLEY'S INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH

§2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter to challenge a common conception of *a priori* philosophical analysis that is common in the philosophy of race. This method is powerful even among some of its critics who share its core presuppositions. I argue that Wittgenstein's conception of the *a priori* avoids the pitfalls that I detect in the traditional conception. To explore these issues, I consider Clevis Headley's "Philosophical Approaches to Racism: A Critique of the Individualistic Perspective" (2000). His general critique of *a priori* approaches comes off as a challenge to *all a priori* approaches. Hence, the Wittgensteinian is challenged to articulate an alternative conception that avoids his criticisms. Headley's challenge can be summed up in three interrelated objections:

1. *A priori* approaches presuppose that their target concept is non-empirical, atemporal, changeless and ahistorical—as though the objects they signified were self-created, self-subsistent and totally independent of human thought and action. However, the object signified by the concept of racism is an empirical phenomenon that does not satisfy these conditions.

2. *A priori* approaches analyze concepts in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, but the concept of racism does not have an essence because it signifies a constantly evolving sociocultural phenomenon.

3. *A priori* approaches to racism are skewed in favor of individualistic analyses, but many paradigmatic forms of racism are institutional and so cannot be adequately explained by individualistic accounts.

Headley concludes that philosophers should replace the *a priori* approach to racism with some empirical approach (preferably a non-individualistic, institutionalist approach). His rejection of *a priori* approaches is not the only line of argumentation he provides. In addition, he defends empirical approaches by pointing out that institutional racism can be just as harmful and morally bad as individualistic forms of racism. He further maintains that institutionalist approaches can accommodate three individualistic forms of racism—behavioral, motivational and cognitive racism.

Against these objections I argue that Wittgenstein's *a priori* approach is rooted in a *prima facie* plausible conception of language. His grammatical conception of language is functionalist, naturalist and anthropological. These aspects of grammatical analysis enable me to reply to Headley's objections and to argue that it is compatible with some empirical-sociohistorical approaches. Before I begin, it will be helpful to distinguish the following notions at the outset:

(a) *a priori* – The method of pure description is *a priori* by virtue of investigating grammar, which is prior to experience. Grammar is *a priori* in the innocuous sense that rules for the use of words are conditions of sense which antecede experience. True and false descriptions of racism presuppose grammatical rules (i.e., norms of description).

(b) *necessity* – The necessity of grammar consists in the necessity of a norm. The necessity of a norm consists in the fact that it governs; in its being authoritative for competent speakers of the language. Thus, we cling to the grammar of racism (e.g., we feel that certain things must be racist). This feeling of necessity corresponds to a moral need, for linguistic norms correspond to human needs. The necessity of a norm is distinguishable

from the possibility of changing/revising it. For the former is entirely contingent upon our *using* it as a norm. When a norm is revised, it no longer has its necessity (i.e., it no longer governs).

§2.2 The *A priori* and Nonnatural Entities

In "Philosophical Approaches" Headley argues that *a priori* approaches to racism are inadequate. He does not say that they are completely useless, only that they cannot fully capture the nature of racism. The first of two key passages advancing this argument is articulated early on in the paper:

> I contend that it is not the case that any plausible philosophical analyses of racism should follow the model of an a priori philosophical analysis of nonnatural metaphysical notions, such as the Good in ethics or Beauty in aesthetics. This means that any proper philosophical analysis of racism should assimilate the model of a critical philosophical analysis of other sociocultural phenomena, such as nationalism and sexism. Hence, instead of employing an a priori philosophical method of analysis, we can adopt a naturalistic approach and utilize information from the social sciences, sociology, history, law and economics, and so forth in an effort to understand the nature of certain sociocultural phenomena. But we should acknowledge that an appeal to naturalism in the context of sociocultural phenomena does not entail a complete rejection of a priori analysis or of its validity in this or any other context. The point is simply that the validity of certain sociocultural concepts depends on whether we can define these concepts in terms of specific cultural, social, or historical practices. The main objective is to connect sociocultural concepts with human practices, a move similar to the attempt to provide an operational definition of certain empirical concepts by connecting them with an identifiable physical operation. (2000, 223-224)

Headley conceives of the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* approaches as targeting different kinds of realities. First, there are "nonnatural metaphysical notions" which are investigated *a priori*. Second, there are "natural sociocultural notions" which are investigated *a posteriori*. So his general conception of the *a priori-a posteriori* distinction amounts to the ontological distinction between natural and

nonnatural realities. But what exactly is a nonnatural entity? Headley seems to think

that it is a timeless, unchanging, monistic, transcendent, essentialist reality. This is

suggested by the second passage mentioned above. Here he rejects *a priori* approaches

because they impose "a common formalistic approach" that is unfit for natural

phenomena. Natural entities are empirical, temporal, contingent, pluralistic, and

changing. As such, the monistic and essentialist nature that is characteristic of *a priori*

entities is incompatible with the complexity and nuance of sociocultural entities:

> Many philosophers assume that employing an a priori method entails
> defining a concept by providing the necessary and sufficient conditions
> governing the application of that concept. Moving from semantics to
> ontology, the above view requires that every concept claim an essence. This
> basic philosophical approach treats a concept as a self-creation capable of a
> certain self-subsistence while existing in total independence of human
> thought and action. However, in the case of the concept of "racism," any a
> priori approach will be deficient. Of course, I am not denigrating the
> legitimacy of traditional philosophical approaches to semantic and
> ontological issues involved in the definition of concepts and in the
> identification of their referents. What I am claiming, however, is that these
> traditional approaches are not fully applicable to sociocultural concepts or,
> rather, to temporal concepts. A sociocultural concept names a phenomenon
> whose nature requires apprehension in time, hence the need to appeal to
> historical, cultural, and social factors. Racism as a phenomenon is the
> product of human actions, beliefs, perceptions, and the like. As such, it
> claims no autonomous ontological status but is, rather, a social construction,
> one that is dependent upon human beliefs, practices, goals, values, and so
> forth. Thus, any effort to treat racism as an abstraction will prove unhelpful.
> Racism is not a predicate determinably explicated in the actions of isolated
> individuals who are randomly and arbitrarily harming and dominating other
> persons on the basis of race alone. Racism also emerges from a complex
> network of institutional practices that are sustained, in part, by webs of
> shared agreements, preferences, and goals. Schmid seeks to capture the core
> feature of racism, but the institutional nature of racism undermines any such
> attempt. (2000, 243-244)

Headley's primary examples of nonnatural concepts are *Beauty* (in aesthetics) and *Good* (in ethics). One of his arguments thus seems to be that *a posteriori* approaches (henceforth, empirical approaches) cannot properly investigate *a priori* concepts, because the nature of nonnatural entities does not change and does not depend on the contingencies and fluctuations of the natural world.

I do not deny that there are philosophical approaches that presuppose Headley's distinction between natural and nonnatural realities. Indeed, there appear to be examples of this approach in the philosophy of race—Garcia's theory of racism immediately comes to mind, for it offers an essentialist/monistic account that simultaneously downplays the relevance of empirical considerations.[23] What I deny is that this is the only or the best way to think about the *a priori*-empirical distinction. In my view, the distinction is not best conceived in terms of *natural* and *nonnatural* realities, but between *empirical* and *conceptual* truth, as I now show.

Section 2 of the introduction detailed Wittgenstein's conception of grammar. Here I will simply provide a succinct summary of the relevant points. Language, for Wittgenstein, is a set of rule-governed practices/conventions. To be a competent speaker of a language is to be a rule-follower and master of several techniques. Knowledge of a language consists in the ability to do several things (the ability to act

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[23] Garcia writes: "Action and beliefs are racist on the basis of their input, not their output: they must come to exist or be sustained in the right ways by racist desiderative, volitional, or affective attitudes. Despite what many say, nothing is made to be racist simply by its effects." (2004, 46)

in accord with linguistic conventions). Linguistic practices intertwine with non-linguistic practices, and so are partly constitutive of our forms of life.

The fact that language is a matter of convention suggests that language resembles other conventions in key respects. In particular, the rules of language are human-created and contingent norms that are open to revision. On one level, everyone already understands this. For we understand that grammatical rules (e.g., syntax rules) are contingent since they could have been otherwise; arbitrary or autonomous[24] since they are not epistemically justifiable; and revisable since language is known to evolve. These factors make language a suitable object of analysis for empirical and naturalistic disciplines, such as anthropology, history and other areas of social scientific inquiry. We can refer to this as the *anthropological and naturalistic character* of grammar.

Wittgenstein believed that clarifying these norms could serve an important philosophical purpose, namely, dissolve philosophical problems, puzzles and perplexities. For he held that philosophical problems arise from a misunderstanding of the grammar of language. For these further claims require further argumentation, and it is my view that his conception of grammar is extremely rich and plausible in its

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[24] I return to this claim later in the chapter. Wittgenstein explains the arbitrariness of grammar in his notes (collected in von Wright's catalogue, *Wittgenstein*): "The rules of grammar are arbitrary means: their purpose is not (e.g.) to correspond to the essence of negation or colour – but is the purpose of negation and of the concept of colour. As the purpose of the rules of chess is not to correspond to the essence of chess but to the purpose of the game of chess. Or: – the rules of chess are not to correspond to the essence // the nature // of the chess king for they give it this essence, but the rules of cooking and roasting should indeed correspond to the nature of meat. – This is, of course, a grammatical remark. (MS 160, 6)" (quoted in Baker and Hacker, 334-335)

own right, irrespective of whether it warrants the kind of philosophical applications Wittgenstein attributes to it. If Wittgenstein's *philosophical use* of the conception that language is essentially a practice turns out to be fundamentally misguided, it does not follow that the conception of language is fundamentally misguided.

As we have seen, Wittgenstein is a conventionalist who holds that conceptual truths (grammatical propositions) are linguistic conventions. Wittgenstein's conventionalism comes out most clearly, not in his *Philosophical Investigations*, but in his work on necessity, for example, his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*: "if you talk about essence—, you are merely noting a convention" (1983, 65).

Headley holds that the concept of racism is empirical, meaning that it designates a natural entity. Is Headley's claim about the kind of concept racism is a claim about what it designates *in cases where we use it* (e.g., to describe the world) or *as such and independently of how we use it* (e.g., to describe what racism really is)? Headley does not tell us, but it seems clear that it is not a claim about what the concept signifies in cases where we use it for everyday empirical description. For no one, I take it, denies that 'racism' is used to describe natural phenomena. When I say, 'S is a racist person,' no one (I assume) thinks that the racist property I attribute to S is a nonnatural entity, for if S is a natural entity then whatever it is about S that is racist is also natural. Similarly, when I say that institution P is racist, I am not claiming that P has some nonnatural property that we name 'racist.' I am instead claiming something about P, namely, that it has a natural property that we name 'racist.' The claim, then, is that the concept of racism as such—independently of its application—signifies a

natural entity as opposed to a nonnatural entity. In other words, this is a claim about what some philosophers might call *the meaning* of the word 'racism' and what others might call *the content of the concept* of racism. In short, we are concerned with that which is expressed in (correct) explanations of racism. For example, definitions of 'racism.'

The idea, then, seems to be that what is expressed by the correct definition of 'racism' is an empirical entity rather than a nonnatural entity. This in turn presupposes that definitions of 'racism' are descriptions. Let us call this view—the view that definitions of 'racism' (or definitions in general) are descriptions of some sort of reality or other—*representationalism*. Thus, the correct definition of 'beauty' describes a nonnatural entity whereas the definition of 'racism,' argues Headley, describes a natural entity (and, specifically, a sociocultural phenomenon). This leads me to my first disagreement with Headley. A definition of 'racism' is not a description of any kind; *ipso facto*, it cannot be the description of a natural entity or a nonnatural entity. For, on the Wittgensteinian view, a definition is a norm of description. For example, 'Racism is always wrong' provides a rule for the correct use of 'racism,' not a description of what racism really is. Representationalism thus contrasts with Wittgenstein's *conventionalism*—the view that definitions of 'racism' (and explanations of meaning generally) are norms of description or rules for the use of words.

One of the problems with representationalism is that it conflates general empirical claims and definitions of words. 'All bachelors are unmarried men' seems analogous to 'All bachelors are over five feet tall,' but the former, unlike the latter, is not 'made true' by the facts. For the definition of 'bachelor' is laid down as correct

and is therefore true *a priori*. The latter, however, is a description of reality; consequently, its truth-value is determined by the facts. If someone were to suggest that we should run a survey to check whether 'All bachelors are unmarried men' is true, we would reject this suggestion as conceptually confused. For the definition is not a description of anything but a convention that guides our representational behavior. Similarly, Headley's claim that definitions of 'racism' are descriptions (of either natural or nonnatural entities) conflates general empirical claims about racism and definitions of 'racism.' Consider:

　　1. Racism is reinforced in our society

　　2. Racism is a sociocultural phenomenon

Since Headley maintains that definitions of 'racism' (such as (2)) are descriptions, it follows that they share this in common with empirical descriptions (such as (1)). He therefore owes us an account of their difference. Headley, of course, goes further than this. For he would have to claim that *both* of these propositions are empirical. Hence, there is no fundamental difference between them. However, we know that empirical propositions are contingent and that (2), on Headley's view, is partly constitutive of the essence of racism. Is (2), then, a contingent truth about racism? Is it also a contingent truth about racism that it is always condemnable? This implies that the definition of 'racism' can change or be revised. For example, racism might be good tomorrow; or perhaps might cease being an empirical concept tomorrow. If the concept were to change in these or similar ways, (2) would no

longer be true. In that case, Headley's institutionalist approach to racism would be undermined. Thus, his approach is potentially self-refuting.

I have argued that Headley's distinction rests on a dubious picture of definitions as descriptions. The aforementioned problems would seem to suggest that we should reject representationalism, and with it the distinction between concepts that signify natural and nonnatural entities. In its place I have suggested that conventionalism provides a better account of definition. It can make sense of the empirical-*a priori* distinction by treating the latter as norms that are laid down as correct, rather than made true by the facts. A proposition like (2) is *a priori* in the innocuous sense that it has normative authority for us. Thus, the mere fact that it is revisable (like all definitions and indeed all norms of any stripe) does not undermine its necessity. For it has the necessity of a norm, not of a law of nature. (2) is necessarily true in the sense that, within a certain context of use, the proposition provides a rule for the use of 'racism.' But what context of use is that?

I would submit that the appropriate context of use here is a theoretical context. It is within the context of naturalistic and empirical theorizing about racism that (2) has a governing role. For it guides the practices of social scientists, such as sociologists and critical theorists, whose naturalistic descriptions and explanations of racism accord with this norm of description. Thus, on conventionalism, (2) provides a condition for the possibility of theoretical description. For if a theory of racism did not accord with this rule, we would not call it a 'naturalistic' or 'empirical' theory of racism. Similarly, a norm like 'Racism is always wrong' is authoritative for us. The

context in which it governs, however, is not a social-scientific context of application, but the moral context of condemnation. In moral contexts, we normally take it for granted that if something is racist, then it is wrong. And we do not entertain the possibility of there being a disproof of the proposition 'Racism is always wrong.' This does not show that rule in question cannot be revised, but only that we will not revise it. That is, it shows that the proposition has the necessity of a norm; i.e., it governs.

We can now take stock. One of the advantages of conventionalism is that it does not run into the sorts of problems we have encountered in Headley's analysis. Yet, there is a further advantage. For my conventionalist conception of definitions of 'racism' is consistent with full-blown naturalism, for it does not posit unobservable entities resembling Platonic Forms—i.e., eternal, immutable, monistic, and non-empirical essences. What is *a priori* on conventionalism is what Wittgenstein calls 'grammar,' the set of rules governing the proper uses of words. But grammar is immanent, temporal and alterable. Language is a human practice that partly constitutes human identity and human forms of life. Explanations of meaning are products of human creativity and ingenuity. In short, language is a natural phenomenon. The Wittgensteinian conception of language is logically *incompatible* with Headley's notion of "nonnatural" entities. I take this to be a point in favor of my analysis of the *a priori* and a deficiency in Headley's analysis of the *a priori*.

We can now conclude that the Wittgensteinian conception of definition provides an alternative conception of the *a priori* which avoids Headley's first objection—the contention that *a priori* approaches presuppose non-empirical,

changeless and ahistorical entities and concepts. Let us the consider his other two objections.

§2.3 *A priori* and Essentialist Definitions

Headley's second objection states that *a priori* approaches are committed to analytic definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. However, I argue that the Wittgensteinian conception of grammar is not committed to analytically defining 'racism' in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. The main reason for this is that pure description does not aim at constructing a definition of 'racism.' The aim is rather to dissolve conceptual confusion. The reason that is developed here, however, is that pure description is a clarificatory exercise. For instance, Headley's interest in developing an institutionalist definition of 'racism' rests on conceptual confusion, for his institutionalist explanations are norms of description.

Headley argues that 'racism' cannot be analytically defined because racism is an empirical and sociocultural phenomenon. As such, it is a constantly changing phenomenon that cannot be pinned down by a monistic and essentialist definition. Racism, unlike gold, he writes, lacks a stable essence because it is socially constructed:

> Racism, understood as a social reality, is a phenomenon primarily dependent upon intersubjective agreements and collaboration. It changes as social, political, and economic conditions change. It is not a stable entity, not a natural object but, rather, a constructed phenomenon that is constantly undergoing alteration and reconstruction. Its repetition is a function of human practices, beliefs, desires, and the like. (2000, 244)

He goes on to argue that:

> As a distinctively sociocultural phenomenon, racism is malleable to the shifting interests, goals, and so forth of a society. Focusing on the otherwise

dynamic aspects of racism enables us to explain various features of social reality. My point, then, is that there can be no successful analysis of racism exclusively generated by an a priori method of philosophical approach that does not take into consideration the social and cultural character of racism. (2000, 244-245)

Headley is correct that the meaning of 'racism' varies across time and place and that shifts in usage are explicable in sociohistorical terms. I further agree that the concept of racism is socially constructed. Finally, I think it plausible to hold that sociohistorical shifts in the use of 'racism' make it more challenging for the analyst to provide a necessary and sufficient definition of the term (though not necessarily impossible). The more variability in usage there is, the more that an analytic definition needs to explain. However, I reject the presupposition of his argument: that the social construction of racism undermines or diminishes the possibility of developing an *a priori* analysis of racism.

However, just as one can study definitions of chess as sociohistorical phenomena *and* normative phenomena, so too can one study the concept of racism as sociohistorical construction and normative practice. Headley's own analysis of racism, for example, sometimes offers grammatical remarks. He regularly applies the method of pure description when he criticizes Thomas Schmid's motivational approach to racism. For much of his argument consists of assembling reminders of rules governing the use of 'racism' for the purpose of dissolving conceptual confusion. He fails to realize that in arguing as he does, he is not highlight *empirical* facts about racism, but *norms* of description that are presupposed in certain theoretical and moral contexts of application.

He develops his argument as a critique of Schmid's individualistic account of racism, so let us briefly articulate his account. Consider Schmid's example of a store manager. Suppose that this individual targets black youths as potential shoplifters. Is the manager guilty of racism toward black youths? Suppose he is motivated by empirical data which suggests that black youths are more likely to shoplift than whites. The, argues Schmid, the manager's conduct is only 'racist' in a weak sense, for he is convinced that the manager's racist practice is morally benign. This leads Schmid to draw a distinction between *ordinary racism* and *true racism*. The former, while not entirely unobjectionable, is not seriously objectionable either, for only the latter, on his view, rises the level of true racism.

To further develop Schmid's thought, we need to draw the following distinctions:

> *Behavioral racism* is the failure to give equal consideration on the basis of race alone.

> *Motivational racism* is the infliction of unequal consideration, motivated by the intent to harm or dominate, on the basis of race alone.

Schmid thinks that behavioral racism (e.g., the store manager's behavior) is ordinary racism, whereas motivational racism is true racism. Further, Schmid distinguishes the principle of equal treatment from the principle of equality. Whereas the store manager does something (mildly) wrong by virtue of treating black youths differently than whites, cases of true racism are seriously racist by virtue of violating the *principle of equality*. Violations of the latter are denials of respect for the factual equality and/or rights of all individuals.

Schmid concedes that the manager might be guilty of true racism if the motivation behind targeting black youths is a certain belief about their predisposition to steal or some other such attitude, which clearly violates the principle of equality. If the manager treats black youths unequally for reasons of domination or hatred of blacks, then he is racist. But if his suspicion of black youths is empirically rooted—e.g., statistical data suggesting that black youths are more likely to shoplift than white or Asian youths—then he is not racist. Ultimately, motivational intent accounts for the difference between cases of ordinary racism and cases of true racism. Whether the manager is a true racist depends on *why* he targets black youths. The mere fact that unequal treatment exists is insufficient for true racism.

Headley raises several objections to Schmid's position. Most of them emphasize the potential harm that the store manager's action produces. But Headley also cites the violation of the principle of equality:

> Like the white motorist who utters the racial epithet "nigger," the store manager's decision to target black youths as potential shoplifters communicates to them that, because they are black, it is reasonable to suspect that they possess a flawed character, that is, they are merely potential shoplifters or just common thieves. Furthermore, what this act of suspicion communicates to innocent blacks is that they, too, are guilty without having been given the chance to demonstrate otherwise. The store manager's behavior harms them by assaulting their moral dignity, moral autonomy, and personhood. (2000, 229).[25]

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[25] The quote continues: "We should note, however, that one need not maintain that the store manager's behavior will necessarily lead to these consequences in every situation. However, it is sufficient that the potential exists for such consequences to result in order for the store manager's behavior to be considered morally objectionable." (2000, 229)

He elaborates on this objection by invoking a distinction between real and objective shoplifters:

> [T]he practice of targeting blacks as "objective shoplifters"[26] indicates the perception that blacks, whether for ethnic, biological, or cultural reasons, are predisposed to shoplifting. The harm is that blacks, regardless of education or socioeconomic status, discover that they are being singled out and targeted as "objective shoplifters." This realization harms them precisely because it attacks the dignity of innocent blacks. When seen as objective shoplifters and, in some cases, as "objective enemies" of society, blacks get the message that they are excluded from the moral community. (2000, 229)

Thus, even if black youths are more likely to shoplift than members of other races, it is still racist for the store manager to treat them as objective shoplifters. For this violates the dignity and autonomy of black youths and therefore violates the principle of equality.

At the same time, Headley argues that the store manager's decision to profile black youths is racist on the grounds that it produces harm, independently of the manager's motivation or intent. He argues for this objection by linking Schmid's notion of behavioral racism to institutional racism. Headley offers scattered explanations of institutional racism, one of which is provided in his conclusion:

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[26] The distinction between *objective shoplifters* and *real shoplifters* is based on Arendt's distinction between "real enemies" and "objective enemies." Headley explains it thus: "'Real enemies' are those persons who openly and actively challenge a political system. Organized opponents of a political regime communicate their desire to engage in political dissent. In such cases, there might be evidence indicating that certain individuals are involved in subversive activities. In the case of 'objective enemies,' there is no [such] evidence" (2000, 229). Arendt tells us that the objective enemy "is never any individual whose dangerous thoughts must be provoked or whose past justifies suspicion, but is perceived as a 'carrier of tendencies' like the carrier of a disease." (1958, 423-24; quoted by Headley) An objective shoplifter, then, is someone who has the tendency to shoplift and, therefore, ought to be treated with suspicion.

3. "Rather, racism has a certain structural nature, sustained and perpetrated by varied apparatuses of racial inclusion and exclusion, which in turn are reinforced by social institutions and cultural practices" (2000, 251).

One of these apparatuses is the social construction of black criminality. Headley explains that the constructedness of black criminality is comprised of multiple empirical factors, such as media depictions of black youths as thugs and criminals, discursive structures that offer explanations and justifications of racial profiling, etc. (2000, 229-239). He argues that these apparatuses are capable of creating a social condition that effectively perpetuates racial harm toward blacks (see especially 2000, 245-246). Finally, he maintains that 'isolated' acts of racism which seem morally benign if considered in the abstract are in fact morally objectionable; however, recognizing this fact requires that these otherwise isolated acts of unequal treatment be situated within a broader sociocultural context (2000, 245-251). Consider, for instance, the store manager's action. Suppose that the society in which he profiles black youths is one in which the aforementioned apparatuses exist. In that case, the manager's practices contribute to the systematic harming of blacks. For Headley, therefore, Schmid is wrong to claim that behavioral racism is morally benign unless there is an intent to harm or dominate on the basis of race alone. Some paradigmatic forms of racism (notably, institutional forms) are racist by virtue of their harmful racial effects.

Headley uses these criticisms to defend an institutionalist approach to the definition of 'racism.' But what has actually accomplished? In my view, his criticisms establish that certain definitions of 'racism' have a normative function within certain

theoretical contexts of use, for they are used to provide norms of theoretical

description in, for instance, social-scientific contexts of use. Institutional definitions

call our attention to the social causes of racism as opposed to the individual

perpetrators of racism:

> We should also note that, when we talk about institutional racism, we are not
> implying that it is possible for discrimination to occur without a perpetrator.
> Explaining institutional racism requires a different analysis of social behavior.
> At the level of institutional racism or discrimination, the focus is on recurrent
> patterns of practices and structures of behavior, attitudes, and habits. Focusing
> on institutional racism enables us to see the way in which "[r]acial
> discrimination is historically patterned rather than idiosyncratic; it is deeply
> embedded in social institutions." As Ezorsky has argued, a person who is not
> a racist can implement neutral policies that have a devastating negative racial
> impact.

I maintain that many of Headley's criticisms of Schmid are explicitly or implicitly

rooted in grammatical remarks. For instance, here are two such remarks:

4. Institutional racism is a matter of "recurrent patterns of practices and
    structures of behavior, attitudes, and habits."

5. Institutional racism is the implementation of "neutral policies that have a
    devastating negative racial impact," even when the person who implements
    them is not a racist.

Statements (3)-(5) provide rules for the use of 'institutional racism.' For these

propositions do not function as descriptions of racism, but as norms of description.

What proof, for example, does Headley have of (3)-(5)? Is there any way to prove

that racism is a matter of "recurrent patterns of practices" without begging the

question against someone who denies the possibility of institutional racism? If I deny

that patterns of practices can be racist, pointing to those patterns as evidence of the

fact that they are racist do not provide an independent reason to accept this claim.

The fact of the matter is that explanations of racism cannot be proved or disproved by the facts, because they are not descriptions of reality, but norms of description. It is question-begging to try and prove them on the basis of evidence, because they lay down the conditions for empirical description: they determine under what conditions something is to be called 'institutional racism.' Propositions (4) and (5) govern uses of 'racism' in moral-social-political contexts—that is, in contexts wherein institutions are criticized as racist. (3), by contrast, is a rule that orients the practices of social scientists and naturalists. The goal in these contexts is not to assign blame, but to explain the existence and endurance of institutional racism. What these considerations show is that it is possible to appreciate Headley's criticisms of Schmid without endorsing an institutionalist approach to the *definition* of 'racism.' That is, we need not begin with the presupposition that there is exactly one true description of racism. Hence, we are neither committed to monism (a single definition) nor to Headley's representationalist conception of definition.[27]

Institutional racism requires a different kind of analysis, as Headley keenly observes, because the wrongness of institutional racism sometimes consists in the *perpetuation* of racial inequality. The judgment that an institution is racist amounts to the condemnation of social norms/practices (e.g., laws, policies, media depictions,

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[27] Headley expresses his intent to defend an institutionalist approach in several places. For example, at the outset of his paper: "This essay examines the question of what serves as the most effective philosophical approach to a definition of racism. It is more specifically concerned with developing a strategic critique of the dominant individualistic or motivational model of racism. The case is made for an institutional approach to the definition of racism" (2000, 223).

and so on). Individuals are sometimes implicated as agents of racism in such contexts. Justice, however, does not always prove a matter of punishing wrongdoers. In institutional contexts, justice commonly assumes the form of *changing* institutional structures: passing legislation, forming an oversight committee, rethinking regulations, funding research, (re-)allocating resources, and so on. This is an important difference with individualistic forms of racism. The moral use of 'institutional racism' typically calls for social change whereas the moral use of 'individual racism' typically calls for proper condemnation and punishment of individuals. By highlighting these grammatical differences, Headley's analysis deploys the method of pure description—only to saw it off by defending an institutionalist approach. It is a grammatical reminder to say: *A store manager can commit acts of true and morally objectionable racism independently of intent or motivation*. For this proposition provides a rule for the use of 'institutional racism.' Headley appeals to reminders such as these for the purposes of dissolving conceptual confusion in Schmid's theory of racism.

With that, we can now reject Headley's second objection to *a priori* approaches. Headley maintains that *a priori* approaches are committed to necessary and sufficient definitions. But this misguided belief is predicated on the thought that there are *a priori* realities that have an unchanging and eternal essence. We have seen that the method of pure description has no such commitment. Further, I have argued that, among other things, the moral wrongness of racism sometimes changes from cases of individual racism to cases of institutional racism. In doing so, we managed to

participate in the grammatical analysis of various explanations of 'institutional racism' without providing necessary and sufficient conditions for the proper use of 'racism.' However, there are further difficulties with Headley's second objection.

§2.4 Institutionalist or Individualistic Definitions

Headley's argument attempted to show that institutionalist definitions of 'racism' are superior to individualistic definitions, but he failed at this task. Many of his arguments, we have seen, are grammatical in nature. Such arguments consist in assembling reminders for the purpose of dissolving conceptual confusion. Headley accomplishes as much in his paper: he successfully reminds us of institutionalist norms that we (and social scientists) take for granted in some of the judgments we make. None of this, however, proves that current rules governing the use of 'institutional racism' are *morally correct*. It might be argued, for example, that we ought to revise some or all of our institutionalist definitions. Headley provides no argument against this possibility. Therefore, since his argument relies on grammatical reminders, it only succeeds in proving that institutional racism is *possible*. That is, it proves that definitions of 'institutional racism' *exist* and lay down *conditions of sense*— conditions for the possibility of describing and condemning institutional practices as racist. In particular, nowhere in his paper does he prove that individualistic definitions of 'racism' are incorrect or secondary to institutionalist definitions.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Headley manages to refute some common individualistic contentions. His arguments in "Philosophical Approaches" establish two main contentions. First, they show that Schmid's individualistic approach to the

definition of 'racism' (and arguably motivational approaches more generally) fail to accommodate certain forms of institutional racism. This implies that at least some individualistic approaches to the definition of 'racism' are deficient. Second, his arguments establish that institutional racism is possible—i.e., that we already have the conceptual resources (rules for the use of 'institutional racism') to condemn non-reductive forms of institutional racism. From these two contentions, however, it does not follow that the institutionalist approach is the morally correct approach. His arguments are insufficient to prove that individualistic definitions are morally incorrect (i.e., should not be in use).

