

What are the Implications of Wittgenstein's Philosophy for Social Philosophy?

Robert Vinten

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of a former supervisor of mine, Bob Arrington, who sadly died in 2015. My discussions with him have had an enormous influence on the way that I think about philosophy. He was an excellent teacher and advisor - kindly, warm and witty – as well as being a great philosopher.

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WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF WITTGENSTEIN'S PHILOSOPHY FOR SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY?

Robert Vinten

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Wittgenstein, filosofia política, epistemologia, conservadorismo, liberalismo, socialismo, livre-arbítrio, justiça

KEYWORDS: Wittgenstein, political philosophy, epistemology, conservatism, liberalism, socialism, free will, justice.

RESUMO

Nesta tese procuro responder à questão: quais são as implicações da filosofia de Wittgenstein para a filosofia social? A tese está dividida em três partes. Na primeira parte discuto a natureza da filosofia de Wittgenstein e das ciências sociais. Concluo que a filosofia de Wittgenstein envolve investigações gramaticais com vista à dissolução de problemas filosóficos. A filosofia, na ótica de Wittgenstein, enriquece ou alarga o nosso entendimento em vez de adicionar elementos ao nosso conjunto de conhecimentos, como as ciências sociais fazem. Na segunda parte considero a relação de Wittgenstein com a ideologia: com o conservadorismo, o liberalismo e o socialismo. Defendo que Wittgenstein não era um conservador mas que também não era um liberal ou um socialista. Na parte final da tese considero o valor de Wittgenstein em ajudar a dissolver problemas em filosofia social e política. Concluo que a filosofia de Wittgenstein tem algumas implicações negativas para a filosofia social e política. Ela dissolve confusões filosóficas e destrói castelos de cartas. Mas a sua filosofia tem também implicações positivas. A filosofia de Wittgenstein enriquece o nosso entendimento de questões sociais e políticas e pode ser de grande benefício no quadro da epistemologia social e política.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I set out to answer the question: what are the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for social philosophy? The thesis is divided into three parts. In the first part I discuss the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy and of the social sciences. I conclude that Wittgenstein's philosophy involved grammatical investigations aimed at dissolving philosophical problems. Philosophy, on Wittgenstein's view enriches or broadens our understanding rather than adding to our stock of knowledge, as social sciences do. In the second part I look at Wittgenstein's

relation to ideology: to conservatism, liberalism, and socialism. I argue that Wittgenstein was not a conservative but nor was he a liberal or a socialist. In the final part of the thesis I look at Wittgenstein's value in helping to dissolve problems in social and political philosophy. I conclude that Wittgenstein's philosophy has some negative implications for social and political philosophy. It dissolves philosophical confusions and knocks down houses of cards. But his philosophy also has positive implications. Wittgenstein's philosophy enriches our understanding of social and political issues and can be of great benefit within social and political epistemology.

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Introduction

0.1 Subject of Thesis, its Aims, and its Methods

This thesis is an attempt to answer the question ‘what are the implications of Wittgenstein’s philosophy for social philosophy?’. I should make clear at the outset that I will be particularly concerned with Wittgenstein’s later philosophical work; his work from the 1930s until his death in 1951. I will take ‘Wittgenstein’s philosophy’ to refer to the mature philosophy of the *Philosophical Investigations*¹ and *On Certainty*² rather than to his work in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*³, that he criticised in the later work. However, I will occasionally refer to his early work and note certain elements of continuity in Wittgenstein’s work.

According to Wittgenstein (throughout his career) philosophy is a discipline that is not based on observation and experiment. It is not an empirical discipline and, more particularly, philosophy is not a science⁴. This thesis will defend the later Wittgenstein’s take on philosophy and attempt to show its usefulness for social philosophy. So, this thesis is not a thesis in social science and it will not rely on empirical data about our current or past social/political circumstances. I will not be attempting to formulate prescriptions for, say, politicians, social workers, or political activists based on evidence drawn from observations, questionnaires, medical records, interviews, or crime statistics. The aim is not to provide advice about policy or information that might help social scientists to solve particular concrete problems that concern them. Rather, this is a thesis that is primarily concerned, as Wittgenstein was, with conceptual matters. The focus will be on examining conceptual matters in social

¹ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Revised 4th edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

² Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

³ Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge, 1961.

⁴ In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein says that philosophy “...is not one of the natural sciences” (4.111) and that it “...aims at the logical clarification of thoughts” (4.112). He says of psychology that it “...is no more closely related to philosophy than any other natural science” (4.1121). In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says that “...our considerations must not be scientific ones... And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All explanation must disappear...” (PI §109).

philosophy with an eye to showing that Wittgenstein's philosophy can be helpful in overcoming confusions about concepts.

Of course, social philosophy is a very broad area and I cannot possibly hope to get rid of all confusion in it within this thesis. Indeed, it is not clear that it is possible to entirely get rid of all conceptual confusions within social philosophy. New developments in society will undoubtedly lead to new frameworks for understanding society and there is always potential for confusion as new attempts at understanding are made. What I will do in this thesis is take a look at some of the issues in social philosophy that I take to be central – (i) issues about the nature of social sciences, whether they can be properly called scientific; (ii) the issue of reductionism, whether social sciences can be explained in terms of the (perhaps more fundamental) natural sciences; (iii) the issue of the proper form of explanation in the social sciences (if indeed there is a proper form of explanation in the social sciences) (iv) the issue of relativism, whether social scientists should contemplate some form of relativism about truth, knowledge, existence, or concepts; (v) the issue of ideology - whether Wittgensteinian philosophy favours a particular ideological standpoint; (vi) the issues of freedom of the will and responsibility; (vii) and, finally, the issue of justice.

However, as mentioned above, in dealing with these issues I will not be making arguments based on observational or statistical evidence. This thesis is a work in philosophy rather than a scientific or empirical work. Its negative aim will be to clear away confusions about the nature of philosophy, the nature of social sciences, and to clear up some confusions that arise in contemplating particular problems within the philosophy of social science such as freedom of the will, control, responsibility, and justice. Its positive aims will be to enrich our understanding of those areas and to show that Wittgenstein's philosophy can be very useful for philosophers of social science, as well as for social scientists.

In order to fulfil those aims I will use methods particularly suited to philosophy as conceived by Wittgenstein. In the first place I will take care in reading the work of philosophers working in social philosophy as well as the work of social scientists and attempt to diagnose cases of conceptual confusion as well as cases of failure in interpretation (for example, in interpreting Wittgenstein's work). So, the thesis will to

some extent be a work in exegesis and interpretative criticism. In trying to achieve my positive aims of producing clarity and understanding in social philosophy I will attempt to follow Wittgenstein's suggestion that we should construct 'surveyable representations' of regions of grammar. What that means is that I will provide explanations of the meaning of terms that are causing confusion (such as, for example, 'reasons', 'explanations', 'consciousness', 'control', 'justice') and discuss how those terms are related to other terms (other terms that are etymologically related, other terms that belong to the same family, or terms as they are used in specifically philosophical (as opposed to ordinary) life). If those explanations are successful then the upshot should be enhanced understanding.

Why is it important to do all of this? I think it is important because the kind of scientism⁵ that Wittgenstein criticised is still rife in social philosophy and the social sciences. Philosophers and social scientists are still confused about the nature of their subjects. There is still confusion about the nature of explanations in social studies. Social scientists still attempt to bring methodologies and standards from the natural sciences into the social sciences where they are not always appropriate (see chapter 1). And philosophers and social scientists still think that greater precision can be achieved by trying to redefine psychological expressions in terms from natural science, particularly neurophysiology (see chapter 6). Producing confused work in social philosophy and the social sciences is time consuming and that time would be better spent if the questions asked were formulated clearly and answered in terms that everyone can understand. Of course, the confusion of 'theorists' can also spread to the audiences who read the work. It is also worth getting clear about the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy so that we can see clearly that it does not support a particular ideological standpoint but that it can be used to clear away confusions in all ideological work in political theory.

⁵ I should be clear here that Wittgenstein did not criticise science. He was deeply interested in engineering, mathematics, and psychology and thought that valuable work was done in all of the various scientific disciplines. The scientism that he was opposed to is the tendency to think that scientific knowledge is a superior kind of knowledge, such that it should be extended into all areas of life (see Hans-Johann Glock's *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, where he talks about scientism as "the imperialist tendencies of scientific thinking which result from the idea that science is the measure of all things" (Glock, H-J. *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 341)).

0.2 Overview of the Contents of the Chapters

In order to answer the question of whether Wittgenstein's philosophy has social and political implications it is best to first get clear about what Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is and to get clear about where Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy stands in relation to other disciplines. This helps us to achieve some clarity about the import that his philosophy *might* have for politics.

To that end, in the first chapter I discuss the issue of reductionism – whether social sciences are reducible to natural sciences – and I conclude that they are not reducible to natural sciences. I also distinguish explanations in terms of reasons (which are particularly prominent in social sciences) from explanations in terms of causes (which are more prominent in natural sciences). Having distinguished reasons from causes I go on to look at the question of methodology. I will argue that there are a great variety of methodologies we might use in our various inquiries, some of which are particularly appropriate to social sciences and others which are particularly appropriate to natural sciences. The question of progress also needs to be addressed. Why is it that enormous progress has been made in the natural sciences and yet philosophers are still discussing the same questions as the ancient Greeks and social scientists seem incapable of resolving deep disagreements?

My answer will be that the considerations about reductionism, reasons, and methodology tell us that the different disciplines have different subject matters, different forms of explanation (and description), and so they have wildly different standards by which we might judge their progress. Disciplines like psychology and philosophy *have* made some progress but the nature of progress in each of these disciplines is very different to the nature of progress in the natural sciences. I will conclude that philosophy, as Wittgenstein conceived it, is quite a different kind of discipline to either social scientific disciplines or the natural sciences. Philosophy aims at clearing up grammatical confusions. It enriches our understanding, whereas cognitive disciplines, such as the natural and social sciences, add to our stock of knowledge.

In the second chapter I examine various questions about relativism. I ask whether it is a serious objection to Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy that he subscribed to some form of relativism. I use Maria Baghramian's taxonomy of the different forms of relativism to look at various forms of relativism and assess them⁶. I argue that ontological relativism, alethic relativism, and cognitive relativism are implausible, and also that they cannot be attributed to Wittgenstein. A more plausible form of relativism is conceptual relativism and it is reasonable to describe Wittgenstein as a conceptual relativist. This chapter helps to answer the question posed in this thesis by answering some of his critics, who claim that Wittgenstein's philosophy implies implausible forms of relativism. My conclusion is that Wittgenstein *is* a kind of relativist but that the fact that he is a kind of relativist does not undermine his philosophical views.

The form of relativism Wittgenstein adopts does not obviously commit him to any particular ideological stance (and I will argue in the following chapters that Wittgenstein was not a conservative, a liberal, or a socialist). However, I will argue in the final chapter that his conceptual relativism would lead him to reject transcendental theories of justice such as Rawls's theory and Peter Winch has argued convincingly that Wittgenstein's conception of practical rationality (which is connected to his conceptual relativism) would lead him to reject traditional accounts of the relationship between rationality and authority, such as Hobbes's view (and Rawls's too)⁷. So, a Wittgensteinian take on philosophy reveals confusions in quite a lot of what has gone by the name of 'political theory' but does not commit Wittgenstein to a full-blown ideology or theory himself. That is not to say that the impact of Wittgensteinian philosophy on political philosophy has to be a wholly negative one – destroying houses of cards. There is a positive aspect to Wittgensteinian philosophy which is that it can aid our understanding of things like practical rationality, authority, and justice. Improved understanding will likely lead to the construction of better political theories.

⁶ From Maria Baghramian's recent book about relativism (Baghramian, M. *Relativism*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

⁷ Winch, P. 'Certainty and Authority', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 28*, pp. 223-237.

The chapters on social sciences and relativism form the first part of the thesis where I am trying to get clear about Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy and its relationships to other disciplines. In the second part of the thesis I look at political ideologies and ask whether Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks imply that he was committed to a particular ideological stance.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to conservatism and I focus particularly on the most prominent conservative interpretation of Wittgenstein which has been presented by J. C. Nyiri. He has argued in a series of papers that Ludwig Wittgenstein is a conservative philosopher. In 'Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back'⁸ Nyiri cites Wittgenstein's admiration for Grillparzer as well as overtly philosophical passages from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*⁹ in support of that thesis. I argue, in opposition to Nyiri, that we should separate Wittgenstein's political remarks from his philosophical remarks and that nothing Wittgenstein says in his philosophical work obviously implies a conservative viewpoint, or any other kind of political viewpoint (which is not to say that no conclusions whatsoever about political theory follow from Wittgenstein's remarks). In his philosophical work Wittgenstein was concerned with untangling conceptual confusions rather than with putting forward a political viewpoint and the two kinds of activities are quite different. There is, however, some evidence of elements of conservatism in the stances that Wittgenstein took on political issues although there is also some evidence of sympathy for left-wing views, particularly during the 'late' period of Wittgenstein's work after he returned to philosophy at the end of the 1920s. Wittgenstein's philosophical work cannot be claimed by people of any particular political persuasion as their own but it can be used to untangle philosophical problems in the work of a great variety of political philosophers.

In Chapter 4 I turn to liberalism. The question of whether Wittgenstein was a liberal philosopher has received less attention than the question of whether he was a conservative philosopher but, as Robert Greenleaf Brice has recently argued, there are

⁸ Nyiri, J. C. 'Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back' in Stuart Shanker (ed.) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments (Vol. 4)*, London: Routledge, 1986.

⁹ Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

hints of liberalism in some of his remarks¹⁰, and some philosophers, like Richard Eldridge have argued that a kind of liberalism follows from Wittgenstein's later philosophy¹¹. Richard Rorty has also drawn liberal conclusions from a philosophical viewpoint which draws on Wittgenstein's work and Alice Crary has suggested that the lessons learned from her own interpretation of Wittgenstein are "reflected in forms of social life that embody the ideals of liberal democracy"¹². In the fourth chapter I argue both that Wittgenstein was *not* a liberal and that his philosophy does not imply a liberal viewpoint. The authors discussed in the chapter do not demonstrate that any broad ideological conclusions follow from Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks.

In Chapter 5 I look at the relationship between Wittgensteinian philosophy and Marxist philosophy, focussing on the work of three English Marxists: Perry Anderson, Alex Callinicos, and Terry Eagleton. They have all produced excellent cultural and philosophical work. However, all three have misinterpreted the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the final chapter in the section of my thesis dedicated to ideology I argue that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is not in tension with Marxist philosophy in the ways that they suggest and that Wittgenstein did not make the errors attributed to him by Anderson, Callinicos, and Eagleton. Marxists would benefit from taking Wittgenstein's work more seriously because it would help them to see the nature of epistemological and metaphysical problems more clearly and would complement and enrich their own accounts of philosophical confusion. One political implication of Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks that I identify in the chapter is that we can get rid of philosophical problems by changing society, by making changes to our practical life.

The final two chapters look at applications of Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks to particular problems that have arisen in the work of political philosophers:

¹⁰ Brice, R. G. *Exploring Certainty: Wittgenstein and Wide Fields of Thought*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014.

¹¹ See Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997 and Eldridge, R. 'Wittgenstein and the Conversation of Justice' in Cressida Heyes (ed.) *The Grammar of Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, pp.117-28.

¹² Crary, A. 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought' in Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.) *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, p.141.

the problem of freedom of the will (including problems about self-control and responsibility), and problems concerning justice.

In the sixth chapter I argue that Wittgenstein's grammatical remarks about psychological concepts as well as his remarks about philosophical methodology can help to dissolve conceptual problems that are clearly relevant to political philosophy. My focus in that chapter will be on Patricia Churchland and Christopher Suhler's paper 'Control: conscious and otherwise'¹³, where they formulate what they think of as a neurobiological account of control. They do so in an attempt to tackle problems about the extent to which we ought to hold people responsible in cases where they are not conscious of the way in which circumstances affect their choices. Some philosophers and cognitive scientists have argued that empirical research shows that circumstances have such a large impact on people's choices that we ought to say that a person's control over what they do in many cases is very limited. Given the lack of control we ought not to hold people responsible for their actions to the extent that we do. This is known as the 'Frail Control hypothesis' and Churchland and Suhler think that their account of control undermines it.

The debate clearly has implications concerning questions of justice in society; implications concerning the way in which we ought to hold people accountable for the things they do. It is also clearly a version of old problems about freedom of the will. Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks can help clarify the terms in which the debate is conducted and to untangle some of the conceptual confusions involved. Churchland and Suhler are right to challenge the Frail Control hypothesis and some of their conclusions are correct. However, the arguments they use to get to their conclusions are confused in various ways. The aim of the sixth chapter of this thesis is to suggest that Wittgenstein's remarks can help us to dissolve confusions surrounding problems about freedom of the will; help us to achieve clarity. A better understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy can help us achieve a better understanding of political philosophy.

¹³ Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. L. 'Control: conscious and otherwise', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, Vol. 13, No. 8, 2009.

Chapter 7 is focused on the question of justice. In the first half of the chapter I look at ways in which we might get clearer about the concept ‘justice’ and I use insights gleaned from Hanna Pitkin’s *Wittgenstein and Justice*¹⁴ in doing that. In the second half of the chapter I look at whether Wittgenstein’s philosophical remarks imply that we should adopt a particular conception of justice and I argue that although his remarks do not imply that we should accept a particular conception of justice his remarks do nonetheless imply that we should reject certain conceptions of justice for making unwarranted assumptions or for having confused conceptions of practical rationality.

Within Chapter 7 I also look at some remarks that Wittgenstein made in *On Certainty*¹⁵ and I suggest that Wittgenstein has things to teach us about the form that political disagreements might take. Political disagreements may well not just involve conflicts of opinion; they might also involve disagreements in evidential standards, disagreements about concepts, or perhaps even a difference in worldview. I conclude that although Wittgenstein acknowledges that disagreement, contestation, or rebellion have a role to play throughout our normative practices, this does not imply that his philosophical remarks are suggestive of a particular form that society should take. In particular I do not think that Wittgenstein’s remarks provide support for the kind of pluralistic democracy favoured by Chantal Mouffe and José Medina.

0.3 Review of Some Recent Literature

There are already several book-length discussions of Wittgenstein’s relation to social and political theory. In this part of the introduction to my thesis I would like to make clear that I am aware of some of the recent literature (other works are discussed within the body of the thesis itself) and also make clear where my own work differs from other book-length treatments of the question. One obvious difference between the work in this thesis and earlier treatments of the topic, such as Hanna Pitkin’s

¹⁴ Pitkin, H. *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

¹⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

Wittgenstein and Justice, John W. Danford's *Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, and Susan Easton's *Humanist Marxism and Wittgensteinian social philosophy*, is that much of the work discussed here in the thesis has been written in the past two decades. For example, in the first chapter, about social science, I discuss recent work from Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Read, Wes Sharrock¹⁶, and John Dupré¹⁷. In the second chapter I discuss recent work on relativism from Maria Baghramian¹⁸ and Hans-Johann Glock¹⁹. In the third chapter I make use of Corey Robin's recent book *The Reactionary Mind*²⁰ in defining conservatism. It should also be clear that the topics I focus on in this thesis differ from those earlier writers.

In this introduction I will discuss three book-length discussions of Wittgenstein's relation to social and political theory and make clear how my own work differs. The three books I will discuss are Peg O'Connor's *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*²¹, Christopher Robinson's *Wittgenstein and Political Theory*²², and Michael Temelini's *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*²³.

¹⁶ Hutchinson, P., Read, R. and Sharrock, W. *There is No Such Thing as a Social Science*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.

¹⁷ Dupré, J. 'Social Science: City Centre or Leafy Suburb' in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, May 2016.

¹⁸ Baghramian, M. *Relativism*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2004.

¹⁹ Glock, H. J. 'Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability' in John Preston (ed.) *Wittgenstein and Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

²⁰ Robin, C. *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

²¹ O'Connor, P. *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life: Feminist Wittgensteinian Metaethics*, University Park PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008.

²² Robinson, C. *Wittgenstein and Political Theory: The View From Somewhere*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

²³ Temelini, M. *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life

Peg O'Connor's book *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life* is primarily concerned with metaethical questions, and so its focus differs from the work in this thesis. However, there is some overlap between her work and the questions discussed here. For instance, she discusses methodology in social science as well as the question of relativism and the cases she discusses (Frederick Douglass's speech 'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?'²⁴, Hurricane Katrina²⁵) have clear relevance to politics. O'Connor makes several recommendations for conducting feminist inquiry and also cites recommendations made by Virginia Held approvingly. I agree with many of the recommendations she makes for feminist inquiry, including the recommendations that she cites from Virginia Held's *Feminist Morality*²⁶. For example, I agree with O'Connor (and Wittgenstein) in being wary of scientism in the humanities and in the social sciences²⁷. We should resist claims about social sciences being reducible to natural sciences and should also be careful about importing methods from the natural sciences into the social sciences, given differences in subject matter and also in the kinds of explanations appropriate to the different fields. I also agree with Held and O'Connor in not taking Wittgenstein's remarks about "our craving for generality"²⁸ to imply that we should eliminate generalisations from explanations in fields concerned with social phenomena. As I will make clear in the first chapter I think that Wittgenstein's remarks about generalisations in *The Blue Book* concern the proper methodology of philosophy rather than the proper methodology of the humanities more generally or of social

²⁴ Douglass, F. 'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?' is available here <https://www.thenation.com/article/what-slave-fourth-july-frederick-douglass/> (accessed 26/05/18) and is discussed on pp. 132-6 of O'Connor's *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*.

²⁵ O'Connor, P. *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, pp. 158-68.

²⁶ Held, V. *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

²⁷ O'Connor recommends that we "[c]reate a moral epistemology that is consistent with much recent work in feminist epistemologies (resisting its reduction or assimilation to an overly scientific model" (*Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, p. 5).

²⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, p. 18.

science. In fact, I think that generalisations have a very important role to play in the humanities and social sciences, alongside close analyses of particular cases²⁹.

O'Connor looks at moral realism and antirealism in the work of John Mackie, Gilbert Harman (both antirealists) and Nicholas Sturgeon (realist) and she argues that neither of these metaethical positions is satisfactory because both are committed to scientific assumptions about the role of observation, causation, and objectivity in thinking about morality³⁰. In the first chapter of my thesis I discuss scientism, reductionism, reasons, and causes, and come to broadly the same conclusions as O'Connor.

The dispute over realism and antirealism also has obvious implications for what has traditionally been called 'moral epistemology' (O'Connor prefers to use the expression 'moral understandings' in order to distance herself from the tradition)³¹. Realists and antirealists do not only make claims about objects, properties, and causes but also make claims about what their theory implies about the kind of knowledge we can expect to have in the area of morality³². If scientism creeps into our conception of our subject matter then that will affect the claims that we will make about knowledge in that area. She concludes, and I agree, that we can make sense of talking about truth and knowledge in morality and she offers her own account of objectivity in the context of her 'felt contextualism'³³. In the first two chapters of this thesis I discuss the

²⁹ Held recommends that we should "[p]roceed not solely on a case-by-case basis (requires some level of generality)" (cited on p. 5 of Peg O'Connor's *Morality and Our Complicated Forms of Life*).

³⁰ O'Connor, P. *Morality and Our Complicated Forms of Life*, p. 22-3. On page 59 she says that "neither realism nor antirealism is tenable as a description of the world and their weaknesses trace back to a shared presupposition".

³¹ O'Connor discusses moral epistemology in Chapter 6 of *Morality and Our Complicated Forms of Life* (pp. 113-136) and it is on p. 117 that she says that she favours the expression 'moral understandings'. For another account, see Venturinha, N. 'Moral Epistemology, Interpersonal Indeterminacy and Enactivism' in Jesús Padilla Gálvez (ed.) *Action, Decision-Making and Forms of Life*, Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016, pp. 109-120.

³² For example, A. J. Ayer claims that sentences expressing moral judgements "are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood. They are unverifiable for the same reason as a cry of pain or a word of command is unverifiable" (*Language, Truth, and Logic*, New York: Dover, 1952, pp. 108-9) and John Mackie famously claimed that "value statements cannot be either true or false" (*Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, New York: Penguin, 1977, p. 25).

³³ See Chapter 7 of *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, pp. 137-68

nature of philosophical inquiry, political enquiry and scientific enquiry as well as questions about relativism and I come to similar conclusions to O'Connor³⁴.

In addition to rejecting the dualism of realism and antirealism O'Connor also rejects the dualisms that she thinks underly the debate – the language-world dualism, and the nature-normativity dualism. A related dualism, the dualism between moral absolutism and moral relativism is another which she thinks involves confusions. As an alternative to all of these she offers her own 'felt contextualism' which preserves claims to truth and objectivity without resorting to moral absolutist claims and she defends the view that "we can have better or worse answers or resolutions to these [moral] conflicts"³⁵.

In explaining her own view, she looks to Wittgenstein's account of the role of authority, training, and normativity in our lives. Conservative accounts have made much of Wittgenstein's stress on the role of authority and rules in Wittgenstein. This is something that I will discuss in my chapter on conservatism and also in my discussion of Michael Temelini's *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics* below.

Wittgenstein and Political Theory

Christopher Robinson's book, *Wittgenstein and Political Theory*³⁶, is largely concerned with the question of theory, as the title suggests. Robinson argues that although Wittgenstein's remarks suggest he opposed theory they are best understood as criticizing metatheory³⁷ and opening up a space for "a new way of theorizing political life"³⁸. According to Robinson's account, *metatheory* is concerned with questions of justification and explanation (traditional epistemological concerns)

³⁴ For my own take on J. L. Mackie's antirealism see Vinten, R. 'Mackie's Error Theory: A Wittgensteinian Critique', *Kinesis*, Vol.7, no. 13, 2015, pp. 30-47.

³⁵ O'Connor, P. *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, p. 146.

³⁶ Robinson, C. *Wittgenstein and Political Theory: The View from Somewhere*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 25, 178.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 13.

whereas Wittgenstein's opposing conception of theory understood theorizing as "an ongoing description of the components and topography of reality from various positions within". Robinson calls this *'immanent theorizing'*³⁹ and he places special emphasis on perception and on mobility (particularly walking). For example, he says that "[f]or theorists following Wittgenstein's path to immanent theorizing, what is valued above all else is mobility"⁴⁰ and he claims that "[t]here is a palpable therapeutic effect in seeing that theorizing is cast more accurately as a primitive activity involving seeing and walking"⁴¹. Immanent theorizing, according to Robinson, involves being mobile and seeing things (reality, practices) close up and describing them⁴² whereas epic theory (metatheory) involves distancing oneself from things and trying to achieve a 'God's eye view' of them. Robinson says that "[t]he further we stand from people, the less we care what happens to them" and that "Wittgenstein expresses this distance as at the heart of 'the darkness of our time'"⁴³. He claims that Wittgenstein abandons "the pretense of a God's eye perspective"⁴⁴ and that "both Wittgenstein and, more famously, Beckett, work from a street-level where no God's-eye point of view is possible, though we may find ourselves waiting for it"⁴⁵.

According to Robinson Wittgenstein's 'therapeutic turn', "promises an erosion of the boundary separating philosophy from other activities"⁴⁶ and "[t]herapy was conceived as a matter of returning philosophers to the pre-linguistic primordial and then guiding them through mazes of contingent, opaque but permeable and overlapping language-games to give a sense of language's capaciousness and

³⁹ Ibid. p. 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 29.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 39.

⁴² Ibid. p. 2.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 17

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 37. Similarly, on p. 48 Robinson talks about "the demise of the pretense of a God's-eye point of view in Wittgenstein's world" and on p. 160 he says that "Wittgenstein and, more famously, Beckett, work from a street-level where no God's-eye point of view is possible, though we may find ourselves waiting for it".

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 160.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 171.

insurpassability... akin to the speech therapies a patient rendered aphasic as a result of a stroke might undergo"⁴⁷. The outcome of Wittgensteinian therapy, according to Robinson, is that the patient remembers "what it is to be human"⁴⁸.

While I agree with Robinson that Wittgenstein would likely have recognized problems with epic or transcendental political theory (this will be discussed in my chapter on justice) I have several disagreements with Robinson's interpretation of Wittgenstein and with Robinson's suggestions about the direction political theory should take. In the first place I think that Robinson misunderstands Wittgenstein's remarks on theory. Looking carefully at Wittgenstein's remarks on theory and philosophy it becomes clear that Wittgenstein was not just criticizing metatheory and nor was he proposing or suggesting a new way of theorizing himself. In §109 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says that "we may not advance any kind of theory". There is no mention of 'metatheory' or 'epic theory' at all anywhere in the *Philosophical Investigations*. However, that does not yet demonstrate that Robinson is mistaken. It could be that what Wittgenstein was objecting to when he objected to theory was what Robinson calls 'metatheory'. That, I think, is Robinson's position. So, in order to see if he is right we should look at what Wittgenstein has to say.

In §109 of the *Investigations*, when Wittgenstein is discussing the nature of philosophy and rejecting the idea that it is theoretical, it seems that (contra Robinson) he does not have in mind political theories which present themselves as offering a 'view from nowhere' (the 'metatheory' that Robinson opposes). What Wittgenstein does in §109 is to contrast philosophy with empirical theories which involve formulating hypotheses, putting them to the test, making observations, and gathering empirical evidence. He says that "[t]here must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations" and that philosophical problems "are, of course, not empirical problems". Robinson is right that Wittgenstein's conception of what he is doing involves description (and not explanation) but he is mistaken about what Wittgenstein says he is describing. Wittgenstein does not suggest that we should walk and see

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 49-50.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 50.

things and describe them from close-up. As we have just seen, the activity he is engages in is not empirical at all. Wittgenstein is not suggesting that we should describe the things that we see. Philosophy's task is not to describe empirical reality but to describe the uses of words, to describe grammar. Philosophical problems, Wittgenstein says, "are solved through an insight into the workings of our language"⁴⁹.

That is not to say that Wittgenstein did not also find metatheory, as Robinson describes it, objectionable. It is just to say that he did not mean to replace it with any kind of theory. Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks in *On Certainty* and elsewhere suggest that he objected to the idea that we could have a God's-eye view but he also objected to the idea that philosophy was in any way theoretical.

But perhaps something like Robinson's position could still be rescued. Wittgenstein's remarks do suggest that certain ways of going about doing political theory are misguided and perhaps we could say that Wittgenstein's remarks do open up a space for a new way of theorizing political life, as Robinson suggests – as long as we do not suggest that this is the activity that Wittgenstein was engaged in when doing philosophy. In coming to understand political situations we do undoubtedly engage in activities that do not just involve describing grammar. We do gather evidence, we do make observations, and we do present and evaluate opinions. Those are activities unlike what Wittgenstein was doing when he was doing philosophy but they are important activities in understanding our political situation (but they also involve more than just walking, seeing things from close-up and describing them – Robinson's 'immanent theorising').

Given what I have said about Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy above I think it is clear that I also disagree with Robinson's portrayal of Wittgenstein's 'therapeutic turn'. According to Robinson Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy was supposed to erode boundaries between philosophizing and other activities. However, Wittgenstein was clear throughout his career that philosophy was a very different sort of activity to disciplines which seek knowledge of the world around us. In particular he

⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2009, §109.

always clearly distinguished philosophy from science. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* he remarks that “Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences”⁵⁰ and that it “...aims at the logical clarification of thoughts”⁵¹. In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein says that philosophers being tempted to answer questions in the way that science does “is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness”⁵² and in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says that “our considerations must not be scientific ones”⁵³. Furthermore, in what is now called *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* Wittgenstein says that “we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history”⁵⁴. Wittgenstein’s work is distinct both from the sciences (including psychology), and from other disciplines in the humanities.

As mentioned above in my comments on Peg O’Connor’s work, our conception of our subject affects what we will say about what we can know, believe, or understand about it. Our conception of our subject has epistemological implications. Given that philosophy is an investigation of grammar and that it involves “assembling what we have long been familiar with”⁵⁵, it is not a discipline aimed at expanding our knowledge but rather it is aimed at increasing our understanding⁵⁶.

Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics

Michael Temelini’s book *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics* is divided into two halves. In the first half of the book (the first three of six chapters) Temelini

⁵⁰ Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge, 1961, 4.111. In remark 4.1121 Wittgenstein also says that Psychology is no closer to philosophy than any other natural science.

⁵¹ Ibid. 4.112.

⁵² Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958, p. 18.

⁵³ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.

⁵⁴ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations (4th edition)*, PPF xii.

⁵⁵ Ibid. §109.

⁵⁶ P. M. S. Hacker gives an excellent account of the nature of philosophy and contrasts it with other disciplines in his ‘Philosophy: Contribution not to Human Knowledge but to Human Understanding’, which has been published in a collection of his essays – *Wittgenstein: Comparisons & Context*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

discusses interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy that stress the role of authority, training, therapy, and forms of scepticism in Wittgenstein's later work. He presents these various interpretations of Wittgenstein under the heading 'therapeutic scepticism'. In the second half of the book Temelini presents interpretations of Wittgenstein which stress making comparisons, dialogue, and understanding. He gathers these interpretations under the heading of the 'comparative dialogical' reading of Wittgenstein and he defends this kind of interpretation as being preferable to therapeutic-sceptical ones.

In the chapters on the 'therapeutic-sceptical' reading Temelini discusses the work of a great variety of thinkers who have interpreted Wittgenstein's work in a variety of ways and who have been inspired by his philosophical remarks. He discusses the work of people who have interpreted Wittgenstein as a conservative, including J. C. Nyiri and Ernest Gellner. He also examines the work of Stanley Cavell⁵⁷, as well as philosophers whose work has been influenced by Cavell, such as Hanna Pitkin⁵⁸, John Danford⁵⁹, and, more recently, the New Wittgensteinians⁶⁰. Also discussed under the heading of 'therapeutic scepticism' are 'Democratic/Liberal' Wittgensteinians such as Cressida Heyes⁶¹, Gaile Pohlhaus, and John Wright⁶², as well as feminist Wittgensteinians, such as Peg O'Connor⁶³ and Alessandra Tanesini⁶⁴. Peter Winch is

⁵⁷ Such as Cavell, S. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1979 and Cavell, S. *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

⁵⁸ I will discuss Pitkin's work in my chapter on justice. Pitkin, H. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

⁵⁹ Danford, J. W. *Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: A Reexamination of the Foundations of Social Science*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

⁶⁰ Crary, A. and Read, R. (eds.) *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, 2000.

⁶¹ Temelini also categorises other contributors to Heyes' volume *The Grammar of Politics* as democratic/liberal Wittgensteinians. Heyes, C. (ed.) *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

⁶² See, for example, Pohlhaus, G. and Wright, J. 'Using Wittgenstein Critically: A Political Approach to Philosophy', *Political Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 6, 2002, pp. 800-27.

⁶³ See O'Connor, P. *Oppression and Responsibility: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Social Practices and Moral Theory*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002 as well as her book *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, which is discussed above.

also considered by Temelini to have interpreted Wittgenstein along ‘therapeutic/sceptical’ lines⁶⁵. Temelini recognizes that these thinkers vary a great deal in terms of their interpretations of Wittgenstein and in terms of their ideological commitments. However, he thinks that all of these interpretations fail to give dialogue sufficient weight, unlike the ‘comparative dialogical’ interpretations (from Charles Taylor, Quentin Skinner, and James Tully), which he discusses in the later chapters. Temelini also thinks that the ‘therapeutic-sceptical’ interpretations lead to conservative, negative, or contingent⁶⁶ conclusions, whereas the ‘comparative dialogical’ interpretations present Wittgenstein’s work as having positive, progressive implications. Temelini favours the latter position.