The only objection left is Headley's third critique. He argues that *a priori* approaches have a tendency to provide individualistic and intentionalist definitions of 'racism.' Thus, his criticism can be seen as posing a challenge to *a priori* approaches: Provide an *a priori* analysis of racism that is non-individualistic. We have already met this challenge, of course, for we have adopted some of his own analyses of institutional racism to dissolve conceptual confusion in Schmid and Headley's approaches to the definition of 'racism.' That is, we have clarified the normative role of some of his explanations of 'institutional racism' for the purposes of dissolving conceptual confusion. In elucidating differences across two contexts of use, for example, we did not commit ourselves to an individualistic conception of racism (nor to an institutionalist conception), because the goal of our analysis was not to define 'racism' but to achieve conceptual clarity.

§2.5 Conclusion

I have argued that the Wittgensteinian conception of the *a priori* successfully meets Headley's general challenges to *a priori* approaches. He is wrong to maintain that empirical and institutionalist approaches are 'correct.' Headley seems to be under the misapprehension that the correct definition of 'racism' is the one that corresponds to the fact of the matter; which seems to be a function of his commitment to representationalism. However, I have argued that on the Wittgensteinian conception of grammar definitions are not descriptions of any kind (for they are norms of description). Hence, there is no fact for them to correspond to. It may turn out, of course, that the conventionalist conception of explanation of meaning is incorrect. In that case, definitions of 'racism' might prove to be descriptions of some kind. But Headley has not argued for such a conception. What I have tried to show is that the conventionalist conception is *prima facie* plausible. I have further argued that the practice of pure description is theoretically useful insofar as it dissolves conceptual confusion.

Contrary to what many philosophers believe, it is a virtue of the Wittgensteinian practice that it leaves everything where it is. The goal of pure description does not offer a causal, reductive or unified account of racism; and it does not attempt to explain one type of racism in terms of another. The method of pure description is designed to dissolve conceptual confusion and it does this by leaving everything where it is. This is a necessary condition for emphasizing plurality,

diversity and difference. It is a method for understanding racism as it actually is, in all of its diversity, contradiction, internal tension, and so on.

Having differentiated the *a priori* method of pure description from empirical and naturalistic approaches, and having established its *prima facie* plausibility and its potential to dissolve conceptual confusion, I will continue to deploy and expand the method in subsequent chapters. In chapter 3, I argue that it can dissolve conceptual confusion in Glasgow's *a priori* theory of racism.

CHAPTER 3

A PRIORI DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS:
A CRITIQUE OF JOSHUA GLASGOW'S MONISTIC APPROACH

§3.1 Introduction

An important Wittgensteinian thesis is the claim that explanations of meaning

lay down norms of representation (i.e., rules for the use of words). A corollary of this

view is that explanations of meaning are constituents of rule-governed practices (i.e.,

language-games). The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how this contention

can be used to develop one line of criticism against descriptive theories of racism.

The foil for my argument is a paper by Joshua Glasgow, entitled "Racism as

Disrespect" (2009). His paper is rather ambitious. In addition to sketching a

rudimentary theory of racism, he advances and defends several methodological

claims. In particular, he articulates three adequacy conditions for descriptive theories

of racism. My chapter focuses on just one of them, the moral condition which states

that descriptive theories should explain the necessary wrongness of racism. Many

philosophers accept some version of this desideratum, so my argument has

implications beyond Glasgow's theory. In contradistinction with this position, I argue

that the moral condition applies to one specific theoretical context, namely, theories

of racism which aim at moral explanation.

In section 3.2, I discuss Glasgow's adequacy condition, evaluate his defense of it, and find it wanting. In section 3.3, I argue that descriptive analysis does not always aim at moral explanation. In particular, I consider a descriptive theory of racism for which Glasgow's moral desideratum does not apply. In section 3.4, I consider some objections to my argument. In sections 3.5 and 3.6, I discuss some ramifications of my argument for the nature of descriptive analysis.

<div align="center">§3.2 The Moral Condition</div>

Glasgow provides three desiderata for descriptive theories of racism. The first is that descriptive theories should accommodate ordinary usage of 'racism' as much as possible. Call this the *ordinary language condition*. He articulates it by contrasting descriptive and revisionist analyses:

> As an attempt to capture the content of our current, ordinary concept of racism, the adequacy criterion operative here is that an analysis should accommodate ordinary usage of relevant terms, terms like 'racism'. I will return to this point at the end of the article, but privileging analyses that accommodate ordinary usage does not entail that we cannot make mistakes in how we deploy the relevant terms—a point that is especially salient when the term in question is often used in contested ways, as is the case with 'racism'. Instead, the adequacy criterion merely states that, other things equal, the more that an analysis can accommodate ordinary usage, the better. Thus, the basic argument for my analysis is that it accommodates ordinary usage better than rival views do, as measured by cases that are intended to resonate with the reader. Some defenders of rival views will perhaps see revising ordinary usage as an acceptable by-product of other concerns or commitments. Such moves are understandable, but I maintain that those revisions nonetheless count as a cost of those views. At the same time, since this measure of adequacy requires that other things have to be equal, I will also try to show that my account captures some features commonly attributed to racism, including most prominently its apparent immorality. I begin with three analytical desiderata that emerge from considering some alternative accounts of racism. (2009, 64-65)

His second desideratum is that a theory of racism should accommodate the categorial plurality of racism (2009, 77), either by positing a necessary and sufficient definition or by positing a disjunctive definition consisting of an exhaustive list of individually sufficient conditions.

His third desideratum is the main interest of this chapter. Call this the *moral condition*. Glasgow initially articulates it thus: "an adequate understanding of racism must meet one final objective: it must accommodate the judgment that 'racism' is, *inter alia*, a term of moral disapprobation. In this regard, I follow others, such as Blum, Garcia, and Philips, in holding that racism is always at least defeasibly morally condemnable" (2009, 77). Glasgow understands the moral condition to be a special case of the ordinary language condition; that is, he thinks that condemnation belongs to the ordinary use of 'racism.' As Glasgow puts it, the theorist starts from the presumption that racism is always presumptively wrong or immoral. This has an important ramification for descriptive analysis. Namely, a descriptive theory of racism ought to *explain* racism's moral wrongness: "I will proceed on the premise that we should try to find an account of racism that can *make sense* of its apparent moral inadequacy" (2009, 80; my italics).

Glasgow defends the moral condition by considering Mills and Shelby's objection to it. Their claim, according to him, is that the intuition that racism is wrong might prove false on some occasions; therefore, it should be defended by argumentation rather than assumed *a priori*. Glasgow does not deny this possibility. Instead, he reminds us that the point of descriptive analysis is to clarify the concept

of racism as it is actually deployed. Thus, if some instances of racism are shown to be

false, this would show that the concept of racism entails an inconsistent triad:

> To be clear, though, it is not the third constraint, or views like mine that comply with it, that are the problem here, if there is indeed a problem. The problem would be that ordinary usage would (by hypothesis) endorse a triad of inconsistent propositions: that racism is always morally condemnable, that agents are always responsible for what is morally condemnable, and that agents are not always responsible for their racist attitudes. Since our primary concern here is to articulate an account of racism in a way that preserves ordinary usage of the term 'racism', we should sacrifice, if only provisionally, the second or third proposition in order to preserve the first. So I will proceed on the premise that we should try to find an account of racism that can make sense of its apparent moral inadequacy. (2009, 80)

To support this contention, he considers and replies to two possible

objections. The first objection and criticism of the moral condition is the case of the

'proud' or 'happy racist':

> One case that might be marshaled against the conceptual tethering of immorality and racism is the proud racist, who considers himself an upstanding person, of firm moral conviction, and who, believing that his race is superior to all others, seeks to entrench members of his race in positions of power. He not only happily embraces his racism; he additionally believes it to be morally justified. And, all the same, he identifies himself and his goals as racist. (2009, 78)

The proud racist believes that racism is good. Intuitively, the proud racist is not

conceptually confused. For his belief does not seem incoherent. If the proud racist

were confused, it seems he should not understand ordinary usage of 'racism,' for the

term is ordinarily used to condemn. Yet, the proud racist's form of life suggests that

he does understand. What is more, the proud racist appears to *disagree* with ordinary

usage. Perhaps, then, it is disagreement rather that confusion that explains his use of

'Racism is good.'[28] And, yet, Glasgow believes that the proud racist *is* confused.

In response to this objection Glasgow can appeal to a different intuition, one

that favors his own assessment of the matter. Consider: It is natural to say of anyone

who asserts that racism is good that one thereby misapplies 'racism.' The following

remarks can be interpreted as a *prima facie* case for preserving this intuition:

> If it is true that racism is morally wrong by definition, then he is not only
> mistaken but actually incoherent to claim both that his supremacist goals are
> racist and that they are not wrong. So saying that such a person is conceptually
> confused is one bullet that I must bite. If I'm going to bite this bullet, I must
> at least explain where such a person makes his error, and the explanation must
> be that he mistakenly thinks either that he is a racist or that he is not morally
> corrupt. I opt for the latter: he is incorrect to think that he is not morally
> corrupt. (2009, 78)

Hence, the proud racist is plausibly understood to be confused.

Glasgow goes on to consider a related objection. The objection is based on

Arthur's (2007) position that racists should not always be held morally accountable

for their racism. For we can imagine a 'reluctant racist,' i.e., a racist who is ashamed

of his or her racism. Such an individual clearly is aware of the fact that racism is

wrong but cannot help but think and act in a racist manner. Hence, the racist's belief

and form of life disagree with one another. Imagine that the reluctant racist takes

every possible step to change his habitual practice and to purify his racist attitudes.

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[28] It might be argued that if the proud racist is not conceptually confused, surely he must hold a false belief. However, this does not necessarily follow. For if conventionalism is true, 'Racism is good' is not a belief in the relevant sense of 'belief.' For to believe that racism is good is to treat this proposition as a norm, that is, to act in accordance with it. In other words, 'Racism is good' is not a description of reality, but a rule for the use of 'racism.'

Suppose further that none of this works in the end. Arthur argues that we should not hold the individual morally responsible for his failure, because he cannot do anything to change his situation and he has made a sincere effort to try and do so. Glasgow replies that even in this context the term 'racism' carries moral weight. That is, even here, it is possible to meaningfully describe the individual as racist. Additionally, Glasgow argues that two distinct questions must be recognized. The first is whether the 'reluctant racist' is in fact racist. The second is whether the 'reluctant racist' should be held morally responsible for being racist. Glasgow points out that on some theories of moral responsibility it may be that we should not hold the 'reluctant racist' responsible. However, this by itself is not reason enough to deny that he is racist. For one can be morally misguided without necessarily being morally responsible.

The upshot of Glasgow's arguments, if they are right, is that his intuition about the wrongness of racism stands. That is, it remains plausible to maintain that racism is always wrong. Hence, the moral condition seems justified: the descriptive analyst should explain the necessary wrongness of racism, for this strikes us as an essential feature of racism. In the remainder of this chapter, I explain why I think Glasgow's defense of the moral condition fails. I will divide my objections into two questions. *First*, does Glasgow's argument and defense of the moral condition succeed? I argue in the remainder of this section that it does not. *Second*, is the moral condition essential to descriptive analysis? In the sections that follow I argue that it is inessential to descriptive analysis.

Glasgow's defense of the moral condition does not succeed, because the proud racist is not conceptually confused. Glasgow's claim to the contrary strikes me as highly implausible. The proud racist is well aware of the opposition to his moral conviction that racism is good. This, however, suggests that he understands that 'Racism is wrong' is the actual norm within his linguistic community. If the proud racist were conceptually confused, he would not take himself to be contradicting the norm, or going against the grain, when he flouts the proposition 'Racism is good.' He might flout it both to offend the anti-racist and to assert the moral superiority of his own position. Suppose he also uses it to protest the ordinary use of 'racism' and to bolster political and social support. In that case, the proud racist is aware of the widespread acceptance of 'Racism is wrong' and is seeking to *revise* the current definition. The implication, then, is that the proud racist understands that 'Racism is good' is *not* the current definition. Indeed, his *rejection* of the definition's moral authority presupposes his *acceptance* of it as the current norm. Therefore, the proud racist cannot be conceptually confused.

This may seem like a contradiction: the proud racist both accepts and rejects the current definition of 'racism.' But the contradiction is easily resolvable: He accepts the definition in the sense that he knows the actual meaning of 'racism.' He is able to use it correctly and he understands what others (notably, ant-racists) mean by it. Thus, his 'acceptance' consists in the fact that he understands the current grammar of 'racism' and has the ability to use the word correctly. This is analogous to someone who knows how play the game of chess but refuses to play according to the existing

rules. Such an individual can intelligibly communicate with those who accept the rules of chess—both in the weak sense that they know the rules and in the strong sense that they believe the existing rules are correct (i.e., how the game ought to be played).

The sense in which the racist rejects the current grammar of 'racism' is that he has a moral objection to 'Racism is wrong.' In general, however, he accepts it for the purposes of speaking and communicating with others. But does he not reject it in his discursive practices? He rejects it discursively in the sense that he *speaks out* against the norm, and in the sense that he *refuses to draw the correct material inferences* (e.g., he refuses to infer the wrongness of X from the fact that X is racist). Such rejection, however, is deliberate and intentional. It is also connected with the racist's non-discursive practices, for example, political acts of protest (e.g., 'I am racist and proud!'). Thus, although there are discursive elements to the racist's rejection, these instances of failing to follow the rule 'Racism is wrong' are best understood as moral failings rather than linguistic or grammatical failings. For first of all, the racist can and does accept the grammar of 'racism' to a large extent, as is evidenced by his ability to community with others; and, second of all, the racist's moral protest presupposes his understanding that 'Racism is wrong' is the current norm. His dual stance on the norm is no more contradictory than the stance of someone who dislikes and speaks out against the norm 'Cars should drive on the left side of the road' while conforming to it when one has to drive. It follows from these considerations that the proud racist is *not* conceptually confused, as Glasgow maintains. Glasgow's defense of the moral condition is mistaken.

Notice that none of my arguments imply that it is false to think that racism is always wrong. My objections have not targeted the claim: *The wrongness of racism is an essential feature of the concept.* For I think this proposition is correct; that is, 'racism' is standardly used to condemn and even in contexts where 'racism' is not used to condemn, ascriptions of racism still have this connotation. Thus, I agree with Glasgow that, under normal circumstances, we justly reason from the proposition that 'X is racist' to the conclusion that 'X is wrong.' Why, then, do I reject Glasgow's moral condition? I think that Glasgow tacitly accepts the following conditional proposition, which strikes me as false: *If racism is always morally wrong, then the descriptive analyst ought to explain why racism is always morally wrong.*

§3.3 Why the Moral Condition is Unjustified

This conditional proposition might seem reasonable if one assumes that a descriptive theory of racism should be comprehensive or exhaustive; that is, if one thinks that *all* of the relevant facts about racism should be explained under a unified theory. Glasgow's preference is for an essentialist theory:

> First, none of the rival accounts considered above can accommodate all cases that seem intuitively to be classified as racist. Thus we still need an analysis that can make sense of the wide range of cases of racism; that is, we still need to solve the location problem. Second, our analysis should find a set of properties (perhaps a disjunction of properties) that specifies necessary and sufficient conditions for racism. Finally, that analysis should somehow make sense of the judgment that racism is morally problematic. (2009, 80)

These remarks suggest that the *goal* of descriptive analysis is to provide a univocal account of racism: a *single* definition of 'racism' that can accommodate every essential

feature of racism and apply to every possible case. Under this assumption, it seems reasonable that a theory of racism should explain the necessary wrongness of racism.

The problem is that descriptive theorizing need not aim at articulating a unified or monistic theory of racism (e.g., an essentialist theory). As we have seen, the Wittgensteinian approach is purely descriptive in the sense that it aims at conceptual clarity (not at determining the correct definition). Hence, the method of this approach is clarification. This consideration alone suggests that Glasgow's moral condition is unjustified. For the fact that racism is always wrong is perfectly consistent with a purely descriptive approach that seeks to clarify the concept of racism without providing an explanation of why racism is always wrong. Suppose for instance, that the Wittgensteinian is interested in dissolving confusion that has little or nothing to do with racism's moral wrongness. In that case, the analysis would have little, if anything, to say about *why* racism is always wrong, but the theory would not be incomplete for all that. For the description might achieve the goal of dissolving conceptual confusion. It follows that Glasgow's moral desideratum is inessential to pure description; *ipso facto*, it is inessential to descriptive analysis as such.

To provide another example, consider Mills' *The Racial Contract* (1997), which develops a naturalistic framework for theorizing white supremacy. "My suggestion is that by looking at the *actual* historically dominant moral/political consciousness and the *actual* historically dominant moral/political ideals, we are better enabled to prescribe for society than by starting from ahistorical abstractions" (1997, 92). Like

Glasgow's descriptive approach, Mills' approach has descriptive and prescriptive components:

> I have spent a great deal of time talking about the *actual* historical record and the *actual* norms and ideals that have prevailed in recent global history. I have been giving what, in the current jargon of philosophers, would be called a "naturalized" account, rather than an idealized account. And that is why I said from the beginning that I preferred the classic use of contract, which is seeking to describe and explain as well as to prescribe. (1997, 92)

Mills' framework describes the actual norms of white supremacy in order to expose and repudiate them. By uncovering harmful social norms, we are in a better position to theorize ways of undermining them. His descriptive theory thus lays the foundation for prescriptive theorizing. In this way Mills argues that

> Racism and racially structured discrimination have not been deviations from the norm; they have been the norm, not merely in the sense of de facto statistical distribution patterns but, as I emphasized at the start, in the sense of being formally codified, written down and proclaimed *as such*. From this perspective, the Racial Contract has underwritten the social contract, so that duties, rights, and liberties have routinely been assigned on a racially differentiated basis (1997, 93).

Mills' argument introduces an analytical framework for social scientific research. Thus, like many others, he argues that the empirical and the *a priori* are enmeshed.

Suppose that some descriptive theorist deploys Racial Contract theory in order to uncover and expose harmful racial norms. Imagine that in spite of the theory's explicit moral implications, the theorist does not go beyond mere description. I will call this use of Mills' theory *Restricted Racial Contract theory*. Restricted Racial Contract theory is a method of descriptive theorizing that is philosophical, descriptive and empirically oriented. So it provides a counterexample to the conditional proposition

discussed above. For the goal of this approach is to *expose* the racist norms that underwrite some practical domain. In this way, it takes the moral wrongness of racism for granted without necessarily offering an explanation of why racism is always wrong.

To better appreciate this point, consider what it means to explain the wrongness of racism. To explain why racism is always wrong is to provide a justification of racism's wrongness, but why must a theory of racism be concerned with developing a justification of moral condemnation? Why should the focus not lie elsewhere? For instance, why not focus on exposing hitherto unrecognized or underappreciated racial norms which are producing racial harm in, say, academic philosophy? Restricted Racial Contract theory provides a counterexample to Glasgow's assertion that the moral condition is necessary for descriptive theorizing.

I have been arguing that the moral condition is invalid for some descriptive theories of racism. However, this is not to say that the moral condition is never justified. What I deny is that the moral condition is essential to descriptive analysis *tout court*, that is, to every legitimate approach to descriptive analysis. My claim, then, is that Glasgow's moral condition lacks *universal validity* and that, at best, it only has *local validity*: it is valid for some descriptive approaches to racism but not for others. My argument has relied on pragmatic considerations. For I have insisted that whether the moral condition is valid depends (at least in part) on the theoretical goal of the analysis. Where the goal of analysis is clarification and freedom from conceptual confusion, the moral condition does not apply. Where the goal of analysis is to

expose racially harmful norms, deeply embedded in our social practices, the moral condition does not apply. And so on.

<p style="text-align:center;">§3.4 The Moral Condition as Norm of Description</p>

I have now shown that Glasgow's defense of the moral condition is inadequate and that descriptive theories of racism are possible that are not guided by the moral condition and have no use for it. I concluded from these considerations that the moral condition is unjustified. To further defend my position, however, I will argue that the moral condition is a norm of theoretical description.

A theoretical norm is one that is authoritative for a theoretical practice. Glasgow's moral condition, like any other norm, performs the function of guiding practice. It seems to me to be a valid guide to descriptive approaches that seek to justify the moral condemnation of racism. I will refer to such theories as *moral descriptions* and *moral explanations*. In a teaching context, 'Racism is always wrong' can be used to teach a child the meaning of 'racism.' However, in a theoretical context, the wrongness of racism is the object of explanation. Hence the operative norm here is something like this: *The goal of descriptive analysis is to explain why racism is always wrong.* Where a philosophical theory does not have this end as its goal, the theory has no need for this norm; consequently, the norm has not authority (necessity) over the theoretical practice in question. A theory of racism that has a different theoretical end as its aim will be guided by a different theoretical norm (i.e., adequacy condition).

Notice that even where the goal of a theory of racism is to provide a definition of the term, it does not follow that the definition should be a moral definition of the

term. After all, the concept of racism is not merely a moral concept; it is also social, political, historical, etc. Headley, for example, defines 'racism' as a sociocultural phenomenon and a social construction. So, what counts as 'the correct definition' of 'racism' depends on the goal of the analysis. Adequacy conditions lay down criteria for evaluating proposed definitions. Since they determine what *counts* as 'the correct definition,' I will describe them as *goal-directed norms*. These are provided *a priori*, but are justified by the goal of the analysis and therefore by the problematic that motivates the analysis. In this way, 'the correct definition' is context-sensitive, for what (definition) it designates will be relative to the theoretical project (bot its goal and the problem that is resolved by the stipulation of the definition as correct).

In *Racism Without Racists* (2006), Bonilla-Silva's guiding question is: How is it that racism continues to exist, and even thrive, within the context of a 'colorblind society,' one that purports to be anti-racist? In his own words: "How is it possible to have this tremendous degree of racial inequality in a country where most whites claim that race is no longer relevant? More important, how do whites explain the apparent contradiction between their professed color blindness and the United States' color-coded inequality?" (2006, 2). Bonilla-Silva's puzzle arises in part because of the professed attitudes of those who reside in colorblind societies. The vast majority of its members openly object to racism on moral grounds and profess liberal principles of universal equality, human rights, and so on. If these values are truly ours, however, one might predict that racial inequality and discrimination would be nonexistent in such a society. Racism, it seems, should be a relic of the past; a problem perpetrated

by 'a few bad apples.' Yet, racial inequality, argues Bonilla-Silva, is alive, well, and widespread. The kind of racial inequality that Bonilla-Silva has in mind often goes by the name 'institutional racism.' Sociologists are puzzled by facts (e.g., statistical generalizations) which suggest that, despite the historical victories of anti-racists, there is relatively little progress for racial minorities on the scores of wealth, housing, and so on. In other words, many of the racial disparities between whites, on the one hand, and blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, and so on, remain very much alive today. Given these racial disparities within the context of a liberal colorblind society, how are they to be explained?

His answer to both of these questions is that there is today a powerful ideology that rationalizes and justifies institutional forms of racial discrimination:

> In this book I attempt to answer both of these questions. I contend that whites have developed powerful explanations—which have ultimately become justifications—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color. These explanations emanate from a new racial ideology that I label *color-blind racism*. (2009, 2)

Bonilla-Silva argues that a partial explanation of institutional racism is given in the ideology of colorblind racism. The ideology is racist by virtue of its social function. For it serves to rationalize and thereby justify the *status quo*, i.e., racial inequality.

The question thus arises: Is Bonilla-Silva's descriptive theory of racism adequate? Let us suppose that his theory adequately answers his own empirical question. Judging by the standard of Glasgow's moral condition, we must conclude that Bonilla-Silva's theory of racism is inadequate. For it fails to explain why racism is always wrong. First, Bonilla-Silva's description does not explain why its object of

explanation (institutional racism) is racist. On the contrary, the theory presupposes the existence of institutional racism. That is, he takes it for granted that racial inequality and disproportional racial disparities are racist. Second, his theory does not explain why colorblind racism is racist. Perhaps it will be objected that this is false. After all, his theory does offer this explanation: 'The ideology of colorblindness rationalizes and justifies institutional racism, therefore the ideology of colorblindness is racist by virtue of its racist social function.' If we should count this proposition as an explanation of why colorblind racism is wrong, then his theory does satisfy the moral condition. But, of course, philosophers like Garcia would (rightly) object that this explanation fails. For it does not specify that in virtue of which something counts as morally wrong.[29] If it is said that a racist social function is simply one that results in racial inequality, then the explanation only pushes our question one level further. We should then ask, what is racism as such? Are all forms of racial inequality racist, for example? And what is the justification for calling institutional-systemic racial ills 'racist'? Presumably, these are the sorts of questions that an explanation of racism's moral wrongness should answer (or at least pave the way for such answers).

Bonilla-Silva's description appears to be a failure when judged by the moral condition. However, my claim is precisely that this is the wrong standard. His theory

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[29] "An account of racism should show why her [a racist named Shaylee] presuppositions are incorrect and why it is precisely in the depths of our individual minds, in our fears and choices, our disdain and hatreds, that racism dwells, with the other moral vices there lodged. It is a shame that nowadays many accounts of racism, focusing as they do on ideologies and theories and grand social structures, side with Shaylee when they should be helping to educate her and us about where her assumptions are in error." (Garcia 2004, 40) One of Garcia's general criticisms of empirical accounts is that they fail to explain what racism (and its wrongness) consists in (see especially Garcia 1999).

does not explain racism's moral wrongness because he is not asking the moral question. His description is sociological and non-moral. What he seeks to explain is why racism still exists in the U.S.—and, specifically, why and how it continues to reproduce itself within the context of our liberal, 'post-racial,' colorblind society.

Bonilla-Silva's analysis does not merely provide an additional counterexample to Glasgow's moral condition. (We have already provided two counterexamples in the previous section.) The main point of introducing his theory is to show that adequacy conditions must be internally related to the goal of the analysis, for without this internal connection, the necessity (authoritativeness) of the norm is nonexistent. If I invent a new game using chess pieces, the authority of the proposition 'No, you *must* not move like that, for the king only moves one square at a time' is nonexistent. It is useless to insist that obey a norm that, at best, will distract one from achieving one's intended goal, and, at worst, will distort the nature of one's practice. Given that Bonilla-Silva aims at explaining racism's existence, he is guided by the following adequacy condition: *A descriptive theory of racism should explain why racism still exists.* Clearly, Glasgow would not accept *that* condition and yet Bonilla-Silva could insist that he *must* conform to this norm. But what is to be gained from such insistence? Bonilla-Silva's desideratum no more applies to Glasgow's descriptive theory of racism than Glasgow's desideratum applies to Bonilla-Silva's descriptive theory.

§3.5 Two Objections to My Argument

A. The moral condition does not apply to descriptive theories of an empirical/sociological nature

I have now argued that Glasgow's moral condition only has local validity, for it is not valid for *every* descriptive theory of racism. Additionally, I have shown that the goal of theoretical analysis determines which adequacy conditions are applicable (i.e., authoritative). I now consider to two objections my arguments.

I begin by considering Shelby's objection to Garcia's claim that the moral condition is essential to descriptive theorizing:

> Garcia, like many people these days, thinks that racism is necessarily wrong. And he maintains that "no account of what racism is can be adequate unless it at the same time makes clear what is wrong with it." However, Garcia offers little argument for this claim, despite the fact that it is far from obvious. Clearly, a sociological or historical account of racism need not make clear what is wrong with it; it would be sufficient if such accounts explained the nature and origins of racism—surely a demanding enough task. So, assuming Garcia would not disagree with this, I take it that he means to apply this methodological requirement to only moral-philosophical analyses of racism. (1996, 411)

Shelby was much too hopeful. In his post-1996 work on racism, Garcia does not restrict his moral condition to moral-philosophical analyses of racism. He criticizes historians, sociologists and cultural theorists for developing ideological, constructivist and institutionalist accounts of racism. He argues against empirical accounts on the grounds that they fail to capture the essence of racism (which, for him, resides in volition).[30] Garcia's criticisms notwithstanding, it is Shelby who is correct. He is right to remind us that theoretical interest in the concept of racism is not exhausted by

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[30] See Garcia (1997; 1999; 2004). See my evaluation of Garcia's theory in chapter 6.

strictly moral considerations. In particular, Garcia is wrong to completely ignore the goals of those accounts he finds wanting (a point that Headley repeatedly comes back to in his own critique of Garcia).[31]

Nevertheless, it might be objected that Shelby implicitly recognizes a distinction between philosophical and non-philosophical theories of racism. After all, he seems to accept the validity of the moral condition to moral-philosophical theories. This leads me to the first objection. It might be objected that Glasgow can easily limit his moral condition to moral-philosophical descriptions of racism. In other words, he need not commit himself to the view that the moral condition has universal validity. He can instead claim that it has local validity within the moral-philosophical domain. Since Bonilla-Silva's theory of racism is sociological rather than philosophical, his theory does not present a counterexample to the moral condition. Another way of putting the objection is this. My invocation of Bonilla-Silva's theory does little more than demonstrate that there are different disciplinary interests in studying racism. However, this is uncontroversial, for who would deny that racism is an interdisciplinary phenomenon that is studied by philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, psychologists, and so on?

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[31] Here is one example: "Again, Garcia's attack against Omi and Winant is misleading. Indeed, at the risk of repetition, his very framing of the issue betrays a careless misreading of their strategic concerns. They have no desire to develop a necessary and sufficient definition of racism. Furthermore, fairness dictates making an honest effort to understand their objectives instead of imposing trivial demands upon them. Their goal is not to capture the essence of racism but, rather, the dynamism of racism by situating their focus on the historical, social, and cultural projects of racial formation." (Headley 2006, 6-7)

The first thing to be said in response is that, even if we accept the proposed distinction between philosophical and sociological theories of racism, my critique nevertheless succeeds at setting a limit on the moral condition. To the extent that the moral condition is justified, it is limited to moral-philosophical theories of racism. In this way, it undermines liberal uses of the moral condition, as we find in the case of Garcia (who seeks to extend this condition to *all* theories of racism, irrespective of whether they are historical, sociological, etc.).

Second, in the philosophy of race and in philosophy in general the nature of philosophical analysis is contested. Some philosophers and philosophical schools of thought, such as naturalists and pragmatists, maintain that empirical or sociohistorical interests in racism are philosophical.[32] That many philosophers see philosophy and the social sciences (or at least parts of it) on a continuum provides *prima facie* evidence against attempts to draw a sharp distinction between 'philosophical theories' and 'non-philosophical theories.' Hence, to successfully raise an objection to my argument on the grounds that a sociological interest is not a philosophical one, it must be shown that these philosophers' conceptions of philosophy are wrong. That is, it must be shown that what they call 'philosophy' is not really philosophy but something else. One way to bite this bullet would be to argue that philosophy is *a priori* whereas the social sciences are *a posteriori*. But even if we accept this argument, it

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[32] See Harris (1998) for a survey of competing theories of race and racism. His survey demonstrates how unobvious it is to think that the moral interest in racism is the correct approach. Also see Headley's (2000; 2006) and Haslanger's (2004) defenses of empirical approaches.

is difficult to see why the definition of 'philosophy' should not be revised. For important work in the philosophy of race engages the philosophical tradition in ways that seem to improve upon some of its traditional methods. Hence, a revisionist definition might be justified on pragmatic grounds.

An example of a self-described theory of racism which is both empirical and *a priori* is Mills' Racial Contract Theory. As we have seen, his theory is a clear case of descriptive theorizing that has descriptive and prescriptive elements. What is more, his analysis has no use for the moral condition. For it takes the wrongness of racism for granted and aims at exposing racial injustices in various domains of social reality. The descriptive element of this approach is concerned with empirical description, not with the justification of moral condemnations of racism.

Mills' Racial Contract theory challenges the thought that sociological theories are not philosophical theories because the former are enmeshed in empirical considerations and aim at resolving empirical problems (as opposed to philosophical or *a priori* problems). My rejoinder is that Mills' philosophical approach is descriptive and enmeshed in the empirical, but is philosophical for all that. Hence, the mere fact that Bonilla-Silva's theory is sociological (i.e., empirical) is not a sufficient reason to reject it from the philosophical domain.

Without the distinction between empirical and non-empirical descriptive theories, it is not at all clear what the grounds are for drawing a sharp distinction between philosophical and non-philosophical descriptions (or between philosophical descriptions and social scientific descriptions) of racism. It is also worth noting that

Bonilla-Silva's notion of ideology is derived from two well-known philosophers,

namely, Marx and Engels'[33] use of the term.[34]

B. If Glasgow's definition of 'racism' is correct, then non-moral definitions are inadequate

Glasgow argues that racism is always wrong because it is a kind of disrespect.[35]

Let us assume that his definition is correct and let us use *D* to designate his

definition. Given that *D* is correct and that it captures the essence of racism, it might

be thought that any description that leaves *D* out of the analysis will fall short of

completeness. For any such analysis will have no satisfactory answer to the question:

What makes racism (on you theory) racist? For instance, what makes colorblind racism (on

Bonilla-Silva's theory) racist? Glasgow can argue that colorblind racism is racist by

virtue of conforming to *D* (i.e., it is racially disrespectful). Arguably, then, if *D*

provides the correct explanation of racism's wrongness, Bonilla-Silva's theory will

prove incomplete, at best.

It seems to me that this objection misses the point of my argument. A moral

explanation of racism (like Glasgow's definition) is irrelevant to Bonilla-Silva's

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[33] See *The German Ideology* selections in Marx and Engels (1978).

[34] In the introduction I defended the *a priori*-empirical distinction. Yet, here I have conceded that naturalistic approaches blur this distinction. How can I have it both ways? The sense in which Mills' approach 'blurs' the *a priori*-empirical distinction is not that it effectively undermines the distinction. Rather, the distinction is blurred in the sense that Mills' approach incorporates elements of both. This is perfectly consistent with the method of pure description. The fact that Wittgenstein's *a priori* approach is purely descriptive does not entail that all *a priori* approaches must be purely descriptive. Blum's (2002) *a priori* approach, for example, attempts to revise ordinary usage. Thus, my own view is that it is possible to carve out a notion of *descriptive analysis*, one which is purely descriptive and *a priori* without maintaining that this is the only viable conception of 'descriptive analysis.'

[35] We need not worry ourselves with the details of his account, since we are interested in his theory only to the extent that it poses an objection to my argument.

descriptive project. Moral explanation of racism is an idle wheel in his sociological context. For what Bonilla-Silva seeks to explain is not the wrongness of racism but the existence of institutional racism. What drives his explanation and what is therefore salient in his description is a causal mechanism. He takes this causal mechanism to be the social function of certain forms of discourse. He might be wrong about this. But if his theory is mistaken, it is not because racism is a kind of disrespect. Imagine someone advancing the following reproach: 'I understand your theory and the question you're trying to answer, but you should point out somewhere in your argument that racism is racial disrespect.' If Bonilla-Silva should oblige, his adding this to his account would not explain and illuminate anything of significance for his purposes. Glasgow's definition of 'racism' is literally useless for the project of social explanation.

In saying this, I do not take myself to be criticizing the project of moral description. My point is that there is more than one approach to descriptive analysis. This should not be surprising. For the concept of racism is, *inter alia*, a moral, social and political concept. Furthermore, descriptive projects are defined (constituted) by their respective goals. Bonilla-Silva's descriptive project is made possible by the fact that concept of racism is a *social concept* while Glasgow's descriptive project is made possible by the fact that it is a *moral concept*. On the assumption that Glasgow's analysis is well suited to the analysis of racism *qua* moral concept, it does not follow that it is well suited to the analysis of racism *qua* social concept.

Nevertheless, the objector might persist. If racism is always morally wrong, then any descriptive theory that does not explain this fact is incomplete. To this I reply that the criteria for judging whether a theory is 'complete' or 'incomplete' are relative to the goal of the practice. Thus, a theory is complete if it adequately and comprehensively settles the question it poses (cf. PI 87, 91). Such criteria must be derived from *within* the theoretical practice, otherwise one is imposing a goal which is foreign to the theoretical context in question. For example, Bonilla-Silva's descriptive theory of racism is admittedly incomplete—however, the reason for this is not that it fails to account for racism's necessary wrongness. The reason is rather that colorblind racism is not the only explanatory mechanism; that is, there are other reasons (besides the ideology of colorblindness) that explain why racism still exists. To suggest that Bonilla-Silva's analysis is incomplete is to imply that it fails to achieve something it ought to achieve; that is, that he does not achieve his intended goal. But it is no part of Bonilla-Silva's aim or intention to explain racism's necessary wrongness. It is instructive that the correct explanation of racism's moral wrongness (whatever it may be) plays no role in Bonilla-Silva's theoretical context, for it does not help to resolve his empirical question. So the charge of incompleteness is misguided.

What is more, the charge of incompleteness cuts both ways. Glasgow claims to have provided an essentialist account of racism's moral wrongness. Suppose his definition of 'racism' is correct in this regard. Does it then follow that his analysis is incomplete because it does not explain why racism exists? Suppose that Bonilla-Silva should argue that an adequacy condition for any descriptive theory of racism is that it

explain why racial inequality still exists. Glasgow, I believe, would reject this desideratum. Yet by parody of form the sociologist (or any other naturalist) is just as entitled to impose it upon Glasgow if the latter is entitled to impose the moral condition. For the sociologist can appeal to his own intuitions on the matter. The sociologist who is perplexed by particular empirical problems might well take the sociological condition to be highly intuitive, for what is taken to be intuitive tends to be a function of one's (theoretical) interests and goals.

Requiring that philosophers conform to the moral condition unwarrantedly privileges the moral features of the concept of racism over and against its social features. The consequence of this is that the moral condition effectively determines the orientation of philosophical analysis. The claim that a descriptive theory of racism ought to explain why racism is always wrong reflects an analytical preference, a philosophical interest, and a theoretical goal for the descriptive project.

If Glasgow's moral condition is inappropriately applied to non-moral descriptive theories of racism, does this mean that his theory of racism is biased, as Mills charges in the case of Garcia? Consider:

> Yet the question of the nature and significance of a social phenomenon (its social sources, functional role, historical evolution, distinctive features, etc.) is a different question from its moral status, and to use morality as a preliminary filter is likely to have unfortunate theoretical consequences. In particular, we should not start *a priori* with the position that racism in its different varieties is always wrong before we seek to do an analysis of racism, since this aprioristic assumption may distort the investigative project. Rather than approaching things neutrally, we may find ourselves denying that certain phenomena which *prima facie* seem racist, or have been taken by many to be racist, are such, because they do not pass the (im)morality test. Shelby argues, and I agree, that this is just what has happened in Garcia's account. By moralizing racism, by

making it (always) a vice, a sin, he not only ties himself to an account with implausible implications, but distorts his own investigation, ending up tailoring the description of the phenomena to fit his preferred definition. (2003, 58-59)

To Glasgow's credit, he, unlike Garcia, does not link racial disrespect too closely to volition or to religious conceptions of disrespect. Hence that portion of the critique has no counterpart in Glasgow's theory. Yet, one might gather from Mills' discussion that the basic problem with the moral condition is that it *biases* or *distorts* the object of description. He worries that "we should not start *a priori* with the position that racism in its different varieties is always wrong before we seek to do an analysis of racism, since this aprioristic assumption may distort the investigative project." Here it seems that Mills' objection goes too far, for the implication is that the moral condition should have no place in descriptive theorizing. However, whether it is likely to distort the investigation or not depends on the goal. If the goal is to analyze the moral wrongness of racism, then the moral condition is an appropriate rule for the theorist to follow. Indeed, the moral condition would be partly constitutive of the theoretical practice, and to transgress it would be to abandon the project (which would ironically enough guarantee the distortion of its object). Therefore, Mills' critique might go too far. At the same time, a weaker point is correct: When descriptive analysis does not aim at moral explanation, imposing the moral condition may well bias and distort the account.

§3.6 Conclusion

To conclude, Glasgow's moral condition has been analyzed as an explanation of meaning, i.e., a rule for the correct use of 'descriptive analysis.' The goal of his

theoretical project is to justify the condemnation of racism. I have argued that the moral condition should not be imposed on everything that is called 'descriptive analysis,' for there are non-moral interests in the concept of racism that have no use for it. In other words, it is possible to have multiple descriptive-theoretical practices (and interests in racism) besides the moral one.

One of the upshots of this argument is that all adequacy conditions provide rules for the correct use of 'descriptive analysis.' A further upshot is that their moral authority is always derived from the goal of the analysis. As Wittgenstein writes: "Concepts lead us to make investigations. They are the expression of our interest and direct our interest" (PI 570). Glasgow (like Garcia, and others) believes that the moral condition has universal validity rather than local validity. He forgets that his moral conception of racism is the expression of a particular interest in racism and that other conceptions and interests are possible. Thus, I have sought to clarify the grammar of 'descriptive analysis' and 'adequacy condition' for the purposes of dissolving conceptual confusion in Glasgow's *a priori* approach to racism.

My critique has been an exercise in the philosophical-grammatical project that I call 'pure description.' I have tried to leave the phenomenon of descriptive analysis where it is in order to highlight differences in the way descriptive theorists approach description. My analysis has deeper ramifications for the nature of philosophical analysis that I cannot explore here, although some of them are explored in later chapters.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYZING DISAGREEMENT ABOUT RACISM:
A NON-ONTOLOGICAL, PRAGMATIC-NORMATIVE ANALYSIS

§4.1 Introduction

Some philosophers of race are arguably committed to the view that

explanations of meaning (and definitions of 'racism' in particular) are descriptions of

an ontological reality. In chapter 2, I called this view 'representationalism.' Consider,

for example, Garcia's claim that descriptive analysis is a matter of 'discovering' the

ontological reality of racism which exists independently of how 'racism' is used:

> What we seek to discover is what, in applying the term ['racism'], we are saying
> about the things to which we apply it. To find this out in light of the origins of
> the term 'racism', and to sort out various inconsistencies and
> misunderstandings in the ways people use it, is the most promising path to
> discovering what racism is. That is what we need to do in order to answer our
> question of how properly to conceive of racism. In this connection, it is worth
> keeping in mind that the fact that the term 'racism' has been employed
> historically in a variety of senses does not entail that there have been many
> forms of racism, just as the fact that the word 'bank' can be used to mean
> either financial establishments or riversides does not mean that there are two
> types of bank. Ontology does not so closely track semantics; lexicography is
> not taxonomy. … Our task is to figure out what it is in virtue of which
> something belongs to the class of racisms, that is, to determine what racism
> consists in. (1997, 6)

Representationalism naturally feeds into the position that *disagreement about racism* is

descriptive, i.e., disagreement about a matter of fact. The aim of this chapter is to

challenge this conception of disagreement. Wittgenstein's view that definitions of 'racism' are prescriptions of norms rather than descriptive propositions implies that disagreement about the nature of racism is normative (disagreement about a norm) rather than descriptive (disagreement about a fact). Hence, my aim in this chapter is to both develop a normative analysis of disagreement that is consistent with Wittgenstein's normative conception of grammar and to apply it to disputes about the nature of racism. I argue that disputes about what racism *is* are best understood as normative disputes, disputes about how 'racism' *ought* to be used.

David Plunkett and Tim Sundell's recent paper and defense of what they call 'metalinguistic negotiation' provides an avenue for carrying out this extension of Wittgenstein's conception of grammar. I will deploy the core of their analysis for my intended purpose. Section 2 presents their normative analysis of disagreement and subsequent sections deploy this conception to cases of disagreement about racism.

<div style="text-align:center">§4.2 Metalinguistic Negotiation</div>

David Plunkett and Tim Sundell's "Disagreement and the Semantics of Normative and Evaluative Terms" (2013) offers what I will call a normative conception of disagreement. Although they have their own philosophical interests for their use of this analysis, I understand it to be an elucidation of a neglected use of 'disagreement.'[36] They describe the goal of their paper as follows:

> We argue that speakers can, and often do, genuinely disagree with each other even while in the disputes reflecting those disagreements, those speakers *do not* mean the same things by their words. How is disagreement reflected in such a

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[36] In particular, I do not endorse their use of this analysis to vindicate contextualism.

linguistic exchange? Via a largely tacit negotiation over how *best* to use the relevant words. Following Chris Barker, we use the term *metalinguistic usage* for cases where a linguistic expression is used (*not* mentioned) to communicate information about the appropriate usage of that very expression in context. In the cases that Barker introduces (and which we discuss later in this paper) the metalinguistic usage of a term centers on descriptive matters of how a term is in fact used in the relevant context. However, by putting forward competing claims of this type, speakers can, *via* metalinguistic uses of their terms, debate how it is those terms *should* be employed. We call a dispute like this — one that employs competing metalinguistic usages of an expression, and that reflects a disagreement about the proper deployment of linguistic representations — a *metalinguistic negotiation.* (2013, 3)

There is a critical component to their argument: "If this argument has been successful, it means that philosophers are wrong to reason from the fact that a particular exchange involves a genuine disagreement to the thesis that the speakers involved in that exchange mean the same things by the words they use" (2013, 24).

Plunkett and Sundell's paper draws a contrast between canonical disagreement and what they call metalinguistic disagreement (metalinguistic negotiation being a special case). Before getting to that, however, let us consider their general analysis of disagreement:

> *Disagreement Requires Conflict in Content* (DRCC): If two subjects A and B disagree with each other, then there are some objects p and q (propositions, plans, etc.) such that A accepts p and B accepts q, and p is such that the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting it are rationally incompatible with the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting q. (Perhaps, though not necessarily, in virtue of q entailing not-p.) (2013, 11)

The vague term 'rationally incompatible' is used in order to accommodate various kinds of incompatibility: incompatible propositions, plans, and so on. On the 'canonical' account of disagreement, the incompatibility is essentially located in

'semantic content.'[37] "Call any dispute that centers on the truth or correctness of the content literally expressed by the speakers a *canonical dispute*" (2013, 6). Thus, two participants disagree when they are committed to incompatible propositions or when they express incompatible desires and plans. Their considered analysis of canonical disputes turns on the incompatibility of two objects:

> A dispute consisting in Speaker A's utterance of *e* and Speaker B's utterance of *f* is canonical just in case there are two objects p and q (propositions, plans, etc.) such that Speaker A's utterance of *e* literally expresses p and Speaker B's utterance of *f* literally expresses q, and q is fundamentally in conflict with p in the manner appropriate to objects of that type. (By p entailing not-q in the case of propositions; by the satisfaction of p precluding the satisfaction of q in the case of desires; by p's implementation precluding q's implementation in the case of plans, etc.) (2013, 9)

Plunkett and Sundell's object to the canonical analysis, but the objection is not that the analysis is false, but that non-canonical disagreements are possible. That is, disagreements can occur that do not involve incompatible semantic contents. In some cases, interlocutors express compatible semantic contents:

> In other words, we granted that if a dispute in fact involves the literal expression of incompatible contents — if it is *canonical* — then the speakers involved are very likely to mean the same things, in the relevant sense, by their terms. In this section, we argue that the first step is flawed. Many disputes expressing genuine disagreement are in fact non-canonical. In other words, many genuine disagreements are expressed *via* disputes in which the speakers literally express *compatible* contents. (2013, 12)

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[37] They accept a general distinction between content and character (2013, 8), a view they attribute to David Kaplan (1989). On this view, an expression's *character* is its contextually invariant meaning and an expression's *content* is what it picks out, relative to the context.

To argue against the claim that the canonical view is the only viable conception of disagreement they develop Barker's analysis of 'sharpening' or 'metalinguistic usage.' According to Barker,

[3] Feynman is tall

need not be used to provide new information concerning Feynman's height. For [3] has another 'mode of use':

> Imagine that we are at a party. Perhaps Feynman stands before us a short distance away, drinking punch and thinking about dancing; in any case, the exact degree to which Feynman is tall is common knowledge. You ask me what counts as tall in my country. "Well," I say, "around here, ..." and I continue by uttering [3]. This is not a descriptive use in the usual sense. I have not provided any new information about the world, or at least no new information about Feynman's height. In fact, assuming that tall means roughly 'having a maximal degree of height greater than a certain contextually supplied standard', I haven't even provided you with any new information about the truth conditions of the word tall. All I have done is given you guidance concerning what the prevailing relevant standard for tallness happens to be in our community; in particular, that standard must be no greater than Feynman's maximal degree of height. (Barker 2002, 1-2; quoted in Plunkett and Sundell 2013, 14)

The example clearly trades on contextualized social standards about what is considered 'tall' for some geographic area or country. Plunkett and Sundell modify Barker's example to turn it into a case of disagreement:

> In his (2002), Barker does not consider cases where speakers disagree about the information communicated by this type of usage. But it is easy to see how his example could be extended in that way. After all, another party to the conversation might simply object and say "no, Feynman is not tall". Just as the original utterance conveyed information not about Feynman's height but rather the appropriate usage of 'tall', so too would the ensuing dispute be a matter not of factual disagreement over Feynman's height, but rather opposing views about the contextually appropriate usage of 'tall'. Barker uses 'metalinguistic' to refer to the type of sharpening use at play here. Accordingly,

we call the corresponding disputes over the correctness or appropriateness of those types of usages *metalinguistic disputes*. (2013, 114)

Plunkett and Sundell analyze metalinguistic disputes as disagreements about which of several competing definitions of a term is the contextually appropriate one. They contrast factual disagreement about Feynman's height with factual disagreement about the contextually correct use of 'tall.' Their point is that there are objective facts about linguistic usage, over which disagreement might ensue. Where a pre-existing linguistic norm is at issue the crucial question is which competing proposal corresponds to the actual norm for the context in question. There will be objectively right and wrong answers here. The Feynman example is a case in point:

> [I]t is quite natural to think that there are antecedently settled facts about the linguistically relevant features of the conversational context, facts which are at least partially independent of the intentions — or at least the very local intentions — of the parties to the conversation. The dispute over the appropriateness of calling Feynman 'tall' is plausibly of this sort. In such cases, it is natural to think of the speakers as exchanging information that is in some (perhaps quite loose) sense, *objective* — information about what the context is actually like. If a disagreement should arise over that information, as it does in our extension of Barker's case, then the disagreement is a factual one about which of two or more competing characterizations of the shared conversational context is most accurate. However, not all cases of metalinguistic usage fit this profile. (2013, 14)

The implication, then, is that some metalinguistic disagreements are disagreements about matters of fact. As such, the Feynman case seems to involve incompatible semantics contents. To be sure, the claims 'Feynman is tall' and 'Feynman is not tall' can be used to prescribe rules for the correct use of 'tall,' rather than to describe Feynman's height. So what is incompatible in this case is not a set of descriptions of reality, but a set of rules or practices. It will be helpful here to

differentiate between factual and normative disagreement. A *factual dispute* is any dispute about a matter of fact. Since there are facts about how words are used (i.e., metalinguistic facts), disputes about what these facts are is a kind of factual dispute. At issue is which prescription is the *actual* or *current* norm. By contrast, a *normative dispute* is any dispute about how things should be. Hence, a metalinguistic dispute is normative if and only if it is a dispute about how a word *ought* to be used— irrespective of how it is actually used. The latter kind of normative dispute is what Plunkett and Sundell call a 'metalinguistic negotiation.' The Feynman case is a case of metalinguistic disagreement, but it is not a case of metalinguistic negotiation, for the aim of the interlocutors is not to negotiate the meaning of 'tall,' but to identify the current linguistic norm.

It follows that some metalinguistic disagreements involve incompatible semantic contents. However, Plunkett and Sundell provide other examples where the semantic contents at play in the dispute seem compatible. Consider, for example, Oscar and Callie's exchange. These individuals are cooking chili together and upon tasting the chili the following conversation ensues:

Oscar: That chili is spicy.

Callie: No, it's not spicy at all.

Plunkett and Sundell analyze the dispute as a case of metalinguistic negotiation:

> In this case, it is much less natural to think that there is some antecedently settled, objective fact of the matter about the contextually salient threshold for 'spiciness'. Rather than advancing competing factual claims about some independently determined threshold, it seems most natural to think of Oscar and Callie as negotiating what that threshold shall be. (2013, 15)

Their analysis continues:

> Why would Oscar and Callie consider it worth their time to engage in such a disagreement, when they already agree on what the chili actually tastes like? Why engage in a dispute over how to use a word? The answer is the same as before: it is worth engaging in such a dispute because how we use words matters. For Oscar and Callie, as for many of us, an agreement amongst all the cooks in the kitchen that the chili can be described as "spicy" plays an important role in collective decision-making. In particular, it plays an important role in decision-making about whether to add more spice. This may have nothing at all to do with what is analytic about 'spicy'. Rather, it derives from sociological facts about how people in kitchens act when their creations earn that label.[38] Why should Callie have to refrain from further seasoning when the chili cannot even be described as "spicy"? (2013, 15)

Plunkett and Sundell present their example as a matter of intuition. But we can easily remove the need for intuition by specifying further facts about the context of conversation. Imagine that Oscar and Callie are chefs at a restaurant and that their disagreement derives from conflicting intuitions about what the customers of the restaurant consider 'too spicy' for their tastes. Imagine further that their conversation continues:

> *Oscar*: I'm afraid I have to disagree. The chili is simply too spicy for the majority of our customers.
>
> *Callie*: I don't think it is; it seems to be the right level of spiciness for our customers. However, I'm willing to negotiate the proper level (i.e., cut it down a few notches) if you are willing to negotiate your standard.
>
> *Oscar*: Okay, let's try and settle upon a definition of 'spicy' that both of us can live with.

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[38] If Oscar and Callie are chefs at a restaurant, their disagreement may also derive from sociological facts about what their potential customers can stomach, customer preferences, what potential customers are willing to buy at a restaurant, etc.

As far as I can tell, this natural unfolding of the conversation would remove the need to posit any kind of 'intuition' about what is going on here. For we have stipulated that negotiation is what is going on. That is, this is what is called 'negotiating the meaning of a word.'[39]

In any case, we have arrived at Plunkett and Sundell's conception of metalinguistic negotiation:

> We use the term *metalinguistic negotiation* to refer to this second type of metalinguistic dispute — those disputes wherein the speakers' metalinguistic use of a term does not simply involve exchanging factual information about language, but rather negotiating its appropriate use. We think that metalinguistic disputes of this latter type are common. Indeed we think such usages extend well beyond the kitchen, to disagreements about what should count as "tall" during our basketball draft, or "cold" in our shared office, or "rich" for our tax base. In any such case, speakers each assert true propositions, but they express those true propositions by virtue of the fact that they set the relevant contextual parameters in different ways.
>
> Why are such exchanges perceived as disputes, when the speakers fail to assert inconsistent propositions? Because in addition to asserting those propositions — in fact *via* their assertion of those propositions — they also pragmatically advocate for the parameter settings by virtue of which those propositions are asserted. The claim that one "spiciness" threshold is preferable to some competing "spiciness" threshold is very much the kind of thing over which two speakers can disagree. To see that, we can just imagine them having a *canonical dispute* about the very same topic. The view we are proposing is that Oscar accepts the content that *we should use 'spicy' in such a way that it applies to the chili* and Callie accepts the content that *we should not use 'spicy' in such a way that it applies to the chili*. Those contents are rationally incompatible; this fact would be obvious if the two of them were engaged in a canonical dispute where Oscar said "we should use 'spicy' in such a way that it applies to the chili" and Callie responded by saying "no, we should not use 'spicy' in such a way that it applies to the chili". (2013, 15-16)

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[39] It seems to me that intuitions about what is said (or what one means by 'such-and-such') are needed when the conjunction of the context of use and the context of conversation do not make clear what is meant by the use of an expression. For example, cases of ambiguity and vagueness. Since we have removed these elements from the present case, I see no reason to appeal to intuition.

Plunkett and Sundell thus conclude that their analysis of this distinct kind of

normative disagreement fits their analysis of disagreement in general:

> Thus, by the lights of DRCC, the disagreements that are reflected in metalinguistic negotiations are entirely genuine. Moreover, given the right context — for example, a context where we must coordinate our chili seasoning, or our thermostat adjusting, or our basketball picks, or our progressive taxation brackets — such disagreements can be very much worth having, a point to which we return in §4. And to emphasize our earlier point, the question of whether such disagreements are worth having is entirely independent of whether the competing claims are advanced via semantic or pragmatic mechanisms. (2013, 16)

In other words, it is not necessarily the case that rational disagreement always

presupposes the incompatibility of semantic contents. For speakers who express

compatible semantic contents can use their respective contents to disagree about

what the of a term ought to be (or about how a word ought to be used).

At this point they have unpacked and defended the core of metalinguistic

negotiation. But their argument continues, for they intend to extend their analysis

beyond linguistic disputes that involve context-sensitive words. In particular, they

argue that there can be metalinguistic negotiations about words that seem to have

more or less fixed meanings:

> In the cases of metalinguistic negotiation we have considered so far, the negotiations have concerned how to fix parameter settings for bits of context-sensitive terminology. … But metalinguistic negotiation is not confined to gradable adjectives or other context-sensitive expressions. It can even concern words that are seemingly quite fixed in their meaning. (2013, 16)

They consider an example from Ludlow's "Cheap Contextualism" (2008) to make

their case. Imagine that there is a list of the greatest athletes of the 20th century, and a

debate ensues over whether it should include the racehorse Secretariat. Plunkett and

Sundell take this debate to be a normative dispute:

> Simplifying a bit, we can imagine the following exchange as part of that debate:
>
> (5) (a) Secretariat is an athlete.
>
>   (b) No, Secretariat is not an athlete.
>
> Unlike the cases of metalinguistic sharpening involving gradable adjectives, there is little reason to think that the relevant linguistic expression here — 'athlete' — is semantically context-sensitive. But as in those cases, there is also little reason to think that the dispute in (5) concerns straightforward factual matters about the topic at hand. The speakers of (5a) and (5b) mutually know all of the facts about Secretariat's speed, strength, etc., and what races, awards, metals he won, etc., just as Oscar and Callie mutually know the facts about the chemical hotness of the chili. The question on the table, then, is this: suppose we want to preserve the intuition that there is a genuine disagreement that is expressed in the exchange that Ludlow overheard. How then should we understand what is going on? (2013, 16)

One way to make sense of their dispute is to suppose that the speakers in this

case mean something different by 'athlete' (i.e., the conflict is at the level of character

rather than content):

> Suppose that the speaker of (5a), systematically applies the term 'athlete' in such a way as to include non-human animals. The other speaker, the speaker of (5b), systematically applies the term 'athlete' in such a way as to *never* include non-human animals. This holds true even when all of the relevant factual information is on hand, including, as noted, the facts about Secretariat's speed, strength, etc. This, at the very least, provides *prima facie* reason for thinking that the speakers mean different things by the word 'athlete'. Thus, it is not unnatural to conclude — as Ludlow does — that the speakers do indeed mean different things, and that the dispute in (5) reflects a disagreement about which of two competing concepts, C1 or C2, is more appropriate to the conversation. What is at issue is how the term 'athlete' should be used in this context. In other words, the dispute is about the *character* of the expression 'athlete'.

On this understanding of the dispute, each speaker literally expresses a true proposition given the concept they in fact express with their term. But beyond that, the speakers pragmatically advocate for the concept that they are using and in virtue of which they assert those propositions. Thus, their metalinguistic dispute reflects a genuine disagreement about how to use the word 'athlete'. In particular, it is a debate in conceptual ethics[40] about which among a range of competing concepts, and in particular, which of C1 or C2, is most appropriate to the conversation and should be expressed by the term 'athlete'. (2013, 16-17)

The disagreement is at the level of character because character is concerned with the rules governing the proper use of an expression, and their disagreement concerns what (some of) those rules ought to be.

They go on to develop other examples that are relevant to substantive philosophical and non-philosophical disputes. Consider, for instance, disagreement about whether tomatoes are fruits:

In thinking about our choices in how to use our terms, it is crucial to understand that that matters of word usage are not limited to mere definition or stipulation, but can themselves be answerable to substantive adjudication. Indeed, in some cases questions of words and usage can be answerable even to purely objective, descriptive considerations in the natural sciences. To see this, suppose that, in the context of a biology classroom, two speakers disagree about the status of tomatoes and utter, in turn, (8a) and (8b).

(8) (a) Tomato is a fruit.

(b) No, tomato is not a fruit.