However, Temelini is willing to grant that some of the therapeutic-sceptical interpreters of Wittgenstein do have progressive politics. His problem with these interpreters is either that they see the progressive politics as something that has to be tagged on to Wittgenstein’s politically neutral philosophy (O’Connor) or their progressive conclusions are rooted in “various kinds of scepticism or non-realism that are essentially taken for granted as essential to Wittgenstein’s method”⁶⁷ (Cerbone, Eldridge, Janik, Zerilli, Pohlhaus and Wright). The problem in those cases, according to Temelini, is not the progressive conclusions but in the fact that those conclusions are drawn from an interpretation of Wittgenstein as some kind of sceptic or non-realist.

There are several problems with Temelini’s account. In the first place, although Temelini recognizes that there is some variety amongst the philosophers he gathers under the heading of ‘therapeutic scepticism’ he does have a tendency to tar them all with the same brush and misrepresent their views. I strongly suspect that the vast majority of them would have no objection to the idea that dialogue can result in

⁶⁴ See, for example, Tanesini, A. *Wittgenstein: A Feminist Interpretation*, Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2004.

⁶⁵ Juliette Harkin and Rupert Read argue that it is a mistake to categorise Winch in this way in their review of Temelini’s book. See Harkin, J. and Read, R. ‘Book Review - Michael Temelini: Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics’, *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 78, Issue 2, 2016, p. 331.

⁶⁶ Temelini says of therapeutic/sceptical readings that “[t]he politics that necessarily derives from this is conservative, negative, or contingent” (*Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, p. 95)

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

mutual understanding and that it should be valued in both political theory and in the practice of politics. Indeed, Juliette Harkin and Rupert Read, in their review of Temelini's book, make this point with regard to the New Wittgensteinians: their "approach to philosophical praxis is precisely that which Temelini seeks to elevate in his study...[t]he import of listening and the practicing of interpretative charity are the central commitments of the New Wittgensteinian's approach"⁶⁸.

Harkin and Read also complain that Temelini misrepresents Winch as a relativist and Cavell as a dogmatic sceptic⁶⁹, and I agree with them in their criticisms of Temelini. I would add that Temelini also misrepresents Winch as conservative, claiming that Winch's position on forms of life is that "we must accept authority"⁷⁰. But this is a peculiar interpretation of Winch's discussion of authority. Winch *does* think that people might have ingrained habits of obedience such that they do not question authority but he also claims that these habits can be challenged and are in fact challenged: "if these habits are to be *challenged*, as of course they sometimes are, a basis will still have to be found for the challenge *in* the life of the community"⁷¹. At no point does Winch claim that habits of obedience or the authority of the state should not be challenged.

What Winch does is give an account of authority which conflicts with traditional accounts in philosophy. Winch looks at remarks from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* in order to give a rich account of practical rationality in opposition to the accounts of practical rationality found in the works of philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (and also, later, John Rawls). Hobbes's account makes it difficult to see why someone would consent to be subject to another's authority⁷² whereas Wittgenstein's helps us to

⁶⁸ Harkin, J. and Read, R. 'Book Review - Michael Temelini: Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics', *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 78, Issue 2, 2016, p. 330.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 331.

⁷⁰ Temelini, *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, p. 59.

⁷¹ Winch, P. 'Certainty and Authority', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 28, 1990, p. 228.

⁷² See pages 224-5 of Winch's 'Certainty and Authority' where he explains Hobbes's account of practical rationality and some problems with it. Winch presents us with Hobbes's definitions of 'command' and 'counsel' and points out that "[i]t is striking that, in the case of command, Hobbes cuts off the 'action' from any consideration of reasons by the ostensible 'agent', whose own beliefs and projects are to be

understand this. One thing to notice here is that Winch is not saying that anyone *should* be subject to another person's authority. What he did was to describe the conditions under which we can come to understand why somebody consents to another's authority – which he thinks traditional theories had made obscure.

Temelini also misrepresents my own views in his discussion of 'therapeutic scepticism'. In the work of mine that he cites, 'Leave Everything as it is: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations of Wittgenstein', I neither emphasize the notion of therapy in Wittgenstein (I do not present a therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein) and nor do I subscribe to a form of philosophical scepticism. My work is mentioned briefly in the second chapter of Temelini's book under the heading of 'strong contextualism' and Temelini argues that the thinkers discussed under that heading either think that we are "thoroughly determined by conventions" or that we are "at the mercy of autonomous, radically contingent, and historically variable conventions operating largely out of our control"⁷³. I do not in fact believe either of these things and the passage that he quotes from my work in order to justify making his claims does not justify him in making the claim that I am a 'strong contextualist'. What I said in 'Leave Everything as it is' was that Wittgenstein and Marx were both "sensitive to the importance of (social) context"⁷⁴. However, it does not follow from this that I believe that "individuals...are thoroughly determined by conventions" or that individuals are "at the mercy of autonomous, radically contingent, and historically variable conventions operating largely out of our control", as Temelini suggests. So, one problem with Temelini's work is that he misrepresents the work of several of the philosophers he labels 'therapeutic sceptics', including my own work.

Another criticism that can be made of Temelini's book is that where he does interpret people correctly he does not always put a finger on a problem with their work. For example, Temelini takes it to be a problem with interpretations of

thought of as irrelevant. The difficulty raised by his definition is how the *will* of another person, the one who commands, can be thought of by the one commanded as *on its own* as reason for acting...".

⁷³ Temelini, M. *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, p. 56.

⁷⁴ See Vinten, R. 'Leave Everything as it is: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations of Wittgenstein', *Critique*, Vol. 41, Issue 1, 2013, pp. 21-2.

Wittgenstein's work that they interpret him as not being a realist. However, if we look at Wittgenstein's later work we see that he regularly objects to realist 'theories' in philosophy, and with good reason. For example, in the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein tells us that "the trouble with the realist is always that he does not solve but skip[s] the difficulties which his adversaries see" and he claims that realists fail to see "troublesome feature[s] in our grammar"⁷⁵. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein says that "this is what disputes between idealists, solipsists and realists look like. The one party attacks the normal form of expression as if they were attacking an assertion; the others defend it as if they were stating facts recognized by every reasonable human being"⁷⁶ and in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein says that the realist's claim that 'there are physical objects' is "a misfiring attempt to express what cannot be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shown"⁷⁷. Feminist Wittgensteinians, such as Peg O'Connor, are on firm ground when they interpret Wittgenstein as presenting realism as confused and she makes a good (Wittgenstein-inspired) case that the moral realism of Nicholas Sturgeon is a confused response to Gilbert Harman's (confused) antirealism⁷⁸.

Perhaps the problem with non-realist views in Temelini's mind is that they either leave us with an 'anything goes' relativism, or they leave us unable to make claims to truth or knowledge. However, Wittgensteinians might very well say that it is the various forms of realism leave us in a confused position and that realism does not do what it sets out to do, i.e. ground our knowledge claims. What we need to do is to return from the metaphysical position of realism to the rough ground of our ordinary lives, where we regularly say that moral claims are true and argue with each other about moral issues on the assumption that there are better or worse stances to take up and standards by which we can make judgements. O'Connor certainly claims that we do have standards⁷⁹, that we can have moral knowledge⁸⁰ and that we can have

⁷⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, pp. 48-9.

⁷⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §402.

⁷⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, §37.

⁷⁸ See O'Connor, P. *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, pp. 26-33.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 63, 94.

better or worse answers to conflicts⁸¹. Temelini does not tackle these arguments and so it seems that he is not in a good position to object to interpretations of Wittgenstein on the basis of them being non-realist⁸².

0.4 Epistemological Elements

This thesis is being presented in support of a doctorate with a concentration in the area of epistemology but it seems to be particularly concerned with social philosophy and politics. So, a few comments about the epistemological aspects of it are appropriate here.

The first comment to make is that the immediate concern of this thesis is not with particular political issues. No attempt is made to resolve a concrete contemporary political problem, although some of the points made within this thesis are of some relevance to understanding concrete political phenomena and should be of *some* help in resolving contemporary problems.

Much of what I say about the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy rest upon how we are to understand philosophy and its relation to other disciplines (and also upon how we understand those disciplines themselves – are the explanations and methodologies used within disciplines like those employed by people working in the natural sciences?). So, in the first chapter of the thesis I discuss whether philosophy is

⁸⁰ Ibid. pp. 113-127.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 146

⁸² I think there are further problems with Temelini's book. I agree with Juliette Harkin and Rupert Read that Temelini misinterprets Wittgenstein's comments about forms of life. I also think that he misinterprets what Wittgenstein says about language games and perspicuous representations. But there is not space here to go into detail on all of this. I think that enough has been said here already to distinguish my position from Temelini's and to make it clear that my take on Wittgenstein and politics is different to his. I do also think that Temelini's book has many virtues as well as vices. I agree with him that conservative interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy are mistaken (see chapter 3 of this thesis) and I think that there is something to be said for highlighting to role of dialogue in understanding and in resolving political disputes (although I also agree with Harkin and Read that too much can be made of this. They ask some rather pointed questions of Temelini - "Are the underclass and the superrich in need mainly of respectful mutual dialogue? Is dialogue necessarily the answer for Palestinians being driven out of their land? Should Syrian revolutionaries be invited to 'listen' to the voice of their 'sovereign government'?" (p. 331 of their review of Temelini's book).

a cognitive discipline; whether it aims at increasing our stock of knowledge. I also ask about the nature of explanations within social sciences and the answers to these questions about the nature of philosophy and the nature of explanations in social science have obvious implications for epistemology, given that epistemology is concerned with knowledge, understanding, belief, and justification. We gain understanding, at least some of the time, by people *explaining* things to us. The upshot of an explanation is meant to be understanding. So, the questions that I raise about explanation in the first chapter have implications for how we are to think about *understanding* things within the various disciplines.

In the first chapter I discuss reductionism in relation to questions about distinguishing various disciplines from each other. The particular examples that I discuss in the section on reductionism have clear relevance to epistemology (I discuss knowledge, understanding, and belief and ask whether they are reducible to mental states or physical states). I hope that in discussing reductionism in relation to knowledge, belief, and understanding, I go some way towards clarifying these concepts.

In discussing the nature of philosophy and its relation to other disciplines I am also saying something about the nature of epistemology itself. Wittgenstein's way of philosophising represented a break with traditional ways of philosophising. Traditional philosophers thought of themselves as constructing metaphysical systems, or as adding to our stock of knowledge, or as doing something continuous with science. Wittgenstein's alternative to traditional philosophy also represents a break with traditional epistemology. There cannot be a philosophical *theory* of knowledge, on Wittgenstein's view, because philosophers are not concerned with hypotheses, gathering empirical evidence, and making discoveries. We do not have to set out to discover what knowledge is, what belief is, or what understanding is. If somebody is a competent language user then they know what these words mean. They know how to use the words 'knowledge/know/knows', 'belief/believe/believes', 'understanding', 'explain', 'justification', 'certainty', and so on, in the course of their ordinary lives. What they need to do is to remind themselves of how these words are ordinarily and correctly used and how they are related to each other. We need to piece together a

surveyable representation of the relevant concepts⁸³. That is how ‘epistemological’ problems will be dissolved. Wittgenstein does not propose a new theory to replace scepticism or realism or idealism. Instead he details the use of relevant expressions and shows the traditional problems to be ‘houses of cards’⁸⁴. As I said in my discussion of Peg O’Connor’s book, the way in which we conceive the disciplines we are examining has implications for the way in which we think about knowledge, understanding, and belief in a particular discipline. So, my discussion of philosophy, social sciences, and natural sciences in Chapter 1 has what we might call epistemological implications.

The second chapter is, again, a chapter that is partly about the nature of philosophy, as Wittgenstein conceived it and, as I have already said, our conception of our subject matter is likely to have what we might call ‘epistemological ramifications’. In that chapter I discuss relativism about truth, rationality, and knowledge – issues that are clearly epistemological – and in section 2.3.1 I address accusations of cognitive relativism levelled at Wittgenstein by Roger Trigg. I argue that it is a mistake to think of Wittgenstein as a cognitive relativist, and also that Wittgenstein was not an alethic relativist (a relativist about truth) or an ontological relativist (a relativist about what exists).

The next three chapters of the thesis are concerned with ideology and so the connection with epistemology is perhaps a little obscure. Chapter 3 discusses Wittgenstein’s relation to conservative philosophy, Chapter 4 asks whether Wittgenstein was a liberal, and Chapter 5 looks at misinterpretations of Wittgenstein’s work in the work of several Marxist thinkers.

In the chapter on conservatism I note that one of the arguments that conservatives make for their conservatism is that individuals have limited political knowledge. Our political societies are like large organisms, according to conservatives, and groups of people within them play limited (and different) roles. Scepticism about

⁸³ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §122. On the notion of ‘surveyable representation’, see also Venturinha, N. ‘Wittgenstein and the Natural History of Human Beings’ in Jesús Padilla Gálvez (ed.) *Philosophical Anthropology: Wittgenstein’s Perspective*, Frankfurt: Ontos, 2010, pp. 91-110.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, §118.

political knowledge in the work of conservative philosophers is related to their organicism and their stress on the variety of roles that people play within society. They think that because elements of society are interconnected and people are likely to only have knowledge of a limited area that they should be extremely careful about making changes. Changes in one area are likely to have ramifying effects (because the elements of society are interconnected) but those effects are likely to be unpredictable (because people's knowledge is likely to be restricted to a very limited area of society) and so we should be wary of making radical changes and should preserve institutions that have stood the test of time.

I suggest, in the chapter on conservatism, that there is something awry with this argument made by conservatives. Conservatism is defined in terms of a political scepticism that is tied to organicism and traditionalism but, as Corey Robin notes, another aspect of conservatism is that it has historically protected the interests of those in power⁸⁵. This aspect of conservatism is in tension with the others because although conservatives profess to want to preserve long-standing institutions they do not actually try to protect all of those long-standing institutions. A relevant case is that of trade unions, which have existed for more than a century. Conservatives do not treasure trade unions as a repository of political wisdom or celebrate traditions of organisations to defend the interests of the working class. This additional element of conservatism, the defence of power, is also a reason to be suspicious of the claim that the traditional institutions favoured by conservatives: the family, the monarchy (in places like Britain), prestigious educational establishments, and the nation, are actually long-standing because they embody the wisdom of the ages. We should ask why it is that some institutions survive and others do not survive. Trade unions have survived *despite* hostility and repression from conservatives because they are intended to serve various beneficial purposes for working people⁸⁶ and have helped working people to

⁸⁵ Corey Robin claims that conservatism is “a meditation on-and theoretical rendition of-the felt experience of having power, seeing it threatened, and trying to win it back” (Robin, C. *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 4).

⁸⁶ The story is actually much more complicated than this of course. Not all trade unions have always served the interests of the workers that they are supposed to represent and they have not always represented progressive causes either. Different elements within a union are likely to have different interests and so the picture is more complicated than suggested here.

gain various improvements in pay and conditions. The institutions favoured by conservatives also serve people's interests but those interests are not necessarily shared by all and they are not necessarily reflective of age-old wisdom. A cynic might say that the arguments about scepticism, organicism, and tradition that conservatives make are actually subservient to the principal aim of conservatives, which is to preserve the interests of those in power.

The fourth chapter contains some elements that are relevant to epistemological discussions, particularly in my discussion of Rorty's pragmatist philosophy. Unlike Wittgenstein, Rorty suggests that we should adopt a new vocabulary both in political philosophy and in epistemology. To set himself apart from the philosophical tradition and in order to persuade people of his own take on things Rorty suggests that we should talk about 'solidarity' instead of 'objectivity', for example. Rorty has quite a different conception of philosophy to Wittgenstein (he thinks that philosophy is continuous with science and that we should attack philosophers for the relative inutility of their positions rather than charging them with nonsense, as Wittgenstein does) and, as I said above, I think that somebody's conception of philosophy is likely to have ramifications in terms of how they think about epistemological matters – and in Rorty's case it clearly does. Whereas Rorty suggests that we adopt a new vocabulary Wittgenstein's approach on the other hand is not that we should abandon the vocabulary traditional philosophers have used, rather we should "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use"⁸⁷. Wittgenstein would not claim that we should replace 'objectivity' with 'solidarity', rather he would suggest that we attend to the ordinary use of 'objectivity' if philosophers have got into conceptual muddles using it.

In Chapter 5 I argue that although Wittgenstein does not argue that we should change our vocabulary, as Rorty does, that is not to say that our vocabulary does not change (or that Wittgenstein would disapprove of changes). Wittgenstein's work is relevant to epistemology in that it is sensitive to the fact that our use of language goes on within practices and that our practices and language games change over time. Perry Anderson mistakenly argues that Wittgenstein's stance was that we should preserve

⁸⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §116.

concepts as they are⁸⁸. However, Wittgenstein was acutely aware that our concepts change over time. This is something that is not always addressed in epistemological discussions, which often present epistemological concepts as if they are timeless and independent of context. The fact that conceptual change goes on, as Wittgenstein recognised, has implications for how we should conduct epistemological investigations and philosophical investigations more generally. We should be sensitive to the fact that past philosophers might have been using concepts in a different way to the way in which we use them now and also sensitive to the fact that they might have been using them differently to how they were commonly used at the time. Wittgenstein tells us in the *Philosophical Investigations* that “new types of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten”⁸⁹ and elsewhere he presents us with a sensitive treatment of religious belief⁹⁰. It is worth remembering that the kinds of claims that he looks at (e.g. the belief that there will be a Last Judgement) would not have been made until relatively recent times. These claims, for example, would be entirely out of place in the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. Epistemological language changes over time.

Another epistemological aspect to Chapter 5 is that I discuss Wittgenstein’s remark §246 from the *Philosophical Investigations* where he discusses whether I can know that somebody else is in pain and also discusses whether I can know that I am in pain. This discussion brings out the first-third person asymmetry in certain of our knowledge claims and also helps to dissolve the traditional epistemological problem of the ‘problem of other minds’.

In Chapter 5 I also look at the nature of philosophy as it is understood by Wittgenstein and contrast it with the misunderstandings of his philosophy found in the

⁸⁸ Anderson, P. ‘Components of the National Culture’, in *Student Power* (edited by Robin Blackburn and Alexander Cockburn), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, pp. 236-8.

⁸⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.

⁹⁰ Wittgenstein, L. ‘Lectures on Religious Belief’ in Cyril Barrett (ed.) *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, p. 53. According to Wittgenstein, religious language differs from the kind of language that we use, for example, in discussing historical facts. If we claim that a particular historical event occurred then we might be asked to produce evidence in favour of that. Religious claims, however, do not rest on evidence. Religious language also often differs from the language we use with regard to beliefs formed on the basis of things that we perceive.

work of Anderson, Callinicos, and Eagleton. I repeat the claim that philosophy aims at clearing away confusion and enriching our understanding but I also add that philosophy does have *some* role in enlarging our knowledge of the world. Although philosophy is not a cognitive discipline it does help us to enlarge our knowledge by clearing away confusions. As I say in a footnote in that chapter: “Once confusions are cleared away questions [asked in cognitive disciplines] will be formulated more clearly and answers to those questions will be more likely to make sense and to be clearly expressed, which will advance knowledge”.

In chapter 6 I make the point that philosophers often see their accounts of epistemology and their political philosophy as being entwined in some way. Plato’s account of human psychology in *The Republic* mirrored his account of the structure of the state and his account of the best means of governing. Some recent philosophers have used their account of human psychology and tried to use it in resolving political problems. Patricia Churchland and Christopher Suhler’s paper about control and responsibility⁹¹, which I discuss in chapter six, is a case in point.

Patricia Churchland and her husband Paul Churchland are particularly associated with an approach to the philosophy of psychology known as eliminativism. They claim that our ordinary psychological notions, such as ‘belief’, ‘desire’, and ‘depression’, are part of a theoretical framework - ‘folk psychology’ - and they argue that folk psychology has not been a successful theory and so our ordinary psychological notions should be eliminated and replaced with neurological notions. This has clear implications for epistemology. The notions that are usually the subject of discussion in epistemology: ‘belief’, ‘knowledge’, ‘memory’, and so on; are vacuous according to the eliminativist approach.

In chapter 6 I argue that eliminativism is confused and that the argument Churchland and Suhler make in favour of adopting a neurophysiological account of control is confused in various ways. We could not identify parts of the brain associated with consciousness, beliefs, memory, and so on, if we did not first have independent criteria for determining whether human beings are conscious, whether they believe

⁹¹ Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. ‘Control: Conscious and Otherwise’, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, Vol. 13, No. 8, 2009, pp. 341-7.

certain things, and whether they remember certain things. Wittgenstein reminds us that “only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious”⁹² and this remark is useful in untangling some of the confusions in Churchland and Suhler’s paper.

Chapter 7 is primarily concerned with the concept of justice and with the question of whether Wittgenstein’s remarks can help us to choose between conceptions of justice. However, it also involves several significant epistemological elements. In discussing the concept of ‘justice’ I use Wittgenstein’s discussion of the concept of ‘knowledge’ in the *Blue Book*⁹³ to highlight points about describing the grammar of concepts. In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein argues that philosopher’s attempts to get clear about the use of certain expressions had been held back by the idea that “in order to get clear about the meaning of a general term one had to find the common element in all its applications”⁹⁴.

I also look at José Medina’s work, which deals with the topic of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice can be found in cases where people’s testimony is not given the weight it deserves, where people are unfairly denied the resources to understand themselves, and in cases where people are not treated with sensitivity because their oppression is ignored or not understood⁹⁵. Medina builds on (and, to some extent disagrees with) Miranda Fricker’s earlier work in *Epistemic Injustice*⁹⁶.

Another epistemological aspect to the final chapter is that I look at Wittgenstein’s remarks in *On Certainty* where he talks about the different forms that disagreements might take. People holding different beliefs might not just disagree in the opinions that they hold; they might also have different evidential standards, different concepts, or different world views. We might not always be able to justify our

⁹² Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §281.

⁹³ Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 19-20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 19.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Medina, J. *The Epistemology of Resistance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁹⁶ Fricker, M. *Epistemic Injustice*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

beliefs to another person and other forms of persuasion might have to take the place of rational argument. These remarks are very significant for political philosophy and how we are to think about political disagreements.

Part I

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Epistemological Implications of the Nature of Philosophy and of Social Science

Chapter 1 - Is There Such a Thing as a Social Science?

*I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings. So I am not aiming at the same target as the scientists and my way of thinking is different from theirs.*⁹⁷

1.1 Introduction

Action is significant in Wittgenstein's later work and Wittgenstein's work is significant in terms of the development of the philosophy of action. In the very first of the numbered remarks in his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein highlights the way a shopkeeper *acts* in delivering goods to a customer as a way of contrasting his understanding of language with the 'Augustinian' picture of language. In discussing one sense of the expression 'language game' Wittgenstein describes a language game as consisting of "language and the activities into which it is woven"⁹⁸. In other remarks Wittgenstein discusses the relationships between action and ostensive definition⁹⁹, the action of a machine (in connection with his discussion of rule following/the relationship between a rule and action in accordance with it)¹⁰⁰, action and reasons¹⁰¹, action/behaviour and language¹⁰², acting and thinking¹⁰³, acting on orders¹⁰⁴, and action and the will¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, p. 7.

⁹⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2009, §7.

⁹⁹ Ibid. see, for example, §33 and §36.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. §193.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. see, for example, §211.

¹⁰² Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' provides a good example of his thinking about language and action but action and language are discussed throughout the *Philosophical Investigations*. See, for example, §243, §556.

¹⁰³ Ibid. see, for example, §330 and §490.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. §459-460, §487, §493, §505, §519.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. §§611-628. In a recent collection of articles on the philosophy of action edited by Constantine Sandis and Jonathan Dancy the editors place this selection of remarks from Wittgenstein at the front of

In his book *The Idea of a Social Science* Peter Winch developed Wittgenstein's ideas about action, behaviour, language, and rules into a critique of the idea that the disciplines known as the social sciences are scientific in the manner of the natural sciences. Action appears in *The Idea of a Social Science* as a way of distinguishing natural sciences, which feature causal explanations prominently, from social sciences, which focus upon human actions and feature explanations in terms of reasons and motives prominently. Winch distinguishes actions from habitual behaviour and distinguishes actions in terms of motives from causal explanations. Wittgenstein was notoriously opposed to scientism, i.e. the attempt to bring the methods of science to bear in areas where they are not appropriate, especially in philosophy¹⁰⁶. Winch, following Wittgenstein, detailed ways in which social investigations differ from investigations in the natural sciences.

Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Read and Wes Sharrock have recently defended Winch's account of differences between natural sciences and social disciplines. In their book *There is No Such Thing as a Social Science* they come to the conclusion that calling social disciplines 'sciences' is likely to lead to confusion¹⁰⁷. However, not all philosophers who have been influenced by Wittgenstein and Winch agree that there is no such thing as a social science. At the British Wittgenstein Society conference in 2015 (on Wittgenstein and the social sciences) John Dupré defended the idea that social studies can be scientific¹⁰⁸.

the book because "[t]he work of Wittgenstein has been seminal in this change [the move towards having graduate classes devoted entirely to the philosophy of action]" ('Preface' to Dancy, J. and Sandis, C. (eds.) *Philosophy of Action: An Anthology*, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2015, p.x).

¹⁰⁶ For example, in the Blue Book Wittgenstein says that "[p]hilosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics and leads the philosopher into complete darkness" (Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, Harper & Row: New York, 1958, p. 18). See also §81, §89, §109, PPF 365 and PPF 371 in Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Hutchinson, P., Read, R., and Sharrock, W. (eds.) *There is No Such Thing as a Social Science: In Defence of Peter Winch*, Ashgate: Aldershot, 2008, p. 51.

¹⁰⁸ A video of the talk John Dupré gave can be found here: <http://www.britishwittgensteinsociety.org/news/annual-conference/conference-videos>. The paper he delivered has since been published as 'Social Science: City Centre or Leafy Suburb' in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, May 2016.

In discussing whether the disciplines that are known as social sciences¹⁰⁹ are in fact scientific there are a number of different ways in which the question might be approached. (i) One way of arguing that social sciences are scientific is to claim that social sciences are *reducible* to natural sciences. The positivists of the Vienna Circle and philosophers influenced by them (as well as many scientists) have made the claim that social sciences are reducible to natural sciences, i.e. that behaviour at the level of social groups can ultimately be explained in terms of objects at another level – cells, or molecules, atoms, physical things or even sense data. Reductionists often accompany this claim with the claim that laws at one level can be derived from laws at a lower level (e.g. that the laws of chemistry can be derived from the laws of physics). (ii) One might not accept reductionism but nonetheless claim that the kind of explanations used in the social sciences are of the same sort as those used in the natural sciences. The debate about whether explanations in terms of reasons are causal explanations is relevant to this. Donald Davidson in the later part of the twentieth century famously argued that reasons are causes. (iii) Another relevant issue in deciding whether the social sciences are scientific is *methodology*. Some have defended the claim that social sciences are scientific on the basis that they employ the same methodology as natural sciences¹¹⁰. (iv) A problem that arises in comparing natural sciences to social sciences is that there does not seem to be the same kind of *progress* in the social sciences as in the natural ones. In the natural sciences we see widespread agreement over a wide range of issues as well as advances in technology and in the sophistication and usefulness of theories. However, in the social sciences disagreement is the rule and doubts are raised about whether any progress has been made (in philosophy in particular). There is certainly no clear agreement amongst philosophers about, for example, the relationship between mind and body, and philosophers are still puzzled

¹⁰⁹ Social sciences are usually thought to include economics, sociology, anthropology, human geography, politics and sociology: disciplines which aim at knowledge of the various relationships between individuals and the societies they belong to. There is more disagreement about whether philosophy and history are to be counted among the social sciences.

¹¹⁰ For example, Otto Neurath (of the Vienna Circle) claims that it is not tenable to separate cultural sciences from natural ones by saying that each employ special methods (Neurath, O. 'Physicalism: The Philosophy of the Viennese Circle', in *Philosophical Papers 1913-1946* (Vienna Circle Collection) Vol. 16 edited and translated by Robert S. Cohen and Marie Neurath, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster, p. 50)

about the question of whether human beings have free will despite centuries of having discussed the question¹¹¹.

It is worth noting that John Dupré and Hutchinson, Read and Sharrock would largely agree in how they would think about the issues of reductionism, the varieties of explanation, methodology, and progress. However, they come to different conclusions. In this chapter I will come down on the side of Dupré and conclude that ultimately the question of whether the social sciences are scientific does not rest on whether they are reducible to natural sciences or whether they employ the same methodologies. I will argue that social sciences are not reducible to natural sciences and that social and natural sciences do not employ the same methodologies across the board (and nor should they) but that nonetheless disciplines like psychology, sociology, and economics can make some claim to be scientific.

Before going on to discuss reductionism it is first worthwhile mentioning the related, infamous, dispute in the late 1950s and early 1960s between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis about whether there were two cultures, literary and scientific, which were mutually uncomprehending of one another. Snow suggested that there were and that in order to correct the situation there should be greater efforts to educate the young in the natural sciences and to introduce more scientific literacy into politics. He thought that this would lead to improvements in society, especially in poorer parts of the world. Snow was accused of scientism for his efforts to promote the role of science in society¹¹². Leavis, on the other hand, argued that there was just one culture¹¹³ (and was accused of 'literarism'¹¹⁴). Leavis's concerns about Snow's scientism are not of the same sort as Wittgenstein's worries about scientism mentioned above. Whereas Leavis was primarily concerned with the way in which Snow emphasized science education

¹¹¹ There is an excellent recent book on the topic of theorising in social sciences written from a critical Wittgensteinian perspective that I will not discuss here. Leonidas Tsilipakos's *Clarity and Confusion in Social Theory* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2015) discusses problems with trying to import theoretical frameworks into social sciences. My review of his book appeared in Vinten, R. 'Review of "Clarity and Confusion in Social Theory" by Leonidas Tsilipakos', *Nordic Wittgenstein Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2015.

¹¹² See Leavis, F. R. 'Luddites? Or, There is Only One Culture' in *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (with Introduction by Stefan Collini), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013 p. 103.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 101 and p. 106.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 103.

and technological progress at the expense of literature and social science education which involved a kind of lacuna in terms of what makes for good, meaningful, happy lives (literature has an important role to play, according to Leavis), Wittgenstein's worries about scientism were primarily about the confusion caused by trying to import scientific methods and concepts into the humanities and the social sciences (particularly philosophy but also psychology and other social/humanistic disciplines) and about attempts to reduce social sciences to natural ones. However, that is not to say that there is no overlap at all. Wittgenstein expressed somewhat similar worries to Leavis about progress¹¹⁵ and Leavis had relevant things to say about the status of social and humanistic disciplines that I will come back to in the conclusion to this chapter¹¹⁶.

1.2 Reductionism

1.2.1 What is reductionism?

Reductionism has been defined as “a commitment to the complete explanation of the nature and behaviour of entities of a given type in terms of the nature and behaviour of their constituents”¹¹⁷. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on reductionism¹¹⁸, makes the point that “[s]aying that *x* reduces to *y* typically implies that *x* is nothing more than *y* or nothing over and above *y*” and so the scientist Francis Crick's claim that “[y]ou'...are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells...”¹¹⁹ is an expression of a reductionist view. Crick goes on to argue that a

¹¹⁵ In one of the remarks published in *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein says that, “[o]ur civilization is characterized by the word ‘progress’. Progress is its form rather than making progress being one of its features. Typically it constructs. It is occupied with building an ever more complicated structure. And even clarity is only a means to this end and not an end in itself. For me on the contrary clarity, perspicuity are valuable in themselves. I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings. So I am not aiming at the same target as the scientists and my way of thinking is different from theirs (Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, p. 7).

¹¹⁶ Leavis and Wittgenstein were briefly friends (see Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, London: Vintage, 1991 pp. 42, 272, 278-9, 569 and also Leavis, F. R. ‘Memories of Wittgenstein’ in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 50-67).

¹¹⁷ Bennett, M. R. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 357.

¹¹⁸ ‘Scientific Reduction’, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scientific-reduction/>, accessed 29/08/16.

¹¹⁹ Crick, F. *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, Touchstone: London, 1995, p. 3.

nerve cell in turn can be expected to be understood in terms of its parts, "...the ions and molecules of which it is composed"¹²⁰. So, one might think that social groups are made up of collections of multicellular organisms, and multicellular organisms are made up of cells, which are made up of molecules made up of atoms composed out of subatomic particles, and that we can explain entities at one level in terms of the lower levels, with the subatomic particles studied by physics at the lowest level of explanation¹²¹.

1.2.2 Why be a reductionist?

The fact that this position is advanced by respected scientists like Crick and others such as Colin Blakemore lends it credibility¹²² and it is not just the fact that scientists subscribe to it that lends it credibility but also the esteem in which science itself is held. Science is seen to have been very successful in making advances, in technology, medicine, and so on. The success of science makes it tempting to import scientific methods and attitudes into other areas to see if they might not benefit from the same kind of treatment. This issue, the issue of scientific progress, will be discussed in section 1.5. Reductionism is also apparently supported by the fact that dualistic conceptions of past philosophy have been discredited and replaced by one or another form of materialism. If everything is made out of the same kind of stuff - matter - then presumably everything can be explained in terms of it. It seems that we have no need for explanations in terms of immaterial substance and scientific explanation does not rely on such explanations¹²³.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 7.

¹²¹ This is what is known as 'classical reductionism', and the classic formulation of it is Paul Oppenheim and Hilary Putnam's 'The unity of science as a working hypothesis' in H. Feigl et. al. (eds.) *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 2, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1958.

¹²² See, for example, Blakemore, C. *The Mind Machine*, BBC Publications: London, 1988, pp. 270-2.

¹²³ However, it is worth noting that one can be a materialist without being a reductionist and one can be a reductionist without being a materialist. Berkeley, an idealist, thought that everything reduces to minds and ideas.

1.2.3 Problems with reductionism

One problem for reductionism is that although the rejection of dualism appears to support a unified materialism, the rejection of dualism does not in fact imply materialism and even when it comes to explanations of material things we often do not explain them or things about them in terms of what they are made of. Materialism, if it is taken to be the view that everything that exists is material, is not well supported. There are many things which we would like to say exist but that are not material objects. As Max Bennett and Peter Hacker note, “laws and legal systems, numbers and theorems, games and plays are neither material objects or stuffs”. Bennett and Hacker point out that even when it comes to material objects we often explain their behaviour, perfectly legitimately, in terms other than what they are made of. We explain some things in terms of their function (e.g. human organs), others in terms of their goals, reasons, or motives (the behaviour of animals and human beings)¹²⁴. Historical events, such as the Russian revolution, are not explained in terms of what they are made of, “...since they are not made of anything”¹²⁵. So, materialism cannot be used in support of reductionism¹²⁶.

Another problem with attempts to reduce social sciences to natural ones is that social sciences often involve reference to the psychological attributes of human beings but psychological attributes of human beings cannot be reduced to any of the usual candidates that reductionist philosophers refer to - cells, molecules, brain states, or sense data. In the *Philosophical Investigations* one case that Wittgenstein brings our attention to is the case of *knowledge*. He carefully examines the grammar of ‘know’ and ‘understand’ and helps us to recognise that knowing cannot be a physical state, a mental state or a disposition. If it were a physical state then there would be (at least) two different criteria for knowing – (i) the correct application of a relevant rule (e.g. a criterion for someone knowing the alphabet is that they can write or say ‘A, B, C, D,

¹²⁴ This will be discussed in the following section.

¹²⁵ Bennett, M. R. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 358.

¹²⁶ Bennett and Hacker’s discussion of materialism leans on John Dupré’s discussion of materialism in *The Disorder of Things*. Dupré discusses and rejects several versions of materialism in his chapter on reduction and materialism (Dupré, J. *The Disorder of Things*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 89-94).

E...’ etc.) and (ii) the criteria for identifying the corresponding physical state or disposition. But it seems that the second criterion is not the one we would use, since even if the brain were in a particular physical state whenever someone recited the alphabet we would not take the presence of the state to indicate knowledge if someone wrote ‘A, D, F, Z, 3’ when asked to write the alphabet¹²⁷. Rather than being reducible to a physical state or disposition, knowledge is akin to an ability¹²⁸, and an ability is categorially distinct from the usual candidates that reductionists refer to (cells, molecules, brain states, physical things, or sense data). Following Wittgenstein, Bennett and Hacker note, “[t]he criteria of identity for mental states, events and processes differ from the criteria of identity for neural states, events and processes”¹²⁹. This should be clear from the fact that psychological attributes are attributable to a person or to animals but neurophysiological attributes are attributable to their brains¹³⁰. So, for example, someone might *believe* that voting to leave the European Union was the right thing to do in the recent referendum in the United Kingdom. I attribute that belief to them (not to their brain) on the basis of their behaviour; particularly their linguistic behaviour. I attribute that belief to them, most likely, because they *say* that they believe that voting to leave the E. U. was right and I have no reason to doubt that they believe that. However, I do not attribute brain states or processes to them on the basis of their linguistic behaviour and those brain states or processes are states *of that person’s brain* and not of the person. The person’s beliefs cannot be neural states or events because their neural states and events have a location but their beliefs cannot be said to have a location (at least not in the same way). It makes no sense to ask ‘where do you believe it was wrong to leave the EU?’ Some questions sharing this form *do* make sense but they are not answered in a way that suggests that beliefs are neural states. So, for example, it does make sense to ask ‘where do you believe the football game between Sporting Lisbon and

¹²⁷ See Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §149.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, §150.

¹²⁹ Bennett, M. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, pp. 360-1.

¹³⁰ See Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §281: “...only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious”.

Benfica will take place?’ but this question is not answered appropriately by saying ‘in my head’, but by something like ‘at the Estádio da Luz’.

It is also worth noting that not only are social sciences not reducible to natural sciences but natural sciences themselves cannot all be reduced to physics. John Dupré has argued convincingly that ecology is not reducible to any level below biology¹³¹, and that there are various problems with reductionist projects in genetics¹³². There have been successful reductionist projects but these successes have been very local. Biological science has not been shown to be reducible to physics and we have good reason to think that it cannot be reduced to physics, namely that categorization in biology and much of the rest of science is driven by changing human interests and there is no single privileged taxonomic scheme in biology in terms of which it could be reduced to physics.

Wittgenstein thought that the temptation to reduce phenomena in one area to phenomena in another was one of the causes of philosophical confusion. In the *Blue Book*, in the passage cited above (footnote 106), Wittgenstein says that his worry about philosophers’ preoccupation with the method of science is, at least in part, a worry about “the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws...” and that “...it can never be our [i.e. philosophers’] job to reduce anything to anything”. Philosophy is descriptive, that is it describes norms of representation with the aim of getting clear about the meaning of problematic terms in order to get rid of the confusion at the root of philosophical problems¹³³.

1.3 Reasons and Causes

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, one of the debates that is relevant to the question of whether the social sciences are continuous with the natural sciences is the debate about whether explanations in terms of reasons are causal

¹³¹ Dupré, J. *The Disorder of Things*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge MA, 1993, pp. 107-120.

¹³² Ibid. pp. 121-145.

¹³³ Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 18.

explanations. One approach is to claim that human *actions* are distinct from behaviour resulting from *habits* (which influence our behaviour causally). A way of bringing out this distinction is to compare human activity with the activities of animals. Peter Winch, a Wittgensteinian philosopher, uses the example of a dog learning to balance sugar on its nose and holding it there until its owner issues a command to eat it. In this case the dog has been trained into a habitual response and cannot be said to be reflectively following a rule. Like rule-following cases the dog might be said to have done something correctly or incorrectly but this is only because we are applying human norms analogically to animals, according to Winch¹³⁴. This is unlike the case of a human being continuing the series of natural numbers beyond 100 upon being ordered to do so because, "...the dog has been *conditioned* to respond in a certain way, whereas I *know* the right way to go on *on the basis of* what I have been taught"¹³⁵.

The debates in philosophy about the distinctions that Winch makes between rule-governed human behaviour and habitual animal behaviour and between reasons, motives, and causes, has moved on since the time of *The Idea of a Social Science*. A seminal anti-Wittgensteinian paper, in opposition to the kind of view that Winch presents, is Donald Davidson's 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes' published in 1963¹³⁶. The arguments between Davidsonians, Wittgensteinians, and others, continue to this day¹³⁷.

1.3.1 Social Studies and Natural Science

The considerations about differences between causal and rule-governed behaviour suggest that human activity cannot be understood in terms of the causal generalizations favoured by natural scientists. However, Winch thinks that

¹³⁴ Winch, P. *The Idea of a Social Science*, p.60.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p.62.

¹³⁶ Davidson, D. 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 60, No.23, 1963, pp.685-700

¹³⁷ See, for example, D'Oro, G., and Sandis, C. *Reasons and Causes: Causalism and Anti-Causalism in the Philosophy of Action*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 and Tanney, J. *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013

explanations of human behaviour in terms of institutions and rules might still be defended by followers of philosophers like John Stuart Mill as being scientific because:

(1) "...an institution is, a kind of uniformity"

(2) "...a uniformity can only be grasped in a generalization."

And so...

(Conclusion) "...understanding social institutions is still a matter of grasping empirical generalizations which are logically on a footing with natural science"

However, this argument is defective according to Winch because where we speak of uniformities we must have some kind of criteria of sameness. To characterize something as going on in a uniform manner is to characterize it as being the same in certain respects throughout time. However, what is characterized as being the same by one criterion might not be characterized as being the same by another. For example, someone looking at two pictures (one picture of an African elephant and one of an Indian elephant) might say that both depict the *same* creature, an elephant, however, we might say that they depict *different* species; one is an African elephant and another is an Indian elephant. Someone who is asked whether the two pictures are *the same* would likely be confused until they are told something further about the criteria they are supposed to apply in deciding. They might respond that they are not the same because the pose of the animal is different in each, or they might refer to the dimensions of the pictures and say the second is larger than the first.

As Wittgenstein says, "[t]he use of the word 'rule' and the use of the word 'same' are interwoven."¹³⁸ What this means is that if we are to decide whether two things are the same or whether something counts as 'going on in the same way' (as in cases when we are asked to continue a series of numbers) we must do so by reference to a definition or a criterion – a *rule* of one sort or another. And, as Winch says, "...rules...rest on a social context of common activity"¹³⁹ and so to decide the nature of a particular field of study we must look at the kind of activities which it involves and also at the rules embedded in those activities which tell us whether the objects of the

¹³⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §225

¹³⁹ Winch, P. *The Idea of a Social Science*, p.84

study are of the *same* kind or not, or whether they continue to be the *same* throughout time.

If we look at the kinds of activities engaged in by natural scientists and by those engaged in fields concerned with human activity (psychology, history, sociology, literature, and so on) then we find that the things studied differ in each case. The rules which we must consider in thinking about natural sciences are, for example, the grammatical rules which constitute scientific concepts, and the rules governing the procedures of the scientists. However, in the case of those studying human activity we must consider not only the rules of the activities of the sociologists but also the rules governing the behaviour of those that the sociologist studies. It is the second set of rules, according to Winch, that tell us about the nature of sociology. It is those rules, “which specify what is to count as ‘doing the same kind of thing’ in relation to that kind of activity”¹⁴⁰.

The significance of this in thinking about the relation between social fields and the natural sciences is that the two kinds of activities are quite different. John Stuart Mill had argued that studying human society is like studying a complicated mechanism. However, if Winch is correct then the sociologist’s “...understanding of social phenomena is more like the engineer’s understanding of his colleague’s activities than it is like the engineer’s understanding of the mechanical systems which he studies”¹⁴¹. Explanation in sociology is often not like the causal explanations of natural science. However, that does not imply that it is not scientific at all.

1.3.2 Is Winch Correct? – Davidson’s Argument that Reasons are Causes.

Winch distinguished explanations in terms of habituation, which he said were causal, from explanations in terms of rules, which he said were non-causal. Donald Davidson, in his 1963 paper ‘Actions, Reasons, and Causes’ argued, *pace* Winch, that explanation of human action citing the agent’s reason for their action (i.e. the kind of action that Winch said was rule governed) “is a species of ordinary causal

¹⁴⁰ Winch, P. *The Idea of a Social Science*, p.87

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.88

explanation”¹⁴². Davidson argues for this first of all by pointing out that the division between explanations in terms of reasons and explanations in terms of causes is not obviously mutually exclusive. It may be that nonteleological causal explanations do not have features that explanations in terms of reasons do, namely that explanations in terms of reasons have a justificatory element, nonetheless, “...it does not follow that the explanation is not also-and necessarily-causal”¹⁴³.

Davidson also goes further. He doesn't rest satisfied with the claim that it is not obvious that explanations in terms of reasons are not causal. He gives an argument in favour of thinking that explanations in terms of reasons *are* causal. Davidson's argument for this is that people can have a reason to do something and yet *that* reason was not the reason why they did it. Several different reasons in a particular case could serve to make an action intelligible. For example, somebody might raise their arm and wave it around outside of their car window in order to greet a friend or in order to signal a turn or in order to cool their hand. We might ask why somebody raised their arm and waved it around outside of their car as they drove around a bend and they might respond 'I saw my friend on the corner and waved at him', or 'my hand was uncomfortably hot having been on the warm steering wheel and so I wanted to cool it down' or 'I wanted to signal that I was turning'. How do we pick out the agent's reason from amongst the reasons that they had, which might have served to make the action intelligible? – Davidson's answer is that “[c]entral to the relation between a reason and an action it explains is the idea that the agent performed the action *because* he had the reason”. And Davidson thinks that in order to “account for the force of that ‘because’” we should think of the relation between reason and action as causal¹⁴⁴.

Davidson argues that his opponents, the Wittgensteinians (including people like Winch), have not accounted for this relation between reason and action by talking about patterns and contexts because “the relevant pattern or context contains both

¹⁴² Davidson, D. 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 60, No.23, 1963, p.685

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.691

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.691

reason and action”¹⁴⁵. Davidson might not have produced a conclusive argument in favour of construing the relation between reason and action in causal terms but it seems as though he has nonetheless provided some reason for thinking that explanation in terms of reasons is a kind of causal explanation. If his opponents are to dispute that, he says that they must identify an alternative pattern of explanation¹⁴⁶.

Davidson’s anti-Wittgensteinian arguments are formidable and have been enormously influential in terms of the way that many philosophers nowadays think about explanations of action in terms of reasons. What this demonstrates is that anyone who wants to defend a position along the lines that Winch wanted to defend must now deal with Davidson’s arguments. The debate has moved on since Winch published *The Idea of a Social Science* and non-Wittgensteinian thought now predominates in philosophy departments around the world.

1.3.3 Is Winch Correct? – Tanney’s Response to Davidson

However, that is not to say that Davidson is correct and that a defence of ideas in the spirit of Winch cannot be given. Over the course of the past two decades Julia Tanney has built up a powerful case against Davidson’s conception of explanations in terms of reasons and she has defended the Wittgensteinian view that Davidson attacked. She has written a series of articles about reasons and rule-following that are collected in the recent volume, *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge*¹⁴⁷.

In her article ‘Why Reasons May Not Be Causes’¹⁴⁸ Tanney examines various cases where somebody had a reason but did not act for that reason. This is the kind of case that Davidson suggested calls for thinking of the relation between reason and action in causal terms; to account for the force of the word ‘because’ where we say ‘the agent performed the action *because* they had the reason’. Tanney denies that we have to bring in the notion of causation in order to account for these cases, instead

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p.692

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p.692

¹⁴⁷ Tanney, J. *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013

¹⁴⁸ The article forms chapter 5 of *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge*, pp.103-132

“we just need to introduce judgements, weights, and values into the ‘anaemic’ analysis of reasons” What needs to be added in such cases is not the notion of causation but “a more complex justificatory machinery”¹⁴⁹. We can explain why someone acted for one reason rather than some other reason that they had by saying that the reason they acted on carried more weight for them than the others, or by adding something to the account about the agent’s values (or both).

Davidson challenged his opponents to identify a pattern of explanation that accounts for the relationship between reason and action in something other than causal terms and Tanney rises to that challenge in her paper, ‘Reasons as Non-Causal Context-Placing Explanations’¹⁵⁰. If the relationship between (1) *a reason* and (2) *the action that it is the reason for* is not causal then what is it? Tanney explains that, “in many cases attributions of motives, intentions and reasons explain a performance by characterizing it as an action of a certain kind”¹⁵¹. Rather than assimilating explanations in terms of reasons to causal explanations Tanney suggests that explanations in terms of reasons are similar to other kinds of explanations that are clearly not causal. An example she gives to illustrate this is of somebody walking out of a chemistry classroom and seeing the letters ‘c’, ‘a’, ‘t’ written on the board. They might ask one of their classmates, ‘why did the teacher write the word ‘cat’ on the board?’ and their classmate could explain what was going on by saying that ‘the teacher was starting to write the word ‘catalyst’ and you left the classroom before they finished writing’. This is clearly not a case of the model of causation Davidson subscribes to where there must be two logically independent events entering into the causal relation. In this case there is just one event (writing on the board by the teacher) which has not been understood and so an explanation is called for¹⁵². Explanations of actions in terms of reasons are similar to this in that what they do is to place an event in context and make sense of it. They are also similar, Tanney suggests,

¹⁴⁹ Tanney, J. *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013, p.109

¹⁵⁰ This paper was originally published in Sandis, C. (ed.) *New Essays on the Explanation of Action*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp.94-111 and was reprinted as chapter 7 of *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013, pp.149-170

¹⁵¹ Tanney, J. *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge*, p.154

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.156-7

because they do not require two independent occurrences causally related to each other.

The fact that explanations of human action in terms of reasons are categorially distinct from explanations in terms of causes gives us some reason to think that social sciences are not like natural sciences. As noted in section 1.2, the existence of explanations in terms of reasons (and in terms of goals and motives) undermines the kind of materialism that says that we are to explain things simply in terms of what they are made of and this in turn undermines reductionists who think that this kind of materialism lends support to their view. Thus far we have two broad reasons for rejecting the view that social sciences are of a piece with the natural sciences. Social sciences are not reducible to natural sciences (section 1.2) and they employ different kinds of explanations to the natural sciences, namely explanations in terms of reasons, rules, motives, and so forth (section 1.3). In the next section I will examine whether we might claim that social sciences are like natural sciences by claiming that they employ the same methodologies¹⁵³.

1.4 Methodology in the Natural and Social Sciences

Claims that the methodologies of the natural sciences are appropriate for use in the social sciences and that they are the only methods appropriate for use in the social sciences are driven by similar kinds of considerations to those that have motivated people to become reductionists. The enormous *progress* made in the natural sciences suggests that there is something right about the methodologies used in them and hints at the desirability of those methods in areas other than natural science. The rejection of dualism has led people to think that they should adopt a kind of monism, namely materialism or physicalism, and if social sciences study the same kinds of things as the natural sciences, namely physical things, then they should use the same kinds of methodologies. Another motivation for the claim that we should use the methods of

¹⁵³ As I mentioned in the introduction, Peg O'Connor objects to metaethical theories for their scientism with regard to the role that they give to causation. She notes that within metaethics "[t]here is a tendency to assimilate reasons to causes...Reasons and causes, however, have very different aims and play very different roles in our lives". See her *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, pp. 115-17.

the natural sciences to study social phenomena is verificationism. We might think that we cannot verify claims about, for example, other people's mental states or claims about ethics and so all we can do in these areas is study relevant quantifiable physical attributes such as behaviour (construed in physicalist terms). The logical positivists argued that ethics as traditionally conceived was unverifiable and should be replaced by science. Otto Neurath heralded a new era in which, "[i]nstead of the priest we find the physiological physician and the sociological organizer. Definite conditions are tested for their effect upon happiness (*Glückswirkungen*), just as a machine is tested to measure its lifting effect"¹⁵⁴.

A method is a way of establishing or accomplishing something. The ways in which the natural sciences establish truths within their domains include using observation and experiment. Observations might give us knowledge or they might lead us to infer that something is the case (perhaps something unobservable) or they might lead us to hypothesise that something is the case (which we might then test using further observations). Scientists have also had success by using explanations of phenomena in terms of their causes and by using mathematical notions to quantify and compare things.

It is certainly true that social scientists make observations, that they can sometimes quantify the things they are observing, and that they can test hypotheses that they formulate on the basis of observations. However, as noted above, there are explanations within the social sciences which are not causal explanations. In the social sciences we explain actions in terms of the reasons that people have and give for doing the things they do, their motives, and their goals. This suggests that there will be significant differences in the methods used by social scientists which reflect the fact that they are investigating the reasons and motives for human action rather than the causes of events involving non-human agents. So, for example, social science research involves questionnaires, surveys, polls, and interviews, in which human beings are asked about the things they do and why they do them. Although social sciences, like the natural sciences, involve observation, the character of the observation is different

¹⁵⁴ Neurath, O. 'Physicalism: The Philosophy of the Viennese Circle', in *Philosophical Papers 1913-1946 (Vienna Circle Collection) Vol. 16* edited and translated by Robert S. Cohen and Marie Neurath, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster, p. 50.

in each. Coming to understand human action through observation involves knowledge of social practices, norms, and conventions and the explanations arrived at by social scientists are not *nomological* explanations as they are in the natural sciences¹⁵⁵. No *laws* of human behaviour or of human psychology have been discovered and we have no good reason to think that they will be.

Moreover, the methods employed by philosophy, of clarifying concepts by presenting overviews of their grammar, are categorially distinct from the methods employed by those working in the natural sciences. Grammatical claims are not hypotheses or reports of observations. They are not justified or tested by reference to empirical reality at all. As Wittgenstein said, “[t]here should be no theories, and nothing hypothetical, in philosophy”¹⁵⁶. Getting clear about the meaning of the expressions one uses is something that one should do *before* one embarks on any scientific investigation.

So, it seems that natural sciences and social sciences, as a matter of fact, employ a variety of different methods. What of the motivations for thinking that perhaps they should employ the same methods – verificationism, materialism, and the progress made by science? Problems with materialism have already been discussed in section 1.2.3 in discussing problems with reductionism. Verificationism, especially the variety presented by the logical positivists is now widely rejected by philosophers with good reason. Wittgenstein made sharp criticisms of the view that the ‘inner’ world is hidden from us and all we can see is bare behaviour (although Wittgenstein’s criticisms have still not been heeded by many philosophers today). We do not *infer* that somebody is in pain when we seem them stub their toe and cry¹⁵⁷. In that case we can *see* that they are in pain and we can distinguish that case from one in which we do make an inference, e.g. when we see a packet of paracetamol opened next to a half-drunk glass of water on the table. There is a *logical* connection between pain and pain

¹⁵⁵ See Bennett, M. R. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 362-366 for more on this.

¹⁵⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised fourth edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, §109.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* §246, §§250-251, §253

behaviour, namely that pain behaviours are (defeasible) criteria for someone being in pain. So, neither materialism nor verificationism provide us with good reasons for thinking that methodology in the social and natural sciences should be the same. The issue of progress in the social and natural sciences will be discussed in the next section below.

1.5 Progress

As already noted above, the impressive progress made in the natural sciences is one of the motivations to have the social sciences emulate the natural ones in one way or another. Academic philosophers and scientists have been unimpressed by the results of psychological theorising and philosophical argument by contrast with rapid developments in physics, biology, and chemistry as well as by the lack of agreement amongst social scientists in contrast to natural scientists. For example, Semir Zeki, an academic working in neuroesthetics, has complained about “the poverty of the results” in philosophy “in terms of understanding our brains and their mental constitution”¹⁵⁸ and the philosopher Paul Churchland has lamented the lack of progress made by ‘folk psychology’ (the name he gives to our ordinary framework of psychological concepts, which he takes to be a theory of human behaviour) which he thinks has not progressed in 2,500 years¹⁵⁹. More recently the physicist Stephen Hawking has declared that “philosophy is dead” and claimed that it has been superseded by developments in science. Zeki thinks that neurobiology should take over problems about the mind (as well as problems concerning justice and honour) from philosophy, Churchland thinks that ‘folk psychology’ (our ordinary framework of psychological concepts as well as concepts employed in psychology) should be abandoned in favour of a neuroscientific psychology, and Hawking thinks that

¹⁵⁸ Zeki, S. ‘Splendours and miseries of the brain’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 354 (1999), pp. 2053-65.

¹⁵⁹ Churchland, P. M. ‘Folk psychology’, in S. Guttenplan (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, pp.310f.

philosophers should give up on questions like ‘why are we here?’ and ‘where do we come from?’ and leave them to science¹⁶⁰.

There is surely something to these worries about a lack of progress in philosophy. Philosophers still puzzle over Zeno’s paradoxes from 2,500 years ago. There are contemporary Aristotelian ethicists but there aren’t any contemporary Ptolemaic scientists. Philosophers are still troubled by sceptical doubts about our senses and by disagreements about what it is that we see and hear. More than two millennia ago Plato made attempts to define knowledge and philosophers today are still making similar attempts. Is it any wonder that people like Hawking think that philosophy might as well just be abandoned?

Ludwig Wittgenstein had an explanation for why it is that philosophical confusions have endured for millennia. It is that these problems are conceptual problems, i.e. problems that result from misunderstanding certain concepts, and that the ‘traps’ set by language – the features of language that cause confusion – have remained in place:

One keeps hearing the remark that philosophy really makes no progress, that the same philosophical problems that had occupied the Greeks are still occupying us. But those who say that do not understand the reason it is // must be // so. The reason is that our language has remained the same and seduces us into asking the same questions over and over again. As long as there is a verb ‘to be’ which seems to function like ‘to eat’ and ‘to drink’, as long as there are adjectives like ‘identical’, ‘true’, ‘false’, ‘possible’, as long as one talks about a flow of time and an expanse of space, etc. etc. humans will continue to bump against the same mysterious difficulties, and stare at something that no explanation seems capable of removing.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Hawking made these claims at Google’s Zeitgeist conference in 2011. See ‘Stephen Hawking tells Google “philosophy is dead”’ in *The Telegraph*, 17th May 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/google/8520033/Stephen-Hawking-tells-Google-philosophy-is-dead.html> (accessed 24th Oct. 2016)

¹⁶¹ Wittgenstein, L. *Big Typescript*, pp. 423-424 (page 312e of *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, German-English Scholars’ Edition, Edited and translated by C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

It could be claimed that progress, of a sort, has been made in philosophy but that some philosophers and scientists have failed to recognise it as such. In his later work Wittgenstein laid out some of the confusions that have troubled philosophers over the centuries and contrasted their confused formulations with ‘surveyable representations’ of the problematic expressions. Surveyable representations clarify the meaning of expressions that are causing confusion, showing the way in which the relevant expression is ordinarily used, and perhaps contrasting it with other similar expressions or giving examples of conceptual connections with other expressions – whatever helps to reduce confusion and produce clarity and understanding. One example of this is Wittgenstein’s discussion of the concept of ‘knowledge’ (discussed above, in section 1.2.3). Elsewhere he dissolves problems from the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus ‘Can one step into the same river twice?’¹⁶², clarifies a centuries old question from Augustine, ‘how is it possible to measure time?’¹⁶³, describes the correct use of words like ‘know’, ‘believe’, ‘certainty’ and ‘doubt’ in dissolving sceptical problems¹⁶⁴, discusses problems resulting from thinking of sensations as private¹⁶⁵, as well as many other philosophical problems from over the past centuries.

Whereas progress in science consists in making empirical discoveries and devising ever more powerful theories, progress in philosophy consists in clarification of concepts which are causing puzzlement and does not involve constructing theories at all. Philosophy should not be blamed for failing to uncover or discover truths about our brains since that is the task of biology and of neuroscience. What philosophers can do is clarify concepts employed in neuroscientific and psychological research (and in other areas of scientific and social scientific research) and thus help to formulate appropriate questions and to ensure that the results of research are expressed clearly. As Bennett and Hacker say in *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, philosophy’s task, “is to clarify the conceptual scheme in terms of which our knowledge is articulated. Its achievements are its contribution to our reflective understanding of the logical structure of our thought and knowledge about the world. It cannot contribute to

¹⁶² Wittgenstein, L. *Typescript 220*, §111

¹⁶³ Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 26.

¹⁶⁴ Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §246.

knowledge about the brain, and it should not be expected to. Philosophers are not closet scientists...”¹⁶⁶.

People like Semir Zeki, Paul Churchland, and Stephen Hawking are confused if they think that philosophy is to be blamed for failing to solve problems that science might solve, since philosophy is of a different nature to the natural sciences. We hope for increases in our knowledge and improvements in theory from science; discarding falsehoods and accumulating truths along the way. However, we cannot hope for such things from philosophy because philosophy is not a cognitive discipline. It aims at developing our understanding rather than contributing to our knowledge of the universe and the natural world. Its progress can be measured in terms of problems that have been clarified rather than in terms of knowledge gained.

As for psychology, Churchland is confused if he thinks that it can be replaced by neuroscience¹⁶⁷. Our ordinary psychological expressions do not constitute a theory, although various theories might be formulated employing psychological expressions. Churchland’s position involves various paradoxes (philosophical or conceptual problems). For one thing he cannot fault ‘folk psychology’ for failing to explain memory or the ways in which learning transforms us if he is correct in thinking that psychological expressions should be eliminated, since psychological expressions are employed in formulating the problems¹⁶⁸. Given that our ordinary concepts are not a theory we cannot expect theoretical progress from them although we might expect some kind of progress from theories that employ psychological terms – from psychological theory – and it is indeed the case that empirical theories in psychology have advanced¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 404.

¹⁶⁷ In Chapter 6 I will look in more depth at problems with eliminativism – the philosophical approach of Paul Churchland and Patricia Churchland.

¹⁶⁸ See Bennett, M. R. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, p.376-7 where they develop this criticism of Churchland and present other similar criticisms. There are detailed objections to both Zeki and Churchland on pp. 366-377 and 396-407 of *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*.

¹⁶⁹ See Bennett, M. R. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, p. 373 for a discussion of progress in psychology.

Psychology cannot be reduced to neuroscience and nor is it similar to sciences like physics in the way that some psychologists have thought. For example, Wolfgang Köhler thought that psychology in the present day was like physics in its infancy. Physics had succeeded in moving from qualitative observations to quantitative measurement and psychology can hope to do the same, he thought¹⁷⁰. But Wittgenstein objected that, “[t]he confusion and barrenness of psychology is not to be explained by its being a ‘young science’; its state is not comparable with physics, for instance, in its beginnings... For in psychology, there are experimental methods *and conceptual confusion...*”¹⁷¹. The ‘objects’ of psychology - mental states, events, and processes - are not hidden to others and only observable in their effects, like electrons. As Wittgenstein observed, we can *see* (at least sometimes) that someone is sad¹⁷² or that they are fearful¹⁷³ or in pain¹⁷⁴. However, none of this implies that psychology is not a science at all. Psychology can be said to have an empirical subject matter, to engage in systematic gathering and accumulation of knowledge, and psychologists might engage in experiments and gather data from those experiments.

Similar things might be said about other social disciplines. Given that they are not reducible to natural sciences, that they employ different kinds of methods and different kinds of explanations, we should not expect exactly the same kind of progress from them. However, political scientists, economists, human geographers, anthropologists and sociologists *do* add to our stock of knowledge; these disciplines *can* be said to have an empirical subject matter, to aim at truth, to gather data and to make useful generalisations from that data.

¹⁷⁰ See chapter 2 of Köhler, W. *Gestalt Psychology*, Liveright: New York, 1929.

¹⁷¹ Wittgenstein, L. ‘Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment’ in *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, §371.

¹⁷² Wittgenstein, L. *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. 1, ed. G. H. Von Wright and H. Nyman, tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, Blackwell: Oxford, 1982, §767.

¹⁷³ Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. 1, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, Blackwell: Oxford, 1980, §1066-8.

¹⁷⁴ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §246.

1.6 Conclusion

In the preceding sections of this chapter I have presented arguments in favour of saying that social sciences are not *reducible* to natural sciences, that they involve different kinds of *explanations* to the natural sciences (i.e. explanations of action in terms of reasons, motives and goals), that the *methodologies* involved in social sciences are at least sometimes different to those employed in the natural sciences, and that the kind of progress that might be expected in social sciences differs from the kind of progress that might be expected in natural sciences (and progress in social sciences amounts to something different than progress in philosophy).

In their book *There is No Such Thing as a Social Science* Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Read, and Wes Sharrock argue that due to these considerations about reductionism etc. there is no such thing as a social science. In the introduction to the book they consider the possibility that the analytical rigour of social studies, the responsiveness to evidence in social studies, and the willingness to learn from other modes of enquiry found amongst those studying the social realm might be reasons to call social studies *social sciences*. However, they reject this on the grounds that neither of these considerations is sufficient for calling something a science.

In contrast to Hutchinson, Read and Sharrock, I want to stand by the claim that social sciences are indeed scientific – that there is such a thing as a social science. Although the kinds of considerations alluded to by Hutchison, Read and Sharrock are not individually sufficient to call something a science they might nonetheless be jointly sufficient (or it may be that together with other considerations they are jointly sufficient). One reason to claim that social studies are, or at least can be, scientific is that calling something ‘scientific’ plays a role in legitimising that discipline. As John Dupré has recently pointed out, the term ‘unscientific’ is used as a term of criticism¹⁷⁵ and we live in a world where social sciences and humanities come under attack from

¹⁷⁵ Dupré, J. ‘Social Science: City Center or Leafy Suburb’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, May 2016, pp. 8-9. Dupré asks “Is there...anything in principle unscientific about the delineation of the rules that exist in a particular society?” and answers “I cannot see why. Language is profoundly normative, but this does not make the science of linguistics impossible.”

governments for being unscientific¹⁷⁶. The mere fact that social sciences are unlike natural sciences in various ways does not imply that they are illegitimate courses of study or that they are any less valuable than the natural sciences. Psychologists, economists, anthropologists, sociologists and human geographers uncover truths and increase our knowledge of human society. Understanding ourselves as human beings and being able to make progress in the way that we relate to each other as economic, political and social beings are all immensely important.

F. R. Leavis, mentioned in the introduction above, emphasised the importance of social studies. One point that he made was that the objects of study in social studies are in a sense *prior* to studies in the natural sciences:

...there is a prior human achievement of collaborative creation, a more basic work of the mind of man (and more than the mind), one without which the triumphant erection of the scientific edifice would not have been possible: that is the creation of the human world, including language¹⁷⁷.

Leavis thought that the study of the human world, including language, was immensely important for various reasons. Social disciplines can work in conjunction with natural sciences by helping to decide the ends which (largely instrumental) natural sciences aim at. Thinking carefully about human ends and more generally about what makes human lives significant, meaningful, happy, and rich as well as about how to bring about rich, interesting, happy human lives is the work of social sciences and the scientism of C. P. Snow, that Leavis was responding to, does not recognise the importance of this. Simply aiming at a 'rising standard of living', as Snow did, fails to engage with questions about what makes life worth living. So, social disciplines are to be called 'sciences' partly because they are important and so *worthy* of the title.

Another consideration in favour of calling social disciplines 'sciences' is that practitioners within these disciplines, for the most part, consider what they are doing to be science of sorts. In his recent book *The Puzzle of Modern Economics: Science or*

¹⁷⁶ See, for example, 'The war against humanities at Britain's universities' in *The Guardian*, 29th March 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/29/war-against-humanities-at-britains-universities> accessed 26th September 2016.

¹⁷⁷ Leavis, F. R. 'Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow (1962)' in *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* with Introduction by Stefan Collini, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 73-4.

Ideology? Roger Backhouse defends the idea the economics is a science despite recognising that economics differs from natural sciences in many ways¹⁷⁸. Similarly, the economist Ha-Joon Chang considers his discipline to be a science despite recognising that “economics can never be a science in the sense that physics or chemistry is”¹⁷⁹. Psychologists also very often talk about their discipline as a science. Recent introductions to psychology include *Thinking About Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*¹⁸⁰, and *Understanding Psychology as a Science*¹⁸¹. Universities throughout the world have faculties of social science incorporating departments of anthropology, economics, business, politics, psychology, sociology, and human geography (and, less often, departments of history and/or philosophy). It is fair to say that calling social disciplines ‘sciences’ is the way that we ordinarily talk about them. A divergence from ordinary use requires more than just showing that social disciplines differ from natural sciences in significant ways, since this is recognised by many of those who quite happily talk about social sciences¹⁸².

So, I conclude that social sciences *deserve* to be called sciences because they are empirical, knowledge producing, disciplines which, done properly, involve analytical rigour and responsiveness to evidence. Here I take social sciences to include economics, sociology, anthropology, human geography, politics, linguistics and sociology.

However, there are some disciplines which do not fit easily into either the natural or social sciences. Philosophy is one of them. As Wittgenstein pointed out, many of the problems of philosophy are the upshot of confusion about concepts and the way to tackle those problems is not to look at empirical evidence but to get clear about the problematic concepts. Literature and literary studies are also disciplines

¹⁷⁸ Backhouse, R. *The Puzzle of Modern Economics: Science or Ideology?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Chang, H-J. *Economics: The User’s Guide*, London: Pelican Books, 2014, p. 5.

¹⁸⁰ Blair-Broeker, C. T., Ernst, R. M. and Myers, D. G. *Thinking About Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behavior*, Worth Publishers, 2007.

¹⁸¹ Dienes, Z. *Understanding Psychology as a Science: An introduction to scientific and statistical inference*, Palgrave-Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2008.

¹⁸² The British Wittgenstein conference at which John Dupré presented the paper I have mentioned was given the title ‘Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences’ (see <http://www.britishwittgensteinsociety.org/news/annual-conference/20-2>, accessed 22/10/2016).

which are of great value but which do not fit comfortably in either of those categories. There is such a thing as a social science but we should be careful to keep an eye on differences between the various scientific disciplines and not assimilate them in ways that lead to confusion¹⁸³

In this chapter my intention was to establish that philosophy, as understood by Wittgenstein, is a discipline which undertakes grammatical investigations in order to dissolve philosophical problems and to distinguish it from social and natural sciences. In the next chapter I will discuss another topic which has particularly vexed social and political philosophers, the problem of relativism. Getting clear about this problem helps to get clearer about Wittgenstein's relation to social and political philosophy and also helps us to see that Wittgenstein's philosophy has some implications for the way that political philosophers should understand their work. I will ask whether Wittgenstein himself was a relativist and also ask whether some form of relativism is credible.