Let us suppose further that the speaker of (8a) is a plant biologist, and the speaker of (8b) is a chef. Just as in the 'torture' case, even if we suppose that

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[40] They attribute the term 'conceptual ethics' to Burgess and Plunkett (2013a and 2013b) and explain it thusly: "These normative questions about thought and talk — how should we use our words? which concepts should we use? how should we use them? — are questions in what we will call *conceptual ethics*. Two important points about our use of the term 'ethics' here. First, we use the term 'ethics' in a broad sense, to designate questions about how to live and what to do. Second, we do not mean to indicate that conceptual ethics necessarily concerns practical norms as opposed to broadly theoretical ones." (2013, 3)

the speakers mean different things by the relevant expression, it is clear that we have not exhausted the evaluative work to be done. While the chef's definition of 'fruit' has advantages relative to our culinary practices and gustatory tradition, the biologist's definition — one according to which tomatoes really are fruit — is better suited to the biology classroom. It is better suited to this scientific context not as a matter of convention or stipulation, but objectively better: the objects in the extension of the biologist's term go together more metaphysically naturally than the objects in the extension of the chef's definition. And it is precisely those (22) metaphysically natural categories that we aim to identity when we are in the biology classroom. (2013, 22-23)

Metalinguistic negotiation is therefore normative disagreement about what a word should mean, independently of what the term's meaning actually is. It is an attempt to negotiate the meaning of the term for some particular purpose or other. Furthermore, such disagreement is pervasive and does not always turn on contextually-sensitive terms.[41] Plunkett and Sundell are right to identify these *linguistic* disputes with substantive *conceptual* disputes, disputes about which concept ought to be deployed. As has been noted, they describe these cases as disputes in 'conceptual ethics,' for the disputes are over which concepts ought to be used. They go on to consider the following objection:

> Suppose that our proposed analysis of the Secretariat case is right. It is likely that the reason why the two speakers bother to go in for this argument in conceptual ethics (an argument about how to use the term 'athlete') is because they ultimately have different normative views about how to live and what to do. In this case, perhaps the speakers have different normative views about what sorts of creatures are deserving of which sorts of recognition and rewards. One might therefore be tempted to ask: is this normative issue

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[41] "Metalinguistic disputes demonstrate not only that speakers who genuinely disagree with each other need not literally express incompatible contents, but that they need not even mean the same things by their words. They might employ context-sensitive terms with the same character but with different contents, as with 'spicy'. Or they might employ ordinary expressions with entirely distinct characters, as with 'athlete.'" (2013, 18)

(rather than the "merely linguistic" issue about how to use the word 'athlete') not *really* what their disagreement is about? (2013, 17)

Their reply is as follows:

> On the assumption that a given exchange is a metalinguistic negotiation, the immediate topic of disagreement in that exchange is one in conceptual ethics [i.e., how the word 'athlete' ought to be used]. But it is perfectly consistent to think both (a) that such-and-such dispute is one about conceptual ethics and (b) that a crucial reason why the speakers engage in this dispute is because of normative views they have about some topic *other* than conceptual ethics. (17)

It seems they are marking the following distinction:

> *Linguistic dispute (conceptual ethics)*: How should the word 'athlete' be used?

> *Non-linguistic dispute*: What sorts of creatures are deserving of which sorts of recognition and reward? (Specifically, are horses so deserving?)

Thus, their claim seems to be that the significance of the linguistic dispute is derived from its connection to the non-linguistic dispute (which is normatively significant in its own right). It seems to me that the so-called 'non-linguistic dispute' about what sorts of creatures are deserving of what sorts of recognition and rewards is part of the linguistic dispute. Hence, I would not draw a sharp distinction between the 'two' disputes as Plunkett and Sundell do, since I take them to be internally related. After all, settling the linguistic dispute (about how the word 'athlete' should be used) is tantamount to settling the non-linguistic dispute about whether non-human creatures (such as horses) should be counted as athletes. The negotiated definition of 'athlete,' whatever it turns out to be, will provide the standard for determining whether Secretariat is an athlete (for the purpose at hand). Hence, understanding what it means to say 'Secretariat is (not) an athlete' (in the final

analysis) is a condition for resolving the so-called non-linguistic dispute, that is, for determining whether this judgment is true or false.

Plunkett and Sundell provide a different argument, however. Suppose that Martha and George wish to buy a Subarus car, but disagree about whether Subarus cars are good cars.

> The dispute between Martha and George is about whether Subarus are good cars, but they enter into that dispute because they differ on what car to buy. Similarly, one can hold the following: the dispute between Ludlow's speakers is about which concept is best picked out by 'athlete', but they enter into that dispute because they differ on whether horses are aptly afforded certain kinds of praise (or because of some other normative issue that they disagree about). In the case of Martha and George, we wouldn't be required to build into the content that they express (pragmatically *or* semantically) the background conditions that explain why they are having this linguistic exchange. It would be just as mistaken to do so in the case of metalinguistic negotiations such as the Secretariat case. (2013, 17-18)

Martha and George are engaged in two distinct but internally related disputes:

(A) Are Subarus good cars?

(B) What kind of car should we buy?'

We are imagining that Martha and George cannot settle question (A) because they disagree about question (B). Suppose that the bulk of the disagreement hinges on two conflicting opinions. Martha gives more weight to spacious cars (like Subarus) than George does, and George puts more weight on efficient cars which would save them money on gas (more so than a Subarus would). It seems reasonable to think that they must first negotiate the criteria for determining the meaning of 'good car' before they can come to an agreement about question (A). But negotiating the meaning of 'good car' is tantamount to settling question (B) for the purpose of purchasing a new car.

For settling question (B), in this context, amounts to laying down criteria for determining the kind of car they ought to buy—criteria that largely constitutes the meaning of 'good car' in question (A). Therefore, questions (A) and (B) are not entirely independent of one another, but are internally related. In particular, they are related to a common linguistic question: What is the meaning of 'good car'? (or What should 'good car' mean?). The connection between (A) and (B) is a connection in grammar, and it is this that explains why answering either of these questions has an *ipso facto* bearing on the other question.

Plunkett and Sundell helpfully identify three salient features of metalinguistic *disputes* (not to be confused with their analysis of metalinguistic *negotiations*, which would require modification of point 3 below):

> 1. They are non-canonical: the speakers involved literally express mutually consistent contents. [For example, the semantic content of 'Secretariat is a good racehorse' is compatible with the semantic content of 'Secretariat is not a good racehorse' when 'good' is used or means differently in each proposition.]
>
> 2. They are non-canonical in virtue of variation in meaning: the speakers express mutually consistent contents because they do not mean (in the relevant sense) the same things by their words.
>
> 3. They nevertheless serve as expressions of genuine disagreement: the speakers involved do accept (and communicate) incompatible contents, and thus satisfy DRCC. (2013, 18)

Apparently, the reason why cases of metalinguistic negotiation satisfy the definition of 'disagreement' provided in DRCC is that any two speakers engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation propose two objects, p and q, which are 'rationally incompatible.' What they propose, of course, are incompatible definitions (which is

why the disagreement is located at the level of character rather than content).

Definitions, however, do not seem to be propositions, plans or desires on Plunkett and Sundell's view.[42] Like Wittgenstein, Plunkett and Sundell seem to think about definitions as linguistic norms. Therefore, what is rationally incompatible are rules for the use of words. This was illustrated by the chili/spiciness case. If we go with the first speaker's proposed definition of 'spicy,' this norm will effectively govern the behavior of our two chefs, such that they will prepare the chili one way rather than another way. In other words, they cannot prepare the chili in accordance with the alternative linguistic norm (or definition of 'spicy'). It is in this sense that they disagree with one another. The disagreement is at the level of practice.

Plunkett and Sundell go on to consider various objections. One of them is that mere verbal disputes are likely to be uninteresting for substantive philosophical purposes. To rebut this criticism they turn to David Chalmers (2011), who provides a criterion for determining whether a dispute is worth having or not. He deploys this criterion in order to differentiate merely verbal disputes from substantive disputes. The criterion involves

> paraphrasing as a way of distinguishing 'merely verbal' disputes (that aren't worth having) from substantive ones (that are worth having) in roughly the following way: substantive disputes are ones that survive paraphrase, while merely verbal ones do not. Thus, it is worth asking: do metalinguistic

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[42] Two objects, p and q, can be rationally incompatible in several ways. The relevant type of incompatibility will depend on what kind of object they are. The relevant passage was quoted earlier, but here is the pertinent bit: "By p entailing not-q in the case of propositions; by the satisfaction of p precluding the satisfaction of q in the case of desires; by p's implementation precluding q's implementation in the case of plans, etc." (2013, 9). Perhaps Plunkett and Sundell hold that rationally incompatible norms (rules for the use of words) are a special case of rationally incompatible plans on the gloss provided in the quoted passage.

negotiations of the sort we have been discussing survive paraphrase? (2013, 23)

According to Plunkett and Sundell, some of the above examples would seem to survive paraphrase. Here is their general argument:

> In such a case, whether or not the speakers will see the debate as one worth continuing to engage in will depend on (a) whether there is something substantive at stake in how the relevant terms are used in the context (which, as we have argued, there often will be) and (b) whether the speakers recognize this fact. If there is something at stake, and the speakers are in a position to recognize this, there is no reason to think that the speakers will dismiss their dispute as one not worth having. (2013, 24)

The upshot of their account of metalinguistic negotiation is that it is possible for disagreement to exist even in the face of differences in linguistic meaning. These disagreements are rightly called 'disagreements' in ordinary language because they involve a kind of rational incompatibility and because they are disagreements worth having (at least some of them are).

Thus far, I have argued that Plunkett and Sundell's analysis offers a way of thinking about disagreement from a classical Wittgensteinian perspective (although that is my claim, not theirs). For their analysis seems to presuppose the view I have termed conventionalism—namely, that explanations of meaning provide rules for the proper use of words—that is at the heart of Wittgenstein's normative conception of grammar.

§4.3 Disagreement About Racism

My aim in this section is to apply Plunkett and Sundell's model of disagreement to disputes about racism. I will argue that many such disputes fit their

model and that they are, therefore, plausibly understood as prescriptive rather than descriptive disputes. I also hope to enrich their conception of metalinguistic negotiation by analyzing disputes about the nature of racism as political disputes.

One of the questions that Plunkett and Sundell ask several times is why anyone would think that disputes about word-meaning are philosophically important? Applying this line of questioning to racism we get this question: How can something so important as the nature of racism be reduced to a mere dispute about language? Consider, for example, Garcia's dismissive remarks in the following passage:

> It has become fashionable these days among scholars of racism to insist there is no nature or essence or definition of the phenomenon because it is so varied across times and places. Some social scientists even claim that White people and Black ones use the term differently, the former seeing it as a matter of individual beliefs and actions and the latter as a system of power and oppression. However, I think this disagreement, whatever the racial demographics of its contestants, should be seen as a dispute over what is racist and, perhaps, over what racism itself is. Note that if it is seen as *a mere difference in word use*, the substantive disagreement between these camps seems to vanish. It would be nice if our differences could so easily be erased, but any position that claims they can be should rightly raise our suspicion that it is *missing what is important*. (1999, 13-14; my italics)

I want to focus on Garcia's italicized remarks. He seems to think that the attempt to analyze the question *What is racism?* as a linguistic question of the form *What does 'racism' mean?* or *How should 'racism' be used?* is an attempt to 'reduce' an ontological problem to a 'mere' linguistic dispute about word usage. Garcia's use of the term 'mere' is negative, for it is meant to suggest that this kind of reduction trivializes a deeply important philosophical problem; that it threatens both to obfuscate the very real differences that philosophers have and to make their substantive disagreements

'vanish.' However, I will argue that the opposite is true. To analyze the so-called ontological question as essentially a conceptual-linguistic question allows us to appreciate the true nature of this philosophical dispute about racism. For as Plunkett and Sundell remind us, many disputes about how words ought to be used are anything but trivial, for concepts have a regulative function and as such are constitutive of our practices (linguistic and non-linguistic). Disagreement at the level of definitions is disagreement at the level of practice—what I will call 'practical ontology' (I elaborate on this point below).

I have argued that disputes about definitions are metalinguistic. I will now argue that disagreement about the meaning of 'racism' can consist in a metalinguistic negotiation. Before doing so, however, I will argue that disputes about the meaning of 'racism' not trivial. They are not trivial because how we settle such disputes bears directly on our non-linguistic practices, for linguistic and non-linguistic practices are internally related. For instance, how we ultimately decide to define 'racism' is extremely important for what we take to be morally objectionable in the domain of race (specifically, it bears importantly on those racial ills that rise to the level of racism). What is more, the domain of race (in some sociohistorical contexts) pervades many aspects of people's lives. Consequently, determining (or, rather, negotiating) the correct meaning of 'racism' is of huge consequence for many people's lives; therefore, it is anything *but* trivial. Garcia's objection can be safely dismissed.

Imagine a protest outside the White House. A group of Tea-Party Republicans is protesting the presidency of a black man. One of them is proudly holding up a sign

that reads 'I am racist and proud!' Let us call this person Adam. The proposition *I am racist and proud!* is meaningful, of course. For the speaker communicates important information about himself, namely, his commitment to racism. Plausibly, what Adam expresses is a *confession* of racism. What is more, Adam's confession is publicly displayed for the world to see. He knows that the vast majority of people will judge him negatively for it and that he will be deemed morally depraved and repugnant. Further, he knows that his stance may be met with anger, disdain and disgust, and with serious social consequences from anti-racists (e.g., violence). Having thought all this through beforehand, Adam decides to protest anyway. But not because he does not care about these consequences. Instead, he decision is based on moral principle. He decides that he is willing to accept the social costs of 'standing up for what is right.' He may even think of himself as a potential martyr who *must* fight for the 'greater good,' for the disdain and offense of having a black man as President and Commander in Chief is, from Adam's point of view, the height of immorality and disloyalty to his great nation. The sacrifice, then, is well worth making.

Adam's commitment to racism arguably suggests that he accepts the following expression as true, 'Racism is good.' After all, his sign does not merely protest the presidency of a black man; it also disparages anti-racists, those who support and uphold the presidency of a black man. Anti-racists condemn Adam on the grounds that he is racist and racism is morally bad. Since they reject Adam's conviction that racism is good, we seem to have a clear case of disagreement. The disagreement is over which of the following two explanations of 'racism' is correct:

1. Racism is morally bad

2. Racism is morally good

The dispute between Adam and the anti-racist is metalinguistic, for they disagree about a definition (i.e., a norm of description). The question thus arises whether their disagreement is normative or factual. I will argue that their disagreement is not about which definition is the *current* norm, but about which definition *ought* to be the norm. Therefore, their dispute is best analyzed as metalinguistic negotiation.

The first thing to observe about Adam is that he is not conceptually confused. Nor is what he says incoherent or unintelligible. When he asserts 'I am racist and proud!' the correct response to him is not: 'No, Adam, you can't be racist and proud, because being racist is not a virtue but a vice; you are misusing the word.' The response is incorrect because Adam denies that he misuses 'racism' and he is correct about this, for people understand what he says. A profession of racism is not incomprehensible, but an affirmation of one's own moral repugnancy. Because we understand what it means to be racist and proud, we condemn it. Further, Adam is not conceptually confused, for he understands what others mean by 'racism.' That is, he knows the current meaning of the term. If he were confused he would not understand many uses of 'racism'—for instance, why people condemn acts of racism; why people think that being racist provides grounds for social reprimand, reproach, etc. Further, he would misunderstand ascriptions of racism, mistaking them for judgments of moral approval and praise. He would be puzzled by the strong moral opprobrium associated with the term 'racism,' and would accuse individuals who

despise racists as misunderstanding what 'racism' means. In short, he would be cut off from a wide range of moral practices as a result of linguistic misunderstanding; and we too would react differently to racists like Adam, if he were confused.

It is also worth pointing out that if Adam were conceptually confused, his confusion could be easily corrected. For his state of confusion would quickly turn up in discussion with him, and then it would be fairly easy to initiate him into the correct practice of applying the term. Adam would be analogous to a novice in the language, someone who did not know the rules for applying 'racism.' But, of course, our situation with Adam is much more sinister than that. The problem is not merely linguistic, but moral. The sense in which the problem is linguistic is that he does not use the word 'racism' as we do, but it is clear that the source of the problem is moral refusal to use it as we do (not an incapability to use it as we do). That is because Adam understands the current use of 'racism,' he knows that to describe something as racist is to condemn it. Indeed, understanding ordinary usage is a necessary condition for protesting it. It is precisely because Adam understands what 'racism' means that he *is able to* rebel against it by openly objecting to the current norm.

We have seen that Adam is not conceptually confused and does not misuse the word 'racism' in any sense that implies linguistic misunderstanding. At the same time, it makes sense to say that Adam does *misunderstand* the word 'racism' and that he does *misapply* or *misuse* the term in some sense of these terms. My proposal is that Adam's misunderstanding and misuse of 'racism' has nothing to do with linguistic competency, but with moral commitment. If one likes one can frame this as a kind of

confusion, namely, moral confusion. For the issue with Adam is not that his intellectual powers are low or that his behavioral abilities are underdeveloped. The problem is rather that he *refuses* to use the term 'racism' as we do; he is *unwilling* to understand the term as we do. So his 'misunderstanding' and his 'refusal' are connected with a problem of volition (rather than a problem of mastery of a technique): his failure is a failure of the will. In other words, his difficulty is moral. Notice that Adam's 'understanding' the current use of 'racism' (in the linguistic competency sense) is a necessary condition for his 'misunderstanding' its use (in the moral sense). Misunderstanding in the latter sense presupposes linguistic competency; otherwise, he would be incapable of (intentionally) refusing to use 'racism' correctly.

Given the distinction between moral misunderstanding and linguistic misunderstanding, it seems that Adam's acceptance of 'Racism is good' is an expression of moral confusion. Similarly, his rejection of 'Racism is wrong' is an expression of moral confusion. When he asserts *'Racism is good' is the correct definition of 'racism'* he means that it is the *morally* correct definition; that it *ought* to be the grammatical rule for his linguistic community. So he is offering a proposal or recommendation for revising the current definition. If his assertion were an expression of conceptual confusion, he would think that 'Racism is good' *already is* the linguistic norm—and we have shown this to be false. He does not hold it to be 'correct' in the sense that it is the *actual* norm of description, but in the sense that it should be. Therefore, his disagreement with the anti-racist is normative. This is a clear case of metalinguistic negotiation.

§4.4 Politicizing Normative Disagreement

We have now seen that some disagreements about racism are 'metalinguistic negotiations,' to borrow Plunkett and Sundell's term. Metalinguistic negotiation about 'racism' is disagreement about what 'racism' ought to mean; how the term ought to be used. Thus, we have vindicated the claim that attempts to settle the ontological question *What is racism?* are essentially attempts to settle the linguistic question *How should 'racism' be used?* The questions are clearly internally related. Settling the ontological question requires providing a definition of 'racism' to function as a standard of correct use. This standard will rule out some controversial uses of 'racism' while permitting others; indeed, the entire point of the definition is to resolve disagreement about racism. However, to provide such a standard just is to settle the linguistic question; for the definition determines how 'racism' should be used.

I will now argue that *some* normative disagreement about racism is political. This is, of course, evident in and consistent with the example of the proud racist. For Adam's (mis)use of the word 'racism' to designate morally praiseworthy phenomena is *intentional*. He willingly *refuses* to use the term in accordance with received standards for its proper use. His rejection of the current norm is *deliberate* and his linguistic practice expresses his personal *commitment* to a racist form of life. His use of 'Racism is good' can be understood as a *recommendation* or *proposal* for revising current usage of 'racism.' It is for these reasons that his use of 'Racism is good' best construed as an attempt to negotiate the meaning of 'racism.' For he uses this definition to *prescribe* a rule for the proper use of 'racism.'

To this I want to add that Adam's use of 'Racism is good' is political. One reason for thinking this is that it satisfies a plausible definition of 'political.' As I use the term, a *political disagreement* is a metalinguistic negotiation that is partly a function of issues relating to sociopolitical power, conflicting self-interests, and substantive moral disagreement. Adam's metalinguistic negotiation with the anti-racist is a case of political disagreement under this definition. Their dispute is partly a moral dispute, for it is internally related to moral disagreement about whether certain races should be discriminated against and others treated as superior. Suppose, for example, that 'Racism is good' were adopted as the new definition. Then this would clearly reflect a fundamental change in our concept of morality. 'Race R1 is inferior to R2' would be affirmed as a true proposition and this would be reflected in our treatment of R1s and R2s. Moreover, their disagreement is related to issues of self-interest and sociopolitical power, for it is currently the case that anti-racists have the power to condemn many acts of racism in meaningful ways, and in ways that are in their interests. It is plausible to think that Adam's metalinguistic proposal is connected with a desire to see social and political change. The fact that most racists have limited power to act in overtly racist ways or to claim property and other rights that serve their interests gives them a reason to insist on revising the current linguistic norm. Therefore, it is plausible to think that Adam's metalinguistic negotiation is a case of political disagreement.

I want to draw an analogy with a hypothetical dispute about the concept of bachelor. Suppose the definition of 'bachelor' is contested on moral, social, and

political grounds. The meaning of 'bachelor' might be contested if certain rights and entitlements are associated with being a bachelor—rights and entitlements that are not afforded to unmarried women. A feminist movement might rise up to demand the extension of these rights to unmarried women. Some such feminists might argue that the best political strategy is to revise the definition of 'bachelor' on the grounds that it is currently linked to sexist practices: 'The concept of bachelor, as it currently stands, does not include transgender women and same-sex couples. But our social concepts should change to reflect considerations of justice associated with social change. Therefore, the concept should be revised to become gender-inclusive: A bachelor should be understood as "an unmarried adult."'

In my hypothetical example, the concept of bachelor is *normatively contested*, i.e., opposed for normative reasons. Feminist revisionists have normative reasons for contesting the definition of 'bachelor.' That is, they have moral, social and political reasons for doing so. When they assert 'Bachelors are unmarried adults,' they use this sentence normatively—not to state the current norm of description, but to propose or recommend a new standard. So, they are engaged in metalinguistic negotiation. Their use of the term is also a kind of *protest*, for they use their proposal aggressively, combatively and defensively. After all, the disagreement between revisionists and traditionalists can be construed as an issue of *power* and as a *moral* issue. Therefore, the dispute over the correct definition of 'bachelor' is a political disagreement.

The feminist example is instructive it seems to me, because it involves disputation about a definition which seems far removed from politics, morality and

controversy. Indeed, it strikes us as a trivial analytic truth. Considered independently

of any sociopolitical context, it strikes us absurd to think that one might dispute the

claim that 'All bachelors are unmarried men.' Indeed, when we imagine someone

rejecting a definition such as this, we are prone to think of a case involving

conceptual confusion. Imagine, for example, someone arguing as follows:

> "If *all* bachelors are unmarried, there must be good evidence for this claim.
> However, I keep requesting it from you for and you refuse to provide a single
> survey or shred of evidence for it. Instead, you keep directing me to the
> dictionary! But this simply begs the question. For what I want to know is
> whether the lexical definition is correct, whether it corresponds to the fact of
> the matter."

Here too we might describe the case as one of disagreement, albeit a clear case of

confused disagreement. For it seems that the disputant suffers from deep conceptual

confusion, an inability to learn language. Thus, the disputant confuses a definition—a

rule for the use of 'bachelor'—for a case of empirical description.

It is obvious, however, that the feminist example is disanalogous to this case.

For feminist revisionists are under no illusion that the definition of 'bachelor' is an

empirical description. Hence, they are not conceptually confused; nor is their

disagreement illegitimate (at least not on mere linguistic grounds). My claim is that the

Adam/anti-racist dispute is analogous to the feminist/traditionalist dispute. Adam's

case does not fit the model of a linguistically incompetent disputant. Both Adam and

revisionists claim that their proposed definition is the 'correct' one, but neither is

claiming that their definition is the correct description of a fact (as though their

definition were empirical). The claim is rather that their definition provides the

correct prescription of a linguistic norm (i.e., the morally correct norm). Similarly, when anti-racists object that Adam misuses the word 'racist,' their complaint is first and foremost a moral objection.

One of the salient differences between political disagreement of the kind I have been discussing and the kind of metalinguistic negotiation Plunkett and Sundell discuss is their emphasis on conversational examples. By contrast, I have imagined cases that are naturally conceived as non-conversational. For we can imagine racists like Adam (or our feminist revisionists) expressing their disagreement in acts of political protest. Indeed, Adam's political protest need not take the form of an explicit dispute concerning the *definition* of 'racism.' For the linguistic dispute is already implicit in statements such as 'I am racist and proud!', 'Bring back Jim Crow!', and so on. Political disagreement thus reveals something about the nature of metalinguistic negotiation. Namely, that explanations of meaning are partly constitutive of our non-linguistic practices. To revise or abandon a definition is to revise or abandon an existing non-linguistic practice. We saw this in the case of 'Racism is good.' To adopt this definition as the norm is to accept it as authoritative; that is, to *act* in accordance with it. Insofar as definitions *govern*, it is impossible to draw a sharp distinction between language and reality. For the truth of a definition and the nature of reality are internally related. This gives us a new way of thinking about ontology. To envision an ontological dispute, or an ontological theory, is to envision a dispute or theory about a form of life. This reinforces the Wittgensteinian contention that our conceptual framework (which is constituted by grammatical

rules) is identical to our normative framework. I refer to ontological disputes and theorizing about the nature of reality (i.e., correct practice) as *practical ontology.*

Practical ontology is by its very nature political. The practice is clearly a rational inquiry, so in that way it is distinguishable from non-rational political disagreement. For political disagreement need not be rational in the sense that those who 'negotiate' revisions to our current norms have *good* arguments for those revisions. Indeed, political disagreements need not be rational in the weak sense that those who prescribe revisions to our current norms purport to have and offer arguments. For we can imagine the successful invasion of a country and the implementation of the victor's norms of description (literally, its language) by sheer force. Thus, it is possible to engage in negotiation without offering any arguments at all. That is, it is possible to proceed by 'sociopolitical acts,' broadly construed. By a *sociopolitical act* I mean individual or collective action that seeks to revise, remove or displace a norm of description. By their very nature such acts are aggressive, combative and defensive, in addition to being intentional, strategic, pragmatic and prudential. Rational argumentation and discursive representation is one of the ways that metalinguistic negotiation can proceed, but it is not an essential method. Thus, Plunkett and Sundell's conception of metalinguistic negotiation needs updating; we need to expand it in order to account for political negotiations that proceed by non-discursive, sociopolitical acts.

The application of Plunkett and Sundell's analysis to sociopolitical concepts, such as racism, requires and opens the door to the *politicization* of metalinguistic

negotiations, to negotiations that deploy sociopolitical acts as *means* of negotiation. The term I will use to designate this special type of negotiation is *political negotiation*. What is crucial to political negotiations is that they 'negotiate' by means of some non-discursive sociopolitical acts. In extreme cases, the process of negotiation will consist in the *forceful imposition* of a linguistic norm (i.e., the forceful imposition of a new practice). In general, however, acts of coercive power and/or control will not be the primary method. Typically, political negotiations will involve a combination of discursive projects, literal acts of social protest, shaming practices, legislation, and so on. The goal of political negotiation is to 'negotiate' linguistic meaning and thereby establish a new practice.

§4.5 Conclusion

My suspicion is that Adam's moral struggle did not arouse much sympathy with the reader. In any case, it did not garner any sympathy from me. Yet, things are different for the struggle of our revisionists (at least it is for me). I feel a pull in their direction and want them to succeed, not only in being accorded equal rights, but in changing the nature of our language. Thus, a question that arises is whether their normative proposal—specifically, their metalinguistic proposal—is *correct*. At the same time, for the Wittgensteinian, a definition is an explanation of meaning and explanations of meaning is correct if it is the current/actual linguistic norm. Thus, there is a sense in which the feminist proposal might be correct (if my sympathies are justified) and incorrect. Let us, then, differentiate between two uses of 'correct use':

1. *Metalinguistically correct*: A definition of 'racism' is Metalinguistically correct if and only if it lays down an actual norm of description (i.e., provides an actual rule for the proper use of this term).

2. *Morally correct*: A definition of 'racism' is morally correct if and only if it ought to be adopted as an actual norm of description (i.e., it should govern linguistic practice), irrespective of how the term is actually used.

These may be called *metalinguistic correctness* and *moral correctness* respectively.

Assuming that my sympathies are correct, for instance, feminist revisionists' prescription of a definition of 'bachelor' is morally correct and metalinguistically incorrect. Of course, whether my sympathies are correct is a matter for practical ontology to resolve. It is not a matter that is resolvable by means of the Wittgensteinian grammatical method (which is committed to pure description). From a moral point of view, one might have good moral, social, or political reasons for revising grammar. Lawrence Blum (2002), for example, makes a plausible case for the revisionist proposal that we should rethink the meaning of 'racism.' For he argues that the term no longer has a determinate meaning, on account of its being overused. He thinks the term has become little more than an epithet for anything and everything that goes wrong in the racial realm. He further argues that in the process we have lost sight of a rich repertoire of moral vocabulary for condemning racism. He thus proposes that we revise the definition of 'racism' to designate the severest of racial ills, which on his view are racial inferiorization and racial antipathy. I mention Blum's argument because his theory of racism strikes me as a clear manifestation and exemplification of practical ontology. He rightly appeals to normative-pragmatic considerations in defending his revisionist proposal.

Practical ontology, it seems to me, is a different kind of philosophical practice than pure description. For the former results in a definition of 'racism' that prescribes minor reforms or substantial revisions of ordinary usage, whereas the latter is committed to leaving ordinary usage where it is. The approaches, however, are not incompatible in the sense that a philosopher cannot wear both of hats. The sense in which they are incompatible is that the goals they seek to achieve cannot be simultaneously pursued by utilizing both methods. To apply one method is necessarily to abandon the other. Of course, on different occasions one might engage in pure description and practical ontology. Therefore, on a sufficiently broad conception of philosophy, it is possible for both of these philosophical practices to exist.[43]

I will close by making a final point about traditional ontology. The Wittgensteinian approach to descriptive analysis does away with the need to posit nonnatural entities (e.g., abstract entities, immaterial deities, transcendent objects, and so on). As we saw in chapter 2, the method is thoroughly naturalistic. As such, it is consistent with empirical and naturalistic approaches to racism. To this we can now add that it is consistent with *a priori* revisionist approaches to racism (e.g., Blum's approach). I have also suggested that practical ontology can replace traditional ontology, where the latter is defined as *an attempt to discover the definition of 'racism' that corresponds to the ontological fact of the matter, independently of how 'racism' is used*. If definitions

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[43] This is essentially the same point I make in chapter 1.

of 'racism' are not descriptions of any kind, then they cannot be ontological descriptions either. However, I have not argued for the claim that definitions of 'racism' are not descriptions. In chapter 2 it was argued that the need to posit ontological facts about racism is rendered superfluous or unnecessary. We need not posit such entities because it is sufficient for our purposes to treat definitions as norms of description. Wittgenstein's conception of language—as essentially a rule-governed practice—is the basis of both his grammatical method (pure description) and the practice I have glossed as 'practical ontology.'