¹⁸³ Interestingly, even Hutchinson, Read and Sharrock suggest that it doesn't matter whether social studies get called social sciences "...so long as one keeps a clear view of what is thus named, and what its character is", *ibid.* p. 51.

Chapter 2 - Wittgenstein and Relativism

2.1 Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein has been accused of being a relativist by various philosophers. In this chapter I will focus particularly on accusations of cognitive relativism levelled at Wittgenstein by Roger Trigg. Accusations of relativism, of various sorts, have been thought to undermine Wittgenstein's philosophical approach¹⁸⁴. However, others, such as Hans-Johann Glock, Robert Arrington, and Gordon Baker have found relativism in Wittgenstein's work and thought that it is a benign or even a positive feature of his philosophy¹⁸⁵. Still others argue that Wittgenstein is not a relativist at all¹⁸⁶. In this chapter I will start by looking at the various forms of relativism and then go on to consider whether Wittgenstein can be placed in one or another of the relativistic camps and throughout the chapter I will look at the credibility of various forms of relativism.

2.2 Varieties of Relativism

In her masterly critical overview of varieties of relativism Maria Baghramian distinguishes three broad categories of "cognitive, moral and aesthetic relativism"

¹⁸⁴ For example, Trigg suggests that Wittgenstein's relativism amounts to an "...implicit attack on the possibility of unprejudiced reason, the removal of the possibility of truth as a standard - ...a direct onslaught on the very possibility of rationality" (Trigg, R. 'Wittgenstein and Social Science' in A. Phillips Griffiths (ed.) *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.209-222 1991: 218). Ernest Gellner has also claimed that Wittgenstein subscribes to a pernicious form of relativism in various places (see, for example, Gellner, E. *Language and Solitude*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 5, 72, 75-77, 95, 119, 145, 177, 191).

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, Hans-Johann Glock's *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 22, 32, 48-50, 110 and his 'Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability' in Preston, J. (ed.) *Wittgenstein and Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008 pp.21-46 (originally published in Vol. 20, No. 4 of *Ratio*) as well as Robert Arrington's defence of a form of conceptual relativism, inspired by Wittgenstein in *Rationalism, Realism and Relativism*, Cornell University Press, 1989. Gordon Baker's take on the 'relativism' present in Wittgenstein's work is different to that of Arrington and Glock and is discussed in 'Philosophical Investigations Section 122: neglected aspects' in R. Arrington and H-J Glock (eds.) *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: Text and Context*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 35-68. Peg O'Connor rejects metaethical relativism and absolutism but holds onto the view that there is a "framework or context to which judgements are relative" (*Morality and our Complicated Form of Life*, p. 141).

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, John Gunnell's *Social Inquiry After Wittgenstein & Kuhn*, where Gunnell suggests that Wittgenstein can be absolved of accusations of relativism because "relativism is a philosophical abstraction and invention..." (p.3) and that "[r]elativism is not really a position at all" (p.30).

Within cognitive relativism she distinguishes between *alethic* relativism (relativism about truth), relativism about *rationality*, and relativism about *knowledge-claims* (epistemic relativism)¹⁸⁷. She then makes further distinctions, between subjective, social/cultural, and conceptual relativism, according to what it is that the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic values are being relativized to (psychological states of individual agents, social and cultural conditions, and conceptual schemes respectively)¹⁸⁸. So, for example, there might be a form of alethic relativism in which truth is relativized to individuals or one where truth is relativized to a social group. In fact, this is the way in which Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont have defined relativism; as the claim that “the truth or falsity of a statement is relative to an individual or social group”¹⁸⁹.

Baghramian’s taxonomy suggests that Sokal and Bricmont’s definition is too narrow in excluding other forms of relativism and, as Hans-Johann Glock has suggested, their definition excludes more credible forms of relativism¹⁹⁰. Alethic relativism lacks credibility because it leads to ontological relativism, the idea that what is real is relative. Glock explains why this is so in his ‘Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability’ where he presents “two truisms about truth and falsehood:

- (i) That witches exist is true \leftrightarrow witches exist
- (ii) That witches exist is false \leftrightarrow witches do not exist”

Given the truth of these truisms and the relativist’s claim that what is true is true relative to a society it would have to be that witches exist for one society ‘A’ (a society that accepts or believes that witches exist) but not for another ‘B’ (a society that does not accept or believe that witches exist). If that were the case then the two societies must inhabit different worlds but, as Glock comments, this “...is surely absurd. Among other things, it makes it difficult to explain how members of B-type societies could have been so successful at exploiting, oppressing and killing members of A-type societies. Are we to suppose, for example, that the bullets which colonial troops

¹⁸⁷ Baghramian, M. *Relativism*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2004, p. 6.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁹ Bricmont, J. and Sokal, A. *Intellectual Impostures*, London: Profile, 1998, pp. 50-1.

¹⁹⁰ Glock, H J, ‘Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability’, in *Wittgenstein and Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, pp. 22-25.

fired...managed to traverse an ontological gap before they hit their targets”¹⁹¹. But the fact that alethic and ontological relativism lack credibility does not mean that other forms of relativism are not credible, since excluding these options still leaves conceptual relativism concerning various kinds of values available.

2.3 Wittgenstein and Relativism

2.3.1 Wittgenstein and cognitive relativism

Wittgenstein is accused of cognitive relativism by Roger Trigg, who claims that “[t]he refusal to distinguish between the subject and object of knowledge, the implicit attack on the possibility of unprejudiced reason, the removal of the possibility of truth as a standard – all of this adds up to a direct onslaught on the very possibility of rationality [in Wittgenstein’s work]”¹⁹². The reason for which Trigg thinks that Wittgenstein’s philosophy removes the possibility of truth as standard is unclear but he claims that in Wittgenstein’s work “[r]eason...cannot be wrenched apart from [language games] so as to pass judgment from the standpoint of some contextless and external realm of truth”¹⁹³, that “...where language-games and forms of life as such are concerned no room is left for the notions of truth and falsity”¹⁹⁴ and that according to Wittgenstein “...beliefs held within a way of life cannot claim any truth which ought to be accepted by non-participants.”¹⁹⁵

However, it is at best unclear why we should need to be able to pass judgement from the standpoint of an “external realm of truth” in order to say things that are true or false or in order to reason. Indeed, it is unclear what an ‘external realm of truth’ might be. While it is true that Wittgenstein does not think that language games are true or false¹⁹⁶ that does not mean that nothing is. It is the things we say that are true

¹⁹¹ Ibid. pp.23-24.

¹⁹² Trigg, R. ‘Wittgenstein and Social Science’, pp. 218-19

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 215.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 216.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 217.

¹⁹⁶ What sense can be made of claiming that ‘giving orders’, (an example of a language game from *Philosophical Investigations* §23) for example, is true?

or false not the form of life or the language in which those things are said. This is a grammatical reminder about how we apply the term 'true'. What Wittgenstein says in one of the relevant passages cited by Trigg is this:

'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?' – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* that they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.¹⁹⁷

Here Wittgenstein is clear that he does not think that human agreement decides what is true and what is false. What is true is *not* necessarily what the community or individual says is true. Wittgenstein is clearly not claiming that truth is relative to a conceptual scheme, or to a form of life. As Peter Hacker points out, "It is not truth that is relative to conceptual schemes, but – pleonastically – concepts. Differences between conceptual schemes result not in relative truth but in incommensurable truth...."¹⁹⁸. Different communities might employ different concepts and it may be that truths expressible in a language used by one community cannot be translated into the language used by another community but this does not imply that there is any disagreement between the communities over *truth*. An example used by Hacker to illustrate this point is a community whose members are all afflicted by Daltonism (red-green colour blindness). They could have a single colour word that applies to what we call red, green and grey things. In that case they could truthfully say that "poppies, grass and clouds are the same colour..." but they could not translate our true assertion that "poppies differ in colour from grass". Both claims are true, and not true-relative-to-a-community. Disagreement of concepts does not generate *alethic* relativism, i.e. relativism about truth¹⁹⁹.

¹⁹⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §241, cited on p. 211, Trigg, R. 'Wittgenstein and Social Science'.

¹⁹⁸ Hacker, P. M. S. 'On Davidson's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 184 (Jul. 1996), p. 303.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 304.

Indeed, as Hans-Johann Glock points out²⁰⁰, Wittgenstein says things about truth, both in his early and late work, which are incompatible with alethic relativism. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, where he says that, “[i]f an elementary proposition is true, the state of affairs exists: if an elementary proposition is false, the state of affairs does not exist”²⁰¹ Wittgenstein presents an obtainment theory of truth. In his later work Wittgenstein presents us with what might be called a form of deflationism²⁰², although given that Wittgenstein did not want to advance any kind of theory or explanation and that he wanted to simply describe our language – i.e. to remind us of relevant norms of representation – this should not be taken as an attribution of a theory of truth to Wittgenstein. In his later work he simply describes our ordinary use of the term ‘true’ with the aim of dissolving philosophical problems. In both cases, as Glock says, “the fact that a proposition is true neither entails nor is entailed by the fact that the proposition is being stated or believed (etc.) to be true by someone, or that it would be useful to believe it, etc.”²⁰³. What this means is that truth is not relative either to the psychological states of individuals or to communities. To say that beliefs can be either true or false is to make a grammatical claim about truth. Somebody believing something does not imply that the thing believed is true and nor does a whole community believing something imply that it is true. As Peter Hacker says, “What is said, when something is said in a language, is true if things are as they are said to be, and there is nothing relative about that”²⁰⁴.

Wittgenstein recognises that alternative forms of representation are possible in the case of things like measuring and counting. Different practices relating to different needs and interests might result in different concepts. We do not need to look to invented ‘language games’ in order to come up with examples. One case is the

²⁰⁰ Glock, H. J. ‘Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability’ in John Preston (ed.) *Wittgenstein and Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, p. 24.

²⁰¹ Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge, 1961, 4.25.

²⁰² See for example *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Appendix III, §6 (p. 117) where Wittgenstein asks, “For what does a proposition’s ‘being true’ mean? ‘*p*’ is true = *p*. (That is the answer)” and also *Philosophical Investigations* §136.

²⁰³ Glock, H. J. ‘Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability’ in John Preston (ed.) *Wittgenstein and Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, p. 24.

²⁰⁴ Hacker, P. M. S. ‘On Davidson’s Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 184 (July 1996), p. 303.

medieval practice of measuring by the ell, which is the length of a person's arm. Cloth was measured in ells until the early 19th century and the ell was never standardized in England. Given that people's arms vary in length it is clear that this system of measurement and the associated practices are different from our own practices of measurement in the present day. This might lead one to believe that Wittgenstein's position was that anything goes, that we could adopt different norms of representation in any area, as we like.

However, Wittgenstein does say that adopting different rules can be 'practical' or 'impractical'²⁰⁵ and we should remember that our concepts are interrelated in such a way that we cannot alter one without altering others. Laws of logic are closely linked to notions like 'reasoning', 'thinking', 'proposition', and 'language' and so practices that do not conform to them "would be unintelligible to us, and would not count as language"²⁰⁶. This suggests that Trigg is wrong to attribute a radical relativism about rationality or truth to Wittgenstein.

Peg O'Connor talks about other kinds of limitations on altering frameworks or norms. She says that we cannot move from framework to framework at will: "...we cannot simply just move away from the spatiotemporal framework of the planet Earth or the solar system...These frameworks do provide limitations. Similarly, I cannot of my own free will jump from the human form of life to the form of life of a lion." The language games we use and the frameworks we inhabit are not freely chosen²⁰⁷.

2.3.2 Was Wittgenstein a relativist?

However, the fact that Wittgenstein was not committed to alethic, ontological, or cognitive relativism in the forms attributed to him by critics does not imply that he was not a relativist at all. As noted above, Peter Hacker suggests that Wittgenstein was committed to the view that *concepts* are relative to conceptual schemes and that conceptual schemes might differ according to the forms of life they are intertwined

²⁰⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932-1935*, from the notes of A. Ambrose and M. Macdonald, ed. A. Ambrose, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979, p. 70.

²⁰⁶ Glock, H. J. *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 49-50.

²⁰⁷ O'Connor, P. *Morality and our Complicated Form of Life*, p. 155.

with. Similarly, Hans-Johann Glock tells us that Wittgenstein was committed to a form of conceptual relativism, namely the view that “...the conceptual framework we use is not simply dictated to us by reality or experience; in adopting or constructing such frameworks there are different options which cannot be assessed as more or less rational from a neutral bird’s eye view”²⁰⁸ and Robert Arrington, in his book *Rationalism, Realism, and Relativism* describes his own form of moral epistemology (inspired by Wittgenstein) as conceptual relativism²⁰⁹ and by this he means that “moral claims are made relative to our concept of morality”²¹⁰. Arrington also makes it clear that he thinks that this kind of conceptual relativism applies to claims beyond the moral sphere as well, to common sense and to scientific beliefs²¹¹.

There is evidence in the work of Wittgenstein that he did indeed adhere to the claims attributed to him by Hacker, Glock, and Arrington (amongst others). So, for example, in the *Philosophical Grammar* Wittgenstein says that “[g]rammar is not accountable to any reality. It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning...”²¹²; in other words, our conceptual scheme is not in some way forced on us by reality and it does not make sense to say that our conceptual scheme is justified by the way things are. Elsewhere, in the collection of remarks published as *Zettel* Wittgenstein says “Why, don’t I call cookery rules arbitrary, and why am I tempted to call the rules of grammar arbitrary? Because cooking is defined by its end whereas ‘speaking’ is not... if you follow grammatical rules other than such-and-such ones that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else”²¹³. What this means is that because the end of cooking is identifiable independently of the rules for cooking (i.e.

²⁰⁸ Glock, H. J. ‘Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability’, p. 25.

²⁰⁹ See pp. 248-315 of Arrington, R. *Rationalism, Realism, and Relativism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p. 257. Arrington also makes it clear that he does *not* commit himself to the view that “what is right and wrong is so relative to our standards of morality” (p. 255).

²¹¹ Arrington says that “...all empirical judgements are relative to the concepts governing their constituent terms... empirical judgements in common sense and science are as non-objective as moral judgements.” – Ibid. p. 262.

²¹² Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, p. 184.

²¹³ Wittgenstein, L. *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. Von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, §320.

edible food) it can be used to evaluate the rules used whereas in the case of concepts the rules in question serve to identify their goals. So, for example, we cannot justify colour concepts or the grammatical rules concerning colour by reference to the way the world is. One reason is that it makes no sense to talk of justifying concepts and another is that the grammatical rules for colour expressions tell us what colour is and what the colours are and so are presupposed by any claim about colour that might be used in an attempt to justify something.

With regard to forms of life Wittgenstein says that “...the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” and that “[w]hat has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life*”²¹⁴. These passages serve as reminders that our concepts are grafted onto pre-linguistic behaviour, such as wincing and crying, and also that our language is tied up with other forms of activity which are involved in learning and explaining those concepts and so are internally related to what we mean when we say something. The second passage cited above is again a grammatical reminder that our forms of life are not justified, and indeed nothing would count as justifying them. That is not to say that we cannot criticize certain ways of living or that any one form of life is the only one possible, but only that we cannot justify what lies at the bottom of our conceptual framework (i.e. a form of life). Justification goes on within a conceptual framework and so presupposes it²¹⁵.

Hacker, Glock, and Arrington are not the only Wittgenstein scholars to find relativism in Wittgenstein’s work and think it a benign or even positive feature of his work. Gordon Baker argues that “Wittgenstein seems to have been subscribing to a form of relativism which most of his would-be followers reject”²¹⁶. However, the form of relativism that Baker thinks Wittgenstein subscribed to is one that Hacker, Glock

²¹⁴ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, eds. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (4th edition), Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, §23, PPF 345 (also see §19, §241 (the passage cited by Trigg, mentioned above), as well as *Philosophy of Psychology, a Fragment* (PPF) 1). For an overview of the different occurrences of ‘forms of life’ in the Wittgenstein papers, see Venturinha, N. ‘Introduction’ in António Marques and Nuno Venturinha (eds.) *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life and the Nature of Experience*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 13-19.

²¹⁵ Wittgenstein’s claim that “[w]hat has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life*” (PPF xi 345) has sometimes been presented as evidence of his conservatism. I will discuss this in chapter 5 in the section about Terry Eagleton’s interpretation of Wittgenstein.

²¹⁶ Baker, G. ‘*Philosophical Investigations* section 122: neglected aspects’, p. 59.

and Arrington object to. According to Baker Wittgenstein thinks that there are various 'modes of representation' which each reveal aspects of the grammar of our words. These each represent different ways of seeing things (so, for example, (i) the Augustinian conception of language discussed at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* and (ii) the proposal that the meaning of a word is its use²¹⁷ are examples of different modes of representation). Whereas Hacker, Glock and Arrington think that Wittgenstein was critical of the *positions* of traditional philosophers and that he *argued* against their positions (e.g. referentialism, behaviourism, Cartesian dualism, Platonism), Gordon Baker thinks that these different modes of representation can each be used to clear away the philosophical vexation of different particular philosophers on particular occasions. Whereas Hacker, Glock, and Arrington think of Wittgenstein as disputing the work of other philosophers by pointing out inconsistencies or lack of sense in the things they say Baker thinks of Wittgenstein's work more as therapeutic. I will return to the dispute between Baker and other Wittgenstein scholars in section 2.4 below.

Given the evidence of some kind of relativism in Wittgenstein's work and the plausible development of Wittgenstein's claims by various Wittgenstein scholars it seems reasonable to claim that Wittgenstein was a kind of relativist, namely a conceptual relativist, but is conceptual relativism a credible form of relativism?

2.3.3 Davidson's challenge to conceptual relativism

The most prominent critic of conceptual relativism in recent times is Donald Davidson. In his article 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme'²¹⁸ Davidson argues that conceptual relativism is incoherent, that we cannot make sense of the idea of completely untranslatable schemes, and also argues that we cannot even make sense of the idea of partial untranslatability of conceptual schemes.

Davidson defines conceptual relativism in such a way that reality is relative to a scheme and different schemes are possible: "what counts as real in one system may

²¹⁷ See Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §43.

²¹⁸ Davidson, D. 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 47 (1973-1974), pp. 5-20.

not in another”²¹⁹. He argues against conceptual relativism by a series of moves. First of all, he objects to the analytic-synthetic distinction as it is found in the work of Kant, the logical positivists, and Peter Strawson. This distinction, he argues, has been undermined by Quine’s considerations in his paper ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’²²⁰ and by Kuhn and Feyerabend’s arguments against meaning invariance, which Davidson suggests result in the observation that “[m]eaning...is contaminated by theory, by what is held to be true”²²¹. Davidson then argues that once the analytic-synthetic distinction is undermined a form of conceptual relativism becomes tempting. Kuhn and Feyerabend’s considerations lead us to the view that changes in science do not just involve rejecting some false statements and accepting some other statements as true. With new theories come new concepts, for example the concepts of space and time are different in the physics of Newton and Einstein’s physics: “what...[speakers of a language] come to accept, in accepting a sentence as true, is not the same thing that they rejected when formerly they held a sentence to be false”²²². As science advances new conceptual schemes emerge that are incommensurable with the old ones. However, Davidson objects to the kind of conceptual relativism found in the work of Kuhn and Feyerabend on the grounds that “retention of some or all of the old vocabulary in itself provides no basis for judging the new scheme to be the same as, or different from, the old” since for all Davidson (or anyone else) knows, the new concepts introduced by a theory might play the role of the old ones²²³.

Davidson also considers and rejects forms of conceptual relativism that talk about schemes being related to the world or to experience where the schemes are said to *organize* the *world* or *experience*. He points out that it makes no sense to talk about organizing a single thing (the world/experience) just as it makes no sense to speak about organizing a wardrobe as opposed to organizing the various things within it²²⁴.

²¹⁹ Ibid. p. 5.

²²⁰ Quine, W. V. O. ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, *Philosophical Review*, 60 (1951): pp. 20-43.

²²¹ Davidson, D. ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, p. 9

²²² Ibid. p. 10.

²²³ Ibid. pp. 10-11

²²⁴ Ibid. p. 14.

Having considered and rejected these forms of conceptual relativism Davidson considers a form of conceptual relativism where conceptual schemes are said to *fit* or *face* experience. In this case a ‘theory’ (an expression Davidson uses interchangeably with ‘language’ and ‘scheme’) fits experience “provided it is borne out by the evidence”²²⁵. But for a theory to fit the evidence is just for it to be *true*, according to Davidson, and the notions of ‘fitting’ or ‘facing’ the world/experience do not add anything to the claim that the theory is *true*. Davidson adds to this that he thinks that the best way of thinking about truth is in terms of Tarski’s theory of truth, according to which,

...a satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence *s* of L, a theorem of the form “*s* is true if and only if *p*” where “*s*” is replaced by a description of *s* and “*p*” by *s* itself if L is English and by a translation into English if L is not English.²²⁶

The language here is slightly obscure but the kind of sentences and corresponding ‘theorems’ Tarski had in mind are cases like the following:

Sentence *s* “Snow is white”;

corresponding theorem “‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white.”.

Davidson thinks about conceptual schemes in terms of intertranslatable languages²²⁷ (because different languages share the same concepts, e.g. “Il pleut” (French) means the same as “it is raining” (English)), and given the fact that Tarski’s theory of truth makes essential reference to translation and the fact that the model of conceptual schemes under consideration makes essential reference to truth, Davidson thinks that we cannot make sense of the idea of a true theory/conceptual scheme that is untranslatable. As a result, Davidson concludes that the model of conceptual schemes where schemes are said to fit or face reality is not one we can make sense of either.

²²⁵ Ibid. p. 15.

²²⁶ Ibid. p. 17.

²²⁷ Davidson, D. ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, p. 7.

2.3.4 Problems with Davidson's arguments

However, there are various problems with Davidson's route to his conclusion. In the first place his early moves in the argument are a series of non-sequiturs. One can be committed to a version of the analytic-synthetic distinction without having to be committed to meaning invariance or to Kantian, logical positivist, or Strawsonian versions of the distinction. Agreeing with Kuhn and Feyerabend that concepts change and that those changes have ramifications does not obviously imply giving up a distinction between specifications of the meaning of a term and specifications of theoretical truths²²⁸ and, as Hans-Johann Glock argues, one can make a distinction between conceptual scheme and empirical content without committing oneself to the kind of models Davidson considers, i.e. those that present the division in terms of scheme and raw material (the world or experience), by recognizing the division as one that is drawn within language, between grammatical claims and empirical ones. Glock points out that drawing the distinction in this way does not involve the kind of objectionable commitments that Davidson and Quine mention, i.e. "...mentalistic metaphors, psychologistic doctrines or the empiricist myth of the given"²²⁹. So, Davidson's conclusion, that the analytic-synthetic distinction must be jettisoned does not follow from the arguments that he employs. Davidson may well be correct that Kuhn and Feyerabend's conception of conceptual schemes is untenable but he has not demonstrated rejecting their view leaves us with only the model of scheme-fitting/facing-experience as a plausible option.

Both Glock and Hacker also object to the way in which Davidson uses the term 'theory' interchangeably with 'language' and 'conceptual scheme' when he talks about what it is that fits or faces the world/experience. It is true that the boundaries between theoretical discourse and non-theoretical or pre-theoretical discourse are imprecise (and that they shift) and it may well be that expressions used in formulating theories change as the relevant theories change. However, it does not follow from this that there is no clear distinction between language and theory. If we look at the grammar of the expressions 'language' and 'theory' we can see that there are clear

²²⁸ See Hacker, P. M. S. 'On Davidson's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', p. 295.

²²⁹ Glock, H-J. 'Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability', p. 31.

differences in their use. It makes sense to talk about a theory being true (or largely true) or about theoretical claims being true but it is nonsensical to say that a language (such as English or Portuguese) is true or largely true. Things we say in English or Portuguese might be true or false but nothing counts as a language being true or false. One attempt to make sense of the idea of a language being true or false might be to think of it as the totality of sentences or things we say but in that case for every true claim made we could also construct its negation in the same language and there are also interrogatives, orders, expressions of wishes, and so on (which cannot be said to be true). If we take the shift from Newtonian physics to Einsteinian physics as a case of changing conceptual schemes then it is clear that there is a difference between scheme and language or theory and language since both of the theories/schemes can be formulated in the same language and yet be different theories/schemes²³⁰. While it may be true that it is difficult to determine whether some statements are theoretical or not there are clear cut cases of non-theoretical statements and non-theoretical uses of language, e.g. 'let's go and sit in the park', 'did I leave the oven on?', and 'I want my toy!'.

One case where the distinction between (empirical) theoretical statements and statements specifying the meaning of the term becomes problematic is a case mentioned in Davidson's essay – that of *truth*. Davidson presents Tarski's work on truth as a *theory* and yet his argument depends on there being an *essential* connection between truth and translation, suggesting that he is thinking of Tarski's comments about truth as being definitional, i.e. specifying the meaning of the term 'truth'. However, as Peter Hacker points out, "Tarski's Convention T, far from providing an accurate description of the way the word 'true' is used, is flagrantly at odds with it. 'True' is not a metalinguistic predicate. Truth is not a metalinguistic property of sentences since it is not a property of sentences at all". Hacker assembles various reminders of how we use the expressions 'sentence' and 'true' to show that it is *what is said* that can be true or false rather than what is used to say it, i.e. a sentence²³¹:

²³⁰ See Hacker, P. M. S. 'On Davidson's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', pp. 297-298 and Glock, H-J. 'Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability', p. 31.

²³¹ Ibid. p. 299-300.

What is said...is that p , and it is this, not the sentence that is used in saying it, that is true or false. Hence, since in saying that p one may be making something, namely, a statement, assertion or claim, and since what is made is individuated by its content, namely, that p , what is made – but not what is used to make it, i.e. a sentence – may likewise be true or false... a written sentence, but not the truth it is used to assert, can be erased with an eraser or can be turned upside down. But one cannot erase a truth or, save metaphorically, turn it upside down.

So, Tarski's 'Convention T' does not provide us with a definition of truth. Contra Davidson, Tarski's work does not embody "our best intuitions as to how the concept of truth is used"²³². Hans-Johann Glock makes this point clearer when he points out that "a Tarskian theory does not provide an explanation of 'true' at all. Instead it allows one to derive T-sentences which state the *conditions* under which sentences of L are true. But... it is one thing to explain what the English term 'true' means. It is another thing to specify under what conditions we would call individual sentences of L true"²³³.

So, Davidson's final move in his argument is unsuccessful since it hinges on Tarski's Convention T being an accurate account of how we use the term 'true'. The space for conceptual relativism as it is found in the later work of Wittgenstein is still available.

2.4 Is it correct to describe Wittgenstein as a relativist or as subscribing to a relativist theory?

In their book 'There is no Such Thing as a Social Science', Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Read, and Wes Sharrock argue that it is wrong to attribute theses or theories to Wittgenstein and that it is also wrong to attribute them to Peter Winch, a philosopher whose work was inspired by Wittgenstein. They say of Winch that he "had no theory"²³⁴ and that "[h]is message is not...really...any kind of relativism"²³⁵ and they

²³² Davidson, D. 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', p. 17.

²³³ Glock, H-J. 'Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability', p. 35.

²³⁴ Hutchinson, P., Read, R. and Sharrock, W. *There is No Such Thing as a Social Science*, Ashgate: Aldershot, 2008, p. 57.

say that a correct understanding of Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations*, specifically sections §§240-2, tells us that "it is absurd to imagine that philosophers can enunciate true statements, 'assertions', 'theses', which (would) settle the debate of 'rationalism against relativism...'"²³⁶. Hutchison, Read, and Sharrock are loath to attribute a theory to Wittgenstein or to (the Wittgensteinian) Winch, whereas people like Robert Arrington, discussed above, are willing to present cognitive relativism as a *theory* in competition with others within moral philosophy (and presumably in other areas of philosophy) and Hans-Johann Glock and Peter Hacker are content to describe Wittgenstein as a conceptual relativist.

As I said above, it is a mistake to suggest that Wittgenstein wanted to advance any kind of theory. Wittgenstein himself said that "...we may not advance any kind of theory [in philosophy]" and that "[i]f someone were to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them"²³⁷. So, it is surely a mistake for Robert Arrington to describe the Wittgensteinian observations about moral rules, judgements, and principles that Arrington calls 'conceptual relativism' as a *theory*. Wittgenstein saw philosophy as a descriptive enterprise rather than as a theoretical or explanatory one. As he says in his remarks about philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations* "All explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place."²³⁸ – The description in question being of the grammar of the words appearing in philosophical problems; of the use of words such as 'knowledge', 'being', and 'I'²³⁹. So, it seems that Hutchinson, Read, and Sharrock are correct to be wary of attributing a theory to Wittgenstein.

We could perhaps say similar things about ascribing a relativist *position* to Wittgenstein. Given that Wittgenstein was in the business of presenting us with grammatical reminders and that it was grammatical reminders that Hacker presented in combatting the views of Davidson (i.e. reminders about the use of 'sentence' and

²³⁵ Ibid. p. 56.

²³⁶ Ibid. p. 55.

²³⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §109 and §128 respectively.

²³⁸ Ibid., §109.

²³⁹ Ibid., §116.

'truth') it is fair to say that the 'position' he was combatting was little more than conceptual confusion – not a position at all - and that the supposedly theoretical remarks contained in Davidson's article (e.g. about Tarski's remarks on truth) were nothing of the sort. Similarly, we could say that the remarks Hacker assembled in combatting Davidson's position were not assertions or theses but grammatical reminders and so not staking out a position in an argument between competing theories. Another way of denying that Wittgenstein took up a position would be to adopt the interpretation of Wittgenstein found in Gordon Baker's work, mentioned above, and to think of Davidson's considerations as presenting one (or more) *aspect* of the use of the relevant terms (i.e. 'truth', 'relativism', etc.) and of Glock and Hacker as simply presenting another aspect of the use of the relevant terms. The set of considerations that we bring our attention to depends on our own philosophical vexations. We should consider those aspects that might help to bring us peace.

However, Hans-Johann Glock argues convincingly that the '*no position*'-position is implausible. One problem with the idea that Wittgensteinian philosophizing just involves 'grammatical aspect seeing' with the aim of bringing (philosophical) peace to some individual (i.e. a 'therapeutic' take on Wittgenstein, like Baker's) is that it does not allow for a distinction between achieving the goal by external means and achieving it by means internally related to the problem. Somebody might come to philosophical peace by receiving a blow to the head (external) or they might achieve philosophical peace through recognizing conceptual errors, or inconsistencies, in the problem as it has been presented to them (internal)²⁴⁰. In the case of Davidson, discussed above, there is an inconsistency between Davidson's claim that Tarski's account of truth accurately reflects the way 'true' is used and the way that 'true' is in fact used. Davidson's account can be described as a position because he takes a stand about the way certain words are used ('true', 'theory', etc.), which can be opposed with arguments. The case Glock and Hacker make against Davidson, in the manner of Wittgenstein, is an attempt to achieve philosophical peace through recognizing conceptual errors and correcting them and so is an attempt at philosophical peace by

²⁴⁰ See Glock, H-J. '*Philosophical Investigations* section 128: 'theses in philosophy' and undogmatic procedure' in R. Arrington and H-J Glock (eds.) *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: Text and Context*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 83-84.

internal means. Their arguments suggest that we should reject Davidson's take on the use of relevant expressions and should reject his conclusion about whether complete untranslatability of schemes makes sense.

John Gunnell, in his recent books about Wittgenstein and social theory has taken up an intermediate view between those outlined above. Whereas Gunnell is reluctant to describe relativism as a genuine position or theory, he does attribute a theoretical position to Wittgenstein. For example, in *Social Inquiry After Wittgenstein and Kuhn* Gunnell says that "...relativism is not actually a problem in social practices, ranging from science to everyday forms of life. It is a philosophical abstraction and invention..."²⁴¹ and yet he claims that "Wittgenstein's work constitutes a theoretical account of the nature of conventional phenomena"²⁴². Given the remarks above about relativism and theory we can say that there is something correct about Gunnell's argument that relativism is not a position but that he is wrong to attribute a theory to Wittgenstein.

2.5 Conclusion

Despite misgivings about calling Wittgenstein a relativist or attributing a theory to him, it is fair to say that the case made by the likes of Glock and Hacker against Davidson, given that it is made fully recognizing that Wittgenstein's work was non-theoretical, is relatively harmless in ascribing conceptual relativism to Wittgenstein, given that they are assembling reminders in order to dissolve confusions presented by Davidson as being problems with conceptual relativism. The methodology employed by Hacker and Glock is certainly in the spirit of Wittgenstein and they recognize that the reminders assembled do not constitute a theory. If Wittgenstein was a relativist at all (and I think it is reasonable to describe him as a conceptual relativist²⁴³) it is fair to

²⁴¹ Gunnell, J. *Social Inquiry After Wittgenstein and Kuhn*, Columbia University Press: New York, 2014, p. 3.

²⁴² Ibid. p. 7. Note: Gunnell makes this claim "...fully recognising his [Wittgenstein's] claim that he was not presenting a theory", p. 7.

²⁴³ Note: the definitions of 'conceptual relativism' presented by Glock and Arrington were given in section 2.3.2 of this chapter.

say that his relativism was a positive contribution to mapping out the conceptual terrain surrounding the grammar of terms like 'sentence', 'truth', and 'form of life'.

What is clear is that it is a mistake to accuse Wittgenstein of other forms of relativism. Wittgenstein was certainly not committed to ontological relativism, alethic relativism, or to cognitive relativism as Trigg describes it.

Part II

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Does Wittgenstein's Work Have Ideological Implications?

Chapter 3 - Was Wittgenstein a Conservative Philosopher?

3.1 Introduction

The question of whether Wittgenstein was a conservative philosopher has generated a large literature²⁴⁴. Given the enormous scope of the literature there will not be space here to consider all of the various arguments in favour of deeming Wittgenstein a conservative. In particular many have focussed in on Wittgenstein's claim in §124 of the *Philosophical Investigations* that philosophy "leaves everything as it is". That remark alone is deserving of a long discussion (I discuss it in Chapter 5 of this thesis) and if controversies surrounding Wittgenstein's remarks about rule-following, rationality, and relativism were taken into consideration a sizable book could be written on the topic of Wittgenstein's relationship to conservatism. I will restrict myself, in this chapter, to the arguments found in J. C. Nyiri's paper 'Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back'.

The evidence brought by each side of the debate about whether Wittgenstein was conservative can be roughly divided into evidence concerning Wittgenstein's occasional remarks directly concerning political matters and evidence from amongst Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks. The reason I say 'roughly' divided is that there is some controversy about the extent to which this division can be made. Within Wittgenstein's typescripts each kind of remark would not be clearly separated; a remark about politics might be followed by a remark about philosophy, and philosophers might think that there is no clear division between the two kinds of

²⁴⁴ Perhaps most famously, J.C. Nyiri argued in a series of papers that Wittgenstein was a conservative philosopher (see, for example, 'Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back' in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments (Vol. 4)*, edited by Stuart Shanker, London: Routledge, 1986). Those agreeing with Nyiri in this include Perry Anderson, Alex Callinicos, and H. C. McCauley. Those arguing that Wittgenstein's philosophy was not conservative include Joachim Schulte ('Wittgenstein and Conservatism', in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments (Vol. 4)*, edited by Stuart Shanker, London: Routledge, 1986), Andrew Lugg (in 'Wittgenstein and Politics: Not Right, Left or Center', *International Studies in Philosophy*, 36:1, 2004 and other papers), Toril Moi (in *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies After Wittgenstein Austin, and Cavell*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017, Chapter 7, pp. 150-171) and see also Vinten, R. 'Leave Everything As It Is: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations of Wittgenstein', *Critique*, 41:1, 2013 and 'Eagleton's Wittgenstein', *Critique*, Vol.43, 2015 . This is just a small selection of all that has been written on the subject.

remark (or that there aren't two kinds of remark at all). In this chapter I will treat the political remarks and philosophical remarks separately and I hope that by the end of the chapter it will become clearer how a separation can be made. I will argue that philosophical remarks that have been construed as having political implications do not in fact have the implications that some commentators have suggested.