CHAPTER 5

DISAGREEMENT AND RATIONAL RESOLUTION:
A CRITIQUE OF LEONARD HARRIS' ONTOLOGICAL APPROACH

§5.1 Introduction

Thus far I have defended the plausibility of conventionalism—the view that

explanations of racism are norms of description. On the basis of this conception, I

have developed substantive objections against recent theories of racism. Additionally,

I used this essential element of Wittgensteinian grammar to defend a conception of

disagreement as non-ontological, normative and pragmatic. The central claim of

chapter 4 was that disputes about the nature of racism are best understood as

metalinguistic negotiations and that some of these disputes are political negotiations.

It follows that rejecting and/or altering current usage involves taking up a normative

stance.

If definitions of 'racism' are conventions, they are necessarily contingent,

immanent and revisable in light of our moral needs and non-linguistic practices. If

they are *mere* conventions—i.e., if they are not also descriptions of an ontological

fact—one might wonder whether disagreement about racism is rationally resolvable.

The Wittgensteinian conception of grammar implies that a definition is 'correct' when

it satisfies the following condition:

- A definition is *grammatically correct* if and only if it is the current norm of description

The sense in which a definition is correct is that it has authority for us; that it governs. Grammar has to do with sense and meaning which are connected with understanding what is said. Therefore, to say that a definition is grammatically correct is simply to say that, if one wishes to understand what is said by the use of a word (what it means in use) within one's existing linguistic community, one must know the correct definition (rule) it conforms to. Conversely, if one wishes to say something by the use of a word within one's existing linguistic community, one must use it in accordance with the correct (i.e., current) definition.

Notice that the grammatical correctness of a definition is compatible with all the contingent facts that attend to norms generally. For instance, the revisability of grammar. That a definition is grammatically correct does not imply that we *cannot* change it. Rather, it implies that we are unlikely to change it, for it has authority for us. For instance, if someone were to object to the current definition of 'bachelor,' we would respond by doubling down: 'No, women can't be bachelors; a bachelor *must* be a man.' This 'clinging' on our part corresponds to the necessity of the norm. It was argued that the sense in which norms are necessary is that we hold fast to them, for example, by insisting on their authority when they are violated. This fact is perfectly consistent with the revisability of grammar, for a grammatical rule loses its authority when it ceases to govern. When a grammatical rule ceases to govern, it is no longer

grammatically correct—and this simply means that it no longer *is* a norm for us, for it has lost its authority. At that point, the definition becomes incorrect.

In light of the revisability of grammar, and in light of the contested nature of the grammar of racism, both today and historically, and both within and outside the academy, it is reasonable to wonder whether the concept of racism should be reformed or even substantially revised. If it is concluded that it should be revised, then it seems that there is a sense in which the current norm has relinquished its 'correctness.' To be sure, it need not have relinquished its grammatical correctness, for the norm may continue to govern within society (for example, if it is contested). But for the revisionist at least, it does seem to be 'incorrect' in some sense or other. Therefore, it is intelligible to wonder whether a grammatically correct definition of 'racism'—i.e., a linguistic norm that currently governs—is correct in a deeper *moral* sense. Thus, grammatical correctness should be distinguished from moral correctness:

- A definition is *morally correct* if and only if it is the norm of description that ought to be the standard of correct use, independently of its current use.

Suppose, then, that we want to preserve the distinction between morally correct and morally incorrect explanations of 'racism' and thereby preserve the distinction between rational and irrational disagreement about which of our explanations ought to be the norm. Suppose further that we want to preserve these distinctions without supposing that morally correct explanations of 'racism' are simply those that correspond to the objective fact of the matter. Is it possible to develop an account of rational disagreement that is appropriate for the correctness of

a norm? For matters of value, unlike matters of fact, do not correspond to an objective fact that makes them true. Indeed, it is unclear what it would mean to say that, for example, the any definition corresponds to a fact—e.g., that 'Racism is racial disregard' corresponds to a fact or that 'Bachelors are unmarried' corresponds to a fact. Consistent with this argument, and with the previous chapter, here I will offer a non-ontological, pragmatic-normative analysis of rational disagreement. The goal of the analysis is to preserve the possibility of rational agreement without presupposing an objective fact of the matter (i.e., a moral fact). I use the term *rational disagreement* to designate disagreement about the nature of racism that is rationally resolvable.

My argument will thus proceed on the following supposition, which I do not argue for: Since explanations of 'racism' are norms of description, they are not descriptions of an ontological fact. If my argument succeeds, however, I will have shown that *it is not necessary to posit an ontological fact of about what racism is* in order to account for the possibility of rational disagreement about what racism is. The upshot of my argument is that the following thesis proves to be superfluous:

- A definition of 'racism' is *ontologically correct* if only if it corresponds to the ontological fact of the matter, independently of all contingent facts

If we are to avoid the need to posit a language-independent fact about racism, the alternative way forward is take Wittgenstein's anthropological conception of language seriously. Uses of 'racism' are goal-directed and the grammar of racism has a point. To use the term 'racism' is to use it in accordance with rules that are partly constitutive of linguistic practices that are interwoven into forms of life. They are first

and foremost interwoven into moral practices of blame and condemnation. By paying attention to these practices, and their goal-directedness, we can better appreciate the function of definitions of 'racism.' That brings me to my thesis: Rational disagreement about racism is possible, because definitions of 'racism' are directed at resolving moral problems. As such, all parties to the dispute (e.g., philosophers of racism) have a common interest in resolving disputes about what racism is.

§5.2 Glasgow and Blum's Normative Disagreement

In this section I argue that Glasgow and Blum's dispute about a particular case is best understood as a case of metalinguistic negotiation. There are two main reasons for this. First, the analysis provides clarity about the nature of their dispute and does so in a way that results in the dissolution of conceptual confusion in Glasgow's critique of Blum. Second, the analysis of metalinguistic negotiation is superior to the alternative ontological analysis, according to which disputation about the nature of racism (i.e., about the correct definition of 'racism') is analyzed as disputation about a matter of fact. The question, however, remains whether their dispute is capable of rational resolution on my proposed analysis. I thus sketch an argument for the possibility of rational resolution.

In "Racism as Disrespect" Glasgow develops a descriptive theory of the ordinary use of 'racism.' His analysis begins with the question of whether it is possible to provide "a single monistic formula" that determines the nature of racism (2009,

64).[44] A monistic formula is one that specifies "what is common to racism's variegated forms." He ultimately arrives at a monistic theory of racism as racial disrespect. At one point he characterizes his theory thus: "φ is racist if and only if φ is disrespectful toward members of racialized group R as Rs" (2009, 81). I will abbreviate this definition as D, and for the purposes of this chapter I proceed on the supposition that D is the correct definition of 'racism.'

Glasgow defends his theory in part by arguing that it explains ordinary usage of 'racism.' As such, his theory meets the following adequacy condition:

> As an attempt to capture the content of our current, ordinary concept of racism, the adequacy criterion operative here is that an analysis should accommodate ordinary usage of relevant terms, terms like 'racism'. I will return to this point at the end of the article, but privileging analyses that accommodate ordinary usage doesn't entail that we cannot make mistakes in how we deploy the relevant terms—a point that is especially salient when the term in question is often used in contested ways, as is the case with 'racism'. Instead, the adequacy criterion merely states that, other things equal, the more that an analysis can accommodate ordinary usage, the better. (2009, 64-65)

Call this the *ordinary language condition*. Glasgow does not argue for it. This seems odd considering his acknowledgement that uses of 'racism' might be mistaken. For if some uses are mistaken, casting our analytical net wide enough to capture as much of ordinary usage as possible might mean that we are capturing incorrect uses of the term. A possible reply to this objection is that he does not *need* to defend the ordinary

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[44] He defines a monistic analysis as one that "gives a feature or conjunction of features, G, that is distinctive and common to all Fs, whether or not F-ness can be found in a variety of locations.… Whether any monistic analysis of racism succeeds will thus depend not on whether we can find one location as the sole fundamental site of racism but on whether the G privileged in the analysans really is found in all and only instances of racism." (Glasgow 2009, 80-81)

language condition because his theory is descriptive. That is, the adequacy condition of accommodating ordinary usage as much as possible is partly constitutive of the *goal* of the analysis, as he notes above. The point is also evident here:

> Thus, the basic argument for my analysis is that it accommodates ordinary usage better than rival views do, as measured by cases that are intended to resonate with the reader. Some defenders of rival views will perhaps see revising ordinary usage as an acceptable by-product of other concerns or commitments. Such moves are understandable, but I maintain that those revisions nonetheless count as a cost of those views. (2009, 65)

The reason why revisionism comes at a cost seems to be that the goal of descriptive analysis, as far as Glasgow is concerned, is to describe ordinary usage. Hence, his concluding remarks: "investigating what our terms refer to and exploring what they could and should refer to are attempts to paint two different pictures. DA [Disrespect Analysis] is an analysis of the former variety" (2009, 93). In light of the aim of his theory, it might be thought that Glasgow does not *need* to argue for the ordinary language condition because it partly constitutes his descriptive project. Thus, when he says that *D* is the correct definition of 'racism' he means that it captures what the term refers to in ordinary contexts of application.

Glasgow uses his analysis of ordinary usage to adjudicate controversial cases. Imagine that a high school teacher, during a class discussion on race relations, calls on a Haitian American student "to give the 'black perspective'" (2009, 92). Glasgow and Blum disagree about whether the teacher does something racist. However, with *D* on hand, the correct answer turns on whether the teacher's action is racially disrespectful:

Blum holds that, although such a question is insensitive and ignorant, it should not be considered racist because it does not spring from inferiorization or antipathy. But perhaps what we should do here is keep what Blum acknowledges is the widespread recognition that such questions are racist and jettison the inferiorization-or-antipathy approach to racism. DA, in fact, can step into the breach and account for the apparent racism in the teacher's request: among other problems, it is racially disrespectful—presumably not just to the individual in question but to all members of the racialized group in question, as members of that group—to homogenize one racialized group's various distinctive points of view and to take one person's perspective as representative of the entire group. (Glasgow 2009, 92)

Since Glasgow believes that *D* is the correct definition, he rejects Blum's judgment (*The teacher's action was not racist*) as mistaken. But it is not mistaken in the sense that it is unintelligible or confused. So the charitable interpretation is that Glasgow takes it to be a false judgment about the teacher's action. Further, since he takes his own judgment (*The teacher's action was racist*) to be correct, it is surely correct in the sense that it is true. The argument can be presented as follows: (1) Racism is racial disrespect; (2) the teacher's judgment is racially disrespectful; therefore, (3) the teacher's judgment is racist. It follows that true and false empirical judgments are determined by the correct definition of 'racism.' That is, *D* licenses correct and incorrect uses of 'racism' (i.e., true and false judgments about what is racist).[45]

But what, on Glasgow's view, makes *D* the correct definition? The answer to this question cannot be that it corresponds to ordinary usage or that it captures the essence of ordinary usage. For suppose that most members of our linguistic

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[45] Glasgow's view seems to be the following: A *correct use* of 'racism' expresses a *true* empirical judgment about what is (or is not) racist. An *incorrect use* of 'racism' expresses a *false* empirical judgment about what is (or is not) racist. By contrast, the *correct definition* of 'racism' is the rule that licenses correct and incorrect uses of 'racism.'

community were to become convinced that ordinary usage ought to change. Is Glasgow prepared to say that we should consider revising *D*? The two possible answers to this question are problematic for Glasgow. That is, he is up against a dilemma. Let us consider each horn of the dilemma in turn.

If he were to concede that ordinary usage *might* be revised, then his use of *D* to adjudicate some controversial cases rests on conceptual confusion. Suppose that ordinary usage might be problematic. Then it is question-begging (against B) to appeal to ordinary usage to resolve a dispute between B who claims that ordinary usage should be revised and G who denies that it should. Glasgow finds himself in this exact position when he appeals to *D* as a standard for assessing Blum's moral judgment (*The teacher's action is not racist*), for the latter's judgment is informed by a revisionist account of racism.[46] Blum's judgment accords with his own definition of 'racism,' which presupposes that ordinary usage is problematic. His proposed definition is not intended to be descriptive of ordinary usage and is not defended on grounds that it corresponds to ordinary usage. Rather, it is defended on practical grounds. Blum argues that a revisionist definition of 'racism' is necessary to resolve various practical problems. Therefore, since his moral judgment in this case is informed by a conception of which norm *ought* to correspond to ordinary usage, Glasgow's objection to his assessment simply begs the question against him.

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[46] For Blum's definition and his pragmatic defense of it, see chapter 1 of his *"I'm Not a Racist, But…"* (2002; the definition is presented on page 8). For his application of his definition to the case of the high school student, see Blum (2002, 55-56).

Glasgow's objection effectively amounts to the claim that Blum's definition of 'racism' fails to conform to ordinary usage—a fact that Blum antecedently concedes. Indeed, this concession, on Blum's part, is a condition for his revisionist proposal. Therefore, on the assumption that Glasgow concedes that ordinary usage *might* need revising, his objection to Blum reveals that he is guilty of confusing the distinction between grammatical and moral correctness; for what his argument establishes is that *D* is grammatical correct, whereas what Blum maintains is that *D* is morally incorrect. These claims are not incompatible as Glasgow seems to think.

If Glasgow were to claim that ordinary usage *should* not be revised, then, once again, he is faced with the same problem as before: he owes the revisionist an argument as to why it should not be revised. The dispute cannot be settled by appealing to ordinary usage; for where ordinary usage is contested, we must go beyond ordinary usage, which means we must turn to pragmatic-moral considerations. Consequently, any argument that Glasgow might give in this regard will effectively expose his conservative value, that, his commitment to the *preservation* of ordinary usage. The problem he runs into here is that he provides no arguments for preserving ordinary usage. This is particularly problematic in the case of he and Blum's dispute. For Blum has offered considerations in defense of the contention that ordinary usage should be revised. Notice, in other words, the change in dynamic: their dispute can now be properly framed as the normative disagreement that it truly is. Blum is best understood as arguing for a *revisionist* proposal and Glasgow is understood as arguing for a *preservationist* proposal. In other words, *neither* party to the

dispute occupies a normatively neutral space. Both philosophers are firmly planted in a moral-pragmatic space, and must defend their views accordingly. Blum has the head-start in this fight, for he owns his normative space. It is Glasgow who denies the need to engage Blum's practical arguments, for he claims that his job, as descriptive analyst, is to merely describe (rather than to prescribe) usage. This defense is thus conceptually confused: Glasgow confuses his preservationist proposal (which is a normative value) for mere description.

To sum up this section, Glasgow's theory of racism implies that all legitimate talk about racism *must* conform to *D*. But why should we grant that his definition is correct? Even if we grant that *D* correctly describes ordinary usage of 'racism,' the question remains: Why should we grant that *D* is the *morally correct* standard of correct usage? What if ordinary usage is mistaken (for pragmatic-moral reasons)? What argument is there for concluding that *D should* be the rule in terms of which we determine what counts as racist? What Glasgow owes us is a normative argument, for his descriptive theory smuggles in a normative judgment. His theory does not merely describe how the term 'racism' is used, it also asserts that uses of 'racism' *ought* to conform to *D*. Hence, my first objection to Glasgow's theory of racism is that it is not purely descriptive as he claims, but prescriptive. My second objection is that he fails to offer a proper normative argument for his prescriptive proposal. That is, he fails to explain why *D* ought to be accepted as the proper norm of description.

To my argument it might be replied that my analysis of Glasgow's argument leaves out an important component. My argument suggests that his rationale goes

something like this: *D* ought to function as a standard of correct use just because it is the current standard of correct use. In short, *D* is morally correct just because it is grammatically correct. Obviously, if this is all there is to his argument, then it is clearly problematic, for the immediate question that arises is *why* we should assume that current usage is morally correct. There is an easy way out of this objection, however, if we add the following component: Current usage is the correct usage because it reflects *most* people's intuitions about racism, and because people's intuitions about racism are the best available data by which to determine what the fact of the matter is. In other words, folk intuitions are truth-tracking. Therefore, moral correctness corresponds to, and is determined by, ontological correctness.

This argument seems problematic on several grounds. First, it is not exactly clear what it means to say that there is an ontological fact of the matter. Is this fact an abstract entity, for example, or a concrete one? Second, if there is an ontological fact of the matter, it is not clear how we could ever come to know what it is. This is connected with a further epistemological problem: Why we should think that folk intuitions are truth-tracking? Why can it not be the case that the majority is wrong? Have they not been wrong on moral matters in the past? Third, what argument is there for the claim that definitions (and explanations of words generally) are descriptions? When we analyze definitions, there normative authority becomes increasingly obvious and clear. But when do we ever use definitions to describe reality? This is the view we encountered earlier, called *representationalism*. It seems to me that this argument clearly presupposes this thesis; hence, it is in need of

defending. Fourth, the thesis of ontological facts is reminiscent of Headley's claim that *a priori* truths correspond to nonnatural entities. Hence, this ontological commitment is incompatible with full-blown naturalism. In this respect, it strikes me that conventionalism about definition is superior to representationalism. Evidently, then, this ontological move comes with a lot more baggage than we bargained for. As such, it strikes me as implausible in its own right and certainly as less plausible than conventionalism.

In the last chapter, it was argued that disagreement about racism can be understood as metalinguistic negotiation. This implies that Glasgow and Blum's dispute can be construed as metalinguistic negotiation. In this section, I have argued that Glasgow and Blum's dispute is prescriptive, for Glasgow seeks to preserve ordinary usage whereas Blum seeks to revise it. The dispute is a metalinguistic negotiation rather than a metalinguistic disagreement, for it is not a dispute about which definition of 'racism' *is* the current norm, but about which definition of 'racism' *ought* to be the current norm. Moreover, we saw that this metalinguistic dispute is at the heart of their ground-level dispute about whether the teacher performs a racist action. Therefore, although there are confusions embedded in Glasgow's argument in support of his intuition (that the teacher acts racist), his ground-level dispute with Blum is in logical order. That is, their ground-level dispute is not (or at least need not be) a function of conceptual confusion. To resolve this dispute, some level of negotiation is in order. Recall, however, that not all metalinguistic negotiations are rational negotiations. For they sometimes proceed

independently of logical argumentation, by means of brute force. The question thus

arises whether metalinguistic negotiations about the meaning of 'racism' can be

rational. I will argue in the affirmative.

What is the basis for rational disagreement about the definition of 'racism'?

The obvious candidate is the moral need that prompts us to condemn racially

harmful practices, for it is evident that definitions of 'racism' have pragmatic value.

This, then, is the strategy that is taken up in the remaining sections of this chapter.

My argument will presuppose the following framework: *First*, the problem of defining

'racism' is not an epistemic problem and hence what is needed is not epistemic

justification. The problem is a practical problem that calls for pragmatic justification.

Second, when we ask for the 'correct' definition we are not asking for the one that

corresponds to reality but the one that (re)solves a practical problem. *Third*, we

should be open to the possibility that there might be several definitions that it would

be rational to accept, corresponding to different ways of (re)solving the problem at

hand. For example, there might be a continuum of more or less correct definitions.

This is connected with my next point. *Fourth*, determining what the correct definition

is might be a matter of making a decision, for example, deciding to endorse a practice

for the purpose of (re)solving the problem at hand. *Fifth*, it might be the case that

there are several interconnected problems that are properly called 'the problem of

defining "racism,"' as opposed to a single problem. For instance, Glasgow and

Blum's dispute need not be construed as a general negotiation about the *universally*

correct definition of 'racism,' as opposed to a particular dispute about the *locally*

correct definition within the local context of individual wrongdoing. Their dispute may only be resolvable by means of stipulating a definition of 'racism,' but it does not follow that other disputes about the correct definition of 'racism' might not require the stipulation of *different* definitions. Plausibly, for instance, disputes about institutional racism might require their own definition. I intend for my argument to be consistent with the possibility of multiply correct definitions. To resolve some particular problem of definition is to determine the definition that is correct for resolving it, and not necessarily for resolving any other problem of definition.

§5.3 A Pragmatic Approach to Rational Normative Disagreement

What are the conditions for the possibility of rational disagreement about a linguistic norm? I am not sure there is a single set of such conditions. For, as I suggest below, there seem to be different levels of rational disagreement about a norm. Nevertheless, my aim in this section is to explore one type of rational disagreement about a norm with the aim of sketching the conditions that make it possible. My discussion here is largely indebted to John Kekes' (1977) account of *essentially contested concepts* (ECCs), although I diverge from his account in some key respects.

Kekes, patching up Gallie's (1956) account of ECCs, explains how it is possible for there to be rational disagreement about a single practice that is more or less well-defined. Kekes is clear that the practice as a whole is what is valued. To illustrate, I focus on the game of basketball. Imagine two people are adequately informed about how to play the game of basketball. These individuals watched a live

game and they agree about all the relevant facts of the game. Notice how this condition rules out the possibility of a certain kind of disagreement. For it sometimes transpires that disagreement arises because one person thinks there was a rule violation while the other person denies this. The first individual, let us say, argues that the rule violation delegitimizes the 'winner' of the game. For instance, imagine being told that team A did not *really* win because one of their players committed a crucial foul which the referees should have but did not call. By stipulating that the two individuals agree about all the *relevant* facts, we are essentially stipulating that their disagreement cannot arise because of any such rule violation.

Kekes explains how, under these conditions, it is possible for disagreement to arise, without it being a function of conceptual confusion.[47] Two individuals might agree about all the relevant facts of the game and yet disagree about which of the two teams is the 'real' or 'legitimate' victor. For example, it might be argued that team A is the real champion because it 'played' better than team B. Imagine that this is said in the face of team A's technically having 'lost' the game, i.e., according to the ordinary convention of crowning the team with the highest score. We can imagine someone arguing that team A *should* be deemed the victors while imagining that fans of team B

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[47] Here he is following Gallie: Now I have no wish to deny that endless disputes may be due to psychological causes on the one hand or to metaphysical afflictions on the other; but I want to show that there are apparently endless disputes for which neither of these explanations need be the correct one. Further, I shall try to show that there are disputes, centered on the concepts which I have just mentioned, which are perfectly genuine: which, although not resolvable by argument of any kind, are nevertheless sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence. This is what I mean by saying that there are concepts which are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users." (1956, 169)

argue against this. It seems that disputes of this kind are (a) not necessarily reducible to "public occasions upon which the participants flaunt their prejudices" (Kekes 1977, 72); (b) not necessarily predicated on conceptual confusion; (c) sometimes rational; and (d) can go on indefinitely. Kekes' term for concepts that satisfy both of these conditions is 'ECC.' How, then, are ECCs possible?

Kekes argues that rational disagreement of this kind is made possible by the internal complexity of the practice.[48] For instance, the practice of basketball can be analyzed into basic elements: shooting the ball in the basket, defensive strategies, strategic passing of the ball, out-rebounding one's opponents, and so on. Given the practice's internal complexity, observers of the game can provide alternative rankings and assessments of the various elements.[49] Thus, one person might rank teamwork, rebounding and good defense over and above scoring the highest number of points while another person might rank the latter elements over and above the former. The possibility of alternative rankings—i.e., the *multiplicity* of rankings—renders modification and disagreement possible.[50] Notice that the disagreement in question is

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[48] Kekes' fourth condition is that the goal-directed activity instantiating an ECC must be 'internally complex' in the sense that "the activity must comprise many elements, each of which plays a role in the performance. An element contributes to the internal complexity of the activity if without it the activity could not be what it is" (1977, 79). But two further constraints must be met: first, "the element must be something that the agent does or has," and, second, "the state or activity should have a direct bearing on the performance" (1977, 79). Thus, things like breathing, having a head, and the existence of the solar system are ruled out as elements.

[49] What I refer to as 'rankings' Kekes describes this as 'various assessments.' Consider his fifth necessary condition for ECCs: "The importance of the elements in an internally complex activity instantiating an ECC must be variously assessible" (1977, 80).

[50] "Modification is possible," writes Kekes, "because various elements can be ranked in different hierarchies. Internal complexity and the various assessibility of the elements guarantee the openness of ECCs and their openness makes the activities modifiable" (1977, 81).

normative rather than descriptive. It is normative because each ranking system

constitutes a prescriptive judgment: Such-and-such elements *ought* to function as

standards of correctness. For example, the real champions in basketball are those that

meet *this* ranking system as opposed to *that* one. Thus, the determinacy (of the rules)

of the practice does not guarantee that normative disagreement will not arise.

Notice that the disagreement in question is capable of going on indefinitely.[51]

This follows because there is no *objective standard* to settle the dispute. By 'objective

standard' I mean a standard that transcends, or stands outside of, the practice at

issue.[52] Suppose that different individuals cling to different ranking systems. Then

what is *taken* to be the 'correct' ranking system varies from one person to the next.

Does it follow then that disputes about ECCs are pointless and subjective? Kekes

rejects both suggestions. Disputes about ECCs are not pointless because both sides

are capable of convincing the other side. What is more, they are capable of doing so

in a rational manner. But how can such disputes be rationally resolvable independent

of an objective standard?

Kekes argues that a practice instantiating an ECC arises because of a problem

or need. The problem, moreover, can be described in a general way and every

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[51] "Where I disagree with Gallie is that he regards these arguments as incapable of resolution, while I think it is possible to teach a rational decision about the merits of conflicting claims in each particular situation" (1977, 73).

[52] Kekes speaks of a 'final answer': "it seems to me that there are no final answers to these questions. For the answer that one can reasonably accept seems to vary with the situation in which the question is posed" (1977, 88).

participant agrees to this general description.[53] Because they share a common

problem, every participant has an interest in resolving it. This common interest is

analogous to an objective standard, for it is an interest in achieving a common goal.

When every participant in the dispute values the same goal, the common interest

determines a norm—a rule-governed practice— directed at satisfying the same need.

The goal-directed nature of this practice makes rational resolution possible.[54] For

instance, in a professional basketball game (say, a game in the NBA finals) the goal of

the practice, as a whole, is to *score the most points*. Thus, an important distinction in

Kekes' argument is the distinction between the *subjective goals* which correspond to

particular rankings of the elements that are constitutive of the practice, on the one

hand, and the *objective goal* of the practice, on the other.

An obvious objection to this argument is that the contestants may not agree as

to the goal of the practice, taken as a whole. That is, the objective goal of the practice

might be contested. For example, players in a basketball game might not agree that

the point of the game is to score the most points. To this Kekes can reply that,

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[53] Kekes' sixth necessary condition for essential contests is that they must be capable of rational resolution: "How can one decide whether arguments about the novel, rationality, logic, etc., are arguments about two or more concepts that are confusedly undifferentiated or whether such arguments are about what the novel, rationality, logic, etc., really are? The answer is simple and it has already been given in the discussion of the second condition. If the contestants agree about the general description of the domain they are contesting, and if they share the problem the solution of which prompts the debate, then their argument is an essential contest, provided of course that all the other required conditions are met." (1977, 84)

[54] "The reason for this is that the activities are valued because they lead to the satisfaction of needs and to the achievement of goals. Parts of the activities, however essential to the practice, do not, by themselves, lead to the goal. So the recognition of the contribution made by an element should not be confused with judgments about the value of the activity as a whole" (1977, 79).

although agreement is not guaranteed, every candidate for a primary goal is internally related to the practice as a whole. Suppose a fan of team B believes that the point of the game is to score the most points. Suppose a fan of team A believes that the point is to have fun. Both subjective ends are potential candidates for the objective goal because each end corresponds to constitutive elements of the practice. Hence, both subjective ends are achievable in the course of the performance. For instance, by virtue of playing a basketball game team A might achieve the end of having fun while team B might achieve the end of scoring the most points. Thus, agreement at the level of the rules of the performance makes it possible for fans of team A to try and convert fans of team B into their own way of thinking. This is evidence of the fact that the game is constituted in such a way that both 'needs' are capable of being met in the course of the performance. So it is agreement in practice in conjunction with the value we ascribe to the ends of the practice (rather than some objective standard) that account for the possibility of rational agreement and for the possibility of rational and indefinite disagreement. The various ends that are achievable in the course of the performance make it possible for two contestants to come to a rational agreement about what the objective goal is.

In light of the preceding discussion, I will drop the term 'objective goal' and replace it with the term 'primary goal.' But I should explain this change of terminology. It is a fact that people play basketball for different reasons. This fact seems to suggest that the game of basketball satisfies multiple needs. Suppose now that we ask which of them is the primary one? Which of these needs corresponds to

the main point of playing the game? It seems to me that there is no objective answer

to this question. Some people might play basketball in order to *compete*, others in

order to *have fun*, and others in order to *score the most points*. Independent of which

goals is taken to be the primary one, contestants S and P might be capable of

appreciating goals other than their own. Most participants should be capable of *seeing*

the value in alternative rankings. Part of what makes this possible is the fact that each

goal corresponds to certain elements of the game that contribute to the performance

of the practice. Because each goal corresponds to elements that are partly constitutive

of the practice, satisfying each of these needs is achievable in the course of playing

the game. Therefore, there is always the possibility that one contestant might be

converted to another contestant's ranking of the elements. To so convert an

individual is to get that person to *see* and *appreciate* the value of one's own ranking.

That is, it is to get that individual to see one's own need and goal as the primary one.

This potential for conversion makes rational agreement possible. But precisely for

this reason, the primary goal of the practice is not an objective goal. For, as we have

seen, it too is open to contestation.