If we can separate out the two kinds of remark then there are really two questions to answer. Firstly, we can ask whether Wittgenstein was conservative in his political views and secondly, we can ask whether Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks have conservative political implications. To the first question my answer will be that Wittgenstein certainly held some political views that can be deemed conservative (although he also held some views that could be characterized as left-wing). But my answer to the second question will be that Wittgenstein's philosophical views are perfectly consistent with radical left-wing views and have no conservative implications. Before looking at the evidence that Wittgenstein held conservative political views we must first have some understanding of what conservatism is.

3.2 What is conservatism?

One thing worth getting clear about when discussing conservatism is that the members of conservative parties are not necessarily conservative in their philosophical outlook and even if they are conservative they may well disagree on many questions. Right-wing liberals have allied themselves with conservatives against the common enemy of socialism. As Anthony Quinton notes in his account of conservatism, "...conservative parties have absorbed so many right-wing liberals...that at times the truly conservative element in them has been almost overwhelmed by liberal individualism"²⁴⁵. This alliance of liberal individualism and conservatism can be seen in one of the most prominent Conservative Prime Ministers of the past few decades, Margaret Thatcher. She led the Conservative Party in Britain between 1975 and 1990 (she was Prime Minister from 1979-1990) and she was a great admirer of the right-wing liberal individualist Friedrich Hayek. Hayek himself explicitly disassociated himself

²⁴⁵ Quinton, A. 'Conservatism' in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, (2nd edition, edited by Robert E. Goodin, Philip Pettit, and Thomas W. Pogge), Oxford, Blackwell, 2009, p.285.

from conservatism in his book *The Constitution of Liberty*, to which he appended a postscript, entitled 'Why I am not a conservative'²⁴⁶. The stress on liberty, and especially a stress on the importance of free markets, is characteristic of right-wing liberalism rather than conservatism²⁴⁷, although the two are often found in combination nowadays.

In the entry on conservatism in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* Quinton identifies three central doctrines of conservatism: traditionalism, scepticism (concerning political knowledge) and the conception of human beings and society as being organically related²⁴⁸. According to conservatives, societies are like biological organisms in that the parts (organs) all play their role in the functioning of the whole and cannot flourish independently of the whole. Each organ has its place and its role and each organ depends on the whole in order to play that role. Similarly, in societies individuals have their proper place and their proper roles to fulfil and they cannot flourish except by being part of a wider whole, their society. This organicism supports sceptical claims about political knowledge. Individuals are imperfect in that they cannot flourish independently of society. No individual can grasp the whole and so theories formulated by individuals will inevitably be imperfect. Radically altering one aspect of society will have ramifying effects throughout all of society and so drastic change is to be avoided because it will have unpredictable results. Society is enormously complex and interrelated. Any changes made should be gradual and should respect the wisdom that has accumulated in long-standing traditional institutions. According to conservatives traditional institutions should be maintained (conserved) and if change is felt to be necessary we should proceed cautiously, remembering that drastic change could have drastic negative effects elsewhere in society.

In his article 'Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back' J. C. Nyiri relies upon a characterisation of conservatism that is closely related to the one given above that was

²⁴⁶ Hayek, F. A. *The Constitution of Liberty*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960

²⁴⁷ See Quinton, A. 'Conservatism' in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, (2nd edition, edited by Robert E. Goodin, Philip Pettit, and Thomas W. Pogge), Oxford, Blackwell, 2009, p.296

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.285-6

presented by Klaus Epstein in his book *The Genesis of German Conservatism*²⁴⁹. The organicism, deemed by Quinton to be a central doctrine of conservatism, can be seen in Epstein's claim that conservatives, "...tend to emphasize the importance of variety whereas their opponents stress general norms". This supports scepticism about political knowledge (Quinton's second central doctrine of conservatism) in that individuals are unlikely to be able to grasp the whole through norms or generalisations because there is such a great variety of people in a great variety of roles. This means that "...the systematic application of reason to political, economic and religious problems usually leads to disastrous results" and supports the third strand of conservatism identified by Quinton, traditionalism. So, all of the strands identified by Quinton are present in the account of conservatism that Nyiri relies upon in his article discussing Wittgenstein's politics.

However, some social theorists have claimed that characterizations of conservatism like those given above are not sufficient. After all, the belief that change should be gradual and a belief in the interrelatedness (and variety) of people is just as compatible with reformist socialism as it is with those more usually associated with conservatism. George Nash, the author of a classic work on conservatism, notes that "[e]ven Fabian Socialists who believed in 'the inevitability of gradualness' might be labelled conservatives"²⁵⁰ and Corey Robin, in his recent book about conservatism, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, takes this as a sign that more needs to be said in order to correctly characterize conservatism. Robin suggests that conservatism is "...a meditation on – and theoretical rendition of – the felt experience of having power, seeing it threatened, and trying to win it back"²⁵¹. He argues, plausibly, that conservatives do not actually protect long-standing institutions unless those institutions fit with the interests of those in power. So, conservatives defend the family and the nation but they do not view trade unions as valuable defenders of the rights of workers, despite the fact that trade unions have evolved and

²⁴⁹ Epstein, K. *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966 cited in Nyiri, 'The Turning Back', p.37

²⁵⁰ Nash, G. *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, p.xiv

²⁵¹ Robin, C. *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.4

survived for many years. This fits with the fact that prominent conservative writers have often written in response to revolutionary movements or movements of oppressed groups. For example, Edmund Burke, the paradigmatic conservative philosopher, wrote in response to the French revolution and Salisbury, the Conservative prime minister wrote that “hostility to Radicalism, incessant, implacable hostility, is the essential definition of Conservatism. The fear that the Radicals may triumph is the only final cause that the Conservative Party can plead for its own existence”²⁵². This leads Robin to claim that conservatism can be partially defined as “opposition to the liberation of men and women from the fetters of their superiors, particularly in the private sphere”²⁵³. So, to conclude this section, we can see conservatism as a combination of organicism (with regard to the relation between individual and society), scepticism (about knowledge of society and of politics), traditionalism, and the defence of power.

3.3 Wittgenstein’s Politics

3.3.1 Evidence that Wittgenstein held conservative views

3.3.1.1 Wittgenstein’s attitudes towards women

One area of politics in which it seems quite clear that Wittgenstein held conservative views is the area of women’s rights. There is evidence from a number of sources over the course of many years which tell us that Wittgenstein held sexist views. For example, David Pinsent, a close friend of Wittgenstein’s, records in his diary on February 7th, 1913 that “[w]e talked about Woman suffrage: he [Wittgenstein] is very much against it – for no particular reason except that ‘all the women he knows are such idiots’. He said that at Manchester University the girl students spend all their time flirting with the professors. Which disgusts him very much – as he dislikes half measures of all sorts, and disapproves of anything not deadly in earnest.”²⁵⁴

²⁵² Cited in Robin, C. *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.19.

²⁵³Robin, C. *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, p.16.

²⁵⁴ Pinsent, D. in *A Portrait of Wittgenstein as a Young Man: From the Diary of David Hume Pinsent 1912-1914*, edited by G. H. Von Wright, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, p.44. Perhaps some would question whether

Evidence from other sources suggests that Wittgenstein continued to hold sexist views. Fania Pascal attended meetings of the Moral Science Club at Cambridge where Wittgenstein spoke (in 1930-31) and then later gave Wittgenstein lessons in Russian (in the mid-1930s) and became a personal friend of his. She claims that Wittgenstein “disliked intellectual women and in company literally turned his back on them”²⁵⁵. This is corroborated by the physicist Freeman Dyson, who lived nearby to Wittgenstein and had some interaction with him. Dyson claims that “he was, of course, always extremely insulting to women. He couldn’t tolerate women coming to his lectures. He would just simply be so rude that they would have to leave. So, a thoroughly disagreeable character.”²⁵⁶ Pascal explicitly describes Wittgenstein as conservative in the early 1930s. She claims that, “at a time when intellectual Cambridge was turning Left he was still an old-time conservative of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire.”²⁵⁷

There is some suggestion that Wittgenstein was not quite as extreme in his sexism as Dyson suggests. We know that Wittgenstein’s lectures were attended by, amongst others, Margaret Masterman, Alice Ambrose, Elizabeth Anscombe, Iris Murdoch, and Margaret Macdonald. Masterman and Ambrose were members of the select group of students that made the notes which form Wittgenstein’s *Blue Book*, and Ray Monk, one of Wittgenstein’s biographers, describes them as being amongst Wittgenstein’s favourite students²⁵⁸. Wittgenstein’s friend Maurice Drury recalls speaking to Wittgenstein about Weininger’s sexist views and Wittgenstein made it clear that he disagreed deeply with Weininger’s sexism, exclaiming “How wrong he

conservatism should be associated with sexism such as this. The reason for doing so is that conservatives revere existing political institutions and oppose radical change. At the time in Britain women did not have the vote and granting them the vote was a radical change.

²⁵⁵ Pascal, F. ‘A Personal Memoir’ in *Recollections of Wittgenstein (Revised edition)*, edited by Rush Rhees, Oxford: OUP, 1984, p.17

²⁵⁶ Dyson, F. interview on ‘Web of Stories’ website <http://www.webofstories.com/play/freeman.dyson/47;jsessionid=27BB84B2E9D0A7D1F0C0C403063703B9>

accessed 15/12/14.

²⁵⁷ Pascal, F. ‘A Personal Memoir’, p.17

²⁵⁸ Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage, 1991, p.336. Of course, none of this demonstrates that Wittgenstein was not sexist.

was, my God he was wrong”²⁵⁹. Elizabeth Anscombe became a close friend of Wittgenstein’s, and later translated his *Philosophical Investigations*, but it seems she was one of a few exceptions to Wittgenstein’s general dislike of academic women. According to Ray Monk Anscombe became an ‘honorary male’, “addressed affectionately by him as ‘old man’”. Monk relates a story of Wittgenstein saying to Anscombe, “[t]hank God we’ve got rid of the women!” at a lecture when he found that there were no other female students left in attendance²⁶⁰.

So, it is fairly clear that Wittgenstein was sexist but what makes this attitude a conservative one? In the first place it is a defence of the status quo, and a defence of the way that things have traditionally been. Women did not have the right to vote in Britain in 1913, when Wittgenstein announced his opposition to women’s suffrage. There is also a kind of organicism in the idea that women should play a different role in society to men and Wittgenstein’s attitudes accord with Corey Robin’s claim that conservatism involves “opposition to the liberation of men and women from the fetters of their superiors, particularly in the private sphere.” So, it is safe to conclude that Wittgenstein was conservative in at least one respect; in terms of his attitudes towards women.

3.3.1.2 Hostility to Marxism

There is further evidence of Wittgenstein’s conservatism, or at least hostility to left-wing views, in what people who knew him recount of what he said about Marxism. Wittgenstein had some acquaintance with the works of Marx and Lenin and his opinion of their works was in some respects quite low. Rush Rhees reports that Wittgenstein “used to speak with disgust of Marx’s phrase ‘congealed labour time’” and that “he

²⁵⁹ Vicente Sanfelix Vidarte brought this remark to my attention (from Drury, M. O’C. ‘Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein’, in Rush Rhees (ed.) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 91).

²⁶⁰ Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage, 1991, p.498. Another reason to doubt Dyson’s claims is that Dyson did not know Wittgenstein well at all and was a physicist rather than a philosopher. Dyson had limited interaction with Wittgenstein.

could imagine that many people would find Marx an infuriating writer to read”²⁶¹ and according to M. O’C. Drury Wittgenstein said that “Lenin’s writings about philosophy are of course absurd”²⁶². When Rush Rhees said to Wittgenstein that he was thinking of joining the Revolutionary Communist Party Wittgenstein tried to dissuade him from doing so on the basis that as a philosopher you should always be prepared to change direction and being loyal to a party would not allow you the necessary flexibility to change course.

Of course, opposition to organised Marxism is not sufficient to label somebody a conservative but it is true, at least, that conservatives would share Wittgenstein’s hostility to organised Marxism. However, there is some unclarity about the extent to which Wittgenstein really did oppose Marxism and that will be discussed later, in section 3.3.2.

3.3.1.3 Wittgenstein’s admiration of conservative thinkers

In his article ‘The Turning Back’²⁶³ J. C. Nyiri argues that one thing to be said in favour of the thesis that Wittgenstein was conservative is that he admired Grillparzer and Grillparzer was a conservative thinker (as well as being a famous poet). In fact, Wittgenstein’s grandmother on his father’s side of the family, Fanny Figdor, was personally acquainted with Grillparzer²⁶⁴. Nyiri notes that Wittgenstein made reference to Grillparzer in his notebooks on three occasions between 1929 and 1931. In the first note Wittgenstein talks about Grillparzer as a ‘good Austrian’. Wittgenstein says that “[t]he good Austrian (Grillparzer, Lenau, Bruckner, Labor) is especially difficult to understand”²⁶⁵. In the second note Wittgenstein quotes Grillparzer as

²⁶¹ Rhees said this in letters to John Moran which Moran cites in his article ‘Wittgenstein and Russia’, *New Left Review*, 1/73, 1972.

²⁶² Drury, M. O’C. ‘Conversations with Wittgenstein’ in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, edited by Rush Rhees, Oxford: OUP, 1984, p.126.

²⁶³ Nyiri, J. C. ‘Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back’ in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, edited by Stuart Shanker, London: Routledge, 1986.

²⁶⁴ Nyiri, J. C. ‘Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back’, p.40.

²⁶⁵²⁶⁵ From an entry in Wittgenstein’s notebooks on 7th November 1929, cited on p41 of Nyiri, J. C. ‘Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back’. This is Nyiri’s translation. In *Culture and Value* it is translated

saying: “How easy it is to move about in broad distant regions, how hard to grasp what is individual & near at hand...”²⁶⁶ Nyiri suggests that the distinction here, between ‘broad distant regions’ and ‘what is individual & near at hand’ corresponds to the distinction between “concrete use of language and speculative chatter”²⁶⁷ that conservatives want to make. According to Nyiri “[t]he conservative individual, with his preference for the concrete, for that which is given, is in fact always hostile to theory [i.e. ‘speculative chatter’]”²⁶⁸. In the third remark Wittgenstein says that “[i]n Bruckner’s music nothing is left of the long & slender (nordic?) face of Nestroy, Grillparzer, Haydn, etc. but it has in full measure a round full (alpine?) face even purer in type than was Schubert’s”. It is difficult to see how this third remark can be construed as suggestive of conservatism in Wittgenstein’s thought, indeed it is difficult to make sense of at all. Nyiri suggests that in order to understand the remark we must place it in the context of the other remarks nearby. In particular, immediately after this remark Wittgenstein said that, “[t]he power of language to make everything look the same which appears in its crassest form in the *dictionary* & which makes it possible to personify *time*, something which is no less remarkable than would have been making divinities of the logical constants”. Nyiri claims that the context of the remark suggests that what connects the remark with those surrounding it is “the idea of *original multiplicity*, of diversity”²⁶⁹ and emphasis on diversity is characteristic of conservatism. Nyiri cites Klaus Epstein’s definition of conservatism in support of his view. Epstein suggests that “[c]onservatives...tend to emphasize the importance of variety, whereas their opponents stress general norms”²⁷⁰.

Moreover, Nyiri does not just cite instances where Wittgenstein mentions or quotes Grillparzer. He proposes that conservative remarks are present in

as “I think good Austrian *work* (Grillparzer, Lenau, Bruckner, Labor) is particularly hard to understand ” (my italics).

²⁶⁶ This remark has been published in Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell. Nyiri cites the passage on page 42 of ‘Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back’.

²⁶⁷ Nyiri, J. C. ‘The Turning Back’, p.42

²⁶⁸ Nyiri, J. C. ‘The Turning Back’, p.38

²⁶⁹ Nyiri’s discussion of the passage in question appears on p.41 of ‘The Turning Back’.

²⁷⁰ The quote comes from Epstein, K. *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, cited in Nyiri, J. C., ‘The Turning Back’, p.37.

Wittgenstein's more overtly philosophical work. Examples of such remarks, Nyiri says, include some that have been published in *On Certainty*. According to Nyiri's interpretation, Wittgenstein maintains that we must "recognise certain authorities in order to be able to make judgements at all"²⁷¹ (OC, §493). Nyiri claims, on the basis of §§47, 644 and 94 in *On Certainty*, that the authorities Wittgenstein thinks we must respect include "one's school, or an inherited picture of the world"²⁷². This kind of respect for inherited institutions fits with the traditionalism of conservatism mentioned above and could perhaps also be seen as a defence of those in power.

3.3.2 Evidence which suggests that Wittgenstein was not conservative

In this section of the chapter I intend to present evidence that Wittgenstein was not wholly conservative in his *political* opinions. The analysis presented by Nyiri is largely *philosophical* in nature and so I will respond to that in section 3.4 below.

Wittgenstein's admiration of left-wing thinkers

It is clear that Wittgenstein saw something in Grillparzer's views and that Grillparzer was a conservative. I will argue in section 3.4. that what Wittgenstein gleaned from Grillparzer was more philosophical than political in nature and that Wittgenstein's philosophical views do not imply a conservative political philosophy. However, as has been noted many times already²⁷³, Wittgenstein also admired thinkers on the left. His friends included people like Nikolai Bakhtin, described by Fania

²⁷¹ Note here that this is Nyiri's rendering of OC, §493. Wittgenstein in fact puts §493 in the form of a question: "So is this it: I must recognise certain authorities in order to make judgements at all?" (in *On Certainty*, New York: Harper Row, 1972 (originally published by Basil Blackwell, 1969)).

²⁷² Nyiri, J.C., 'The Turning Back', p.40. The passages from Wittgenstein he mentions are "This is how one calculates. Calculating is *this*. What we learn at school, for example. Forget this transcendent certainty, which is connected with your concept of spirit." (OC, §47), "For otherwise, wouldn't all assertion be discredited in this way?" (OC, §644) and "But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false" (OC, §94).

²⁷³ See, for example, Ray Monk's biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage, 1991), F. A. Flowers *Portraits of Wittgenstein*, Thoemmes Continuum, 1999, and Vinten, R. 'Leave Everything As It Is: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations of Wittgenstein', in *Critique*, 41:1, pp.9-22.

Pascal as “a fiery communist”²⁷⁴, George Thomson; a Marxist classics lecturer at Birmingham who had a role in shifting Bakhtin’s politics to the left, and Pierro Sraffa, an economist who was friends with the Marxist Antonio Gramsci and who Wittgenstein credits as being the stimulus for ‘the most fruitful ideas’ of the *Philosophical Investigations*²⁷⁵. Wittgenstein was also friends with the communist writer and activist, Maurice Dobb, and shared lodgings with him for a while²⁷⁶.

But there is not just evidence that Wittgenstein was friends with many people on the left, there is also evidence that Wittgenstein had some sympathy for their views. Although Wittgenstein said that he saw Lenin’s philosophical views as absurd he followed this by saying “at least he did want to get something done”²⁷⁷ and although Wittgenstein disliked Marx’s way of expressing himself, Rush Rhees says that this did not mean that Wittgenstein objected to Marx’s views²⁷⁸. It is worth noting that Wittgenstein, on more than one occasion, expressed a desire to visit communist Russia, first in 1922²⁷⁹ (soon after the Russian Revolution) and then in 1935, when he did in fact go to Russia²⁸⁰. Some have argued that his interest in Russia had nothing to do with left-wing sympathies and more to do with his asceticism or even his (alleged) conservatism. For example, Fania Pascal said that “[t]o my mind, his feeling for Russia

²⁷⁴ Pascal, F. ‘A Personal Memoir’ in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees, Oxford: OUP, 1984 (Revised edition), p. 14

²⁷⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations (Preface)*, p. 4 (in the Revised 4th edition by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. On the relationship between Wittgenstein and Sraffa, see Venturinha, N. ‘Sraffa’s Notes on Wittgenstein’s “Blue Book”’, *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 1, 2012, pp. 181-191.

²⁷⁶ See Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage, 1991, p.272, p.343, and p.347.

²⁷⁷ Drury, M. O’C. ‘Conversations with Wittgenstein’ in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, edited by Rush Rhees, Oxford: OUP, 1984, p.126.

²⁷⁸ In a letter to John Moran “Rhees twice emphasized that Wittgenstein regarded not Marx’s views, but ‘the way he wrote’ ...as infuriating”. See Moran, J. ‘Wittgenstein and Russia’, in *New Left Review*, 1/73, May-June, 1972.

²⁷⁹ In a letter to Paul Engelmann. See Engelmann, P. *Letters From Ludwig Wittgenstein. With a Memoir*, translated by L. Fürtmüller, edited by Brian McGuinness, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, pp.52-53.

²⁸⁰ Pascal, F. ‘A Personal Memoir’ in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees, Oxford: OUP, 1984 (Revised edition), p.29.

would have had at all times more to do with Tolstoy's moral teachings, with Dostoevsky's spiritual insights, than with any political or social matters"²⁸¹.

However, there is evidence that there was more to Wittgenstein's motivations than this. In a letter of introduction that J. M. Keynes wrote to Ivan Maisky, the Russian ambassador in London, on behalf of Wittgenstein Keynes said that Wittgenstein "has strong sympathies with the way of life which he believes the new regime in Russia stands for"²⁸². What did Wittgenstein believe the regime in Russia stood for? According to Rush Rhees "Wittgenstein would say [towards the end of the Second World War] 'the important thing is that the people have *work*'...He thought the new regime in Russia did provide work for the mass of the people...He also thought it would be terrible if the society were ridden by 'class distinctions'". In a footnote Rhees adds "[w]hen I said that the 'rule by bureaucracy' in Russia was bringing in class distinctions there, he told me 'if anything could destroy my sympathy with the Russian regime, it would be the growth of class distinctions'"²⁸³. Furthermore, Ray Monk cites Wittgenstein's friend, George Thomson as saying that Wittgenstein's attitude towards Marxism was that "[h]e was opposed to it in theory but supported it in practice" and Monk notes that "[t]his chimes with a remark Wittgenstein made to Rowland Hutt...: 'I am a communist, *at heart*'". Monk concludes that "[t]here is no doubt that during the political upheavals of the mid-1930s Wittgenstein's sympathies were with the working class and the unemployed, and that his allegiance, broadly speaking, was with the Left"²⁸⁴.

So, it seems that Wittgenstein's interest in Russia did have something to do with political and social matters. Wittgenstein admired the Russian regime for providing full-employment and for eradicating class distinctions (as he saw it). Wittgenstein, despite having some serious reservations, had some respect for Marxist theory, and this can be seen in the fact that he used the formulation "the transition

²⁸¹ Pascal, F. 'A Personal Memoir', pp.44-5. J.C. Nyiri associates Wittgenstein's interest in Russia with conservatism in 'The Turning Back', pp.45-6.

²⁸² See Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p.349

²⁸³ Rhees, R. 'Postscript' in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, edited by Rush Rhees, 1984, p.205

²⁸⁴ Monk, R., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage, 1991, p.343

‘from quantity to quality’”²⁸⁵ in §284 of the *Philosophical Investigations* which is drawn ultimately from Hegel but which later appeared as Engels’ ‘first law’ of dialectics. And there is new evidence from Rush Rhees’ notes of conversations with Wittgenstein, published in *Mind* recently, that Wittgenstein was thinking of Marxist ideas in this passage. According to Rhees, “Marx got the phrase from Hegel but I think Wittgenstein had Marxist ideas in mind here”²⁸⁶. This is not to suggest that Wittgenstein was a full-blown communist but it does at least indicate that Wittgenstein was not conservative in all of his political views. Wittgenstein was deeply conservative in his attitudes towards women but this did not form part of a wider conservative outlook when Wittgenstein was working on his later philosophy.

3.4 Wittgenstein’s Philosophy - Nyiri on Wittgenstein and Grillparzer

In this section I will pick up on the second of the questions I raised in the introduction to this chapter: do Wittgenstein’s philosophical remarks have conservative implications? I will start by looking at Nyiri’s arguments concerning Wittgenstein and the conservative poet Franz Grillparzer and then move on to look at the remarks in *On Certainty* mentioned by Nyiri.

Nyiri proposed that Wittgenstein’s admiration for Grillparzer and his own family’s connections with Grillparzer were good evidence that Wittgenstein was conservative. It should be clear, first of all, that a family connection and a remark from Wittgenstein about the good Austrian work of Grillparzer (amongst others) do not constitute solid evidence that Wittgenstein was conservative. Your grandmother’s acquaintances do not all necessarily hold the same politics as you do and it is possible to have admiration for a poet’s work without agreeing with their politics. The second remark from Wittgenstein about Grillparzer was a quote from Grillparzer and we should ask whether it is a case of Wittgenstein highlighting something that he saw as good in Grillparzer’s conservatism. However, it is far from clear that this was Wittgenstein’s intention. The passage in question was: “How easy it is to move about

²⁸⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §284

²⁸⁶ Citron, G., Rhees, R., and Wittgenstein, L. ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Conversations with Rush Rhees (1939-50): From the Notes of Rush Rhees, *Mind*, Vol.124 : 493, January 2015

in broad distant regions, how hard it is to grasp what is individual and near at hand". Nyiri defended this as an expression of conservative politics by arguing that Wittgenstein was here contrasting concrete uses of language and speculative chatter. Conservatives, according to Nyiri, favour concrete uses of language ("individual and near") over speculative chatter ("broad distant regions") because they doubt that theorising about society is worthwhile, or even whether it is possible. But there are clear suggestions elsewhere in Wittgenstein's work that the contrast between concrete uses and speculative chatter is not what he had in mind. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein looks to the correct use of ordinary terms in contrast to the misuse of terms by earlier philosophers. The contrast that Wittgenstein has in mind in the *Investigations* is the contrast between sense and nonsense. So, for example, at §39 Wittgenstein picks apart referentialist 'theories' of meaning by arguing that

...it is clear that the sentence 'Nothung has a sharp blade' has a *sense* whether Nothung is still whole or has already been shattered. But if 'Nothung' is the name of an object, this object no longer exists when Nothung is shattered into pieces; and as no object would then correspond to the name, it would have no meaning. But then the sentence 'Nothung has a sharp blade' would contain a word that has no meaning, and hence the sentence would be nonsense. But it does have a sense...

Wittgenstein makes a similar point when he argues that "[w]hen Mr N. N. dies, one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say this, for if the name ceased to have meaning, it would make no sense to say 'Mr N. N. is dead'" (*PI* §40). Later on in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein clearly connects the tasks of philosophy with this distinction between sense and nonsense when he says that "[t]he results of philosophy are the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense and the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language" (*PI* §119). Seen in this light it seems plausible that Wittgenstein was not contrasting 'concrete' uses of language with speculative chatter about how to organize society, as Nyiri argues, rather he was contrasting broad attempts to grasp the essence of language or some other phenomenon (which lead us

into speaking nonsense) and particular, correct, ordinary uses of language (which make sense). His discussion of the nature of philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations* suggests that Wittgenstein wanted to look closely at particular uses of language in order to dissolve philosophical problems that arise “when language goes on holiday”, i.e. when people do not use words correctly and end up speaking nonsense. So, it is far from obvious that the passage from Grillparzer supports the view that Wittgenstein was a conservative. When Wittgenstein talks about that which is “individual and near” it seems plausible that he is talking about looking at particular, correct, ordinary uses of language in contrast to the “broad distant regions” of metaphysical nonsense.

The final passage in Wittgenstein’s notebooks where he mentions Grillparzer is the one where he contrasts the ‘nordic’ face of Grillparzer with the ‘alpine’ face of Bruckner and Schubert. Nyiri tries to suggest that this passage is indicative of conservatism because it represents a kind of emphasis on diversity that conservatives favour. However, even if Wittgenstein’s intention is to highlight diversity, it is unclear that an emphasis on diversity of any and every sort is characteristic of conservatism. For example, the conservative chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, has made a point of saying that having diverse cultures within a country does not work. At a meeting in Potsdam in 2010 she said that “[t]his [multicultural] approach has failed, utterly failed”²⁸⁷. David Cameron, the conservative Prime Minister of Great Britain, made the same point in 2011 at a conference in Munich soon after²⁸⁸. This may not be the kind of diversity (cultural diversity) that Nyiri had in mind but if he does not have this kind of emphasis on diversity in mind it seems a little implausible that we are to look for the diversity favoured by conservatives in the particular instances mentioned by Wittgenstein (i.e. ‘faces’, musical styles, kinds of poetry)²⁸⁹. And even if we were to

²⁸⁷ Quote taken from ‘Angela Merkel: German multiculturalism has “utterly failed” in the Guardian newspaper, 17/10/2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed>, accessed 19/12/2014

²⁸⁸ See ‘PM’s speech at Munich Security Conference’ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>, 05/02/2011, accessed 19/12/2014

²⁸⁹ A similar point can be made about Nyiri’s suggestion that conservatives place particular emphasis on particularity – on concrete circumstances. From the opposite end of the political spectrum Vladimir Lenin argued that “[t]he Marxist dialectic demands a concrete analysis of each specific historical situation” (in *The Junius Pamphlet* (1916) in *CW* 22:316 – where he stressed the importance of knowledge of detail rather than *a priori* reasoning). This suggests that an emphasis on the concrete is not distinctive of conservatism.

accept that the passage about Bruckner was suggestive of conservatism in Wittgenstein's political views it would not demonstrate that Wittgenstein's philosophy is conservative.

Nyiri argues that the third passage in Wittgenstein's notebooks about Grillparzer (about his 'nordic' face) is to be understood in the light of the comment Wittgenstein makes afterwards. This is where Wittgenstein talks about "[t]he power of language to make everything look the same...which makes it possible to personify *time*, something which is no less remarkable than would have been making divinities of the logical constants". Rather than interpreting this, as Nyiri does, as representing a conservative stress on diversity, it would perhaps be more natural to interpret it again in the light of Wittgenstein's remarks about the nature of philosophy, sense, and nonsense. Given that Wittgenstein makes mention of the 'divinity' of the logical constants here it would make sense to interpret this as a remark which has his predecessors in the philosophy of logic in mind. When Wittgenstein was writing his later philosophy he often attacked the referentialism and philosophy of logic associated with Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell. The natural way to interpret the comment would be as an attack on their philosophy which, as Wittgenstein saw it, obscured the understanding of language by assimilating expressions to one another²⁹⁰ and which made the mistake of thinking that the logical constants must refer to entities (a view which he attacked in both his early and his later work). The point is that it is more natural to understand Wittgenstein as making a philosophical point here (i.e. as one to do with language, logic, sense, and nonsense) rather than as making a political point about the superiority of conservatism over its left-wing or liberal rivals. Indeed, in *The Blue Book* Wittgenstein says something similar to the passage quoted by Nyiri in the context of discussing conceptual confusions surrounding the notion of 'time'. There he says that, "[i]f we look into the grammar of that word, we shall feel

²⁹⁰ So, for example, in §10 of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein says "...making the description of the uses of these words [number words, object words, and so on] similar in this way [saying that they all signify something] cannot make the uses themselves any more like one another!" and in §11 he suggests that it would be better to think of words by analogy with tools, with various uses/functions.

that it is no less astounding that man should have conceived a deity of time than it would be to conceive of a deity of negation or disjunction.”²⁹¹

Similarly, it is more natural to understand Wittgenstein as making philosophical points (which are consistent with any political ideology) in the remarks that Nyiri cites from *On Certainty* than it is to understand them as in some way expressing sympathy for conservative political views. For example, Nyiri cites §47 from *On Certainty* in support of his argument because it mentions school as an authority. What Wittgenstein actually says is, “[t]his is how one calculates. Calculating is *this*. What we learn at school, for example. Forget this transcendent certainty which is connected with your concept of spirit”. The context for this remark is a discussion of the concepts of ‘knowledge’, ‘doubt’, ‘certainty’, and ‘belief’. Wittgenstein has moved on from discussing Moore’s claims to *know* things like ‘here is a hand’ and is discussing knowledge and certainty in the area of mathematics. An earlier passage sheds some light on what is going on in §47:

Knowledge in mathematics: Here one has to keep on reminding oneself of the unimportance of the ‘inner process’ or ‘state’ and ask “Why should it be important? What does it matter to me?” What is interesting is how we use mathematical propositions. (OC §38)

So, the context is one in which Wittgenstein is arguing that we should move away from thinking about knowledge as an inner state (this is conceptually confused, as Wittgenstein argues elsewhere²⁹²) towards looking at how we actually use mathematical propositions. In §47 he is recommending that we move away from the conception of certainty that is associated with confused views of the mind (e.g. the view that knowledge is a mental state) and look at how mathematical propositions are learnt and used in practice. Wittgenstein is talking about how the concepts of ‘calculating’ and ‘certainty’ are employed. He makes no comment in §47 about whether the ability to calculate must be acquired in a school – school is not seen as a necessary institution but as an instructive example – and nor does he make any

²⁹¹ Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, Harper and Row: New York, 1958, p.6. Wittgenstein also comments on conceptual confusions about time in the *Philosophical Investigations*, see, for example, §90, §196.

²⁹² See §§148-155 *Philosophical Investigations*.

comment on whether schools should be preserved as an institution or on whether, say, schoolchildren should respect school authorities. No conservative political point is made. The passage is part of an extended discussion which is intended to make our use of various related concepts ('calculate', 'knowledge', 'certainty', 'doubt', 'belief' and so on) more perspicuous with the aim of dissolving epistemological problems (for example, scepticism is compared to the "hypothesis of our having miscalculated in all our calculations"²⁹³ – with the purpose of showing that neither is a possible hypothesis). Wittgenstein does, in a way, suggest that we should respect an authority. Before we can challenge mathematical rules we must first be trained in mathematics and what we should respect is the correct uses of these terms. We should respect the correct uses of these terms if we do not want to be led astray into talking nonsense and get caught up in philosophical confusion. This is quite different to the conservative emphasis on respecting authorities such as the church, political authorities, and school teachers, which Wittgenstein makes no comment on.

3.5 Conclusion

So, I conclude that none of the philosophical remarks in Wittgenstein's work discussed by Nyiri in his article endorse or imply a conservative viewpoint. Wittgenstein's philosophy concerns confusions about concepts rather than grappling with ideological problems directly. There is some evidence that Wittgenstein was conservative, at least in some respects, in his politics, but his philosophical work does not have any obvious political implications. I suggest elsewhere in this thesis that it does have some not so obvious political implications (although not to the extent that it implies endorsing a particular ideology). My principal concern in this chapter has been to demonstrate that some of the arguments offered in favour of Wittgenstein being conservative, by the likes of Nyiri, miss their mark.

²⁹³ Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, §55.

Chapter 4 - Was Wittgenstein a Liberal Philosopher?

4.1 Introduction

There is a substantial literature on the question of whether Wittgenstein was a conservative philosopher²⁹⁴ but much less has been written on the question of whether Wittgenstein was a *liberal* philosopher despite the fact that, as Robert Greenleaf Brice has recently argued²⁹⁵, there are hints of liberalism in Wittgenstein's writings²⁹⁶. Brice ultimately argues that the case for Wittgenstein being a liberal is no stronger than the case for him being a conservative. In both cases the evidence is a long way from conclusive. However, other philosophers have been less circumspect. In his essay 'Wittgenstein and the Conversation of Justice', Richard Eldridge argues that "...a kind of substantive or weak perfectionist liberalism" follows from "...the condition of the human person that is enacted in *Philosophical Investigations*"²⁹⁷. Richard Rorty puts a pragmatist spin on Wittgenstein's work and suggests that liberalism is a mode of thought with greater utility than others; one which allows us to cope better. And Alice

²⁹⁴ See, for example, Nyiri, J. C. 'Wittgenstein's later work in relation to conservatism' (in Anthony Kenny & Brian McGuinness (eds.) *Wittgenstein and His Times*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 'Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back' (in Stuart Shanker (ed.) *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments (Vol. 4)*, London: Routledge, 1986) and 'Wittgenstein's New Traditionalism', *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 1976, vol.27, pp.503-9; McCauley, H. C. 'Wittgenstein: Philosophy and Political Thought', *The Maynooth Review*, 2:2 (1976); Bloor, D. *Wittgenstein: A social theory of knowledge*, Macmillan, 1983; Anderson, P. 'Components of the National Culture' in R. Blackburn & A. Cockburn (eds.) *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action*, London: Penguin Books, 1969; Gellner, E. *Words and Things: An examination of, and an attack on, Linguistic Philosophy*, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1959; Callinicos, A. *Marxism and Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; Janik, A. 'Nyiri on the Conservatism of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', and 'Wittgenstein, Marx and Sociology' in Allan Janik's *Essays on Wittgenstein and Weininger*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1985; Lugg, A. 'Wittgenstein and Politics: Not Right, Left or Center', *International Studies in Philosophy*, 36:1, 2004; and Vinten, R. 'Eagleton's Wittgenstein', *Critique*,

²⁹⁵ Brice, R. G. *Exploring Certainty: Wittgenstein and Wide Fields of Thought*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014, pp.86-94.

²⁹⁶ It could be argued, of course, that works which try to settle the question of whether Wittgenstein was a conservative philosopher indirectly answer the question of whether he was a liberal. However, I hope to make clear in this chapter that there are specific arguments in favour of Wittgenstein being a liberal that should be addressed in order to answer the question.

²⁹⁷ Eldridge, R. 'Wittgenstein and the Conversation of Justice', in Cressida Heyes (ed.) *The Grammar of Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, pp. 127-8.

Crary, while critical of Rorty, suggests that the lessons learned from her own interpretation of Wittgenstein are “reflected in forms of social life that embody the ideals of liberal democracy”²⁹⁸.

In this chapter I will agree with Brice that there is not a particularly strong case in favour of Wittgenstein being a liberal and nor is there a particularly strong case to be made in favour of liberalism using Wittgenstein’s philosophical writings. In the course of coming to those conclusions I will first examine the variety of positions going by the name of liberalism. I will then go on to look at the case that Brice pieces together in support of the claim that Wittgenstein was a liberal in *Exploring Certainty*. Following that, I will go on to argue that Eldridge, Rorty, and Crary fail to demonstrate that there are liberal tendencies in Wittgensteinian philosophy. While agreeing with much of what Crary says in her arguments against Rorty I will argue that no broad ideological conclusions follow from Wittgenstein’s philosophical remarks²⁹⁹.

4.2 Liberalism

The most obvious thing to say about liberalism is that liberals seek after *liberty* or *freedom*. However, there are different accounts of what liberty and freedom amount to and of what it is that should be free. Some philosophers stress negative freedom, i.e. freedom from coercion by others³⁰⁰; while other philosophers stress positive freedom, arguing that someone is free only if they are autonomous or self-directed³⁰¹ or that someone is free only if they have effective power to act³⁰². Some

²⁹⁸ Crary, A. ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought’ in Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.) *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, p.141. Bernard Williams, in his ‘Pluralism, Community and Left Wittgensteinianism’ suggests that “the tendency of Wittgenstein’s influence has been distinctly conservative” (p. 34) but thinks that a ‘Left Wittgensteinianism’ can be gleaned from his work (p.37). I think Williams’ arguments for these claims relies on a flawed understanding of Wittgenstein’s use of the expression ‘form of life’.

²⁹⁹ Vicente Sanfélix Vidarte has also entered into the discussion about whether Wittgenstein was a liberal. Like me, he does not think that Wittgenstein was a liberal, or that his philosophy has liberal implications, but he focuses on Wittgenstein’s earlier philosophy whereas this chapter (and the whole thesis, in fact) focuses on Wittgenstein’s later philosophy (see ‘Was Wittgenstein a Liberal?’ in K. Wojciechowski and J. Joerden (eds.) *Ethical Liberalism in Contemporary Societies*, Peter Lang, 2009.

³⁰⁰ See, for example, Berlin, I. ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ in *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 122.

³⁰¹ See, for example, Green, T. H. *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Essays*, Paul Harris and John Morrow (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986 [1895], p. 229.

liberals emphasize the freedom of people to do what they like as long as their exercise of their freedom does not interfere with other people's whereas others emphasize free markets.

Liberals nowadays often tie their support for freedom to support for democracy but there is no necessary connection between liberalism and support for democracy³⁰³. In their entry on liberalism in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Gerald Gaus, Shane D. Courtland, and David Schmidtz suggest that Thomas Hobbes could be considered a liberal because he adheres to the 'fundamental liberal principle', namely the claim that "restrictions on liberty must be justified"³⁰⁴, despite the fact that Hobbes does then go on to argue that severe restrictions on liberty *can* be justified. Hobbes was not a supporter of democracy and it is also questionable whether one of the founding fathers of liberalism, John Locke, was. Locke is rightly credited with inspiring moves towards greater democracy and toleration but he was not in favour of women having the vote or of a universal male franchise³⁰⁵. Locke argued in favour of religious toleration but did not think that such toleration should extend to atheists or to Catholics³⁰⁶. And it is not just liberals from centuries ago that have been ambivalent about democracy; Friedrich Hayek, in an interview with the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio* said that he preferred "...a liberal dictator to democratic government lacking liberalism". The key ingredient of a liberal society, according to Hayek, was free markets. Dictatorship was not his professed ideal but was preferable, in his view, to a

³⁰² See, for example, Tawney, R. H. *Equality*, New York: Harcourt. Brace, 1931, p. 221.

³⁰³ In 'Was Wittgenstein a Liberal Philosopher?' Vicente Sanf elix Vidarte note both that the term 'liberal' is "...far from precise" and that "though there has been...no lack of liberals who are democrats, there have been many others who were not." p. 119 and p. 120 respectively.

³⁰⁴ Courtland, D., Gaus, G., and Schmidtz, D. 'Liberalism', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberalism/>, (entry first published in 1996, substantially revised 2014, accessed 15/01/2016). Note: Alan Ryan, in his entry on Liberalism in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* says that, "...it would be absurd to call Hobbes a liberal even while one might want to acknowledge that he supplied many of the ingredients for a liberal theory of politics" (Ryan, A. 'Liberalism', *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 298).

³⁰⁵ Thomas, D. L. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Locke on Government*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 41.

³⁰⁶ B ela Szabados and Eldon Soifer explain why Locke took these stances in their book *Hypocrisy: Ethical Investigations*: "Locke believed that Catholics, through their acceptance of the authority of the Pope, had in effect declared allegiance to another sovereign and thus could not be tolerated within civil society. Similarly, he believed that the oaths and pledges of atheists could not be relied upon, since they had no divine sanction to back them up", Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004, p.214.

democratically elected government that placed severe impediments ('impurities') in the way of free markets, such as democratic trade unions and government-controlled industry. His ideal was a democracy "clean of impurities". In his ideal world it seems that he would have liked to avoid having an electorate able to vote for government control of industry or able to organize themselves into unions. In the interview with *El Mercurio* mentioned above Hayek defended the military dictatorship of General Pinochet in Chile³⁰⁷, which had overthrown a democratically elected socialist government and had rounded up thousands of opponents and had them killed. Classical liberals such as Hayek and 'neoliberals' like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were of the opinion that Pinochet's dictatorship was better than democratically elected socialists³⁰⁸.

However, not all liberals are in the classical mold of Locke and Hayek. Modern liberals in the tradition of J. S. Mill, L. T. Hobhouse, and John Rawls tend to emphasise the ability of individuals to develop themselves in "manifold diversity"³⁰⁹ and this also means that they tend towards supporting toleration of other people and their (diverse) opinions. The liberal positions that are most relevant here are those described by Brice, Eldridge, Rorty, and Crary, and in each of these cases it would be fair to say that they are modern liberals or that the liberalism they focus their attention on is of the modern variety.

4.2.1 Brice on liberalism

According to Brice, important elements of liberalism include, "a respect for... a *reasonable pluralism*³¹⁰" of beliefs and opinions, and with that a recognition of the

³⁰⁷ All of the references above to the *El Mercurio* article refer to 'Extracts from an Interview with Friedrich von Hayek', *El Mercurio*, Santiago de Chile, 12th April 1981, pp. D8-D9. The text of the interviews with Hayek can be found in Caldwell, B. and Montes, L. 'Friedrich Hayek and his visits to Chile', *The Review of Austrian Economics*, 28 (3), pp.261-309.

³⁰⁸ Interestingly, even Tony Blair and Jack Straw, of Britain's Labour Party helped Pinochet to avoid being brought to justice (see 'Secret UK deal freed Pinochet', *the Guardian*, 7th January 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/jan/07/chile.pinochet> (accessed 19/01/16))

³⁰⁹ Mill, J. S. *On Liberty*, London: Longman, Roberts, & Green co., 1869, III. 2.

³¹⁰ Brice cites Rawls here, with regard to the use of the expression 'reasonable pluralism' (Rawls, J. *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 4).

capacity of human beings for *tolerance* and *acceptance* of others who disagree with oneself. Brice lists further features that he deems essential to liberalism including "...a concern for, and a respect of the working class; a concern for and a respect of the environment; an abhorrence of war, and a willingness to share what one has with others"³¹¹. On Brice's account John Stuart Mill is a paradigmatic liberal and Rawls is cited in listing the key elements of liberalism. Brice also, rather eccentrically, describes Marx as a liberal thinker³¹², although Marx would more usually be thought of as an opponent of the liberal thought that grew up with capitalism. This suggests that Brice has left-wing ideology more generally in mind rather than just left-wing varieties of liberalism.

The description of liberalism given by Brice stands in stark contrast to the kind of views held by classical liberals like Hayek, which suggests that, as Alan Ryan says, "...we should be seeking to understand liberalisms rather than liberalism"³¹³.

4.2.2 Eldridge on liberalism

Like many liberals, Richard Eldridge places emphasis on the notion of *freedom*. In particular, Eldridge repeatedly emphasizes the notion of 'expressive freedom' and suggests that achieving expressive freedom is Wittgenstein's primary aim. So, for example, he says that the *Philosophical Investigations* is "a drama of a continuing struggle to achieve expressive freedom"³¹⁴ and that "[t]here is in *Philosophical Investigations* a continuing tragic not-reaching of a goal, and nonetheless a continuing aspiration to achieve expressive freedom..."³¹⁵. Eldridge hints at what he means by this by presenting examples of "sureness in self presentation" including "the power and

³¹¹ Brice, R. *Exploring Certainty*, p. 90.

³¹² Ibid. p. 90.

³¹³ Ryan, A. 'Liberalism', in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 292.

³¹⁴ Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 92.

³¹⁵ Ibid. p. 94.

restraint of Gil Shaham's performances of the Prokofiev violin concertos"³¹⁶. So, the *Philosophical Investigations*, according to Eldridge, "...presents a protagonist seeking to articulate the terms for full human self-command and self-expression"³¹⁷.

Eldridge spells out what the liberalism that he finds in Wittgenstein would involve in his 'Wittgenstein and the Conversation of Justice'³¹⁸. There he says that since there are various, reasonably competing, ways of life we should be tolerant of others and mutually respectful. The framework of this variety of liberalism would also involve a commitment to personal autonomy as a substantive good. This, presumably, chimes with the goal of "full human self-command and self-expression" mentioned above.

4.2.3 Rorty's Utopian Liberalism

Richard Rorty's liberalism is a curious mixture of the kind of politics associated with the left and the politics of the right. On the one hand he stresses the notion of *solidarity* (which he opposes to that of 'objectivity'), supports trade unions in their demands for better wages and conditions³¹⁹, applauds the development of substantial welfare states³²⁰, and opposes the growth of economic inequality³²¹ as well as inequality of opportunity³²²; but on the other hand he sees a lack of patriotism as a problem with the left³²³, opposes multiculturalism³²⁴, and sees free markets as

³¹⁶ Ibid. pp. 6-7.

³¹⁷ Ibid. p. 7.

³¹⁸ Eldridge, R. 'Wittgenstein and the Conversation of Justice', in Cressida Heyes (ed.) *The Grammar of Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, pp. 117-28.

³¹⁹ In his article 'Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes' Rorty says that, "[t]he rise of the trade unions is, morally speaking, the most encouraging development of modern times", (in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London: Penguin Books, 1999, p.207 (the article first appeared as 'Endlich sieht man Freudenthal' in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20th February 1998.))

³²⁰ See, for example, 'Trotsky and the Wild Orchids' where Rorty says that "welfare state capitalism is the best we can hope for" (*Philosophy and Social Hope*, p.17) and 'Looking Backwards from the Year 2096' where Rorty suggests that "fully fledged welfare states" will promote economic development and defend against civil unrest (*Philosophy and Social Hope*, p.247-50).

³²¹ Rorty, R. *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London: Penguin Books, 1999, p. 243.

³²² Ibid. p. 231.

³²³ Ibid. p. 252.

indispensable³²⁵. However, despite the fact that his politics contains right-wing elements Rorty's liberalism is closer to the modern liberalism described by Brice – influenced by Mill and Rawls – than it is to the classical liberalism of Locke and Hayek. Rorty himself recognizes something of a split in his politics and that is reflected in the fact that he calls himself a 'liberal ironist'.

Rorty's discussion of liberalism tends to be an *abstract* one – presenting an ideal rather than describing the way that liberals actually behave. He talks about what 'liberal democracies' do or don't do but not about what, for example, the U. S. government does. So, he says that "[a] liberal democracy... will use force against the individual conscience just in so far as conscience leads individuals to act so as to threaten democratic institutions"³²⁶ but modern liberal democracies, such as the United States, use force in so many instances that conflict with this that it is highly doubtful whether they even aim at acting on that principle much of the time. Rorty acknowledges that his liberalism is utopian (and his indebtedness to Mill) when he says, that the institutions in the society he envisages,

"would be regulated by John Stuart Mill's dictum that everybody gets to do what they like as long as it doesn't interfere with other people's doing the same.

As far as I can see, nothing theoretical that we have learned since Mill's time... give[s] us reason to *revise* as opposed to supplement our previous descriptions of utopia."³²⁷

A final aspect of Rorty's liberalism worth noting here is that he sees himself as following in the footsteps of American pragmatists and as being influenced by pragmatist elements in Wittgenstein's thought, as he sees it. This means that he thinks

³²⁴ Ibid. pp. 252-3.

³²⁵ Ibid. p. 204. Also see 'Looking Backwards from the Year 2096' where he says that "a viable economy requires free markets", in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 244.

³²⁶ Rorty, R. 'Priority of Democracy to Philosophy', in *Critical Theory: A Reader*, (Douglas Tallack ed.), London: Routledge, 1995, p. 374.

³²⁷ Rorty, R. *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 235.

about philosophical and political views in terms of their utility or their inutility³²⁸, their usefulness, or their point. When thinking about language he wants to focus on words as *tools* for coping with our environment rather than thinking about language as being representational³²⁹. He contrasts his own view, with its stress on *solidarity*, with the realist view which stresses *objectivity* and emphasises notions like *truth* and *representation*. One way of advancing towards the liberal utopia that he envisages is to develop a new *vocabulary* that draws people into recognizing the relative utility of liberalism compared to other ways of thinking³³⁰. On Rorty's view there is no clear distinction to be made between philosophy and other disciplines: "...both scientists and philosophers help us learn to get around the world better. They do not employ distinct methods"³³¹.

Wittgenstein's influence can be seen in Rorty's talk of words as tools. At the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein contrasts the 'Augustinian view', according to which words name objects and sentences combine names (§1), with the view of words as tools. He suggests that we, "[t]hink of the tools in a toolbox: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue pot, glue, nails, and screws.- The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects."³³². Rorty also suggests that the Wittgensteinian maxim "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use" suggests a pragmatic reading of his work. It suggests to Rorty that "any utterance can be given significance by being batted around long enough in more or

³²⁸ So, for example, in 'Hilary Putnam and the Relativist Menace' he says that "[c]riticism of other philosophers' distinctions and problematics should charge relative inutility rather than 'meaninglessness' or 'illusion' or 'incoherence'", in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 3, p. 45

³²⁹ In 'A World without Substances or Essences' Rorty says that we should see language "as providing tools for coping with objects rather than representations of objects, and as providing tools for different purposes", in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 65.

³³⁰ For example, he talks approvingly of Dewey hoping that "we would stop using the juridical vocabulary which Kant made fashionable among philosophers, and start using metaphors drawn from town meetings rather than tribunals" (Rorty, R. 'Pragmatism and Law: A Response to David Luban' in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 111)

³³¹ Rorty, R. 'Wittgenstein and the linguistic turn', in *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Vol.4 Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 166.

³³² Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §11. Wittgenstein continues to use the comparison with tools throughout the *Philosophical Investigations* – see, for example, §14, §15, §17, §23, §53, §360.

less predictable ways”³³³, and so leads to Rorty’s view that we can formulate more fruitful ways of talking, such as using a ‘vocabulary’ employing the term ‘solidarity’ rather than that of ‘objectivity’. We can talk in ways that allow us to cope better and a kind of liberal ironist vocabulary would allow us to do that, according to Rorty³³⁴. One other way in which Wittgenstein has influenced Rorty is in his talk of ‘language games’. Rorty seems to see his talk of *vocabularies* as being similar to Wittgenstein’s talk of language games and forms of life³³⁵.

4.2.4 Crary and Liberalism

Alice Crary, in her article ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought’, suggests that the lesson we learn from Wittgenstein about “investigating established modes of thought and speech” is “...one [she suspects] we would find reflected in forms of social life that embody the ideals of liberal democracy”³³⁶. What is meant by ‘liberal democracy’ is not perfectly clear but this term is typically used to distinguish modern, capitalist, representative democracies with elections, human rights, and civil liberties, from both other kinds of democracies (e.g. direct democracies such as in the Paris Commune) and from undemocratic states with limited freedoms (e.g. Saudi Arabia). According to this rough outline countries as different as the United States, Japan, and Sweden would all count as liberal democracies. A state might count as a liberal democracy whether it has a social democratic government or a conservative one and so to say that the lesson we learn from Wittgenstein is reflected

³³³ Rorty, R. ‘Wittgenstein and the linguistic turn’, p. 172.

³³⁴ It is worth briefly noting here that Wittgenstein never actually employed the slogan used by Rorty. It was first offered up by John Wisdom as epitomising Wittgenstein’s view (Wisdom, J. *Philosophy and Psycho-analysis*, Oxford, 1953, p. 117).

³³⁵ So, for example, he quotes Sabina Lovibond approvingly when she says that, “[a]n adherent of Wittgenstein’s view of language should equate that goal with the establishment of a language game in which we could participate ingenuously, while retaining our awareness of it as a specific historical formation. A community in which such a language game was played would be one... whose members understood their own form of life and yet were not embarrassed by it” (quoted in Rorty, R. *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers: Volume 1*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.32, fn. 15 (the passage is originally from Lovibond, S. *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 158) and presumably he thinks that Lovibond’s talk of establishing a language game parallels his own talk of shifting vocabularies.

³³⁶ Crary, A. ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought’, p.141.

in forms of social life embodying the ideals of liberal democracy is not to say that Wittgenstein was a liberal or that his philosophy has liberal implications, and so her claim is weaker than the one made by Eldridge. In 'Wittgenstein's Pragmatic Strain' Crary suggests that lessons from Wittgenstein might help to resolve disputes between liberals and communitarians and so the suggestion is that her own position combines elements of the two approaches³³⁷.

Crary acknowledges that she does not build a conclusive case for this conclusion but that is not her intention in the article. Her intention is to demonstrate that widely accepted interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy, from both left and right, misunderstand Wittgenstein's account of meaning and so their conclusions about the political implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy are shaky. So, Crary makes something of a negative case for her position by undermining the arguments of people like Ernest Gellner and J. C. Nyiri, who argue that Wittgenstein's philosophy has conservative implications because it does not allow for rational criticism of other forms of life.

4.2.5 Summary

The philosophers under consideration in this chapter have a conception of liberalism that is a modern one. What this means is that they emphasize the kind of freedom, democracy, toleration, and mutual respect between people with differing moral and political outlooks that is found in modern capitalist representative democracies and that they seek to broaden the scope of those values within a liberal-democratic framework. However, there are other kinds of liberals: classical liberals and neoliberals, whose emphases are different. In the next section I will consider whether Wittgenstein might be considered a liberal of some sort, whether liberal democracies are particularly conducive to carrying out the kind of philosophical work that Wittgenstein engaged in, and whether Wittgenstein's philosophy might be of help in promoting liberal values.

³³⁷ Crary, A. 'Wittgenstein's Pragmatic Strain', *Social Research*, Summer, 70:2, 2003, pp. 369-90.

4.3 Wittgenstein and Liberalism

4.3.1 Brice's case for Wittgenstein being a liberal

In *Exploring Certainty* Robert Greenleaf Brice tries to demonstrate that something of a case can be made in favour of Wittgenstein being a liberal just as some kind of case can be made in favour of saying that Wittgenstein was conservative. However, he is clear that he does not wish to endorse the view that Wittgenstein was a liberal. His point is to argue that “it is wrong to try to draw any definitive conclusions from the ‘evidence’”³³⁸, given that both kinds of cases can be made with some force.

Brice starts by examining evidence of Wittgenstein's political views. He cites a passage from Ray Monk's biography of Wittgenstein in which Monk says that, “[t]here is no doubt that during the political upheavals of the mid-1930s Wittgenstein's sympathies were with the working class and the unemployed, and that his allegiance, broadly speaking, was with the Left”³³⁹. As we saw in Chapter 3, Monk himself cites evidence from friends of Wittgenstein in support of his claim, including George Thomson's claims that Wittgenstein “supported [Marxism] in practice” and that Wittgenstein, in the 1930s, was “alive to the evils of unemployment and fascism and the growing danger of war”³⁴⁰. As noted in section 4.2.1 above, Brice thinks that “...a concern for, and a respect of the working class” is essential to liberalism, and so Wittgenstein's sympathy for the working class counts as evidence in favour of him being a liberal, according to Brice.

However, it is debatable whether sympathy for the working class is essential to liberalism. There are liberals, like Hayek, who are content to see trade union rights removed, since these are a barrier to the free markets that he particularly treasures, and it seems that somebody with a particular sympathy for the working class would not be so blasé about removing a worker's right to organize in trade unions. Ideologies particularly associated with sympathy for the working class are socialist and

³³⁸ Brice, R. *Exploring Certainty*, p. 86.

³³⁹ Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage, 1991, p. 343.

³⁴⁰ Thomson, G. ‘Wittgenstein: Some Personal Recollections’, *Revolutionary World*, XXXVII, no.9, 1979, pp. 86-8.

communist ideologies and so the passages Monk relies on would perhaps be better used in support of claiming that Wittgenstein was a socialist or communist rather than to support the claim that he was a liberal. Brice's definition of liberalism is extremely broad – too broad, in that it encompasses Marxist views – but this does not undermine his central claim, that “it is wrong to try to draw any definitive conclusions from the ‘evidence’” about Wittgenstein's political views. The fact that there is some evidence of Wittgenstein holding left-wing views undermines the claims made by Nyiri and Bloor about Wittgenstein's supposed conservatism and this supports Brice's conclusion.

Brice also cites passages which suggest that Wittgenstein was opposed to bourgeois thinking³⁴¹, that he was a pacifist (or at least abhorred war)³⁴², and that he supported the Labour Party in the 1945 elections. However, just as in the case of sympathy for the working class, these stances are not associated particularly with liberalism. The Labour Party in Britain is a social democratic, reformist socialist party, not a liberal one, and the people voting for it are in any case not necessarily entirely in agreement with its views. Opposition to bourgeois thinking is more often associated with Marxism, socialism, and anarchism than with liberalism. In fact, liberalism, as an ideology which defends capitalism, could well be seen as a form of bourgeois ideology itself. Pacifism, again, is not particularly associated with liberals. There are anarchists who are pacifists, socialists who are pacifists and liberals who are pacifists. Moreover, it is clear that Wittgenstein was not a lifelong pacifist, despite sometimes saying things which indicated that he inclined in that direction. For one thing, he was eager to fight in the First World War, and did so as a volunteer, from the beginning of the war in 1914 and after the Second World War Wittgenstein wrote that:

³⁴¹ Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value (Revised Edition)*, 1998, 24e – where Wittgenstein says, “Ramsey was a bourgeois thinker. i.e. he thought with the aim of clearing up the affairs of some particular community. He did not reflect on the essence of the state – or at least he did not like doing so – but on how *this* state might reasonably be organized. The idea that this state might not be the only possible one partly disquieted him and partly bored him. He wanted to get down as quickly as possible to reflecting on the foundations – of *this* state.”

³⁴² In a letter to Norman Malcolm, written shortly after the end of the Second World War, Wittgenstein said that, “[p]erhaps I ought to feel elated because the war is over. But I'm not. I can't help feeling certain that this peace is only a truce. And the pretence that the complete stamping out of the 'aggressors' of this war will make this world a better place to live in, as a future war could, of course, only be started by them, stinks to high heaven &, in fact, promises a horrid future.” In Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, (2nd edition) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, p.97.

The hysterical fear over the atom bomb now being experienced, or at any rate expressed, by the public almost suggests that at last something really salutary has been invented. The fright at least gives the impression of a really effective medicine. I can't help thinking: if this didn't have something good about it the philistines wouldn't be making an outcry...the bomb offers a prospect of the end, the destruction, of an evil, - our disgusting soapy water science. And certainly that's not an unpleasant thought³⁴³.

So, the passages that Brice cites do not lend credibility to the conclusion that Wittgenstein was a liberal.

Brice also suggests that support for the thesis that Wittgenstein was a liberal can be found in Wittgenstein's more philosophical writings. He cites Wittgenstein's 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*' in attributing to Wittgenstein the traditional liberal value of tolerance. However, the passage that Brice cites from Wittgenstein makes no mention of tolerance of other's beliefs or of acceptance of people with different beliefs. The point that Wittgenstein makes is better described as being about methodology in anthropology and about the correct categories for describing the beliefs of others. In the passage that Brice cites Wittgenstein says:

Frazer's account of the magical and religious views of mankind is unsatisfactory; it makes these views look like *errors*... The very idea of wanting to explain a practice seems wrong to me. All that Fraser does is make them plausible to people who thinks as he does. It is very remarkable that in the final analysis all these practices are presented as, so to speak, pieces of stupidity. But it will never be plausible to say that mankind does all that out of sheer stupidity³⁴⁴.

Wittgenstein is suggesting that Frazer is limited in his explanatory framework given that he thinks of magic as a kind of proto-science. We do not have to conceive of magic in this way, Wittgenstein points out. Symbolic and ritualistic behavior need not involve

³⁴³ Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value (Revised Edition)*, pp. 55e-56e. Note: Although Wittgenstein sneers at 'philistines' being opposed to the bomb in this passage it does not indicate that he was in favour of the bomb himself. What he says is good about the atom bomb is the effect that it has on people's take on science.

³⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, L. 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', in *Philosophical Occasions*, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, p. 119.

false beliefs about its instrumental efficacy. Belief in such things as killing a priest in his prime in order to keep his soul fresh (the kind of beliefs that Frazer sought to explain) are not empirical beliefs. As Peter Hacker points out, “[t]hey are not based on observations of constant conjunctions in nature, and cannot be shown to be mistaken by an *experimentum crucis* or more careful inductive procedures”³⁴⁵. In the kinds of cases under consideration by Frazer, Wittgenstein wants to say that “there is *no* question of an error”³⁴⁶. Similar considerations apply to the other passages from Wittgenstein cited by Brice³⁴⁷, i.e. no mention is made of toleration or acceptance of the beliefs discussed by Frazer; rather points are made about methodology, explanation and understanding in anthropology.

Brice also suggests that liberal conclusions about acceptance flow from Wittgenstein’s remarks in *On Certainty* about forms of life shifting or changing³⁴⁸ and he cites Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology (Vol. II)*³⁴⁹ in connection with the theme of acceptance: “Given the same evidence, one person can be completely convinced and another not be. We don’t on account of this exclude either one from society, as being unaccountable and incapable of judgement” (§685). However, in none of these instances does Wittgenstein himself draw any conclusions about tolerance or acceptance and nor do such conclusions follow from what he says. It is interesting, for one thing, that in the remark immediately following the one cited by Brice (from *RPP*, Vol II, above) Wittgenstein says “But mightn’t a society do precisely this?” (§686) with no comment on whether excluding people in such a way would be

³⁴⁵ Hacker, ‘Wittgenstein on Frazer’s Golden Bough’, in P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Connections and Controversies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 82.

³⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, L. ‘Remarks on Frazer’s “Golden Bough”’, cited in Hacker, P. M. S. ‘Wittgenstein on Frazer’s Golden Bough’, p. 82.

³⁴⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Occasions*, pp. 125 and 131.

³⁴⁸ Brice, R. G. *Exploring Certainty*, p. 92. Brice cites *OC* §256 (“...the language game does change with time”), §559 (“You must bear in mind that the language game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there-like our life.) and §97 (“The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of one from the other”).

³⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume II*, (edited by G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, translated by C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.

desirable or not, suggesting that the point he is making is not about tolerance of others but rather one about how we think about judgement.

So, although Brice succeeds in demonstrating, *pace* Nyiri and Bloor, that Wittgenstein's was far from a thoroughgoing conservative, he does not produce a convincing case in favour of Wittgenstein being a liberal³⁵⁰.

4.3.2 Eldridge, Liberalism, and Wittgenstein

Recall that Eldridge places particular emphasis on the notion of 'expressive freedom' in his account of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The path carved out by the discussion between the various voices of the *Philosophical Investigations* is a "drama of a continuing struggle to achieve expressive freedom"³⁵¹. Elsewhere Eldridge describes the *Investigations* as "the ongoing reenactment of a condition [the condition of the human subject] – rather than... the conclusive establishment via argument (deductive or quasi-deductive) argumentation of theses about the nature of meaning or understanding"³⁵² and Eldridge goes on to argue that, "[w]hat follows... from the condition of the human person that is enacted in *Philosophical Investigations* is... a kind of substantive or weak perfectionist liberalism"³⁵³. It is a form of perfectionist liberalism, on Eldridge's view, in part because it aims to "articulate the terms of full human self-command and self-expression"³⁵⁴. The upshot of all of this is a liberalism involving tolerance, mutual respect, and a commitment to autonomy.

³⁵⁰ And, as mentioned earlier, this was not Brice's intention. He says that, "...it was not my purpose to argue that *one* social/political interpretation of Wittgenstein is right, or better than another. Indeed, drawing conclusions about Wittgenstein's political temperament by pointing to passages that seem to confirm a particular position, while simultaneously overlooking other passages that may contradict that position, is most certainly wrong... Rather, my purpose was to show the distractive power...such 'arguments' have on us." In *Exploring Certainty*, p. 93.

³⁵¹ Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 92.

³⁵² Eldridge, R. 'Wittgenstein and the Conversation of Justice', in Cressida Heyes (ed.) *The Grammar of Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 235, fn.10.

³⁵³ *Ibid.* p.127.

³⁵⁴ Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life*, p. 7. Ray Monk picks up on hints of perfectionism in Wittgenstein's work in the subtitle to his biography of Wittgenstein – 'The Duty of Genius' (thanks to an anonymous

The first thing that might make us slightly wary of Eldridge’s account is that the elements Eldridge takes to be central do not appear in the *Philosophical Investigations* at all; at least not in the form that Eldridge discusses them. Not only does Wittgenstein not use the term ‘expressive freedom’ but the central liberal notion of *freedom* or *liberty* is not mentioned in the *Philosophical Investigations* at all. There is also no mention of autonomy, tolerance, or mutual respect. The expression ‘self-command’ is not used, although early on in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein does talk of commanding “a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words [in a language game]”³⁵⁵ and later, again, tells us that commanding “a clear view of the use of our words”³⁵⁶ is one of his principal aims.

So, is there any truth in Eldridge’s account? – Certainly, it is true that Wittgenstein does not aim at debating or putting forward *theses*³⁵⁷. In discussing the nature of philosophy, as he practices it, Wittgenstein says that, “[i]f someone were to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them because everyone would agree to them”³⁵⁸. It is also true that Wittgenstein does sometimes speak of an element of self-control being involved in philosophizing. Eldridge cites a passage from the ‘Big Typescript’ in support of his case, where Wittgenstein says,

“DIFFICULTY OF PHILOSOPHY NOT THE INTELLECTUAL DIFFICULTY OF THE SCIENCES, BUT THE DIFFICULTY OF A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE. RESISTANCE OF THE WILL MUST BE OVERCOME. ... Work on philosophy is...actually more of // a kind of // work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On the way one sees things... THE METHOD OF PHILOSOPHY: THE PERSPICUOUS REPRESENTATION

referee commenting on my paper ‘Was Wittgenstein a Liberal Philosopher?’ (*Teorema*, Vol.36, Issue 1, 2017) for this point). The current chapter is a revised version of that paper.

³⁵⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §5.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, §122.

³⁵⁷ See Hans-Johann Glock’s ‘*Philosophical Investigations* section128: ‘theses in philosophy’ and undogmatic procedure’ for an excellent discussion of what Wittgenstein means by ‘theses’ in this context.

³⁵⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §128.

OF GRAMMATICAL // LINGUISTIC // FACTS. THE GOAL: THE TRANSPARENCY OF ARGUMENTS..."³⁵⁹

Eldridge also cites a passage from *Culture and Value*, where Wittgenstein says that, "[t]he edifice of your pride has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work"³⁶⁰. Another respect in which Eldridge's account is at least partially correct is that he claims that Wittgenstein wants to avoid being dogmatic or doctrinaire. So, Eldridge says of Wittgenstein that he wants to "...avoid all at once dogmatism, nihilist skepticism, and simple indifferentism..."³⁶¹ and that "onwardness and self-revision, not doctrine and self-completion are pervasive"³⁶². There is support for this in Wittgenstein's later work, for example in the *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein raises worries about, "[t]he dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy"³⁶³. Wittgenstein makes it clear that he is far from seeking to impose a set of beliefs or opinions (i.e. being doctrinaire), in his lectures (1939) where he said that he was not advancing opinions at all³⁶⁴ and said that if anyone were to dispute anything he said he would let that point drop and move on to something else³⁶⁵.