I have proceeded under the assumption that the goal of a practice is always

open to rational contestation. If it should turn out that for some practices there is

only one primary goal, then I should concede that the primary goal is identical to its

objective goal. I now argue that the primary goal of a practice is capable of changing

relative to a context. Take my example of an NBA finals game. In a professional

athletic context (such as the NBA), it may be more difficult to argue against the claim

that the primary goal is to *win* the game. For instance, it seems that it would be difficult (though perhaps not impossible) to rationally defend the position that the point of an NBA finals game is to *have fun*. And yet it is easy to imagine a context in which the explanation 'Basketball is a game that is played in order to have fun' might be a viable contender for a primary goal. For example, think of a basketball game in the context of a children's basketball league. We can imagine a parent of one of the children arguing that 'Both teams are the real champions because everyone had fun.' We can also imagine the argument that only one team is the real champion because the other showed no interest and little engagement. In normal circumstances, having fun would not be a viable contender for the primary goal of an NBA finals game. (Which is not to say that this end is not achievable in the course of playing the game.) What this argument shows is that the set of viable candidate primary goals (the possible candidates for the primary goal) can vary from one context and situation to another.

Thus far in our discussion we have proceeded under the assumption that the practice in question is *singular* and *well-defined*. But these assumptions do not hold up in respect to many contested concepts. Consider the concept of racism. The concept seems to pick out *several* kinds of practice. And what is more, many of these practices, if not all of them, seem to be *interwoven* with others. In some cases, it may not be clear where one racist practice ends and another racist practice begins. Good examples of this are cases that intersect the individual and institutional domains. For example, it is conceivable that an individual's action might seem racist from an institutional context

(say, because it contributes to patterns of racial inequality), but non-racist from an individual context (say, because the individual does not act from ill-will, disregard or the knowledge of the effects of one's action). The question thus arises whether it is possible to provide an account of rationality that does not presuppose an ontological fact (which might then function as a language-independent standard of correctness). I will not attempt here to provide a robust conception of rational agreement. But I believe that the above approach provides one possible way of moving forward.

Kekes' analytical method is designed to analyze one *particular* practice instantiating an ECC. Since there is no single practice instantiating the concept of racism, but rather a multiplicity of such practices, Kekes' method might be modified in the following way: it might be applied at the level of *particular* racist practices rather than the *domain* of racism as such. That is, some definitions of 'racism' purport to define the domain of racism (call these 'domain questions') whereas others purport to define some local region of this domain (call these 'local questions'). My suggestion is that Kekes' method, if applied at the level of local practices, might enable us to resolve disputes about racism. The method would likely lead to a contextualist theory of rationality. Domain questions would seem more difficult to resolve, but it might also be that there simply is no such definition. That is, there might not be a definition of 'racism' that is universally correct in the sense that it applies to everything that is called 'racism.' The point, then, is this: If there is no universally correct definition of 'racism,' there may still be correct and incorrect definitions relative to local practices

(again, bearing in mind that 'the correct definition' may vary from one context to another—as is arguably the case with respect to the correct definition of 'basketball').

For example, let us return to Blum and Glasgow's disagreement about the teacher. Their disagreement can go on indefinitely, but rational agreement is possible because their respective positions are internally related to the practice in question. Blum appreciates the fact that the high school teacher acts *wrongly* (i.e., commits a *racial ill*). Similarly, Glasgow recognizes that there are racial ills that are *morally more serious* than the teacher's action in this particular case. In recognizing these facts, these philosophers reveal their agreement on the following issues: (i) racism is a kind of racial ill; (ii) racism should be condemned; (iii) individuals can act racist. This agreement determines a trivial definition of the general practice in question: *Racism involves individual action that is morally condemnable on grounds that it involves a kind of racial ill*. We can conceive of this definition as the definition of a local practice rather than the universal definition of 'racism' as such. The practice as a whole aims at individual condemnation. For the point of calling the teacher's action 'racist' (or a 'racial ill') is to condemn it with a certain degree of severity. Their disagreement seems to be about the severity or degree of the moral harm committed by the teacher. Given their shared goal, it is possible for Blum to convert Glasgow, or vice versa. Hence, it is plausible that the possibility of rational agreement presupposes a common goal for the linguistic practice in question.

It would be very different, it seems to me, if Blum were arguing that the teacher does not act racist because his action fails to accord with some institutionalist

definition of 'racism.' For then he would have a very different intention for the use of the term 'racism.' His judgment would be directed at a different goal. Here it would be plausible to argue that they are talking about different *kinds* of racism. Indeed, it might be plausible to argue that their disagreement is predicated on conceptual confusion. Their disagreement in that case would require therapeutic treatment of the aims and intentions for the use of 'racism.' For it is possible that *both* philosophers might be right. One might be right to judge that the teacher's judgment is (or is not) individually racist, on the one hand, and to the other might be right to judge that the teacher's action is (or is not) institutionally racist, on the one hand.

The aforementioned local definition is local because it does not necessarily apply to other racist practices. For example, it does not seem to hold in the case of many institutional forms of racism. So we can summarize the contextualist approach as follows. First, a contextualist approach to rational agreement should allow that different racist practices might require *different definitions* (standards of correctness), relative to the goal of the particular practice. Second, it should make room for the possibility that the goal of a linguistic practice may *vary across contexts and situations*. Third, it should accommodate the possibility of *rational disagreement about the goal* of a local practice.

To be sure, moving forward in this way would not answer the question about the unity of the concept of racism. But that is a further question. My aim here has been to argue that there are ways of moving forward with a normative analysis of

racism that preserves the possibility of rational disagreement without positing an ontological fact (i.e., an objective, unchanging and universal definition of 'racism').

§5.4 Harris' Adequacy Condition for Rational Resolution

In the preceding section it was argued that Kekes' conception of ECCs can be modified and used for the purpose of preserving rational disagreement. I argued that such an account might be relativized to specific contexts/practices. The basic idea is that rational disagreements about the nature of racism might be relative distinct contexts, that is, to different goal-directed linguistic practices (which are interwoven with non-linguistic practices, e.g., moral practices). These linguistic practices can be roughly defined in a general and trivial manner to make clear what the goal is of calling something 'racist.' Because the disagreement in question presupposes a common goal (i.e., one that is shared by the contestants), rational agreement is possible. The fact that (a) disagreement can go on indefinitely; (b) the fact that the practice in question does not correspond to an ontological fact standing outside of the practice; and (c) the fact that the goal of the practice is modifiable relative to context and situation does not undermine the possibility of rational agreement. Before moving on I should point out that the above model is intended to be nothing more than a *possible* way of accommodating rational agreement. I suspect that there are many other ways of moving forward.

I would like to conclude by applying my normative analysis to Leonard Harris' discussion of whether racism is an essentially contested concept. I will attempt to dissolve conceptual confusion in Harris' ontological approach to racism. I argue that

his so-called ontological argument and defense of 'realist approaches' to racism is really a disguised normative argument which is rooted in moral-pragmatic considerations.

In "The Concept of Racism: An Essentially Contested Concept?", Harris discusses whether racism is an ECC. He argues that it is not, because the concept of racism has a knowable nature or essence. It is important to note that Harris is working with a different definition of 'essentially contested concept,' namely, Gallie's original definition of the term. According to Gallie, ECCs do not have a knowable nature because their essence is necessarily open to contestation.[55] Thus, Harris' strategy in arguing that racism is not an ECC is to argue that disputes about the nature of racism are 'legitimate,' i.e., rationally resolvable. Of course, on Kekes' definition of ECCs, the rational resolvability of an essential contest is a necessary condition for a concept's being an ECC. Thus, we will set aside the terminological question of how best to define the term 'ECC.' The question of interest to me is

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[55] As Gallie explains: "So long as contestant users of any essentially contested concept believe, however deludedly, that their own use of it is the only one that can command honest and informed approval, they are likely to persist in the hope that they will ultimately persuade and convert all their opponents by logical means. But once let the truth out of the bag-i.e., the essential contestedness of the concept in question-then this harmless if deluded hope may well be replaced by a ruthless decision to cut the cackle, to damn the heretics and to exterminate the unwanted" (1956, 193-194). He also writes: "Reason, according to so many great philosophical voices, is essentially something which demands and deserves universal assent-the manifestation of whatever makes for unity among men and/or the constant quest for such beliefs as could theoretically be accepted as satisfactory by all men. This account of reason may be adequate so long as our chief concern is with the use or manifestation of reason in science; but it fails completely as a description of those elements of reason that make possible discussions of religious, political and artistic problems. Since the Enlightenment a number of brilliant thinkers seem positively to have exulted in emphasizing the irrational elements in our thinking in these latter fields. My purpose in this paper has been to combat, and in some measure correct, this dangerous tendency" (1956, 196).

whether Harris' argument is best conceived as an ontological argument or a pragmatic argument.

Harris' paper develops a framework for thinking about the nature of racism. He maintains that, roughly speaking, it is helpful to classify approaches to the question 'What is racism?' into two basic approaches. He acknowledges that there are many exceptions to his two poles. The first approach is that of *objective realism*. The realist treats 'racism' as a metaphorical noun that names a thing of social reality. This 'thing' is a more or less stable entity that is capable of enduring or existing "wholly present at a single moment" (1998, 217). For the realist, racism has a knowable nature which is in principle definable (1998, 217). A realist about race treats the term 'race' (and 'black,' 'white,' etc.) as a metaphorical noun that names a thing of social reality—i.e., a real group.

The alterantive approach is *social constructivism*. The constructivist treats 'racism' as a metaphorical predicate or floating attribute which names a phenomenon of predication: "predications best describe the vicissitude of valuations we apply to mentally constructed groups" (1998, 218). The constructivist might argue that 'racism' is used in different ways relative to the mental constructions that are prevalent within some sociohistorical context. Which races are 'real' at a point in time is a function of individual attitudes. But different individuals might have conflicting interests and intentions for the use of racial terms like 'race' and 'racism.' In this way, such terms typically describe a variety of entities (persons, things, processes, practices, etc.). As such, these terms are arguably immune to philosophical attempts to define

them in terms of an essentialist/analytic definition. Hence, the constructivist can argue that racism is not a stable social reality but an instable, diffuse and evolving construction that ultimately depends on mental groupings and classifications. Or the constructivist can argue that racism is essentially contested or relative.

Harris argues that these basic approaches helpfully catalogue a variety of schools of thought. He goes on to argue that the dispute between realists and constructivists is rational because it is predicated on ontological and explanatory issues that are resolvable. After providing several examples of constructivist and realist approaches to race and racism, Harris turns to the question of whether the concept of racism is an ECC. He argues that it is not: "I argue that there are genuine philosophic differences over the meaning of racism which are not a function of confusion, indeterminacy, or an essentially contestable character" (1998, 220). His argument appeals to the possibility of rational resolution:

> Racism and race arguably exhibit Gallie's criteria of essentially contested concepts, i.e., appraisive, variously describable, oppositional, and positing itself as a whole. The concepts of racism and race nonetheless remain genuinely controversial. Whether racism is best understood as a noun or a predicate is decidable. Controversies concerning whether "racism," "racisms," or "race" exist are contingent on deciding an array of philosophical issues about ontology, morality, and explanatory notions of agency, evidence, and causation. Moreover, criteria for making decisions about competing background assumptions often involve morally appraisive beliefs. (1998, 227)

The idea here seems to be that the ontological dispute regarding the nature of racism can be resolved—contingent upon resolving a host of other issues. The implicit premise here seems to be that *if the dispute over the nature of racism is resolvable,*

then it cannot be an ECC (on Gallie's definition). Therefore, the concept of racism is

not an ECC (on Gallie's definition). Harris is more explicit about this elsewhere:

> Racism seems not to be an essentially contested concept, although, ostensibly
> it seems to have all of the requisite requirements. The primary reason for this
> is that there are a family of ideas associated with the term 'racism' which cut
> across competing schools of thought. Nonetheless, I believe that there are
> legitimate conflicts. (1998, 221)

Toward the end of his article, Harris lists a variety of pragmatic considerations

in support of objective realism. These considerations seem to be the primary reason

why he thinks that disagreement about the nature of racism is rationally resolvable:

> We must, however we construe the relationship between race and racism,
> make pragmatic judgments informed by some notion of how we should treat
> social entities and what sorts of entities should hold what status. This is the
> case whether one is an objectivist, constructivist, or a naturalist falling
> somewhere between these options. (1998, 227)

So, the dispute over the nature of racism is decidable on heuristic grounds:

> Even if racism is considered an indeterminate concept, best understood as a
> predicate, we must decide when we are faced with an instance of a racism,
> among the infinite variety of racisms. That is, when we are, for heuristic and
> practical purposes, required to act in an endurantist fashion—when an object
> is wholly present at a single moment—we are entrapped. We are entrapped in
> making moral decisions about persons as if their race was a stable category.
> We are compelled to proceed as if the definitions we use for when a person is
> black or white, for example, are stable. We know that Who is Black in
> America is defined by the one drop rule—one drop of sub-Saharan African
> ancestry makes a person black. This definition is peculiar to a certain period in
> American history and has little to do with the myriad of ways races are defined
> in other parts of the world. When prejudice occurs, it affects enduring persons
> living under social definitions of their identity, contrived, real, or strictly
> limited to a particular community. (1998, 227)

Thus, the ontological dispute about racism's nature is resolvable on heuristic

grounds. The basic thesis seems to be that realist approaches are more likely than

constructivist approaches to resolve the moral harm produced by racism.

Consequently, there is pragmatic support for realist approaches. It is as if Harris is

arguing that although it is true that philosophy has not settled all the relevant

theoretical questions (e.g., whether racism is real), we must *act as if* such questions

have been settled, at least for practical purposes, i.e., so as to make moral and

sociopolitical decisions about how to deal with racism. Harris' argument is therefore a

pragmatic argument for objective realism. What is interesting about this argument is that it

would support objective realism even on the assumption that realism is false or

misguided. For, on his view, there are good moral-pragmatic reasons to think it is

true. Harris seems to acknowledge this point when he writes:

> In order to institute social policies, we must have an account of groups as
> enduring entities or social facts. Institutional rules and regulations apply to
> individuals understood as instantiations of types, if not kinds. Why, and what,
> institutional rules and practices perpetuate human misery require explanations
> of group behavior. These explanations direct us in suggesting solutions that
> are at least reasonable to consider. Thus, assuming that there are no
> ontologically stable, enduring, and causing group agents, we use heuristic
> categories to account for why, and what, rules and practices sustain human
> misery. (1998, 228)

Although Harris does not explicitly refer to constructivist approaches in the

above passage, it is clear that his criticisms are designed to target them. For

constructivists deny that social groups can be "ontologically stable, enduring, and

causing agents." Harris' reply to this denial is that even if objective realism is false, we

can still rely on heuristic categories which *practically* play the same role as ontological

categories. His argument thus relies on the claim that subjective experiences—such as

psychological pain, misery, hardship, happiness, etc.—as well as objective life

circumstances and potentialities, appear to be functions of social group relations,

regardless of whether those groups are real or imagined. It is as if the ontological

status of groups drops out as insignificant and what becomes primary is the

pragmatic status and lived experience of those that we categorize as members of a

race:

> We must decide how to act as if social groups behave with essence like
> qualities, i.e., how to act as if individuals were instantiations of types, if not
> kinds. If it is false that "women" are historical agents, intentionally causing
> social events in ways that are not reducible to biological causations, it does not
> follow that we should ignore the oppression of women as a group because
> they lack ontological status. We can, and must, decide how to treat social
> wholes enduring long enough to suffer across generations. Ethnic groups,
> classes, and categories such as woman, homosexual, or aboriginal people, for
> example, have histories and forms of immiseration associated with their
> existence. (1998, 228)

If sound, Harris' pragmatic argument for objective realism would establish the

following adequacy condition: *An adequate theory of racism must make a substantial*

contribution to the moral problem of ending racism, on either the subjective or objective levels of

experience. Harris' move away from the ontological toward the pragmatic involves an

implicit recognition of the need to resolve a problem. This thesis is consistent with

Kekes' claim that the point of an essential contest is to solve the problem that

prompts the dispute. As Kekes argues:

> A feature of these problems is that solving them does not remove the
> problems. Solution, in this case, consists in finding a way to cope with the
> situation, to develop a workable, consistent attitude; the solution is always a
> *modus vivendi.* Most problems are not like these: normally, finding a solution
> leads to the disappearance of the problem. Proving a theorem, scaling a
> mountain, making one's way in a literal or metaphorical maze, understanding
> an argument, a person, a joke, are problems only until a solution is found. But
> having decided, say, that nature is neither good nor bad, but neutral, or that a

> certain amount of solitude is necessary for one's well-being, or that respecting other people's dignity is often more important than helping them, does not remove the problems that these decisions solve. The solution consists in adopting a way of coping with them. I shall call these two kinds of problems "problems-to-cope-with" and "problems-to-remove." (1977, 87-8)

What Harris' argument offers us, then, is a criterion for prescriptive theorizing. The point of theorizing racism is not to identify what racism is *as such*, but to define it *for the sake of* resolving a set of related moral problems.

One of the ramifications of Kekes' account of ECCs is that philosophical problems more closely resemble existential problems. For example, consider the problem of deciding what to do with one's life. Should one become a philosopher or an astronaut? Should one major in business or in philosophy? Often, there may be many candidates for a 'correct' answers. Which of them proves to be correct depends on one's decision. Yet, this fact does not make one's decision trivial, easy or less momentous. One is left with the burden of making the decision. So the fact that existential problems do not necessarily admit of mind-independently correct answers does not imply that they are not legitimate problems. Not all existential problems are the same. Some require a *one-time decision/action* (e.g., the problem of saving the drowning child). Others call for a lived life and consistent practice—what Kekes calls a *modus vivendi*. For instance, problems of 'keeping the faith' or 'being a good person' seem to be of this sort. In the final analysis, the relevant data consists of one's entire life. Let us describe these situations as problems requiring a *long-term decision/commitment*. It seems that the existential crisis of racism is a problem of the latter kind. It is the problem of deciding how to act and live; of what policies to

support; of what movements to join; and so on. Individuals, groups, societies and scholars are forced to decide how to live in a condition of racism and how to fight and combat racism. So the problem of racism that Harris seems to be describing is a problem to cope with rather than a problem to remove (in Kekes' sense[56]).

Essential contests, as Kekes understands them, are normative. They are resolvable because there is a common goal that prompts them. "The general principle for rationally settling disputes concerning the proper use of ECCs is that that use should prevail which is most likely to lead to the solution of the problem that prompted the debate" (85). This notion brings in the elements of decision and consensus: "The arguments are about the means for reaching the ideals. It is this community of interests and consensus about what would satisfy it that makes debates about ECCs rationally tractable" (86). This is connected with Kekes' model of problem-solving:

> The logic of the situation is that if the participants recognize a common problem and share a sense of values in some specific domain, then their disputes can be rationally settled. If, however, they do not share a problem, or accept different ideals, or fail to agree on a general description of the relevant domain, then they are not engaged in essentially contesting a concept. (86)

The theoretical problem of determining the fundamental nature of racism is essentially a *practical problem*: the is the problem of ending racism. Racism continues to exist and thrive unencumbered; it continues to evolve and take on new forms; and it

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[56] Of course, one would hope that the problem of racism could ultimately be removed. Indeed, that is the goal of the anti-racist. But the point here is that removing racism is not a matter of making a single decision, instituting a single policy, etc. That is, it is not a 'problem-to-remove' in Kekes' sense. Racism is more of an enduring condition and resolving this problem seems to require a *modus vivendi*.

continues to target its unfortunate victims with impunity. Racism has a remarkable

historical presence on various levels of social existence, across multiple regions,

countries and societies, and across times and spaces. The fact that racism should be

abolished as thoroughly and as soon as possible is taken for granted by all the

relevant theoreticians in the debate over the nature of racism. Leonard Harris' "What,

then, is Racism?" provides an excellent statement of the practical problem:

> What, then, is racism? Racism is a polymorphous agent of death, premature
> births, shortened lives, starving children, debilitating theft, abusive larceny,
> degrading insults, and insulting stereotypes forcibly imposed. The ability of a
> population to accumulate wealth and transfer assets to their progeny is stunted
> by racism. As the bane of honor, respect, and a sense of self-worth, racism
> surreptitiously stereotypes. It stereotypes its victims as persons inherently
> bereft of virtues and incapable of growth. Racism is the agent that creates and
> sustains a virulent pessimism in its victims. The subtle nuances that encourage
> granting unmerited and undue status to a racial social kind are the tropes of
> racism. Racism creates criminals, cruel punishments, and crippling
> confinement, while the representatives of virtue profit from sustaining the
> conditions that ferment crime. Systemic denial of a population's humanity is
> the hallmark of racism. (1998a, 437)

As Harris sees it, a theory of racism must speak to the oppressive and morally

harmful aspects of all forms of racism. The theoretical-practical problem is, therefore,

the problem of developing 'theoretical projects' by which I mean any of the

following: an effective analysis, theory, description or explanation that can in some

sense or other help to undermine racism. Projects may provide causal explanations,

discuss the nature of moral justification, paint helpful pictures and analogies, theorize

solutions and practical approaches, criticize legal, academic and political institutions,

and so on. A project must directly or indirectly address, or relate to, one or more

aspects of racism. Theories of racism are therefore subservient to the practical

problem of ending racism. They are means to this end. Given this goal, theories of racism are not devised for their own sake. It is not necessary that a theory of racism develop a practical strategy, but the project must have practical ramifications, whether immediate or potential, clear or inchoate, hypothetical or speculative, etc. It follows that the ultimate pragmatic justification for theorizing racism is a *moral end*. At the end of the day, an adequate theory must have something to say about the practical problem, for as Harris explains: "There are competing views of racism that would not approach explanations in the above way. However, I do not believe that other explanatory approaches should depict the miseries any less vividly or recommend any milder actions to destroy the terror of race and racism" (1998a, 449).

We are now in a position to appreciate why Harris' ontological argument for objective realism is better conceived as a normative argument. When he says that a theory of racism should treat racism *as if it is real*, he means that the experiences of those who are victims of racism should be *taken seriously*. So his argument is really a normative appeal, an appeal to our moral sensibilities. We do not need to posit an ontological fact—a 'thing' of social reality—in order to make sense of this appeal. Ultimately, he is arguing for an adequacy condition (as noted above). His condition and argument are best understood when they are framed within the framework of normative disagreement and within the context of Kekes' notion of problem-solving. Harris' pragmatic arguments recognizes that theories of racism are, first and foremost, attempts to solve practical problems. Hence, they must own their normative space and ought to recognize the goal-directedness of their respective

theoretical projects. Unlike Glasgow's theoretical approach, Harris' approach is embedded within the normative domain.

§5.5 Conclusion

I have argued for several claims in this chapter. First, I argued that essential contests over the nature of racism are rationally resolvable, despite the fact that they are essentially contested (i.e., open to contestation). They are resolvable because every contestant is ultimately trying to achieve the same end within the context of particular rule-governed practices. In other words:

(a) Essential contests about racism are rationally resolvable because scholars of racism uniformly aim at resolving the practical problem of ending racism.

It might be objected that (a) is false because scholars of racism have a wide variety of philosophical and non-philosophical goals and interests. Arguably, however, these differences can be explained. For any given theory or approach to racism, it is possible to distinguish its *final end* and its *immediate end*. For instance, the goal of one theory might be to provide a general account of racism's moral wrongness; the goal of some other approach may be to explain why racism still exists. What unifies them is not a common methodology or approach, but a commitment to the final end of combatting racism. Hence, approaches to racism may be conceived as theoretical strategies. There is no *a priori* reason to think that one kind of strategy is superior or inferior to another. (However, there may be good empirical reasons for thinking thus.) Intuitively, it seems that a multiple strategies approach provides the best way forward, that is, the most promising way of achieving the final end: developing

effective practical strategies for combatting racism. A rational resolution to the question 'What is racism?' is possible because there is a single goal which is the final end of all theories and approaches to the philosophical analysis of racism.

The fact that the concept of racism is essentially contested speaks to two interrelated facts about the concept. First, it speaks to its openness: the ability to revise and alter it. Second, it speaks to the fact that the problem of theorizing racism is a problem to cope with. The fact that this problem has a rational resolution should not be taken to imply that it has a final answer, for the theoretical problem of defining racism is an ongoing practical problem.[57] This is our problem to cope with, a *modus vivendi*. How well a theory of racism addresses it provides is assessable.

Consider, for example, critical theories, institutionalist accounts and sociological theories of racism. We will continue to need such theories as long as racism exists. This, in turn, can and should continue to bear on, and influence, our philosophical conceptions of racism. Perhaps the best illustration of this is Mills' racial contract theory which provides a systematic and empirically-informed framework for theorizing white supremacy. One of the things his theory explains is the prevalence of normative whiteness in academic philosophy. By this he means that issues of interest to socially marginalized groups are marginalized within philosophy as well. They are not considered 'serious' philosophical issues, or they are reframed

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[57] As Kekes explains, "it seems to me that there are no final answers to these questions. For the answer that one can reasonably accept seems to vary with the situation in which the question is posed" (1977, 88).

within the periphery of 'mainstream' philosophical theories (e.g., race is analyzed as a function of class on Marxist theories). Clearly, deploying a theoretical framework that calls out academic philosophy on its racial blindness is intended to have some bearing on the practical problem of racism. Therefore, his theory illustrates that theories of racism are context-sensitive and goal-oriented. Mills' theory acquires its significance from a context in which racism is real, alive and doing well. It is this *practical need* to theorize racism that prompts and justifies his theory. What Harris' argument adds to this conversation is a standard of correctness, an adequacy condition for properly theorizing racism. The upshot of his pragmatic argument seems to be that philosophers (and specifically, theorists of racism) should strive to understand the phenomenon of racism in ways that bear directly or indirectly on its resolution.

CHAPTER 6

RACISM AND RACIAL DISREGARD:
A CRITIQUE OF JORGE GARCIA'S VOLITIONAL APPROACH

§6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I deploy Wittgenstein's grammatical method to achieve

conceptual clarity regarding the concept of racist belief. Four distinct uses of 'racist

belief' are identified and shown to constitute distinct language-games. Perspicuous

understanding of these language-games is used to dissolve conceptual confusion in

Jorge Garcia's theory of racism. My argument has implications for the way the

distinction between descriptive and prescriptive approaches to racism is currently

applied. Glasgow articulates the distinction as follows:

> Third, I don't mean to deny that we also might want to use and unpack the
> term 'racism' in a way that deviates from ordinary usage but that serves
> various pragmatic or liberating ends. But investigating what our terms refer to
> and exploring what they could and should refer to are attempts to paint two
> different pictures. DA [Glasgow's Disrespect Analysis] is an analysis of the
> former variety. Perhaps we'd be better off if we reserved the term 'racism' for
> a different set of social ills than what it currently covers; perhaps not. In either
> case, though, a focus on what it currently covers is the constraint by which any
> descriptive analysis must abide. (2009, 93)

A descriptive theory of 'racism,' we are told, merely seeks to describe what this term

refers to. A prescriptive theory, by contrast, seeks to explore what this term could or

should refer to. Judging by this criterion, Garcia's theory should be counted as

descriptive, for he writes: "In this paper, I present an account of racism that, I think, better reflects contemporary usage of the term, especially its primary employment as both descriptive and evaluative…" (1996, 6).

I argue that Garcia is wrong to think that his analysis merely describes ordinary usage, for it actually goes beyond mere description. His theory fails to accommodate certain forms of racism precisely because it prescribes a definition of 'racism' as correct that betrays his commitment to political conservativism. Thus, my analysis suggests that the correct way to think about 'descriptive analysis' is in terms of clarification of ordinary usage. A descriptive account is one that aims at conceptual clarity regarding existing definitions of 'racism,' not one that aims at identifying the correct definition of 'racism.'

§6.2 Garcia's Volitional Account

In "The Heart of Racism" Jorge L. A. Garcia defends a volitional/virtue ethics approach to the analysis of racism. His seminal paper aims at describing ordinary usage of 'racism' without significantly revising it. In subsequent papers, Garcia defends his account against detractors' objections and aggressively criticizes rival theories both within philosophy and within the social sciences.[58] He argues that 'racism,' in its most basic sense, signifies a vicious form of racial disregard, focally located in the 'heart' (viz. the will, intention, desire and motivation). In his own words:

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[58] See Garcia (1997; 1999; and 2004).

My proposal is that we conceive of racism as fundamentally a vicious kind of racially based disregard for the welfare of certain people. In its central and most vicious form, it is a hatred, ill-will, directed against a person or persons on account of their assigned race. In a derivative form, one is a racist when one either does not care at all or does not care enough (i.e., as much as morality requires) or does not care in the right ways about people assigned to a certain racial group. (1996, 6-7)

This chapters argues that Garcia's theory of racism fails to meet two of his adequacy conditions, which he lays out in his "Current Conceptions of Racism: A Critical Examination of Some Recent Social Philosophy" (1997). He writes:

Among other things, it should count in favor of an understanding of racism if it does, and count against it if it does not: A) clarify why racism is always immoral (without trivializing the moral judgment by making it a matter of definition); … F) conform to our everyday discourse about racism, insofar as this [sic] free from confusion. (1997, 6)[59]

Racial disregard is said to be the core or heart of racism from which extensions (i.e., distinct kinds of racism) develop. A helpful picture is that of an infectious disease, such as cancer. Imagine a cancer that is initially isolated in a certain region of the body, but soon spreads to infect the rest of the body. Garcian essentialism understands racial disregard as akin to an infectious disease that originates in the will of a person. It can spread internally, within the individual (to one's beliefs, actions, etc.). It can also spread externally, outside the individual (to institutions, laws,

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[59] Presumably Garcia does not defend these adequacy conditions because he takes them to be intuitively obvious. That being said, these adequacy conditions are commonly accepted in the literature, particularly among analytic *a priori* approaches to racism. For a defense of these and other adequacy conditions, see Glasgow (2009). For examples of philosophers whose theories of racism seek to satisfy these conditions, see Schmid (1996), Taylor (2004) and Glasgow (2009).

symbols, etc.). However, unlike cancer, racism always arises in the same central

location: volition.

Garcia differentiates two ways of being an essentialist. The first is to identify a

common property common to every instance of racism. The second is to identify the

core of racism and to then use this to explain other forms of racism[60]:

> [Robert] Miles challenges those who insist on talking only of 'racisms' in the
> plural to 'specify what the many different racisms have in common' (Miles,
> 1989: p. 65). This may go too far. Some philosophers have offered respected
> accounts of common terms that seem not to require that every time A is an F
> and B is an F, then A and B must have some feature in common (other than
> that of being-an-F, if that's a feature). Nominalism and Wittgenstein's 'family
> resemblance' view are two examples. However, if we are not dealing with two
> unrelated concepts the English terms for which merely happen to have the
> same spelling and pronunciation (like the 'bank' of a river and the 'bank' that
> offers loans), then we should be able to explain how the one notion develops
> out of the other. (1996, 10)

His essentialist approach admits of non-intentional forms of racism. This is possible

when racial disregard is the explanation or cause of racism.[61] For instance, Garcia can

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[60] Garcia's infection model approach to essentialism is a form of *core essentialism*, that is, it starts with a basic core which is then used to explain distinct forms of racism in causal or reductive terms. Many essentialist approaches to racism are instances of *property essentialism*, that is, they attempt to identify a single property which is common to every form of racism. For examples of the latter approach, see Taylor (2004) and Glasgow (2009).