Nonetheless, there are problems with Eldridge's account of Wittgenstein. Whereas Eldridge contrasts Wittgenstein's opposition to advancing theses in philosophy with "the ongoing reenactment of a condition", Wittgenstein himself, in the passages on philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations*, contrasts advancing theses with presenting descriptions of the grammar of our language with the goal of dissolving philosophical problems. So, in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein says that,

³⁵⁹ Wittgenstein, L. 'Philosophy: Sections 86-93 of the So-Called "Big Typescript" (Catalogue Number 213)', in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993, pp. 161-63, 171. Cited on p. 109 of Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life*.

³⁶⁰ Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value (Revised Edition)*, p. 30e. Cited on p. 109 of Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life*.

³⁶¹ Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life*, p. 7.

³⁶² Ibid. p. 89.

³⁶³ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §131.

³⁶⁴ Wittgenstein, L. *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge, 1939*, Cora Diamond (ed.), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976, p. 103.

³⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 22.

“...we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light – that is to say, its purpose – from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; but are solved through an insight into the workings of our language... The problems are solved... by assembling what we have long been familiar with.”³⁶⁶

The purpose of philosophy, as Wittgenstein does it, is not self-command (although an element of self-command is involved in fulfilling this purpose) but to dissolve philosophical problems by assembling relevant grammatical rules that we are already familiar with – by ‘assembling reminders’ of the correct use of words (“the work of a philosopher consists in marshalling recollections”)³⁶⁷. The element of self-command that is involved – the overcoming of the resistance of the will, or the dismantling of pride – is required because we are ‘bewitched’ by sentences that appear to make sense but which do not: “Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language”³⁶⁸. Similarly, it is not “onwardness and self-revision”, as Eldridge says, that Wittgenstein opposes to dogmatism and doctrine, rather it is the careful examination of the grammar of our language. So, for example, when we are faced with a philosophical problem in mathematics what we should do is to “...render surveyable the state of mathematics that troubles us”³⁶⁹. In order to achieve understanding in philosophy we should produce surveyable representations of the relevant region of grammar³⁷⁰ (i.e. remind ourselves of how the relevant words are ordinarily used).

When Wittgenstein talks about dogmatism in philosophy he does not have in mind the kind of objectionable blinkered or inflexible stances taken in politics that

³⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. §127.

³⁶⁸ Ibid. §109.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. §125.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. §122.

might be contrasted with more open-minded or perhaps liberal stances, rather he is talking about a kind of philosophy in which an archetype or a model is held onto in such a way that it amounts to a “preconception to which reality *must* correspond”³⁷¹ his targets were Spengler, who he accused of “dogmatically attribut[ing] to the object what should be ascribed only to the archetype”³⁷² and his own earlier philosophy. As Peter Hacker puts it, “...it is characteristic of misguided [dogmatic] philosophy to insist that things *must* be thus-and-so, because this is how one has resolved to represent them”³⁷³. Wittgenstein’s point is that grammatical rules do not describe *de re* necessities, rather they are rules for the use of words (i.e. not descriptions at all). Wittgenstein’s philosophy is not doctrinaire or opinionated because it does not involve presenting opinions at all. The activity that Wittgenstein is engaged in is the description of norms of representation, the description of grammar, with the purpose of getting rid of philosophical (i.e. conceptual) confusion and this is quite different to presenting opinions (i.e. not grammatical claims) on matters in politics, morality, or metaphysics. *Describing* grammar is also a quite different kind of activity to theorizing, which aims at *explaining* some phenomenon.

Eldridge himself acknowledges the appeal of this account of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, attributing the view to Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker. He says that it is “...a considerable and powerful view. Put into practice, it yields trenchant criticisms of a great deal of work in linguistics, cognitive psychology, and the theory of perception...”³⁷⁴. However, Eldridge thinks that this account is open to serious objections. On the one hand it acknowledges Wittgenstein’s remark about philosophy not advancing theses or any kind of theory but on the other it attributes a thesis to Wittgenstein, namely that grammar is autonomous.

However, it is not clear that Eldridge’s objection finds its target. For one thing, Baker and Hacker themselves do not refer to ‘grammar is autonomous’ as a thesis. So,

³⁷¹ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §131.

³⁷² Wittgenstein, L. *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, German-English Scholars Edition, Edited and Translated by C. G. Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p.204e.

³⁷³ Hacker, P. M. S. ‘Wittgenstein on Grammar, Theses, and Dogmatism’, in *Wittgenstein: Comparisons & Context*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 167.

³⁷⁴ Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life*, p. 103.

there is no explicit commitment from them to the clash that Eldridge identifies. Moreover, it is not clear that 'grammar is autonomous' is a thesis. If it were a thesis then it is, at best, unclear what evidence could be adduced in support of it. An alternative way of viewing the remark that 'grammar is autonomous' is to view it as itself a kind of grammatical remark (and so not the kind of thing such that we might adduce evidence in support of it). The remark basically amounts to saying that "[t]here is no such thing as justifying grammar as correct by reference to reality"³⁷⁵, and so it rules out philosophical attempts to do that, such as that in Wittgenstein's own earlier work. 'Grammar is autonomous' could be taken to be like 'inner states stand in need of outward criteria', in playing the role of a synoptic description "drawing together and interrelating a multitude of grammatical propositions that are truisms"³⁷⁶.

The other problem facing Eldridge's objection is that it seems as though if he objects to Baker and Hacker on those grounds he would also have to bring the objection against Wittgenstein himself, since Wittgenstein makes remarks in several places that amount to saying that grammar is autonomous. For example, in *Philosophical Grammar* Wittgenstein says that "[g]rammar is not accountable to any reality. It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning"³⁷⁷ and in *Zettel* we find Wittgenstein saying that, "one is tempted to justify rules of grammar by statements like 'But there really are four primary colours'. And the remark that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is directed against the possibility of this justification"³⁷⁸. It seems unlikely that Wittgenstein himself would have held both that 'grammar is autonomous' is a thesis and that he would remark that there are no theses in philosophy. This lends support to the view that 'grammar is autonomous' is not a thesis at all.

³⁷⁵ Baker, G. P. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity* (second edition, extensively revised by P. M. S. Hacker), Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 336.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 20.

³⁷⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Grammar*, Rush Rhees (ed.), A. J. P. Kenny (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1974, p. 184.

³⁷⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *Zettel*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, §331.

Given the problems with Eldridge's account (i.e. the inconsistencies of his account with Wittgenstein's own professed aims) and the plausibility of Baker and Hacker's account, I suggest that the latter is preferable, and so the case that Eldridge makes for there being a variety of perfectionist liberalism in Wittgenstein's work is seriously undermined³⁷⁹. Neither Brice, nor Eldridge has made a convincing argument in favour of Wittgenstein being a liberal. In the next section I will turn to Rorty's pragmatic case for liberalism and argue that it does not suggest that there is any kind of liberalism in Wittgenstein's philosophical work.

4.3.3 Rorty, Wittgenstein, and Liberalism

In the section above (4.2.3) it was suggested that there were some commonalities between Wittgenstein's and Rorty's philosophies. However, with regard to the topic in question, namely Rorty's pragmatic case for liberal ironism, it is the differences between the two that are more striking. (i) One way in which Rorty and Wittgenstein differ is in *how they conceive their relationship to traditional philosophy*. Rorty's pragmatist line is that "[c]riticisms of other philosophers' distinctions and problematics should charge relative inutility rather than 'meaninglessness' or 'illusion' or 'incoherence'"³⁸⁰, whereas, as Alice Crary notes, "it is a signature gesture of Wittgenstein's philosophy... to appeal to nonsense as a term of philosophical criticism"³⁸¹ and Crary's take on Wittgenstein is supported by remarks that Wittgenstein himself made, such as his remark that "[t]he results of philosophy are the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense..."³⁸². (ii) Wittgenstein does not think of his

³⁷⁹ Eldridge is amongst those interpreters of Wittgenstein who take the *Philosophical Investigations* to be a literary text and so puts pressure on the philosophy/literature distinction. Eldridge wants to suggest that the 'voices' in the text are in a discussion that never comes to resolution, in contrast to, for example, Peter Hacker, who want to suggest that Wittgenstein presents conclusive arguments against certain philosophical positions (including Wittgenstein's own earlier views). See, for example, 'Gordon Baker's Late Interpretation of Wittgenstein' in G. Kahane, E. Kanterian, and O. Kuusela (eds.) *Interpretations of Wittgenstein*, Blackwell: Oxford, 2007.

³⁸⁰ Rorty, R. 'Hilary Putnam and the Relativist Menace', in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers Volume 3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 45.

³⁸¹ Crary, A. 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought', p. 128.

³⁸² Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §119. Elsewhere Wittgenstein says "To say that this proposition ['This is how things are'] agrees (or does not agree) with reality would be obvious nonsense"

work in philosophy as consisting in *creating new vocabularies* as Rorty does. Rorty thinks that we should give up on certain distinctions and ways of speaking associated with past philosophy and promote new, more useful, ways of speaking (such as the liberal ironist vocabulary that he wants to promote). So, for example, he suggests that we set aside “the subject-object, scheme-content, and reality-appearance distinctions and [think]... of our relation to the rest of the universe in purely causal, as opposed to representationalist, terms”³⁸³, that “we cannot employ the Kantian distinction between morality and prudence”³⁸⁴, and that we should “stop using the distinctions between finding and making, discovery and invention, objective and subjective”³⁸⁵. Wittgenstein also has problems with distinctions made by traditional philosophers but he does not suggest jettisoning the old dichotomies. Instead he says that “[w]hat we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use”³⁸⁶. What that means is that we should ‘marshal recollections’ or ‘assemble reminders’³⁸⁷ of the ordinary use of the words in question so that we can recognize that the way that past philosophers have used the words in question is nonsensical – “to pass from unobvious nonsense to obvious nonsense”³⁸⁸. (iii) The difference in philosophical approaches is summed up by one of James Conant’s objections to Rorty. Wittgenstein famously said that his aim in philosophy was “[t]o show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle”³⁸⁹ and I take it that this aim was synonymous with the aim mentioned above, of passing from unobvious to obvious nonsense – to make clear where past philosophers were confused and to remind people of how the relevant words are used ordinarily. However, James Conant notes that “Rorty’s recommendation appears to be that one

(§134) and “...only I can know whether I am really in pain: another person can only surmise it. – In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense...” (§246). (See also PI §252, §282, §464, §524)

³⁸³ Rorty, R. ‘Hilary Putnam and the Relativist Menace’, p. 49.

³⁸⁴ Rorty, R. *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. xvi.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. p. xviii.

³⁸⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §116.

³⁸⁷ Ibid. §127.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. §464.

³⁸⁹ Ibid. §309.

should leave the fly in the fly-bottle and get on with something more interesting”³⁹⁰ and Rorty himself, in commenting on this assessment, says that “Conant here gets me exactly right”³⁹¹. (iv) It follows from Wittgenstein’s account of philosophy as involving uncovering or discovering nonsense that he would not want to affirm the negation of the traditional philosophical ‘theories’ that he examines, because the negation of nonsense is itself nonsense. However, as Alice Crary³⁹² and Hilary Putnam have observed, Rorty seems to want to do something like affirming the negation of traditional philosophical positions. Rorty objects to realism but responds to it by saying that we can’t describe reality in itself³⁹³. Whether or not Rorty’s position is coherent it clearly is not Wittgenstein’s one³⁹⁴. (v) Rorty and Wittgenstein also differ in their approach to the issue of how philosophy relates to science. Throughout his career Wittgenstein made a clear distinction between philosophy and science. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein said unequivocally that “philosophy is not one of the natural sciences”³⁹⁵ and in the *Philosophical Investigations* he says that “...our considerations [in philosophy] must not be scientific ones.”³⁹⁶ Philosophy, unlike science, describes linguistic norms³⁹⁷ with the aim of dissolving (conceptual) confusion, according to Wittgenstein. However, Rorty, says that “...both scientists and philosophers help us to learn to get around the world better. They do not employ distinct methods.”³⁹⁸ (vi) A final difference between Rorty and Wittgenstein that is

³⁹⁰ Conant, J. ‘Introduction’ to Putnam, H. *Realism with a Human Face*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. lii.

³⁹¹ Rorty, R. ‘Hilary Putnam and the Relativist Menace’, in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers Volume 3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 47, fn. 17.

³⁹² Crary, A. ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought’, pp. 127-8.

³⁹³ Putnam, H. *Realism with a Human Face*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 39. See also, pp.27-56 of Putnam’s *Pragmatism* for a full discussion of why Putnam thinks that it is mistaken to describe Wittgenstein as a pragmatist).

³⁹⁴ See, for example, Wittgenstein’s *Blue Book*, where he examines the grammar of the relevant terms involved in disputes between idealists, solipsists, and realists (Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, pp. 48-9.)

³⁹⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.111.

³⁹⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.

³⁹⁷ Ibid. §124.

³⁹⁸ Rorty, R. ‘Wittgenstein and the linguistic turn’, in *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Volume 4 Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 166.

particularly worth commenting on here is their difference over the issue of meaning and use. Rorty presents us with the outline of a “‘social practice’ theory of language”³⁹⁹ which he describes as a pragmatic theory “epitomized in the Wittgensteinian maxim ‘Don’t look for the meaning, look for the use’”⁴⁰⁰. However, according to Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy there could be no *theses* in philosophy and although Wittgenstein is credited with the ‘maxim’ he never himself said such a thing. Wittgenstein did not recommend replacing talk of meaning with talk of use and he did not think that meaning could be explicated in terms of use in every instance. What Wittgenstein actually said in the *Philosophical Investigations* was that “[f]or a large class of cases of the employment of the word ‘meaning’ – though not for *all* – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language...”⁴⁰¹. Rorty thinks Wittgenstein’s thought here suggests that “any utterance can be given significance by being batted around in more or less predictable ways”⁴⁰² but although Wittgenstein would have agreed that any utterance could be *given* a meaning he would have been wary of the thought expressed by Rorty here. As we have already seen Wittgenstein did not think that certain words used in traditional philosophical ‘theories’ were given a clear sense despite being used in ‘more or less predictable ways’. As Daniel Whiting notes in his introduction to a collection of essays about Wittgenstein and language, “there is a normative dimension to use...from the fact that, for example ‘bachelor’ means *eligible, unmarried, adult male*, it appears trivially to follow that it would be wrong or incorrect to apply it to a married woman or to form the sentence, ‘My sister is a bachelor’”⁴⁰³. If someone were to repeatedly say ‘my sister is a bachelor’ at ten o’clock every morning (i.e. bat the phrase about in ‘more or less predictable ways’) the phrase would not become any more meaningful. As in the case of traditional philosophers, if you use a word in a way that flouts the

³⁹⁹ Ibid. pp. 172-3.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 172.

⁴⁰¹ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §43.

⁴⁰² Rorty, R. ‘Wittgenstein and the linguistic turn’, p. 172.

⁴⁰³ Whiting, D. ‘Introduction’ in Daniel Whiting (ed.) *The Later Wittgenstein on Language*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 4.

ordinary rules for its use then you need to at least explain what you mean by what you say in order to be understood.

These sharp differences between Wittgenstein's philosophy and Rorty's pragmatist philosophy tell us that whatever the virtues of Rorty's pragmatist case for liberalism it is not a case that is strongly rooted in Wittgenstein's philosophy. It might be said to be inspired by Wittgenstein's philosophy but this inspiration consists in taking words and phrases from Wittgenstein's work and twisting them beyond recognition and so Rorty's case does very little to demonstrate that there is any kind of liberalism to be found in Wittgenstein's work. In fact, given that Wittgenstein is primarily concerned with matters of grammar, sense, and nonsense, it seems clear at the very least that his concerns are not political or ideological (although his work may well be of help in dissolving conceptual confusions in the work of political philosophers, which might, indirectly lead to changes in people's ideology, perhaps by undermining the credibility of the philosopher in question).

4.3.4 Crary on Rorty and Liberal Democracy

Alice Crary, in her 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought' objects to Rorty's arguments in several places. She objects to the way in which he throws out the baby with the bathwater when he suggests that we should drop realist jargon (e.g. objectivity) because realism is incoherent. In this respect she is closer to Wittgenstein than Rorty, in that Wittgenstein only wanted to bring back words from their metaphysical to their ordinary use rather than drop them, as Rorty suggests. As already noted, she also objects to the way in which Rorty moves from rejecting realism to asserting something like its negative and makes a similar objection to the one that Conant has made concerning the way that Rorty just wants to discard traditional philosophy and move onto something more interesting rather than engage with the way in which philosophical problems beguile us⁴⁰⁴, and finally, she objects to views which attribute theses about meaning to Wittgenstein.

⁴⁰⁴ Crary, A. 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought', pp. 127-9.

Rorty presents us with something like a false dichotomy, between realist philosophy and 'pure language game' philosophy. Crary notes that Wittgenstein "rejects as the product of metaphysical confusion the idea that we must choose between, on the one hand, having the world and forfeiting responsibility and, on the other, having responsibility and losing the world."⁴⁰⁵ i.e. the kind of division that Rorty has in mind. In place of Rorty's confused 'theorising' Crary suggests that we adopt of view of Wittgenstein such that he is calling upon us to develop sensitivities acquired when mastering our language. We should, on this view, "put... to use- and perhaps stretch – our *imagination*"⁴⁰⁶. This seems reasonable enough. Wittgenstein's philosophy does involve us having to think about how we ordinarily use the terms that are under consideration and then to assemble to appropriate resources to tackle philosophical problems. However, it is difficult to see how Crary gets from this to the conclusion that the lessons from her interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy would be found "reflected in forms of social life that embody the ideals of liberal democracy"⁴⁰⁷. Crary herself says that this is only a suspicion that she has and she does not specify the ideals that she has in mind. It is also difficult to know quite what she is opposing the ideals of liberal democracy to: is she thinking about private property (liberal) vs. public property (socialist), free markets (liberal) vs. government control of industry, or perhaps maximal individual liberty vs. responsibility to a collective? Without further specification it is difficult to evaluate her conclusion and how she has arrived at it, and so I would suggest that, at best, a weak case has been made for saying that Wittgenstein's thought is reflected in the forms of social life she mentions. We might say that Wittgensteinian philosophizing is particularly encouraged by societies that allow people time to reflect, to develop their imaginative capacities, and which educate them well, but neither of these elements is tied particularly to liberal democracy. In fact, one might argue that the capitalism that has grown up with liberal democracy denies much of the world opportunities to develop in these ways. Tendencies towards specialization, and pressures to publish original material in

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 141.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 140.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 141.

philosophy journals in liberal democracies might also be thought to be trends that undermine philosophizing as Wittgenstein suggested.

4.4 Conclusion

So, neither Brice, Eldridge, Rorty nor Crary has made a convincing case for there being some kind of liberal or liberal-democratic tendencies in Wittgenstein's thought. As noted in the previous chapter, in his political pronouncements Wittgenstein himself combined elements of conservative influence with sympathy for elements of bolshevism, as well as a "Tolstoyan ideal of a life of manual work"⁴⁰⁸ so if there are hints of liberalism in Wittgenstein's philosophical thought it would seem that Wittgenstein himself was not particularly well attuned to them⁴⁰⁹. Wittgenstein's political thought was not liberal and his philosophy does not obviously have any ideological implications; rather it was focused on dissolving the conceptual confusions found in the work of past philosophers. I will go on to argue in later chapters that Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks do have some political implications but the implications that they have do not suggest that Wittgenstein was a liberal⁴¹⁰.

⁴⁰⁸ Glock, H-J. *What is Analytic Philosophy?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 192.

⁴⁰⁹ For a good overview of Wittgenstein's various political opinions see Ray Monk's autobiography of Wittgenstein – Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage, 1990.

⁴¹⁰ This chapter has been primarily focused on modern liberalism rather than classical liberalism. I think that the combination of elements of conservatism in Wittgenstein's thought, his support for social democratic parties (voting for the British Labour Party), and things like his distaste for class division in his (romanticised) view of post-revolutionary Russia already make it fairly clear that Wittgenstein was not a classical liberal. Further support for the claim that Wittgenstein was not a classical liberal can be found in Hayek's recollections of Wittgenstein (Hayek was Wittgenstein's second cousin and Hayek met Wittgenstein on a few occasions). Hayek (a classical liberal) said that when he met Wittgenstein in the early 1940s he avoided talking about politics with him because "we knew we disagreed politically". Although it is unclear exactly how Hayek and Wittgenstein disagreed it is at least clear that they did – and to the extent that they would avoid talking about politics (see Hayek, F. A. 'Remembering My Cousin, Ludwig Wittgenstein', *Encounter*, August 1977, p. 22).

Chapter 5 - English Marxist's Interpretations of Wittgenstein: A Critique

5.1 Introduction

The later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein has had a mixed reception amongst Marxists. For the most part his work has been ignored by Marxists but among those who have paid him some attention the response has often been to focus in on a limited number of remarks and to put a distorted spin on those remarks. In particular, Marxists have tended to place great emphasis on Wittgenstein's remark in the *Philosophical Investigations* that philosophy "...leaves everything as it is"⁴¹¹. Early, critical, responses to Wittgenstein from figures on the left proved to be influential, including Ernest Gellner's *Words and Things*⁴¹², and Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*⁴¹³. However, more recent accounts of Wittgenstein's thought from Marxists in both the continental and analytic traditions have been more sympathetic and have overcome some of the weaknesses of the earlier analyses⁴¹⁴.

Having looked at Wittgenstein's relationship to the ideologies of conservatism and liberalism, this chapter will look at the relationship between Wittgenstein's philosophy and socialist and Marxist philosophy. To get clearer about this I will examine accounts of Wittgenstein in the work of three influential English Marxists:

⁴¹¹ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §124.

⁴¹² Gellner, E. *Words and Things: A examination of, and an attack on, Linguistic Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Routledge: London, 2005, [1959]. T. P. Uschanov's essay 'Ernest Gellner's criticisms of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy' gives a good account of the reception of Gellner's account of Wittgenstein and also makes sharp criticisms of Gellner's work (Uschanov's essay appears in Kitching, G. and Pleasants, N. (eds.) *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, morality and politics*, Routledge: London, 2002). Perry Anderson, whose essay 'Components of the National Culture' will be examined in this chapter, describes Gellner's book as a 'classic' and he clearly thinks that Gellner has dealt decisively with 'linguistic philosophy', including Wittgenstein ('Components of the National Culture' in Blackburn, R. and Cockburn, A. (eds.) *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, fn. 28, p. 280)

⁴¹³ Marcuse, H. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd edition, 1991, [1964].

⁴¹⁴ See, for example, Kitching, G. and Pleasants, N. (eds.) *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, morality and politics*, Routledge: London, 2002; Badiou, A. *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, Verso: London, 2011; and Karczmarczyk, P. 'Althusser and Wittgenstein: Ideology and Therapeutical Analysis of Language' in *Rethinking Marxism*, 25 (4), pp. 534-548, 2013.

Perry Anderson, Alex Callinicos, and Terry Eagleton. All three are academics⁴¹⁵ but they also have audiences that go beyond academia. Anderson was, for a long time, editor at the *New Left Review* and regularly writes for other publications, including the *London Review of Books*. The paper of his that will be examined here, 'Components of the National Culture', has been reprinted numerous times⁴¹⁶. Alex Callinicos is an active socialist, editor of the *International Socialism Journal*, and he regularly writes for the British socialist newspaper *Socialist Worker*. Eagleton has published about 50 books and his *Literary Theory*, in particular, has been a best seller, selling more than 750,000 copies⁴¹⁷. Their work is worth examining because all three have produced excellent political, cultural, and historical work that has reached a wide audience and all three have paid some attention to developments in philosophy as well as to the history of philosophy. However, all three have misinterpreted the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Anderson and Callinicos have dismissed Wittgenstein's work without engaging with it in a serious way whereas Eagleton has taken Wittgenstein's work seriously (he wrote the script for Derek Jarman's film about Wittgenstein⁴¹⁸ and his work in cultural theory is clearly indebted, to some extent, to Wittgenstein⁴¹⁹) but has nonetheless misconstrued some of his remarks.

Why should Marxists take Wittgenstein seriously? Whether Marxists agree with him or not, Wittgenstein is regarded by many as the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century. Bertrand Russell, writing in 1959, said that "[d]uring the period since 1914 three philosophies have successively dominated the British philosophical

⁴¹⁵ Anderson is Professor of History at UCLA, Callinicos is Professor of European Studies at King's College London, and Eagleton is Professor of English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University.

⁴¹⁶ Anderson, P. 'Components of the National Culture' in Blackburn, R. and Cockburn, A. (eds.) *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, pp. 214-84, 1969. It has reappeared in Anderson, P. *English Questions*, Verso: London, 1992 and in Milner, A. (ed.) *Postwar British Critical Thought*, Vol. 2, Sage: London, 2004.

⁴¹⁷ See 'A theoretical blow for democracy' *Times Higher Education*, June 1st, 2001 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/a-theoretical-blow-for-democracy/160508.article> .

⁴¹⁸ *Wittgenstein* [Film] Directed by Derek Jarman. Japan/UK: BFI Production/Bandung Productions/Channel Four Films/Uplink Co., 1993. Eagleton's script for the film was published in the same year: Eagleton, T. *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script, The Derek Jarman Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1993. For a critical take on Jarman's film and Eagleton's script see Colin McGinn's article 'Soul on Fire', *New Republic*, 210:25 (20th June 1994), pp. 34-9.

⁴¹⁹ See Vinten, R. 'Eagleton's Wittgenstein' in *Critique*, Vol. 43, No. 2, May 2015, p. 264, for some detail on how Wittgenstein influenced Eagleton.

world, first that of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, second that of the Logical Positivists, and third that of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*"⁴²⁰. Wittgenstein's work has been enormously influential, not only in philosophy but in psychology, sociology and cultural theory, and it has inspired poetry, novels, and film. Marxists should also take an interest in Wittgenstein's thought because it is *revolutionary*. That is not to say that Wittgenstein theorised about revolution; Wittgenstein wrote very little about politics and, as we have seen, he was averse to theorising in philosophy but he did totally transform the way in which philosophical problems from the history of traditional philosophy were viewed. He recognised that traditional problems in metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language were conceptual muddles and that we should not attempt to find an informative solution to them. Philosophy of that sort should not seek to enlarge our knowledge of the world but to clear away confusions and enrich our understanding⁴²¹. Marxists such as Marcuse, Anderson, and Callinicos have thought that this vision of philosophy is fundamentally opposed to the Marxist's attempt to give a scientific account of human history, society, and culture and to change the world. However, I want to suggest that this is just another conceptual confusion from traditional philosophy. It is perfectly possible to both reveal confusions about the meanings of words in the work of philosophers like Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Russell, and Frege, as Wittgenstein did, and to give a systematic account of the historical development of class societies as well as to write work to encourage large scale changes in society, as Marxists do. If Marxists take Wittgenstein seriously and develop the kind of sensitivity to language which Wittgenstein's work exemplified then it will enrich Marxist thought and help to put up defences against "wrong turnings"⁴²² in dealing with philosophical problems.

⁴²⁰ Russell, B. *My Philosophical Development*, Allen and Unwin: London, 1959, p. 216. Indeed, Anderson describes Wittgenstein as a "brilliant originator" ('Components of the National Culture', p. 233) and Eagleton acknowledges that Wittgenstein is "commonly thought to be the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century" (in *The Meaning of Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 5).

⁴²¹ That is not to say that philosophy is of no use in enlarging our knowledge of the world. Once confusions are cleared away questions will be formulated more clearly and answers to those questions will be more likely to make sense and to be clearly expressed, which will advance knowledge.

⁴²² Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value: Revised Edition*, von Wright, G. H. and Nyman, H. (eds.) Revised by Alois Pichler, Winch, P. (trans.), Blackwell: Oxford, 1998, p. 25e – where Wittgenstein says "Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of well kept wrong turnings...So what I should do is erect signposts at all the junctions where there are wrong turnings, to help people past the danger points".

Wittgensteinians could also undoubtedly learn from the kind of rich and thorough analyses of society, economics, culture, and class offered by Marxist thinkers⁴²³.

5.2 Perry Anderson's Interpretation of Wittgenstein

In 1969, in the wake of student revolts in the U.S.A., Italy, Britain, and France, a collection of essays by young Marxists, *Student Power*, was published, including a lengthy essay about British culture by Perry Anderson⁴²⁴. Anderson's essay was an ambitious attempt to give an overview of the various disciplines concerned with politics and culture in Britain with the aim of developing a revolutionary culture and aiding student and worker's struggles in Britain. He dedicated sections of the essay to the various components of British culture, which he took to be, first and foremost, sociology, political theory, history, economics, psychology, aesthetics, psychoanalysis, anthropology, literary criticism, and philosophy.

One of Anderson's claims was that between 1900 and 1950 British culture came to be dominated by 'white' (i.e. anti-, or counter-revolutionary) emigrants including Ludwig Wittgenstein (other names on the list include Bronislaw Malinowski, Lewis Namier, Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, Melanie Klein, and Ernst Gombrich⁴²⁵). Anderson suggests that the 'white emigration' occurred because Britain's conservative culture appealed to some people who were fleeing instability in their own countries. A key characteristic of the white emigration on Anderson's account was hostility to 'general ideas' and Wittgenstein's own hostility to general ideas was expressed by dismissing them, "by undermining their status as intelligible discourse altogether"⁴²⁶.

⁴²³ See Vinten, R. 'Eagleton's Wittgenstein', p.262, Kitching, G. 'Introduction' in *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, morality and politics*, p. 3, Schatski, T. 'Marx and Wittgenstein: Natural Historians' in *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, morality and politics*, pp. 49-62, Manser, A. R. *The End of Philosophy: Marx and Wittgenstein*, Camelot Press: Southampton, 1973, Rubinstein, D. *Marx and Wittgenstein: Social Praxis and Social Explanation*, Routledge: London, 1981, Easton, S. *Humanist Marxism and Wittgensteinian social philosophy*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1983 for efforts to highlight commonalities in the thought of Marx and Wittgenstein.

⁴²⁴ Anderson, P. 'Components of the National Culture' in Blackburn, R. and Cockburn, A. (eds.) *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, pp. 214-84, 1969.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 230.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 232.

This kind of hostility to theory is characteristic of conservatism⁴²⁷ and what the white emigrants did was to systematise the English conservative's rejection of theory. According to Anderson, Wittgenstein, in his later philosophy, recognised that there was a tension between rejecting theory on the one hand and producing a systematic (i.e. theoretical) rejection of it on the other and so Anderson says that what Wittgenstein did was to "retreat back to a non-systematised empiricism, a guileless, unaggregated registration of things as they were, in their diversity"⁴²⁸. In particular, Wittgenstein wanted to register how things were in terms of linguistic conventions and to ensure that linguistic conventions were not violated. Wittgenstein, on Anderson's account, thought that "the true philosopher was the guardian of conventions"⁴²⁹ and Anderson's view was that "[t]he main effect of Wittgenstein's later philosophy was simply to consecrate the banalities of everyday language... the duty of the philosopher was to ensure the identity and stability of the system by preventing unorthodox moves within it"⁴³⁰.

In Anderson's account of Wittgenstein in 'Components of the National Culture' he only cites Wittgenstein's work once. At the centre of Anderson's case against Wittgenstein is the passage mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, namely §124 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is"⁴³¹. This passage does a lot of work in Anderson's account of Wittgenstein. It is meant to illustrate Wittgenstein's

⁴²⁷ See Quinton, A. 'Conservatism' in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 2nd edition, edited by Goodin, R. E., Pettit, P., and Pogge, T. W., Blackwell: Oxford, 2009, pp. 285-6; Nyiri, J. C. 'Wittgenstein 1929-31: The Turning Back' in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, Shanker, S. (ed.), Routledge: London, 1986, p. 38; and Vinten, R. 'Was Wittgenstein a Conservative Philosopher?' in *Revista Estudos Hum(e)anos*, No. 8, 2014/1, pp. 48, p. 51.

⁴²⁸ Anderson, P. 'Components of the National Culture', p. 233.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 235.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

⁴³¹ Anderson quotes from G. E. M. Anscombe's original translation of the *Philosophical Investigations* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1953). In Hacker and Schulte's recent version (4th edition) the passage is translated as "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".

conservatism but is also used to support the claim that Wittgenstein “rejected the very notion of intellectual innovation”⁴³².

This kind of straightforward registering of the way things are and the apparently conservative attitude to intellectual endeavours amounts to an endorsement of common sense, according to Anderson and, as Gramsci has taught us “common sense is the practical wisdom of the ruling class”. The ideas that seep down and come to seem like basic practical knowledge are the ideas that our rulers would like us to live our lives by but which are not necessarily beneficial for most of us. Wittgenstein’s philosophy boils down to a “blanket endorsement of the categories of the ongoing society”⁴³³. Moreover, the idea that we should continually preserve linguistic conventions as they are reveals, in Anderson’s view, “a basic premise of timelessness”. According to Anderson “[t]he whole Wittgensteinian theory of language, in effect, presupposes an unchanging corpus of concepts and an unalterable pattern of the contexts governing them”. Wittgenstein was able to present language in this way, as “an a-historical absolute”⁴³⁴ because “he lacked any notion of contradiction”⁴³⁵. Presumably Wittgenstein’s alleged failure could have been avoided if he had read Hegel and Marx and had formulated a dialectical materialist account of linguistic change⁴³⁶.

⁴³² Anderson, P. ‘Components of the National Culture’, p. 236.

⁴³³ Ibid. p. 237.

⁴³⁴ Marcuse also made this accusation against Wittgenstein in his *One Dimensional Man*. He suggests that in Wittgenstein’s work, “Multi-dimensional language is made into one-dimensional language...the explosive historical dimension of meaning is silenced” (Marcuse, H. *One Dimensional Man*, New York: Routledge, 2007 [1964], p. 202).

⁴³⁵ Anderson, P. ‘Components of the National Culture’, p. 238.

⁴³⁶ Incidentally, Wittgenstein was somewhat familiar with Hegel’s philosophical work. In a conversation with Maurice Drury Wittgenstein said: “Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different” (quoted in Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Vintage, 1991, pp. 536-7). Wittgenstein had read an account of Hegel’s dialectical method in C. D. Broad’s taxonomy of philosophical styles and said that he preferred Hegel’s method to Descartes’ (“the dialectical method is very sound and a way in which we do work” (ibid. p. 322)).

5.3 Problems with Anderson's Account

5.3.1 General Ideas and Theory

Anderson argued that Wittgenstein was hostile to 'general ideas' and that he dismissed them "by undermining their status as intelligible discourse altogether". While it is true that Wittgenstein was very much concerned with intelligibility it is not true that Wittgenstein ever claimed that generalisations were unintelligible. In fact, in a few places in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein writes about things that people *generally* do and the way that things are *generally*. So, for example, Wittgenstein says that, "[m]athematicians don't in general quarrel over the result of a calculation. (This is an important fact)"⁴³⁷ and that "[w]hat we have to mention in order to explain the significance...of a concept are often extremely general facts of nature"⁴³⁸. However, Wittgenstein was not normally concerned with empirical generalisations. He was certainly not concerned with producing a detailed inventory of things as they are, as Anderson suggested. As I pointed out in my discussion of Christopher Robinson's book in the introduction to this thesis, (section 0.2), philosophy is not an empirical discipline at all on Wittgenstein's view⁴³⁹.