[61] Garcia's (2010) thus uses his infection model to deflect objections from his detractors. See, e.g., his reply to Faucher and Machery's (2009). These authors raise several objections against Garcia's affective model of racism, one of which is the claim that his monistic account of racism's moral wrongness is unable to explain a wide variety of racial ills. Specifically, they focus on racial ills that are instances of implicit racial bias and which have their source in affective states other than malevolence or lack of benevolence. One of Garcia's replies to this objection is that his model is capable of accommodating forms of implicit racial bias as a function of ill-will or racial disregard. That is, his account provides a causal explanation of the wrongness of these states. Consider, for instance, race-based disgust and race-based fear. Garcia accommodates them as follows: "Still, it appears that at least disgust toward a person (or group of persons) offends against the moral virtues of benevolence and respect for persons as such. If so, then it too is comfortably accommodated within V[olitional]A[ccount of]R[acism]" (2010, 257). He later adds: "it is when a white student's race-based

maintain that a swastika in a front yard is racist—albeit not racist in and of itself, since taken in itself it is a mere artifact.[62] A swastika, on his view, is derivatively racist, that is, infected with racism. Volitional considerations explain the infection: a vicious intention led to the swastika's being placed in the front yard. To call it 'racist,' then, is not to condemn the object or some intrinsic property it possesses, but rather the person who placed it there. Thus, it appears that talk pertaining to the viciousness of the object or what it symbolizes is metaphorical in nature: a way of criticizing the motives of the individual. The effects of the object's being where it is, or the fact that it symbolizes what it does, are not fundamental causal variables of racism—for they are infections, and hence extensions or secondary forms, of racism.

What is true for swastikas, moreover, is true of all non-intentional forms of racism. All secondary forms are explained in a similar way, as originating in the heart. For instance: "Actions and beliefs are racist in virtue of their coming from racism in the desires, wishes, and intentions of individuals, not in virtue of their leading to these or other undesirable effects" (1996, 11).

Garcia's theory of racism is really two theories in one. First, there is the *semantic thesis* that his account of racism conforms to ordinary usage of 'racism.' Second, there is the *ontic thesis* that his account captures the primary form and core of

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fear, envy, pity, or some other motivation disposes her to a (similarly race-driven) malicious, disdainful, or cold-heartedly indifferent stance against African Americans, Amerinds, or Asians (including a stance against some individual because of her supposed membership in the group) that she crosses the line into real racism. For it is only then that she is *against* (members of) the group in a relevant way" (2010, 258).

[62] My example of a swastika as a racist symbol is from Blum (2004, 74).

racism. To undermine the ontic thesis all we need is a single counterexample, a case in which volition has no explanatory role or is relegated to a secondary form. The idea, then, is to show that volition is not the basic cause of every instance. To undermine the semantic thesis we need a single case in which the ordinary use of 'racism' does not conform to Garcia's definition of the term even though the linguistic practice appears to be meaningful and free from conceptual confusion.

§6.3 Ordinary Usage: The Semantic Thesis

In this section, I argue that Garcia's theory of ordinary usage is flawed, because it overlooks an ordinary use of 'benevolent racism.' My argument will build on Charles Mills' counterexample (2003), although he does not develop it as an objection to Garcia's semantic thesis. His criticism of Garcia is that racial disregard (or ill-will) is not a necessary condition of racism, because people can have good-will toward others while being racist toward them.

Mills highlights cases where the racist has inferiorizing racial beliefs which motivate action that is intended to benefit those targeted. These cases have been called 'paternalistic racism' and 'benevolent racism.' From the point of view of objective morality, the paternalist harms the individual he intends to help. Garcia's theory, however, links moral wrongness to intentionality. Mills reminds him that what is considered morally harmful is a subjective matter which trades on a particular set of beliefs. Suppose that a white aristocrat living in the period of segregation, while intending to respect the interests of a black man, acts contrary to those interests. From the white man's perspective, no moral wrong is committed. Objectively,

however, the white man has acted wrongly. His mistaken belief that acting as he does

will benefit the black man is predicated on false beliefs about black interests. As Mills

explains:

> A white person has feelings of good-will toward Native Americans (whom he
> wants to see successfully assimilate), to black slaves in the U.S. (whom he
> wants to take care of, since they are incapable of taking care of themselves), to
> blacks, browns, and yellows in the colonial world (whom he wants to civilize).
> His feelings of benevolence seem quite real, but in each case they are
> predicated on his belief in the inferiority to whites, whether biological and/or
> cultural, of the nonwhite racial groups. So these inferiors—Tonto, Faithful Ol'
> Uncle Remus, Gunga Din—need to be helped, and he gets real pleasure out
> of doing what he can to help them. Now in the literature on racism, this is
> seen as an important sub-variety; racism comes in more than one form, and
> there are other kinds besides the malevolent kind. Yet most theorists would
> insist that this still counts as racism, since what is crucial for them, unlike
> Garcia, is the doxastic dimension: the paternalist's belief in the racial
> inferiority of these nonwhites. (2003, 51)

Mills defines *benevolent racism* as racism that involves good intentions but results

in objectionable conduct. He argues that benevolent racism is possible by virtue of

the subject's being misinformed about black interests. The argument here can be

stated as follows. What matters morally, according to Garcia, are the hearts of

individuals. A subject's intention is to be judged in light of *her* subjective attitudes

(e.g., her feeling of racially motivated ill will). This approach fails to recognize an

important distinction between subjective and objective racism. The paternalist is

someone whose motivations are *objectively racist* and *subjectively benevolent*—i.e., result in

bad outcomes while being benevolently motivated. The paternalist does not know

that his good intentions result in bad outcomes because he mistakenly takes them to

be good; and his assessment is mistaken because he holds false racial beliefs which

lead him to perceive the outcomes as helpful rather than harmful. On Garcia's theory,

there are no conceptual resources to condemn the paternalist's intentions on

objective grounds.[63] For racism, on his view, is essentially subjective. Therefore,

Garcia's theory prevents us from condemning paternalistic racism. As Mills explains:

> What entitles him (he thinks) to make his judgment of ill-will, is that he is
> relying on an objective (i.e., non-racist) standard of black well-being and black
> interests, and an objective (non-racist) judgment of what place blacks should
> have in the society (i.e., any place that their talents, which are equal to whites',
> can take them). But my claim would be that *he is not entitled to do this*. From the
> perspective of 'intent,' the crucial issue is not how Garcia (or any other non-
> racist, third-person observer) sees things, but how the *southern aristocrats* (as
> first persons) see things. "Intent," and its link with ill- or good-will has to be
> determined with respect to them. "*Well-being" "advancement" and "interests" are all
> then contested rather than neutral terms*. … Garcia's judgment on the southern
> aristocrats relies on the rejection as false of a view of well-being, advancement,
> and interests that is predicated on black racial inferiority. And given his non-
> doxastic account, he is not entitled to do this, since he is implicitly appealing
> to a belief (in racial equality) not shared by them, and which he is not
> supposed to need to judge them as having racist intent. (2003, 53)

Garcia had anticipated this type of objection in "The Heart of Racism." There

he replies by effectively denying the possibility of benevolent racism. That is, he

denies the benevolence of the so-called benevolent racist:

> What is essential is that [racial antipathy] consists in either opposition to the
> well-being of people classified as members of the targeted racial group or in a
> racially based callousness to the needs and interests of such people. This, I
> think, gives us what we need in order to see part of what makes our patricians
> racists. … They stand against the advancement of Black people. … They are
> averse to it as such, not merely doing things that have the *side* effect of setting

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[63] In genuine cases of paternalistic racism, the racist's intentions are superficially good, which is to say, good in light of the racist's manner of thinking and background beliefs. Were we to ask a racist aristocrat, S, why he seeks to retard black interests he would deny that he does this. Moreover, his denial would be sincere. Given S's sincerity, Garcia's ontic theory determines that S is not a racist. For all instances of personal racism, on his account, involve (or are infected by) racial disregard; that is, Garcia maintains, as a universal thesis, that volitional considerations are the primary form of racism which explain all of its non-volitional forms and manifestations.

> back the interests of Black people. Rather, they *mean* to retard those interests, to keep Black people "in their place" relative to White people. They mean to adopt this stance of active, conscious, and deliberate hostility to Black welfare either simply to benefit themselves at the expense of Black people or out of the contemptuous belief that, because they are Black, they merit no better. In any event, these aristocrats and their behavior can properly be classified as racist. (1996, 17)

Although paternalists appear to be benevolent, says Garcia, they are not really so. Their reports in support of blacks are insincere; their beliefs about racial inferiority and superiority are rationalizations of white privilege and white supremacy. Paternalists, on Garcia's account, covertly harbor racial disregard toward blacks in spite of their assertions to the contrary.

Mills rightly rejects this reply for the reasons stated above.[64] Garcia's example of paternalists who insincerely represent their racist motives commits the *red herring* fallacy, for these individuals are not tokens of the type of paternalism Mills has in mind. After all, Garcia is surely correct that some aristocrats "*mean[t]* to retard those [black] interests, to keep Black people 'in their place' relative to White people." This empirical claim is intuitively plausible if not straightforwardly verifiable. What is more, at least one ordinary use of the expression 'keeping black people in their place'

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[64] Here is more from the previously quoted passage: "Now by Garcia's own criteria, it is not enough that actions, or general patterns of behavior, are 'against the advancement of Black people' to call them racist. Given his virtue-theorist's emphasis on individual motivation and personal intent, the criterion has to be motivation-based, not results based (and in fact Garcia says this explicitly elsewhere, in his criticisms of attempts to prove 'institutional racism' just by looking at outcomes). So the criterion here is 'subjective,' adverting to motivation, rather than 'objective,' adverting to outcomes. The crucial question is: what do they intend? Garcia says of the southern aristocrats that they are 'opposed to the well-being' of blacks, 'stand against their advancement,' and 'mean to retard their interests' in order to keep them in their place. But superficially, at least, their motivation is benevolent, based on the belief that they know best what black interests are." (Mills 2003, 53)

suggests this much. To the extent that aristocrats used expressions such as this, they likely did so in connection with Garcian racial disregard. For the paradigmatic picture associated with this expression is not one of paternalism and good-will but of brute force, domination and oppression. If person S intends to keep blacks in their place, this might entail that S is *intent* upon imposing brute force or has the *desire* to dominate and oppress.

The question, however, is whether Garcia's account of benevolent racism is exhaustive. Mills has argued that it is not. Not all forms of paternalism involve Garcian racial disregard. More to the point, some forms of racism are predicated on subjectively good intentions. A possible reply is that Mills' account of benevolent racism is historically inaccurate. Specifically, Garcia might object that it is false to contend, as Mills does, that, as a matter of historical fact, benevolent racism has been rooted in beliefs about racial superiority/inferiority. So, Garcia would have to show, on empirical grounds, that this is never born out in history—a prospect that does not look promising, according to Mills.[65] Yet, even if Garcia could prove otherwise, his reply would be inadequate. For his theory commits him to the rejection of the very possibility of benevolent racism, as defined by Mills. Otherwise Mills could argue that benevolent racism, as he conceives it, *might* exist; hence, that it is a legitimate kind of racism.

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[65] Mills cites Litwack's "definitive book on Jim Crow" in support of this claim (2003, 43). The citations are to Litwack (1998, 186, 202, 204, 211).

Since the mere possibility of Mills-type benevolent racism is incompatible with Garcia's theory, Garcia's univocal account of benevolent racism must be defended on *a priori* grounds. Garcia must maintain that Mills' account of 'objective racism' is misdescribed; benevolently motivated acts which result in bad outcomes should not be called 'racism.' The point can be clarified as follows. Mills and Garcia agree that the paternalist is someone who intends 'to keep black people in their place,' but they have two different kinds of case in mind. Namely:

I.   The black man must be kept in his place, because he is my property; because I am white and he is black; because I can and will dominate him; etc.

II. The black man must be kept in his place, since otherwise he might hurt himself or get into trouble; because he cannot fully control his violent dispositions; etc.

Garcia's theory of paternalistic racism seems to commit him to the following claims. First, cases of paternalism that fall under type (I) are the only ones that satisfy the proper definition of 'benevolent racism.' Second, many if not most of the cases that seem to fall under type (II) actually fall under type (I). Third, to the extent that there are actual cases of type (II), these are illegitimate instances of racism; *ipso facto*, they are not instances of benevolent racism, properly conceived.

Mills counters that there are irreducible cases of type (II), which are legitimately called 'benevolent racism.' Since expressions like 'keep black people in their place' are contested, he claims, the dispute cannot be settled by pointing to ordinary usage of such expressions. A white aristocrat might use it in connection with racial disregard, i.e., with racism in his heart. However, he might instead use it in

connection with good intentions and good-willed efforts to help black people. According to Mills, this is how many historians and social scientists actually use the term. Garcia recommends that we not describe these cases as benevolent racism. But recommendation moves him away from description. His recommendation only serves to underscore the fact that expressions like 'keeping black people in their place' have multiple uses. So, Garcia's semantic theory is called into question by the simple observation that terms such as this are contested.

To sum up, Garcia's volitional theory implies that benevolent racism, if associated with type (II) cases, is impossible. However, the use of 'racism' in connection with type (II) cases is meaningful. Therefore, his theory fails to accommodate existing usage of 'racism.' Garcia might object that this particular usage is confused. But I have argued that Mills' use of 'benevolent racism' (i) seems to be meaningful and free from confusion; and, what is more, (ii) nothing in Garcia's theory demonstrates anything to the contrary. Consequently, Mills' use of 'benevolent racism' satisfies Garcia's desideratum (F). That is, it offers a legitimate counterexample to Garcia's semantic theory of racism.

§6.4 Racism's Moral Wrongness: The Ontic Thesis

I have presented Mills' counterexample as an objection to Garcia's *semantic* theory of racism whereas Mills originally presented it as an objection to his *ontic* theory. In this section I turn my attention to the latter. Among other things, I continue to deploy Mills' counterexample to meet this end, but I also extend it in new directions with the aim of defending two additional claims. First, Garcia mistakenly

presents his theory as descriptive; in fact, it is prescriptive. Second, his infection

model lacks the resources to account for two kinds of racist belief.

Mills offers a powerful objection to Garcia's ontic theory. Garcia's volitional

definition treats racism as an individualistic phenomenon and hence as a purely

subjective phenomenon. However, acts that are motivated by good intentions can

result in bad outcomes. Garcia, however, rejects the possibility of this kind of racist

belief. Hence, his claim that racism is essentially a subjective phenomenon (a matter

of volition) proves to be politically conservative; for example, it precludes certain left-

wing forms of social criticism. Again, it is not clear what his grounds of exclusion are,

because the belief in question (which Mills thinks is rightly called 'racist') does not

appear to be conceptually confused. Garcia could adopt the strategy of rejecting

Mills' gloss as conceptually confused. That is, he could argue that we should not

describe type (II) cases as 'racist.' If it is objected that type (II) cases are morally

problematic independently of whether we call them 'racist,' Garcia can reply that they

should be condemned on other grounds. But this reply seems to miss the point, for

what we need is to condemn them on racial grounds, that is, *as* racist.

Garcia is advancing a normative claim about what should and should not be

called 'racist.' So, it is a legitimate criticism here to object that Garcia's theory is

conservative.[66] For conservativism is a political and moral stance; a substantive

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[66] Mills makes this observation in the opening remarks of his paper: "Within the overwhelmingly left-wing (liberal to radical) black philosophical community, Garcia is one of the few conservatives, not in the free-market, libertarian, Nozickian sense, but the traditionalist, religious, anti-modern Burkean

normative position regarding the *proper* use of 'racism.' But let us be clear about what the criticism is. The problem is not that conservatism is morally and politically indefensible. The problem is rather that Garcia's commitment to conservatism renders his definition of 'racism' a *prescriptive proposal.* That is, it amounts to a *recommendation* to define 'racism' in conservative terms; for his analysis excludes non-conservative uses of 'racism' as incorrect. The upshot of this conclusion is that Garcia misrepresents the goal of his analytical project (unwittingly perhaps), for he holds that his theory of racism is descriptive rather than prescriptive. His conservatism betrays the actual function of his account, viz. to prescribe what racism ought to be (how we ought to think about racism). A theory of racism that purportedly describes a region of ordinary language while rejecting another (that seems to be in logical order as it stands) is revisionist.

Garcia cannot have it both ways. Either he should concede that Mills' cases of benevolent racism provide legitimate counterexamples to his theory or he should drop the descriptive pretense and admit that his project is prescriptive and revisionist. It might be objected that Garcia's theory prescribes changes to ordinary usage only when this helps or improves the linguistic practice, i.e., to correct slipshod usage of 'racism.' However, I reply that the assertion is false. First, there is nothing inconsistent or problematic about using the term 'racism' to condemn paternalists in

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sense. Apart from the intrinsic merits of his work, then, his presence helps to keep the rest of us honest, by contesting the cozy left consensus on race. Thus he is emerging as an important spokesperson for an alternative to this perspective, a stature likely to be enhanced by the forthcoming publication of his book, also titled The Heart of Racism." (2003, 30)

type (II) cases. Certainly, Garcia gives us no reason to think that there is. Second, the motivation for excluding these cases seems to be purely theoretical, viz. a function of his methodological constraints and approach. Evidently, it is also function of his bias against pluralistic and non-univocal accounts, on one hand, and his commitment to conservatism, on the other. Thirdly, without something like Mills' definition of 'benevolent racism' we lose the ability to advance harsh moral criticisms of the *racial* element in these paternalistic practices. So, Garcia's revisionist account is unattractive in this regard, for it robs us of a significant linguistic resource that enables the satisfaction of a salient racial need. In making this claim my point is a logical one, not a defensive one. That is, I am not attempting to go beyond mere description. My point is simply that there are pragmatic reasons why Mills and others use 'benevolent racism' in the way Mills describes. Therefore, to properly undermine this usage, one must address these pragmatic issues.

To sum up, Mills rightly argues that Garcia's theory of racism does not provide a necessary condition of racism, because non-intentional forms of benevolent racism are possible. Garcia's reply that racial disregard provides a necessary condition for some important types of benevolent racism is correct, but the reply is beside the point. At best, the reply establishes that racial disregard sometimes provides a sufficient condition for racism. That is, we are sometimes justified in condemning one as racist on the basis of one's intentions (which may, in turn, infect one's racial beliefs). Mills need not deny this fact in order to inform us that in type (II) cases

racial beliefs (rather than racist intentions) are the fundamental problem and source of racism.

If Garcia should reply that his preferred use of 'benevolent racism' is correct and that Mills' use is mistaken, his account is best understood as a recommendation to revise ordinary language. For I have argued that, if Mills' use of 'benevolent' racism' is mistaken, it is not mistaken in the sense that it is conceptually confused. The only sense in which it is 'mistaken' seems to be that it does not conform to Garcia's essentialist theory of racism. This, in turn, suggests that Garcia's definition is motivated by a personal commitment to a politically conservative approach, i.e., to a moral, social and political ideal.

I will now explain why Garcia's infection model should be rejected. His model presupposes a distinction between that which is racist *by virtue of its content* (i.e., racist intention) and that which is racist *by virtue of infection* (i.e., every other form of racism). I will call the former *inherent racism*; the latter, *infected racism*. An example of each is evident in Garcia's discussion of belief, for he asserts that racist belief cannot be racist by virtue of its content alone. This leads Lawrence Blum to raise the following objection:

> But what about the proposition P itself? Isn't the proposition 'blacks are subhuman' a morally repulsive proposition, independent of what leads anyone to believe it? That is, isn't there something about the content of propositions itself that can make them racially objectionable—that they declare a racial group to be humanly deficient, or inferior in some fundamental way, or … that they portray a racial group as worthy of hate? (2004, 72)

Blum is correct, for ordinarily 'Blacks are subhuman' expresses a racist proposition.

Can Garcia's theory allow us to call this belief racist? (My focus is on the *belief* rather

than the proposition that blacks are subhuman.) Garcia deploys the inherent

racism/infected racism distinction to argue that it can. He argues that although racist

beliefs cannot be inherently racist, they can still be infected by racism: "Of course, we

can still properly call prejudiced-based beliefs racist in that they *characteristically* either

are rooted in prior racial disregard, which they rationalize, or they foster such

disregard" (1996, 12-13). He later adds:

> The beliefs themselves can be called racist in an extended sense because they
> are characteristically racist. However, just as one may make a wise move
> without acting wisely (as when one makes a sound investment for stupid
> reasons), so one may hold a racist belief without holding it for racist reasons.
> One holds such a belief for racist reasons when it is duly connected to racial
> disregard: when it is held in order to rationalize that disaffection or when
> contempt inclines one to attribute undesirable features to people assigned to a
> racial group. One whose racist beliefs have no such connection to any racial
> disregard in her heart does not hold them in a racist way, and if she has no
> such disregard, she is not herself a racist, irrespective of her prejudices. (1996,
> 13).

Garcia's distinction allows him to accommodate some ordinary uses of 'racist

belief.' For it allows him to analyze racist beliefs as instances of infected racism. In

light of his analysis, the following disjunctive definition emerges:

(1) A belief becomes infected with racism (i) when it rationalizes an agent's
disaffection toward members of an assigned racial group or (ii) when it is a
function of an agent's contempt for a racial group (i.e., the agent's contempt
leads one to attribute undesirable features to members of the assigned racial
group).

The problem for Garcia's theory is that definition (1) is not an exhaustive account of

racist belief. In particular, there are uses of 'racist belief' that do not conform to (1).

We have already encountered one of these cases in our discussion of Mills'

counterexample:

> (2) A belief is racist when undesirable features are attributed to members of an assigned racial group on the basis of false doxastic racial beliefs.

Definition (2) covers instances of benevolent racism as Mills understands the

phenomenon. We have seen that something like this definition constitutes a

legitimate counterexample to Garcia's essentialist theory, since his theory cannot

accommodate it.

I now argue that Garcia's theory is incapable of accommodating a third

definition of 'racist belief.' Since his infection model requires that a belief be infected

with racism, it implies that no belief can be racist by virtue of its content alone.[67]

However, following Blum, I argue that some beliefs are racist by virtue of their

content. One of the ramifications of this type of racist belief is that the agent's reason

for believing it is irrelevant. I take the following racist belief as my primary example:

> B = *Blacks are intellectually inferior to whites*

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[67] This intuition is shared by other philosophers as well. For example, Shelby, a defender of an ideological approach, nevertheless concedes: "First, it would appear to commit a category mistake. Beliefs aren't the kinds of things that can be immoral; they can be true or false, warranted or unwarranted, rational or irrational, but certainly not virtuous or evil, just or unjust, at least not in themselves" (2002, 416). He later adds: "[A] belief-centered conception of racism does not commit a category mistake, and it is no threat to intellectual freedom. In treating racism as an ideology, we are not claiming that ideological beliefs are in themselves immoral" (2002, 417). Unfortunately, Shelby does not argue for these claims and I find them implausible. If by 'immoral' he means that the individual who affirms the belief in question is morally blameworthy, then I would agree with him that ideologies are not immoral in this sense. For instance, the person who believes that we live in a post-racial society arguably contributes, however small a part, to the ideological problem of sustaining institutional forms of racism, but it does not follow that she is morally culpable for this, since it is not her intention (nor is she aware) of this harmful contribution. The sense in which ideological beliefs are 'immoral' is that they have a harmful social function.

I take it that Garcia's account of 'characteristic racism' admits the following judgment as true:

R = *The belief that blacks are intellectually inferior to whites is racist*

His theory of characteristic racism allows us to assert R, for it is characteristically racist since B is generally connected with racial disregard.

Garcia's account of the truth of R seems problematic, for it seems to provide an incorrect explanation of B's racism. If the *only* reason why B is racist is that it is 'characteristically racist,' such that B cannot be racist by virtue of its content, then the proposition might be justly believed in certain cases. Imagine that S believes that B on empirical grounds. Imagine further that S's belief does not corrupt and infect his will with racism. In that case, this *characteristically racist belief* would not be racist on this particular occasion, for it would not be infected (see Garcia 1997, 16; quoted in note 69). Now suppose that S should explain to a friend: 'It is okay to believe that blacks are intellectually inferior to whites, so long as you do not rationalize racial disregard on the basis of this belief.' I submit that S offers the wrong explanation to his friend. If S's friend should reply that this inferiorizing belief is racist by virtue of its content, S would not understand what she means. If she should add that B degrades black people, S would either deny that it does or wonder why this fact entails that B is racist. Consequently, S *misunderstands* the meaning of 'racism' in this context of use. And that is because S's linguistic resources are limited, for S is restricted to the

Garcian definition of 'racism.' Therefore, Garcia's infection model distorts the concept of racist belief.[68]

What we need is a more capacious conception of racist belief, one that allows multiple definitions. One such definition is needed to condemn racist propositions on the basis of their content. Garcia's theory would have us reject such a definition, but this flies in the face of the moral and racial need to condemn such cases. Therefore, I submit that corresponding to this moral-racial need is something like the following definition:

> (3) A belief is racist when its content expresses degradation of human life or value, solely on the basis of race alone.

It seems to me that many people already use something like this definition to explain why racism is wrong in many instances. Hence, I will attempt to motivate it by means of a thought experiment. Suppose that *B* is called racist during a protest, say, outside a publishing house that has just made a controversial decision to publish a racially

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[68] Notice that my objection is not that, because S believes that *B*, it follows that S is a racist person. If that were my objection, Garcia could reply that simply holding a belief that is characteristically racist does not by itself entail that one is a racist person. He approvingly quotes Appiah to this effect (Garcia 1997, 14-15): "It would be odd to call someone brought up in a remote corner of the world with false and demeaning beliefs about white people a racist if she gave up these beliefs quite easily in the face of evidence" (Appiah 1992, 14; 1990, 8). Garcia later approves of these remarks: "Appiah refrains from moral condemnation of such persons and that seems correct. It is too harsh to denounce someone morally simply for believing certain propositions. At the heart of morality, on the most enlightening philosophical understandings of it, are people's commitments, choices, and relationships. Thus, there is little reason to think the person Appiah describes a morally bad person, although she certainly holds some dangerous and ugly doctrines. A person may properly be subject to moral criticism on the basis of her beliefs only when she holds those beliefs because of some moral vice. Certainly someone may hold a 'racist belief,' in the sense of a belief characteristic of racists, though she herself is not a racist." (1997, 16) My objection, then, is not that S is a racist person, but that S fails to understand the meaning of 'racist' and 'racism' in certain contexts of use. Specifically, S cannot explain why the *content* of some beliefs is racist independently of why some people believe them; that is, independently of whether they are believed for empirical or other reasons.

offensive article; in it the argument is made that good empirical reasons exist to believe that blacks are intellectually inferior to whites. Thus, we are imagining a case in which *B* is published in an article and *R* is proclaimed by protestors outside the publishing house in response.

Our hypothetical activists might operate with a Garcian picture of racism. That is, they might be infuriated by the beliefs of the author whom they deem a racist person. And they might be equally incensed by the editors and leadership at the publishing house for deciding to publish it in spite of intense opposition and in spite of the harm it might produce. Hence, it is possible that when our protestors assert *R* what they mean by 'racist' is that certain individuals are racist and should therefore be held morally accountable for the publication. This analysis of the protestor's use of *R* is consistent with Garcia's volitional definition of 'racist belief.'

I have nothing against the Garcian analysis, for it will likely explain what some protestors and activists mean by 'racist belief.' But there is another use of *R* which might be applied. For *R* might be used in connection with the fight and struggle for social and racial justice. That is, it can be used to express a resolve and commitment to stand up for the intrinsic value of blacks: to reaffirm their dignity and humanity.[69] On this context of use, whether the author of the article is racist or not is beside the point, for *B* is racist by virtue of what it *says* about blacks as a group. The protestor's

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[69] My protestors may be hypothetical, but my example has a basis in historical reality. See, for instance, Mills' discussion of sub-persons (1998). There he argues that black people, and other people of color, have historically been treated and conceived as sub-persons, as opposed to persons and non-persons.

application of 'racist' (which is to say, their use of R) does not conform to Garcia's definition, for it belongs to a different language-game. For Garcia, the *point* of calling something 'racist' is to condemn or blame an individual or group of individuals. However, for the protestors that I have imagined, this is not the point at all. The point is rather to express one's resolve and commitment to defend a dignified picture of black folk. So from one perspective the protestors' goal is positive (affirmative) rather than negative (condemnatory).[70] The point is to *take a stance*—a moral, social, and political stance—*for* black folk. The protest use of 'racist belief' corresponds to a distinct moral need which goes unrecognized on Garcia's account. This need is arguably present within racial struggles such as the "Black Lives Matter" movement: the political need to demand positive socio-systemic change.[71] This deep pragmatic need gives the linguistic practice its point. It follows that moral uses of 'racism' of an individualistic nature are not the only kind of *moral* use, as Garcia seems to think.

We are now in a position to appreciate the limitations of Garcia's essentialist theory. His infection model requires that we explain all forms of racist belief as racist by virtue of infection, if they are to be racist in the morally objectionable sense. If we instead attempt to apply his theory of characteristic racism, the analysis sometimes

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[70] Conceived as a *demand for equality*, assertion R (within a protest context) is positive and affirmative. Conceived as a *social critique of the status quo*, assertion R (within a protest context) is negative and condemnatory. There is no contradiction here, however. For 'social criticism' and 'demand for equality' are internally related notions. The one term is partly defined in terms of the other.

[71] I have in mind here systemic and structural forms of racism. For two philosophical analyses of institutional and structural forms of racism, see Headley's "Philosophical Approaches to Racism: A Critique of the Individualistic Perspective" (2006) and Mills' *The Racial Contract* (1997). The latter offers an analysis of racism as a function white supremacy.

provides the wrong explanation. For a belief that is characteristically racist might not have any connection to racial disregard on some occasion; yet, it might be racist by virtue of what it says about R1s. Even when a belief such as *B* is racist by virtue of infection, it might also be racist by virtue of its content. And we have seen why this matters. Racism is not merely a matter of condemnation; it is also (among other things) a matter of promoting social forms of racial justice and progress (e.g., improved access to economic and material resources). Arguably, then, definition (3) should be retained. For it satisfies the important moral need to affirm the dignity and personhood of people of color. To the extent that Garcia wishes to challenge the legitimacy of this use of 'racist belief,' he owes us a normative argument against it. For it seems to be justified on moral-pragmatic grounds: arguably, this usage exists because it satisfies an important moral need.

Garcia might object that my counterexample does not demonstrate what I say it does. In particular, it does not undermine the claim that individual racial disregard is the core of racism. He might point out, for instance, that even in my own example, the word 'racist' in sentence 'R' *implies* individual moral culpability, even if it is not the *point* of the assertion to condemn anyone. For to use *R* in the context of a protest such as this *ipso facto* impugns the moral character of the author (and, arguably, that of others as well).

To this objection I reply that it relies on the wrong explanation of racism. However, I should first concede the point of indirect condemnation. The protest use of 'racist' (i.e., the use of *R* to condemn the act or decision to publish the article)

arguably impugns the character of, say, the author of the article. However, one misses

the point of the assertion, and thereby misunderstands it, if one analyzes its meaning

(i.e., what the speaker says) as a claim about individual intentions. For in this context

of use what it means to *say* that *B* is racist is that an unjust and dehumanizing picture

of black people permeates society. In other words, for the protestors that I am

imagining, the term 'racist' is used to condemn a social pattern, not a group of

individuals. What the objector's reply misses (and seems to dismiss) is the *practice* with

which the protest use of 'racist' is internally related. Social criticism of this kind

essentially involves standing up for a rival picture of social justice. My claim is that *R*

is best understood in relation to definition (3), not (1).

A different kind of reply to the objector is that there are other uses of

sentence *R*, that is, outside the protest use. For example, it can be asserted as a

general truth. After all, it is true that the belief that blacks are inferior to whites is

racist. This assertion is intelligible despite the fact that I have not directed my remarks

to any particular individual; and even if no one believes this proposition, it is racist

nonetheless. Hence, it is possible to assert *R* without impugning anyone's character.

But what does it mean to say that *B* is racist in and of itself? Or by virtue of its

content? Perhaps it is the expression of the following attitude: the belief that *B* is

harmful and degrading to blacks, irrespective of why it is believed. These unqualified

charges are unqualified for a reason: for what is herein condemned is not a *person* but

a *practice*.[72] Hence, the truth of these remarks does not wait upon considerations of intention and epistemic reasons for believing that *B*. The content of *B* is racist irrespective of these considerations, even if they are relevant to whether S's belief that *B* is justified. It is racist, not only in the weak Garcian sense that it is 'characteristically racist,' but in the stronger moral sense that it should not be believed (regardless of one's reasons or intent). There is no contradiction in asserting that (a) people should not believe that *B* and (b) some people, in certain circumstances, may be subjectively justified in believing that *B* (i.e., we should not condemn them as racist).

Garcia's theory does not allow us to say that propositions like *B* are racist in themselves. Therefore, he ultimately fails to satisfy desideratum (A), which requires that an adequate theory of racism explain why racism is wrong in *every* case. Not only does his theory fail to explain the moral wrongness of *B*; but when we apply his

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[72] A plausible pragmatic case can be made for the moral need to condemn *practices* independently of intention. Consider Fiss' (1977, 278-9; 1978, 23) example of a school board that decides in favor of a policy that has racially discriminatory ramifications. Fiss argues that if these consequences are foreseeable, the school board should be held morally accountable irrespective of the intentions of its members. Extending this thought, it seems plausible to think that the policy itself should also be condemned racist, irrespective of intentional considerations, and for reasons similar to those that Fiss adduces. He argues that if group/organizational decisions can only be condemned when there is an intention on the part of those individuals to inflict racial harm, organizational decisions will rarely be legitimately condemned. For it is extremely difficult to prove intent when the only basis upon which to do so is a board member's vote in favor of a policy in conjunction with a brief explanation of why one is voting for it. He points to other reasons as well. But even if we focus on just this consideration, the inability to condemn group decisions will likely lead to two further consequences. First, the morally harmful policy will, in all likelihood, continue unhinged; for, on Garcia's infection model, a *practice* is racist only when it is a function of individual *intent*. Second, the difficulty of proving intent gives any potentially racist members of the school board (i.e., those who intend to inflict racial harm) a strong incentive to vote for the harmful policy (and for any other such policies). Fiss argues that the ability to condemn racial ills such as this is enhanced by the removal of the requirement of intention. Therefore, the requirement of intention should be dropped in favor of a criterion of 'foreseeable' harm.

theory of characteristic racism to certain cases, his analysis offers the wrong explanation of moral wrongness and thereby distorts the nature of certain manifestations of racism.

There is another reply to this objection and with it I close my chapter. Recall that the objector maintains that, even when 'racism' is used for purposes other than individual condemnation, it nevertheless implicates and thereby impugns the character of certain individuals. This observation, although correct in many instances, is incorrect in many others. For it is not always true that calling one's belief racist *ipso facto* impugns her moral character. Another way of putting the point is that definitions (1)-(3) are not exhaustive. There is a fourth definition of 'racist belief' that Garcia's account fails to accommodate. I argue that not all racist beliefs are racist by virtue of their *content*. Some are racist by virtue of their *function*. Here I will focus on functionalist explanations of racist belief. Social scientists, and naturalistic philosophers, have taken an interest in beliefs which inform the dominant social consciousness and public discourse of the day. The term 'ideology,' as used in the Marxian tradition, emphasizes the *social function* of such beliefs within some particular sociohistorical context.[73]

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[73] The social function of ideology is typically said to be the justification of socio-systemic forms of oppression and discrimination. Shelby thus defines it this way: "Put briefly and somewhat crudely, 'ideologies' are widely accepted illusory systems of belief that function to establish or reinforce structures of social oppression" (2002, 415). Historian Frederickson illustrates one possible use of this definition in historical explanation. He writes: "But racism as I conceive it is not merely an attitude or set of beliefs; it also expresses itself in the practices, institutions, and structures that a sense of deep difference justifies or validates. Racism, therefore, is more than theorizing about human differences or thinking badly of a group over which one has no control. It either directly

Consider Bonilla-Silva's *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the*

Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States (2009). His book argues that many

prevalent views about race and other liberal matters help to reinforce and sustain

racial inequality, i.e., patterns of institutional discrimination.[74] He writes: "How is it

possible to have this tremendous degree of racial inequality in a country where most

whites claim that race is no longer relevant? More important, how do whites explain

the apparent contradiction between their professed color blindness and the United

States' color-coded inequality?" (2009, 2). His answer is that there is a powerful

ideology that rationalizes and ultimately justifies institutional forms of racial

discrimination:

> In this book I attempt to answer both of these questions. I contend that
> whites have developed powerful explanations—which have ultimately become
> justifications—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from
> any responsibility for the status of people of color. These explanations
> emanate from a new racial ideology that I label *color-blind racism*. (2009, 2; his
> italics)

His argument has implications for the notion, 'racist belief.' A racist belief is

one that partly constitutes a racially harmful ideology—e.g., the ideology of

colorblindness, the ideology of biological racism, or some other ideology. The

content of the belief need not be morally objectionable. Consider, for instance, the

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sustains or proposes to establish *a racial order*, a permanent group hierarchy that is believed to reflect
the laws of nature or the decrees of God" (2002, 6).

[74] The forms of discrimination he has in mind are commonly described as 'institutional racism.' See,
for example, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010). Alexander argues that the U.S. criminal
justice system forms a new racial caste system, which adversely and systematically targets people of
color, especially black people. For an excellent philosophical defense of institutionalist approaches to
racism, see Headley (2000). Also relevant is Headley's (2006) use of this approach to criticize the
work of Garcia.

belief that black people are naturally powerful and strong. This racial stereotype may be false, but judging by its content it is arguably morally benign. Imagine now a society in which the dominant ideology holds that black people are naturally prone to violence and criminality, predisposed to harm white people, easily aroused, impulsive and lacking in self-control. Suppose further that blacks are subject to discrimination and unjust treatment in public life. In this context, *Black people are naturally powerful and strong* is arguably racist given its potentially harmful social function. For this belief will likely be *used* to rationalize sentiments, judgments, policies, and practices that target black people in harmful ways. Yet, in another sociohistorical context, the belief may not have any negative social function. Indeed, it might be taken as complimentary, flattering and morally benign.

Bonilla-Silva argues that many liberal values, including the ideal of colorblindness, are partly constitutive of the ideology of colorblind racism. What I find interesting about this claim is that it implies that non-racial beliefs can be racist by virtue of their social function. For example, the belief that everyone can succeed in the U.S., if they only work hard enough, has been called racist, because it perpetuates (among other things) a myth of equal access to opportunity. Bonilla-Silva argues that this belief is effectively used to justify 'victim blaming' and thereby justifies the *status quo* of institutional racism. Specifically, whites are free of any moral responsibility to create structural and institutional measures to address disproportional levels of, say,

wealth inequality among people of color (since their lack of wealth is thought to be their own fault).[75]

Liberal societies value and strive toward colorblindness. People should be judged on the basis of the content of their character, and not on the basis of the color of their skin. These words from Martin Luther King Jr. are widely professed in American society. Politicians and political commentators have suggested, partly on the basis of this proposition's widespread acceptance, that we live in a post-racial society, that society has moved beyond certain forms of racism. But, argues Bonilla-Silva, this widespread belief ultimately has a racist political function, namely, to justify the *status quo*, which is to say, social and political inaction. Explanations of racial disparities in terms of racial discrimination (e.g., in housing) are undermined by the fact that the vast majority of people no longer 'see' race. One of the effects of this liberal, colorblind attitude is that it is no longer socially acceptable to talk about race

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[75] Bonilla-Silva offers the following example from an interview of a white woman named Mandy: "*Mandy*: Generally, I think that's probably true. Now are you talking about *all minorities*? [*Interviewer: Umhumm.*] 'Cause I don't—when you look at the people coming from Asia, Japan, and China . . . they're making the honor roll. When you look at the honor [roll] here in Rochester, they're all foreign names. You know, some of those kids from minority families figured out that they had to work and strive and work harder if they were going to make it all the way to the top. *Interviewer*: Okay. So you're saying that you would classify minorities by race and go from there? *Mandy*: Not all minorities are lazy and lay on the couch all the time. / This story line equates the experiences of immigrant groups with that of involuntary 'immigrants' (such as enslaved Africans). But as Stephen Steinberg has perceptively pointed out in his *The Ethnic Myth,* most immigrant groups were able to get a foothold on certain economic niches or used resources such as an education or small amounts of capital to achieve social mobility. 'In contrast, racial minorities were for the most part relegated to the preindustrial sectors of the national economy and, until the flow of immigration was cut off by the First World War, were denied access to the industrial jobs that lured tens of millions of immigrants. All groups started at the bottom, but as Blauner points out, 'the bottom' has by no means been the same for all groups.' Thus, comparing these groups, as this story line does, is comparing apples and pears as a way to 'blame the victims' (many minority groups)." (2006, 83)

(for we should not talk about what does not exist). For Bonilla-Silva, this effect

causes more harm to people of color than good. Thus, a racist belief, on his view, is

one that is racist in terms of its social function and *ipso facto* partly explains why

institutional racism continues to exist in liberal, colorblind, societies.

The correctness or incorrectness of Bonilla-Silva's argument largely depends

on empirical considerations. Clearly, this is not the place to resolve the matter. My

interest is not in whether some liberal and colorblind doxastic attitudes are racist, but

whether racist beliefs in Bonilla-Silva's sense are possible. I see no reason to deny this

possibility. That is, it seems possible that beliefs might perpetuate institutional racism

by virtue of their social function—by their characteristic use within a certain

sociohistorical context. Indeed, it seems possible that 'racist beliefs' of this variety

need not be *racial* beliefs as far as their content is concerned, as long as they have

racially harmful effects. So there is another use of 'racist belief' that cannot be

explained by Garcia's theory, namely, ideological uses of this expression:

> (4) A belief is racist when it forms part of an ideology the social function of
> which contributes to patterns of discrimination, exclusion and disproportional
> harm for the members of a particular racial group.

Garcia's infection model requires that racist beliefs have some connection to

racial disregard. So they must be functions or rationalizations of racial disregard.

However, I have argued that beliefs can sometimes be racist by virtue of their social

function alone, that is, independently of their connection to intent. It thus appears

that racist beliefs on the model of (3) constitute legitimate counterexamples to

Garcia's ontic theory of racism. My argument also serves to undermine his distinction

between inherent and infected racism. For beliefs that are racist by virtue of their social function are not racist by virtue of being 'infected' by racial disregard. Perhaps Garcia would object that, as a matter of fact, there are no ideological beliefs which can bring about such largescale social harms. Nevertheless, if it is at least possible that some widely held beliefs might do so, then that alone suffices to undermine Garcia's infection model.

Garcia might defend his infection model and essentialist theory of racism by rejecting the ideological use of 'racist belief.' But it is not clear how he would go about doing so. For the use does not seem to be confused and he has not argued otherwise in spite of the fact that he has offered some critical remarks concerning ideological approaches to racism.[76] Garcia owes us an argument against the possibility of the ideological use of 'racist belief.' He must establish that it is confused or incoherent to link racism to the social function of racially harmful belief. There is reason to believe that any such attempt will likely fail, for Bonilla-Silva's use of 'racist belief' has an important sociological and moral function: not only does it help to explain the persistence of institutional racism, it also enables us to condemn patterns

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[76] Garcia criticizes ideological conceptions in several places. His most systematic treatments are his "Current Conceptions of Racism: A Critical Examination of Some Recent Social Philosophy" (1997), "Philosophical Analysis and the Moral Concept of Racism," and "Three Sites for Racism: Social Structures, Valuings, and Vice" (2004).

of discursive injustices.[77] Headley (2000; 2006) has used this point to offer a powerful critique of individualistic accounts.

Barring any successful argument for the claim that definitions (2) and (3) are incoherent or confused, the only way forward for Garcia, it seems, is to argue that they *ought* to be excluded from ordinary language. However, we have already traveled this road and know where it leads. To properly argue for this point, some type of *normative argument* must be developed and defended, one that lends support to a revisionist proposal. Should Garcia successfully present such an argument, it would confirm, among other things, that his theory of racism is essentially prescriptive rather than descriptive. So, it would effectively undermine his semantic thesis.

§6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have labored to identify four definitions of 'racist belief' in order to dissolve conceptual confusion in Garcia's volitional theory of racism. I have argued that three of these definitions are inexplicable on Garcia's infection model of secondary forms. The ramifications of my critique are several. The first is that he ultimately fails to satisfy two of his conditions for an adequate theory of racism: (i) A theory of racism should explain why racism is always wrong; and (ii) should conform

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[77] Bonilla-Silva's use of 'racist belief' is sociological and non-individualistic. It is therefore incompatible with individualistic theories of racism. Individual intent is useful in explaining individual action, but not necessarily in explaining social reality. For instance, Garcia's use is not particularly helpful within sociohistorical contexts of use, for its explanatory value is rather limited. Hence, a theory of racism that has its eye on the goals of sociological explanation will prefer social uses of 'racist belief' over individualistic uses. Functionalist accounts of belief are primarily at home, not within the moral psychology of the individual, but within the network of sociohistorical realities—structures, institutions, laws, social practices, the media, and so on.

to everyday usage as much as possible, insofar as this is free of confusion. Additionally, because his theory fails to satisfy condition (ii), I argued that his theory amounts to a revisionist proposal. Accepting his analysis requires that we take a politically conservative stance, since it rejects some uses of 'racist belief' (such as the ideological use) from the language. Consequently, Garcia inadvertently misrepresents his own analytical project. Moreover, in cases where his infection model fails to satisfy condition (i), it sometimes offers an incorrect explanation of racism's moral wrongness. These considerations lend plausibility to the method I have glossed as pure description. For I have sought to do nothing more than merely describe ordinary usage in order to identify four kinds of racist belief, i.e., four uses of 'racist belief' that are intricately linked to distinct purposes and practices.

The upshot of my arguments is a new way of thinking about the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive analysis. It is typically held that approaches like Garcia's and Glasgow's are descriptive, whereas theories such as Blum's and Mills' are prescriptive. The former are said to be descriptive because they are attempts to discover the *current* meaning of ordinary usage, whereas the latter are said to be prescriptive because they are attempts to *revise* ordinary usage. In fact, however, we have seen that Garcia's approach is prescriptive—for he seeks to preserve certain conservative sentiments. Thus, if my criticisms are correct, some approaches to racism are misdescribed as descriptive, for they are in fact prescriptive proposals in the guise of descriptions.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have applied Wittgenstein's grammatical approach to the philosophy of racism. I have argued that his method is justified by virtue of its ability to dissolve substantial forms of conceptual confusion in contemporary theories of racism. My aim in criticizing philosophical theories of racism is similar to Bowden's aim in moral philosophy, and the ethics of care in particular:

> My aim, then, is to reorient interest in the ethics of care by directing attention to the multiplicity and diversity of its practice in a variety of examples of specific caring relations—namely, mothering, friendship, nursing and citizenship. Thus, this investigation is directed 'not towards phenomena' but, in Wittgenstein's words, 'towards the "*possibilities*" of phenomena.' (1997, 2)

I too hope that this dissertation redirects philosophers' attention to the possibility and multiplicity of racisms.

The invariable consequence of applying the method of pure description to the analysis of racism is an uncovering of a plurality of racisms. On Bowden's view, the Wittgensteinian method is connected with the rejection of "*a priori* reflection in the search for universals that underlie the variety of human ethical practices" (1997, 4). If Bowden's 'universals' are conceived as transhistorical essences (or 'nonnatural entities' as Headley refers to them), I agree that the search for *a priori* truths should be abandoned. However, it appears that she goes further than I wish to go. For she

argues that the value of the Wittgensteinian approach is that it can wean us off what she calls 'grand theorizing':

> The alternative approach that shapes my investigation develops from two main lines of reaction to this tradition [of grand theory-making]. The first relates to the reductive tendencies of 'grand theory' according to which the dynamic complexity and diversity of specific situations, and the particular needs, desires, intellectual and emotional habits of the persons participating in them, are theorizing in common terms. In contrast, I emphasize the ethical irreducibility of specific situations. According to the view I endorse, no single theory can be created to subsume all instances, no moral concept can catch the essence of all of its uses, and no moral judgement can be expected to resolve a particular conflict without leaving further ethically significant aspects in its train. Instead, understanding is directed towards consideration of the particularity of concrete situations, and their complex interconnections in the fabric of their unique participants' lives. Ethics is recognized as constitutively contextual and based in the actual experiences of actual persons. (1997, 3-4)

Given the argument I have developed in this dissertation it might be thought that anti-essentialism is an inescapable conclusion. For my methodology seems to entail a multiplicity of forms of racism (as was shown in chapter 5). Further, I criticized Glasgow and Garcia's essentialist accounts (in chapters 2 and 5, respectively). In this way, my argument sits well with other pluralists and anti-essentialists who have suggested that racism is a family resemblance concept.[78] Am I not committed, then, as Bowden is, to the claim that grand theorizing is impossible in the light of what Blum (2004,) calls the 'categorial plurality' of racism? I think not.

It seems to me that the question of essentialism is a *further* issue that requires additional argumentation. Essentialism is an issue that I sometimes mentioned in my dissertation but never addressed in its own right, for it was not my intention to

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[78] See Pataki (2004a, 10) and Headley (2000, 245).

debunk (or defend) essentialism. My reason for avoiding the issue is simple: The

categorial plurality of racism does not entail anti-essentialism. For it might turn out

that, irrespective of how many racisms there are, there is some ingenious way of

explaining them all in essentialist terms. As Baker and Hacker note: "we might, with

sufficient ingenuity, concoct a definition" of the concept of 'game,' although they

find this prospect doubtful (2005, 221). Glock makes the same point here:

> Wittgenstein presents this finding [that 'game' is a family resemblance
> concept] as the result of an examination (PI 66; TS302 14). But he has only
> argued for it by counter-examples to some plausible definitions. He is
> therefore open to the charge that, with persistence, 'game' can be analytically
> defined, for example, as a rule-guided activity with fixed objectives that are of
> little or no importance to the participants outside the context of the game. It
> could be claimed that such a definition does not merely sharpen our concept
> through a stipulation, a possibility Wittgenstein concedes (PI 69), but captures
> how we already use 'game.' (1996a, 121)

Glock's particular example of an analytic definition of 'game' runs into the same

difficulties raised against Suits' ingenious analysis of 'game.'[79] Nonetheless, Glock's

basic point seems correct: no matter how improbable it may seem that a definition of

'game' might be found, such a definition is *possible*. Therefore, what is required to

disprove essentialism is a disproof of the *possibility* of an essentialist definition. This

would of course require an *a priori* argument that goes beyond a mere cataloguing of

distinct racisms. The upshot, then, is that we cannot rule out essentialism without

further argumentation.

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[79] Suits (1978). For a devastating critique of Suits' definition, see Ellis (2011).

At the same time, however, Baker and Hacker point out that the possibility of essentialism does not undermine the goal of Wittgenstein's analysis of *game*. For

> the ability to give a definition in terms of characteristic marks is not a necessary condition of understanding such a word (§70). If games have no common properties, it is impossible so to define 'game', and hence *nobody* has the ability so to define it; but it does not follow either that nobody knows or that nobody can explain what it means (cf. §§69, 75). And if games do have common properties, it need not be *in virtue* of these that we call certain activities 'games' (M 17; AWL 32; PG 75). (2005, 213)
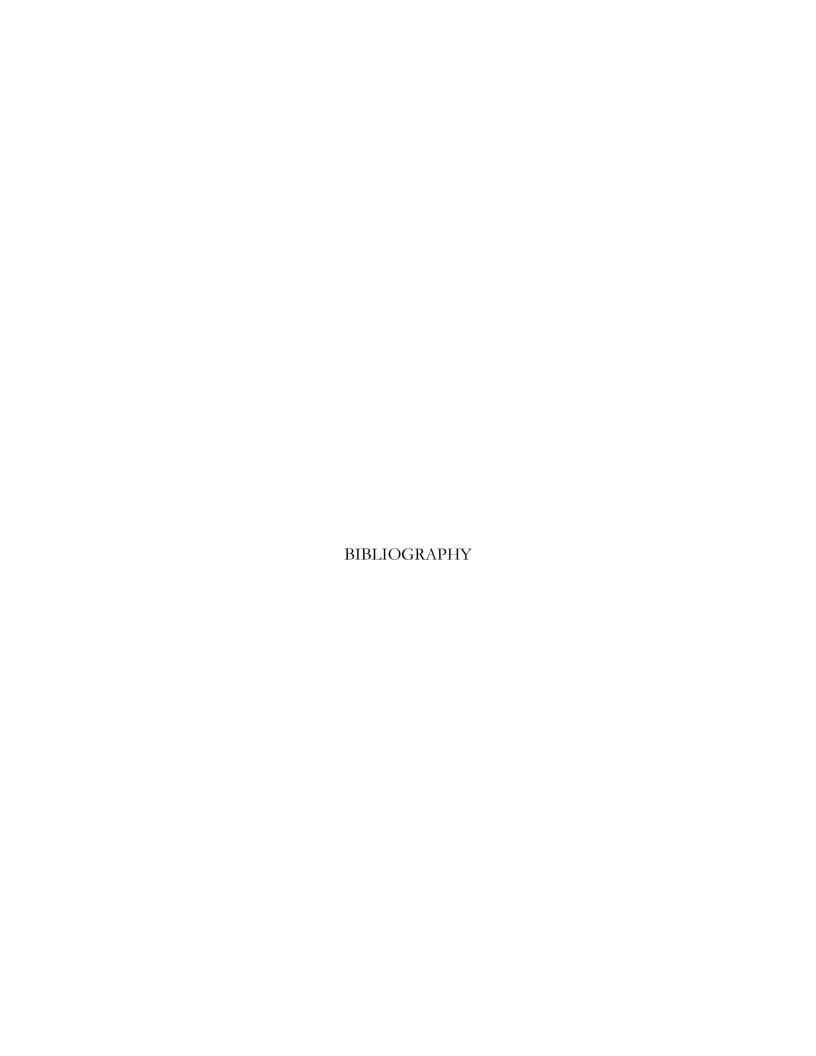
The point they are making here is that Wittgenstein's main reason for saying that *game* is a family resemblance concept is not to disprove essentialism, but to show something about the concept of *understanding* and its relation to the concepts of *meaning* and *explanation of meaning*. For it is not by virtue of essential features that we call something 'game.' For instance, we do not first check to see whether 'chess' (or any other game) has the features *winning and losing*, *two or more players* and *aims at amusement* (or some other set of features) before we decide to call it a game. Nor do we use a checklist of this sort to test every other activity that is called a game. We do, of course, look for 'resemblances,' but my point is that we do not have an exact set of such features that all competent speakers of the language agree on to use. Thus, our ability to understand the word 'game' is not dependent on an exact list of features (i.e., necessary and sufficient conditions), but on a game's being a part of a network of such features. Family resemblance concepts are 'family concepts' by virtue of criss-crossing and overlapping features, rather than by virtue of necessary and sufficient features. And this is consistent with a concept's having characteristic (or necessary and sufficient) features.

An analogy might be helpful. A grouping of fruit might have the following features in common: they all came from the same location; they all taste sweet; they all have the same color; and they are all in the same bowl. So it is possible to provide an analytic definition of them: A particular fruit *f* is a member of group F if and only if *f* was grown in location *s*, tastes sweet, has color *c*, etc. Now, the fact that we can give an analytic definition of this group of fruit does not mean that they belong to this group *by virtue of* having these properties. Similarly, if an analytic definition of 'game' is one day provided, this would not necessarily undermine Wittgenstein's claim that *game* is a family resemblance concept. For he could still maintain that it is not by virtue of these characteristic marks that we call everything that is a game 'game.'

> The essential points in defence of Wittgenstein's position are (a) that the standard speaker of our language is not aware of any properties common to all games *that make them all games*; (b) hence, that there is no common property or properties *in virtue of which* we hold all and only games to be games; (c) that we do not explain 'game' by enumerating characteristic marks of games; (d) that if asked or challenged, we would justify calling some activity 'a game' by reference to similarities to paradigmatic examples of games, rather than by citing properties common to all games; and (e) that even if we were to discover such properties, this would not reveal the marks of our concept of a game because they would not belong to our (present) practice of explaining 'game'. (Baker and Hacker 2005, 214-215)

So what does this point about family resemblance concepts have to do with the concept of racism and its relationship to essentialism? The above argument (with respect to *game*) suggests the following distinction: A concept C might have characteristic marks (necessary and sufficient conditions) without necessarily being an essentialist concept. For what matters is *why* we refer to particular Cs as 'C.' Do we refer to them as such *because* of these marks or for other some other reason? It is not

at all clear to me that the question of whether the concept of racism has characteristic

marks is the most important question for philosophers of racism to be pursuing.

Perhaps a better question is *why* many of us are inclined to group the various things

that we do under the category of racism? What is it in virtue of which we designate

phenomena 'racist'? What needs does this categorization serve? Might these needs be

better served by using other categories besides 'racism' or by using multiple

categories? In future work I hope to be able to pursue these further questions

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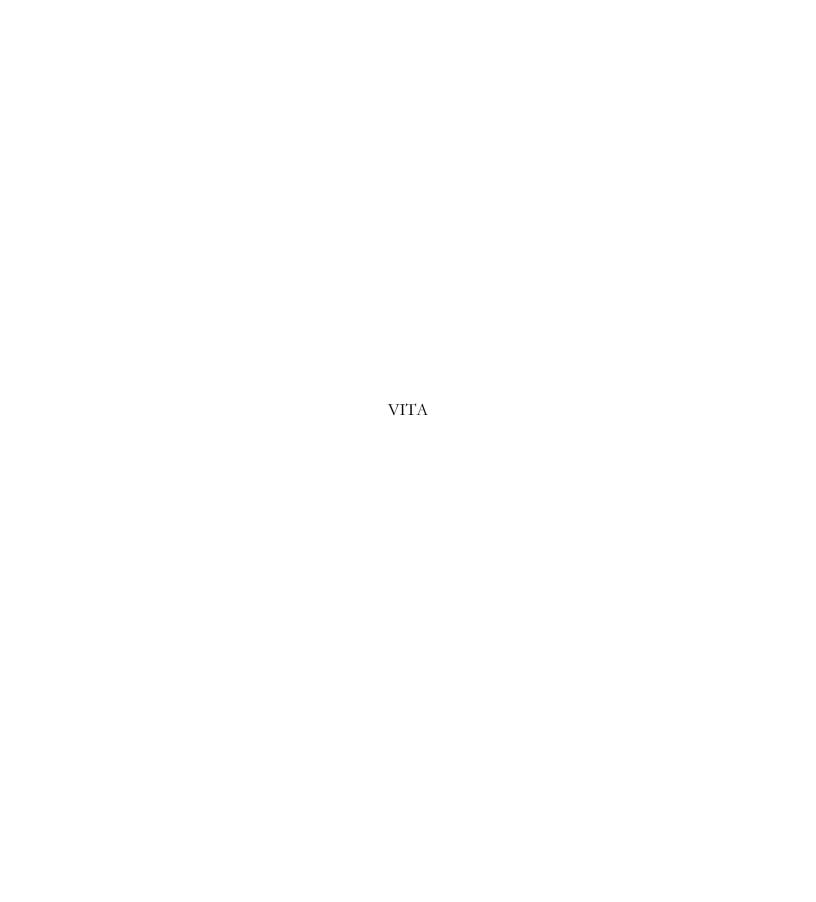
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VITA

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Alberto G. Urquidez was born and raised in Monterey County, CA. In 2004, he completed the A.A. degree from Hartnell Community College (Salinas, CA). He transferred to the University of California at Los Angeles and completed the B.A. in philosophy in 2006 with College Honors and Department Honors. In 2008, he received the M.A. in philosophy from Claremont Graduate University (Claremont, CA). A generous Predoctoral Fellowship from the Ford Foundation allowed him to continue his studies in philosophy at Purdue University (Lafayette, IN).

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