Anderson might have got the idea that Wittgenstein was hostile to general ideas from Wittgenstein's remarks about theory. Wittgenstein does apparently make objections to putting forwards theories. For example, in §109 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says that, "...we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear..."⁴⁴⁰. However, in the passage in question Wittgenstein is talking about what we may do *in philosophy*, conceived as a discipline in which problems are solved through insights into the workings of our language. Philosophical problems of the sort

⁴³⁷ Wittgenstein, L. 'Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment', §341, in *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition.

⁴³⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, p.62e.

⁴³⁹ Philosophical problems "are, of course, not empirical problems; but they are solved through an insight into the workings of our language, and that in such a way that these workings are recognised – despite an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with." Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.

⁴⁴⁰ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, §109.

that Wittgenstein concerned himself with are grammatical or conceptual problems; problems which are solved by getting clear about what words mean⁴⁴¹. Scientific theories are not ruled out and nor are political ones (although we should be clear about differences between political inquiry and inquiry in the natural sciences). In fact, the possibility of *philosophical* theorising of some sort is not ruled out, since Wittgenstein saw what he was doing as “one of the heirs of the subject which used to be called ‘philosophy’”⁴⁴². This leaves open the possibility that one of the other legitimate heirs of the old subject, perhaps going by the name of ‘philosophy’ might include theoretical aspects. There is no inconsistency in thinking that we might produce theories when we are engaged in one sort of activity but not in another (such as carefully examining the grammar of our language with an eye to clarifying epistemological or metaphysical problems). It remains possible to be both a Marxist and a Wittgensteinian⁴⁴³.

5.3.2 Registering and Preserving Concepts

Anderson proposed that Wittgenstein wanted to register the way that concepts or linguistic rules are and to keep them that way. In fact, as we have seen, Anderson claimed that, “[t]he whole Wittgensteinian theory of language, in effect, presupposes an unchanging corpus of concepts and an unalterable pattern of the contexts

⁴⁴¹ Marxists may well think that any major philosopher whose work ignores class has an inadequate philosophy. While it is true that class does not feature as an element in Wittgenstein’s philosophy that does not show that his work is inadequate. We judge works as inadequate according to their task(s). If we take our task to be coming to an understanding of society in order to transform it for the better then class should undoubtedly play a role in our account. However, if the tasks are understanding the nature of epistemological and metaphysical remarks of past philosophers, unravelling of conceptual confusions in the work of past philosophers, and presenting synoptic representations of grammar to overcome those confusions then Wittgenstein should be regarded as one of the greatest philosophers to have lived. The way in which Wittgenstein addressed these issues was more than merely adequate.

⁴⁴² The italics are mine. See, Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1965 [1958], p. 28.

⁴⁴³ That is not to say that there are no tensions between remarks that Marxists have made and remarks made by Wittgenstein. It is clear that some things that have been said by Marxists would fall foul of Wittgenstein’s objections to scientism. See my ‘Leave Everything As It Is: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations of Wittgenstein’ pp. 13-14 for more on this.

governing them.”⁴⁴⁴ However, Wittgenstein did not propound a theory of language. As we have already seen, Wittgenstein did not want to advance theories but to present segments of the grammar of problematic expressions used in philosophy with the aim of alleviating confusion and promoting understanding. This was something that Anderson himself objected to (Wittgenstein’s supposed rejection of general ideas) and so it is peculiar that he then goes on to object to the “Wittgensteinian theory of language”. The claim that Wittgenstein’s remarks presuppose an unchanging body of concepts is also untrue. Wittgenstein makes clear in several passages that he recognises that conceptual change occurs and he gives a sophisticated account of it. In works like *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* Wittgenstein demonstrates an unusual sensitivity to changing contexts and concepts. For example, in *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says that “this diversity [of sentences] is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten”⁴⁴⁵. In *On Certainty* he says that, “[w]hen language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change”⁴⁴⁶ and that “[i]t might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time”⁴⁴⁷. There is nowhere in Wittgenstein’s later work that he suggests that this conceptual change should be prevented. The passage cited by Anderson, §124 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, neither says nor implies that the uses of expressions will not change or that they should not change. It is worth looking at it again to see that it gives no support to Anderson’s account:

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.

For it cannot give it any foundation either.

⁴⁴⁴ Anderson, P. ‘Components of the National Culture’, p. 238.

⁴⁴⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, §23.

⁴⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972 [1969], §65.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, §96.

It leaves everything as it is⁴⁴⁸.

Wittgenstein's point is that the philosopher's task is not to come up with new concepts (perhaps in an attempt to eliminate ambiguity or vagueness in existing concepts)⁴⁴⁹ but to examine the uses of the concepts that are causing confusions in philosophical problems⁴⁵⁰. Wittgenstein is talking here about what *philosophy* may or may not do. There is no prohibition on scientists, political theorists, sociologists, or anybody else formulating new concepts. Anderson misrepresents Wittgenstein's take on philosophy and dismisses it too quickly. There are, in fact, no deep tensions between Marxist theory and Wittgensteinian philosophy.

5.3.3 Common Sense

Anderson also took §124 of the *Philosophical Investigations* to be an endorsement of common sense, and thereby an endorsement of ruling class ideology. According to Anderson this also involves rejecting intellectual innovation. However, we have already seen that Wittgenstein did not see his task as being one of endorsing a set of concepts but as describing concepts with an eye to getting rid of confusion. This does not mean providing an inventory of concepts and urging people to keep them. Rather it involves reminding people of how concepts involved in philosophical problems are ordinarily correctly employed so as to show that concepts are being misused or not used at all (by contrast) when philosophical confusion arises. Furthermore, endorsing a set of concepts, whatever that might amount to, is not the same thing as endorsing an ideology. We can use a language to express ideological convictions of various conflicting sorts but the language itself is not an ideology. It is fair to say that people might try to redefine terms with ideological goals in mind (for example, the ruling class might try to define class in cultural terms as a way of

⁴⁴⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §124.

⁴⁴⁹ In particular, it is not the philosopher's task to introduce an ideal language (see Glock, H-J. *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 296-7).

⁴⁵⁰ This is not the only task of philosophers, in Wittgenstein's view. Wittgenstein thought that there were various different kinds of philosophical problems and proposed a variety of methods in dissolving them. "There is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were" (*Philosophical Investigations*, §133d).

preventing people from identifying themselves with people with common economic interests), but one can recognise this without coming into conflict with Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy or of conceptual change. So, Wittgenstein was not endorsing any kind of ideology in his work. His work did not concern ideology at all⁴⁵¹.

Considering Wittgenstein's biography as well as his non-philosophical remarks also suggests that it is a misrepresentation of Wittgenstein to say that he naively endorsed ruling class ideology. As we saw in Chapter 3, Wittgenstein took an interest in Soviet Russia and was attracted to the idea of living and working there from about 1922 onwards. According to John Maynard Keynes, Wittgenstein was among those who "seek for something good in Soviet Russia"⁴⁵² and we also saw that in the 1930s a friend of Wittgenstein's, George Thomson, said that Wittgenstein's political awareness was growing and that "[h]e was alive to the evils of unemployment and fascism and the growing danger of war" and that Wittgenstein's attitude towards Marxism was that, "[h]e was opposed to it in theory, but supported it in practice". As Ray Monk points out in his biography of Wittgenstein, this accords with Wittgenstein's own claim that "I am a communist, *at heart*" and with the fact that Wittgenstein's friends included the Marxist Pierro Sraffa, amongst others⁴⁵³. In the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein said that he owed "the most fruitful ideas of this book" to Sraffa⁴⁵⁴. Wittgenstein held Sraffa's opinion in the highest regard when it came to political matters. He also remained sympathetic towards Soviet Russia in the

⁴⁵¹ This is not to say that there is no relationship between language and ideology whatsoever. There are interesting discussions to be had about, for example, concepts like 'democracy' - whether they are 'essentially contested', and if so whether particular interpretations of them belong to particular ideologies. It may be that disagreements between the adherents of different ideologies also involve disagreements about the application of certain concepts. The relevance of Wittgensteinian philosophy to such disputes would be to try to achieve clarity about the different legitimate uses of a concept and to try to disentangle empirical and grammatical elements to the disputes to the extent that it is possible. Wittgensteinian philosophers might *also* engage in ideological disputes when they are not doing philosophy as Wittgenstein does - and so it is not impossible that they might make claims about how terms like 'democracy' or 'working class' should be understood, and so reject other uses of those terms on grounds other than whether they make sense. However, this does not change the fact that the negation of any ideological claim can be expressed within language, that any interpretation of an essentially contested concept can be used in various ways - it can be quoted, discussed, rejected - and so it is clear that the language itself is not an ideology and I would suggest that description of grammar is not essentially ideological (thanks to Pedro Karczmarczyk for pushing me to develop this point).

⁴⁵² Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 248.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

⁴⁵⁴ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, p. 4e.

1930s and said that “[i]f anything could destroy my sympathy with the Russian regime it would be the growth of class distinctions”⁴⁵⁵. This is not, of course, clear evidence that Wittgenstein was a Marxist but it does show that Wittgenstein did not lap up the ‘ruling ideas’ in Britain at the time unquestioningly.

As for common-sense; Wittgenstein explicitly disavowed common-sense approaches to philosophy in his lectures. He said that “[y]ou must not try to avoid a philosophical problem by appealing to common sense; instead, present it as it arises with most power...the common-sense answer in itself is no solution; everyone knows it. One must not in philosophy attempt to short-circuit problems”⁴⁵⁶. In his remarks on epistemological problems which have been published in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein attacked G. E. Moore’s attempt to use the claims of common sense to undermine scepticism. Instead, Wittgenstein carefully described the use of expressions such as ‘knowledge’, ‘certainty’ and ‘doubt’ with the aim of dissolving the problems.

Wittgenstein did not reject intellectual innovation. His remark that philosophy leaves everything as it is concerns everything within its domain, i.e. the concepts involved in philosophical problems. This does not even imply that his philosophy leaves *philosophy* as it is, let alone other disciplines. As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein’s way of viewing philosophy revolutionised it and provided innovative new techniques for viewing philosophical problems and clearing away confusion. The remark he makes in §124 is perfectly consistent with believing in, welcoming, or accepting intellectual innovations, although it is surely the case that Wittgenstein, like everyone else, would welcome some and reject others.

What is true is that Wittgenstein despised the kind of technical philosophical work found in journals like *Mind*. However, Wittgenstein’s point was not that the same things could be said more clearly in non-technical language or that what people ordinarily said about the issues in question was correct. Wittgenstein thought that previous philosophers’ conception of their task was entirely misconceived. Philosophers should not be trying to provide metaphysical grounding for other regions

⁴⁵⁵ Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 353.

⁴⁵⁶ Ambrose, A. (ed.) *Wittgenstein’s Lectures, Cambridge 1932-35, from the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret Macdonald*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979, p. 109.

of thought, they should not be trying to work out the relation between mind and body, or trying to discover the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. Wittgenstein's innovativeness lay in his recognition that problems like these were 'pseudo-problems' of a particular sort: the problems would disappear or dissolve once it was recognised that the vexation surrounding them resulted from conceptual confusion rather than from the fact that they were particularly profound (metaphysical/epistemological) problems.

5.4 Callinicos on Wittgenstein – Meaning, Use, and Theory

In his book *Marxism and Philosophy* Alex Callinicos made an effort to critically assess analytic philosophy from a Marxist perspective and to build bridges between Marxists and analytic philosophers. His account is not so dismissive of Wittgenstein as Anderson's had been. Callinicos cites several passages from Wittgenstein's work and sometimes seems sympathetic to it. He describes Anderson's treatment of Wittgenstein as "grossly unfair"⁴⁵⁷. However, Callinicos does think that "[m]any of the charges made by Anderson and others against mainstream Anglo-Saxon philosophy can be justified" and he mentions Frege and Wittgenstein as exemplars of this tradition⁴⁵⁸. In fact, Callinicos makes the same sorts of criticisms of Wittgenstein's work as Anderson had, objecting to anti-theoretical aspects of his work⁴⁵⁹, claiming that analytic philosophy (presumably including Wittgenstein) ignores history⁴⁶⁰, suggesting that analytic philosophers generally fail to consider conceptual change⁴⁶¹, and objecting to the "apologetic cult of common sense"⁴⁶² found amongst ordinary language philosophers (inspired by Wittgenstein).

A lot of these criticisms have already been dealt with above. However, Callinicos puts a different slant on the question of theory by attacking Wittgenstein's

⁴⁵⁷ Callinicos, A. *Marxism and Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 141.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. p. 149.

⁴⁶² Ibid. pp. 149-50.

remarks about meaning and use as a way of defending the notion that we can and should develop a theory of language. Callinicos suggests that some Marxists might raise objections to the very idea of a systematic theory of meaning, taking Wittgenstein's 'slogan' "the meaning of a word is its use in the language"⁴⁶³ to imply that "[w]ords and sentences acquire a meaning only in the specific context of their use"⁴⁶⁴. Callinicos takes it that this objection to developing a theory of language has been dealt with decisively by Michael Dummett in his book *Truth and Other Enigmas* where he says that,

The fact that anyone who has a mastery of any given language is able to understand an infinity of sentences, an infinity which is, of course, principally composed of sentences which he has never heard before... can hardly be explained otherwise than by supposing that each speaker has an implicit grasp of a number of general principles governing the use in sentences of words of the language... It is hard to see how there can be any theoretical obstacle to making those principles explicit; and an explicit statement of those principles an implicit grasp of which constitutes mastery of the language would be, precisely, a complete theory of meaning for the language.⁴⁶⁵

So, Callinicos thinks that we should develop a theory of language and he thinks that an important aspect of language to acknowledge in developing such a theory would be Frege's distinction between the sense of a sentence and its force. The thought expressed by a sentence is its sense. But we can express thoughts without asserting them or judging that they are the case. We should distinguish the thought expressed from the force with which a sentence is uttered, i.e. whether we *assert* the thought, *judge* the thought to be true, issue an *imperative* involving the thought, or ask a question involving the thought (utter it with *interrogative* force).

However, there are several problems with Callinicos' and Dummett's arguments here. One thing to note initially is that it is a misconstrual of Wittgenstein's remark to describe it as a slogan. The remark quoted by Callinicos is part of a longer

⁴⁶³ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §43.

⁴⁶⁴ Callinicos, A. *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 141.

⁴⁶⁵ Dummett, M. *Truth and Other Enigmas*, London: Duckworth, 1978, p. 451.

passage where Wittgenstein says that in a “large class of cases...though not all” ‘meaning’ can be explained by saying that “the meaning of a word is its use in the language”⁴⁶⁶. The passage is meant as an explanation of meaning of the word ‘meaning’, and so it is meant as a grammatical claim, a claim about the grammar of the word ‘meaning’. It is a description of the grammar of an expression – ‘meaning’. The second thing to note is that what is said in §43 does not imply that “[w]ords and sentences acquire a meaning only in the specific context of their use”. As just noted, Wittgenstein is clear that there are cases where ‘meaning’ cannot be explained in terms of use (“large class of cases... though *not all*”) and it is also not clear that even in the cases where the meaning of a word *is* its use that this means ‘use on a particular occasion’⁴⁶⁷.

It might be thought that the argument against Callinicos thus far only adds to his case because it dismantles the argument against the possibility of a theory of language that he raises. The argument in *favour* of a theory of language is in the passage Callinicos cites from Dummett. However, Dummett’s argument does not establish the conclusion that Callinicos wants. A statement of the “general principles governing the use in sentences of words of the language” (the rules of language) is no more a theory than a statement of the rules of chess is a theory of chess. It might aid our understanding to be presented with a list of rules but a list of rules does not constitute a theory. It might be objected that the rules of a single game, chess, are not analogous to the rules of a language but to the rules of a language game (or a region/segment of language). However, adding the rules of more games would not make the product any more theoretical. A statement of the rules of all existing games would not be a theory of games and similarly a statement of the rules of all language games would not be a theory of language. Callinicos’ and Dummett’s confusion here is an example of more general confusion in philosophy about the difference between

⁴⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, §43.

⁴⁶⁷ There are some excellent discussions of meaning and use in *The Later Wittgenstein on Language*, edited by Daniel Whiting. Whiting’s own introduction contains a sharp discussion of meaning and use and the first two essays in the collection are also focused on this issue (see Whiting, D. ‘Introduction’, Horwich, P. ‘Wittgenstein’s Definition of Meaning as Use’ and Hacker, P. M. S. ‘Meaning and Use’ in Whiting, D. (ed.) *The Later Wittgenstein on Language*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

grammatical or conceptual investigations on the one hand and theoretical or empirical investigations on the other.

Moreover, it is unfortunate that Callinicos does not consider Wittgenstein's remarks in response to Frege, since they undermine the claim that his distinction between sense and force might form a significant part of a theory of language. In §22 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, he says,

Frege's opinion that every assertion contains an assumption, which is the thing that is asserted, really rests on the possibility, found in our language, of writing every assertoric sentence in the form 'It is asserted that such-and-such is the case'. – But 'that such-and-such is the case' is *not* a sentence in our language – it is not yet a *move* in the language-game. And if I write, not 'It is asserted that...' but 'It is asserted: such-and-such is the case', the words 'It is asserted' simply become superfluous.

We might very well also write every assertion in the form of a question followed by an affirmative expression; for instance 'Is it raining? – Yes!' Would this show that every assertion contained a question? ...⁴⁶⁸

So, Callinicos, employing an argument from Dummett, has not established that a theory of language is possible or desirable. If what we are after is an account of what language *is* then what we want is not a theory but a clarification of the meaning of expressions such as 'language', 'meaning' and 'proposition' and this is something that Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* offers⁴⁶⁹. In asking what language is we are asking what 'language' means and we should not expect an answer which specifies an essential feature of language. This grasping after essences is something that has led philosophers astray on all kinds of questions. As Wittgenstein says, "When philosophers use a word – 'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', 'proposition/sentence', 'name' [and we could add 'language'] – and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing: one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language in

⁴⁶⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, §22.

⁴⁶⁹ See, for example, §§65-66 of the *Philosophical Investigations* and many of the passages leading up to them. Wittgenstein also asks the question 'what is the meaning of a word?' at the beginning of *The Blue Book* (Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958, pp. 1-5).

which it is at home? – What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use”⁴⁷⁰. Callinicos, as a Marxist sensitive to the changing nature of language should appreciate that a theory of sense and force along Fregean lines would struggle to get to grips with the open-endedness and ever-changing diversity of language. Words and sentences are comparable to *tools* and new tasks, new activities, call for new tools or adaptation of tools to those new activities^{471, 472}

5.5 Eagleton on Wittgenstein

As has already been mentioned above, Terry Eagleton has engaged in a serious way with Wittgenstein’s work and has also endeavoured to understand Wittgenstein as a person. Eagleton wrote the script for Derek Jarman’s film about Wittgenstein and Eagleton’s own work in cultural theory is clearly indebted to Wittgenstein. For example, his *Ideology: an Introduction* employs the Wittgensteinian notions of ‘family resemblance’ and ‘forms of life’ and Eagleton also leans on Wittgenstein’s remarks about epistemological matters in it⁴⁷³. Eagleton’s novel, *Saints and Scholars*, has a semi-fictionalised version of Wittgenstein as a character meeting with James Connolly, Nikolai Bakhtin, and Leopold Bloom⁴⁷⁴. So, it is clear that Eagleton has some respect for Wittgenstein’s work and has examined it reasonably closely.

Eagleton’s take on §124 of the *Philosophical Investigations* (where Wittgenstein says that “[p]hilosophy...leaves everything as it is”) is more subtle – and more charitable to Wittgenstein - than Anderson’s or Callinicos’ interpretation⁴⁷⁵. In his paper ‘Wittgenstein’s Friends’ Eagleton acknowledges that Wittgenstein surrounded himself with leftists and Marxists (the ‘friends’ of the title) and compares

⁴⁷⁰ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, §116.

⁴⁷¹ See Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, §23.

⁴⁷² I critically assess some other aspects of Callinicos’ account of Wittgenstein and analytic philosophy in Vinten, R. ‘Leave Everything as it is: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations of Wittgenstein’, *Critique*, 41:1, 2013, pp. 18-20.

⁴⁷³ Eagleton, T. *Ideology: An Introduction (New and Updated Edition)*, London: Verso, 2007 (originally published 1991).

⁴⁷⁴ Eagleton, T. *Saints and Scholars*, London: Futura, 1987.

⁴⁷⁵ Eagleton, T. ‘Wittgenstein’s Friends’ in *Against the Grain*, London: Verso, 1991 (first published 1986), pp. 100.

Wittgenstein's remark to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach⁴⁷⁶. Eagleton does not take the remark to straightforwardly imply that Wittgenstein was conservative.

Eagleton also defends Wittgenstein against charges of conservatism when he suggests that some interpreters of Wittgenstein have mistakenly attributed conservative views to him on the basis of his remark that "what has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life*"⁴⁷⁷. This could be taken to mean that we have to accept the institutions we are presented with, the traditions in our society, or the ways of living that we are engaged in. However, Eagleton does not think that Wittgenstein's remark is indicative of conservatism because "there is no reason why what has to be accepted are *these particular* forms of life, and ...little reason to believe that Wittgenstein himself was in the least content with his own society"⁴⁷⁸. Eagleton is certainly right in thinking that Wittgenstein was dissatisfied with his own society⁴⁷⁹ but it is not clear that changes in society would amount to a change in a form of life. Davide Sparti, in his paper 'Rules and Social Community: Does Wittgenstein's Philosophy have Conservative Implications?'⁴⁸⁰ agrees with Eagleton that Wittgenstein's remark is not indicative of conservatism but thinks that we should be careful to distinguish forms of life from particular ways of living. Wittgenstein is not

⁴⁷⁶ "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to change it" – in Marx, K. 'Theses on Feuerbach', *Selected Works in One Volume*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970, p. 30.

⁴⁷⁷ Wittgenstein, L. 'Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment xi' §345 (in Hacker and Schulte (eds.) *Philosophical Investigations*). I previously discussed this passage in Chapter 2 in connection with relativism. Examples of philosophers who have used this passage or similar passages in support of arguments that Wittgenstein was a conservative include Ernest Gellner (see *Reason and Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, p. 120), David Bloor (in *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge*, London: Macmillan, 1983, p. 161) and J. C. Nyiri (in 'Wittgenstein's Later Work in relation to Conservatism', p. 58).

⁴⁷⁸ Eagleton, T. 'Wittgenstein's Friends', p. 107.

⁴⁷⁹ For example, in his 'Sketch for a Foreword' – a proposed preface for the *Philosophical Remarks* – Wittgenstein says that "This book is written for those who are in sympathy with the spirit in which it is written. This spirit is, I believe, different from that of the prevailing European and American civilization. The spirit of this civilization the expression of which is the industry, architecture, music of present day fascism and socialism, is a spirit that is alien and uncongenial to the author" (see Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value, Revised Edition*, p. 8e).

⁴⁸⁰ Sparti, D. 'Rules and Social Community: Does Wittgenstein's Philosophy Have Conservative Implications?', *Wittgenstein-Jahrbuch 2001/2002*, Lütterfelds, W., Roser, A., and Raatzsch, R. (eds.) Peter Lang, 2003.

arguing that we have to accept institutions like private property or representative democracy, and nor is he claiming that particular traditions must be maintained. According to Sparti, Wittgenstein's position was that "forms of life are beyond the reasonable and the unreasonable"⁴⁸¹. In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein claims that justifying evidence comes to an end and Sparti thinks that the "ungrounded way of acting'...is [the] 'given' that lies at the bottom of our language games, and must be accepted"⁴⁸². The kind of thing that has to be accepted – that lies beyond justification – are things like "that we have ten fingers, that we react to pain (in a specific way), that we accept certain measurement procedures and not others..."⁴⁸³. Whether Sparti's interpretation is correct or not it seems clear that Wittgenstein was not saying that we *should* accept certain traditions or norms.

However, Eagleton says that there is "some truth" in the idea that §124 is "an index of social and intellectual reaction, a complacent consecration of existing 'language games'"⁴⁸⁴ and says that Wittgenstein's "numbingly consensual thought"⁴⁸⁵ is "reactionary"⁴⁸⁶ in some respects.

Eagleton thinks that Wittgenstein is reactionary because he does not go down deep enough. Wittgenstein is able to recognise problems in the work of the likes of Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege and it seems that Eagleton thinks that Wittgenstein deals with some philosophical problems adequately. The major problem, according to Eagleton, is that Wittgenstein does not recognise that in order to overcome metaphysics "it could only be by a transformation of practical life, not by a mere return to it"⁴⁸⁷. Wittgenstein suggests that we should get away from the "slippery ice" of metaphysics and return to the "rough ground" of ordinary language. However, on

⁴⁸¹ Sparti cites Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* §559 in support of this. There Wittgenstein says "You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there-like our life".

⁴⁸² Sparti, D. 'Rules and Social Community', p. 140.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. p. 141.

⁴⁸⁴ Eagleton, T. 'Wittgenstein's Friends', p. 100.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 121.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 107.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 119.

Eagleton's view there is a tension in Wittgenstein's thought here because Wittgenstein also thinks that the "rough ground" of ordinary language is a source of metaphysical vexation. "Wittgenstein will escape... by turning *away* to ordinary language...But...it is here...that philosophico-grammatical illusions are continually generated; the very instruments with which the metaphysical will be safely defused are themselves metaphysically contaminated"⁴⁸⁸. What is needed then, it seems, is a transformation the practical life in which ordinary language is entwined. Eagleton's diagnosis of the central problem in Wittgenstein's philosophy is repeated, in subtly different ways, throughout his essay 'Wittgenstein's Friends'. He says that Wittgenstein's philosophy "is reactionary...not in its referring of beliefs and discourses to social activity, but in its assumption that such referring constitutes a liberation from the metaphysical"⁴⁸⁹, that Wittgenstein's "'popular' language remains largely metaphysical"⁴⁹⁰, and that "Wittgenstein can give language an historical home only at the cost of leaving its metaphysical base intact"⁴⁹¹.

There are several problems with Eagleton's account of Wittgenstein. The first problem is that Wittgenstein recognises that philosophical problems can be overcome by a transformation of practical life. In what has been published as *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* Wittgenstein writes that, "[t]he sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and it was possible for the sickness of philosophical problems to get cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a medicine invented by an individual"⁴⁹²⁴⁹³. The

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 108.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 107.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 111.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. p. 119.

⁴⁹² Additionally, there is evidence from recently published conversations between Rush Rhees and Ludwig Wittgenstein that Wittgenstein thought that changes in people's ideas might come through changes in society. According to Rhees Wittgenstein was dismissive of the idea that fascism could be combatted by combatting loose thinking, "as though you could *persuade* people to be logical in their thinking" (Rhees, R., Wittgenstein, L. and Citron, G. (ed.) 'Wittgenstein's Philosophical Conversations with Rush Rhees (1939-50): From the Notes of Rush Rhees', *Mind*, 124:493, January 2015, p. 58). Wittgenstein apparently regularly spoke to Rhees about how he thought that anti-semitism had disappeared as a result of a "change in the form of society" in Russia. Rhees opines that, "I think he believed that the central place of manual labour and the vanishing of the prestige which money gives was one main factor in this." (Ibid. p. 59)

second problem is that Eagleton is mistaken in thinking that metaphysics can *only* be overcome by a transformation of practical life. Eagleton thinks that Wittgenstein's attempts to dissolve philosophical problems by careful attention to ordinary language is doomed to failure because ordinary language is 'metaphysically contaminated' and he thinks, moreover, that Wittgenstein himself takes the view that ordinary language is metaphysically contaminated. However, although Wittgenstein recognises that everyday expressions are likely to lead us astray into philosophical confusion (metaphysics) he does not think that ordinary language is irredeemably contaminated⁴⁹⁴. We might be tempted to stray into speaking nonsense but we are not compelled to. What philosophers can do is to "erect signposts at all the junctions where there are wrong turnings so as to help people past the danger points"⁴⁹⁵ – that is we can present people with reminders or recollections of the correct uses of ordinary expressions when they are tempted to misuse those expressions and go wandering off into metaphysical territory⁴⁹⁶. Eagleton does not provide any good reason to think that it is not possible to do this and he actually presents at least one case of Wittgenstein doing just this in sympathetic terms when he discusses the argument of §246 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*⁴⁹⁷.

In §246 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says that "only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it. – In one way this is false and in another nonsense. If we are using the word 'know' as it is normally used...then other people very often know if I'm in pain." So, Wittgenstein wants to say that it is false that I can only surmise (and not know) that someone else is in pain. If I

⁴⁹³ Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Third edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001 [1956], p. 132, §23.

⁴⁹⁴ See, for example BT 424, where Wittgenstein says that philosophical problems have continued to perplex us because "...our language has remained the same and always introduces us to the same questions. As long as there is a verb 'to be' which seems to work like 'to eat' and 'to drink'; as long as there are adjectives like 'identical', 'true', 'false'...people will run up against the same teasing difficulties..." (Wittgenstein, L. *Big Typescript*: TS 213, trans. C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian E. Aue, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

⁴⁹⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, Revised 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998 [1977], p.25e.

⁴⁹⁶ See Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §127.

⁴⁹⁷ In his essay 'Wittgenstein's Friends' Eagleton says that "I cannot say 'I can know that I am in pain but can only guess that you are' since as Wittgenstein comments the sentence 'I know that I am in pain' is meaningless. I can be as certain of someone else's sensations in certain circumstances as I can be of any fact" – p. 105.

see somebody fall over and then they rub their knee while saying “Ow! That hurt!” then I know that they are in pain. Admittedly people can fall without hurting themselves and can pretend that they are in pain and these introduce reasons for doubting whether someone is really in pain in some circumstances but the fact that we can sometimes doubt that someone is in pain does not imply that we can never know that they are. In fact, as Wittgenstein reminds us (erecting a signpost warning against a wrong turning) the possibility of doubt is entwined with the possibility of knowledge. As he says: “...it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself.” The fact that I cannot doubt that I myself am in pain – that this makes no sense – and that it also makes no sense for me to talk about grounds or evidence when it comes to my own case show that it is nonsense to say that “only I can know whether I am really in pain” if this is meant to be parallel to a case like ‘I know that Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth’ (in this case it makes sense for someone to say that they doubt whether Charles Dickens was born there and there is also evidence that he was (this is a case of “...using the word ‘know’ as it is normally used”))⁴⁹⁸.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion then, Anderson’s picture of Wittgenstein as a white emigrant opposed to intellectual innovation is inaccurate, Callinicos’s objections to anti-theoretical arguments derived from Wittgenstein fail to convince, and Eagleton fails to demonstrate that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is reactionary or self-defeating. There is no good reason to think that philosophical problems cannot be dissolved by careful attention to the way words are normally used and by drawing attention to differences between the way they are normally used and the way they are used in the context of philosophical puzzles. This leaves open the possibility that some philosophical problems might disappear with changes in practical life and others might be dissolved by putting up signposts in the manner of Wittgenstein. Marxists can develop useful skills by reading Wittgenstein closely and by carefully attending to the way words are

⁴⁹⁸ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §246.

used and I think Wittgensteinians can also learn from Marxist writers about how social and economic arrangements are related and about how to change society for the better.

Part III

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Applying Wittgenstein's Work to Problems in Social Philosophy

Chapter 6 - Wittgenstein and Freedom of the Will

6.1 Introduction

It seems that Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks might be useful in getting to grips with traditional problems in epistemology and metaphysics but that it has little bearing on social and political philosophy. However, that would be to draw a conclusion too quickly. Philosophers from the tradition that Wittgenstein distanced himself from concerned themselves with social and political issues going at least as far back as Socrates and Plato. In the *Republic*, for example, Plato presents a philosophy of mind and epistemology that parallels and complements his political philosophy. Traditional philosophers such as Plato saw their political philosophy as something intertwined with their reflections upon knowledge, mind, and reality and there are still social philosophers today who see their social-philosophical concerns as being entwined with their philosophy of mind and epistemology.

Having discussed the nature of philosophy and political ideologies in previous chapters, the focus of this chapter will be on the issue of freedom of the will. This is a traditional philosophical problem (or set of problems) and also one that appears to have implications for social and political philosophy. Conceptions of freedom, and of decision making are implicated in discussions of democracy, of legal responsibility, and of morality. If determinism is correct then it would seem to have very profound implications for our understandings of these issues. The role of Wittgensteinian philosophy in discussing these issues, I suggest, is to help us to get clear about the relevant concepts and ultimately to give us the understanding that will make the problems dissolve – to make latent nonsense patent nonsense and to show that the formulation of the problems involve some conceptual confusion.

As hinted at above, there is not one single problem of freedom of the will. Various problems have arisen in the history of philosophy: some relating freedom to goodness and evil, some concerning the role of God in the universe and its compatibility with human freedom, and others concerning causation or mental causation. Philosophers have asked questions like 'Can I freely choose to do evil?', 'If

God knows what will happen in the future then how can it be that my actions were freely decided upon by myself?', 'If every action has a cause and causes necessitate their effects then how can my actions be free?', 'How can mental faculties (the will) or mental acts (volitions) bring about movements in a body?', 'Does my action being free imply that I could have done otherwise?'. I cannot possibly hope to give a thorough survey of these problems, let alone solve or dissolve them within this chapter and so the scope of the chapter will be more restricted.

In a recent paper, 'Folk Psychology and Freedom of the Will', Martin Kusch has suggested that it might be fruitful to approach problems surrounding freedom of the will by connecting those problems to debates about folk psychology. Debates about folk psychology would benefit from expanding their focus out from belief, desire and action into questions about intentions and volitions and philosophers of action would benefit from reflecting on debates about folk psychology⁴⁹⁹. I agree with Kusch that approaching problems concerning freedom of the will in the light of debates about folk psychology could be fruitful and here I will focus on the work of Patricia S. Churchland; a philosopher who discusses both folk psychology and issues surrounding freedom of the will.

Churchland thinks of our ordinary explanations of behaviour in terms of ordinary psychological expressions as being part of a theoretical framework. The framework includes our ordinary psychological concepts (e.g. belief, desire, pain, memory, intention, hunger) and also offers up causal laws (e.g. a person denied food for a great length of time will feel hungry) and warrants predictions. Given that our ordinary psychological concepts and ordinary explanations of action are part of a theory we might ask how that theory has fared and whether other theories might fare better. Churchland does not think that folk psychology has been a successful theory⁵⁰⁰. According to Patricia S. Churchland, and her husband Paul Churchland, folk psychology

⁴⁹⁹ Kusch, M. 'Folk Psychology and Freedom of the Will', in Hutto, D. and Ratcliffe, M. (eds.) *Folk Psychology Reassessed*, Springer, 2007, pp. 175-88.

⁵⁰⁰ For example, in 'The Impact of Neuroscience in Philosophy' she says that "...folk psychology embodies much misdirection" and suggests that we should turn to neuroscience to understand human morality and decision making (in *Neuron* 60, November 6, 2008, p. 409)

has failed to explain various things, such as why we get depressed or fall in love⁵⁰¹, and it has failed to make progress⁵⁰². It also faces the problem that it cannot be reduced to successful theories in neurobiology, physics and chemistry⁵⁰³. Given its crudity and the fact that it cannot be reduced to more successful, advanced and advancing theoretical frameworks, folk psychology should be eliminated and replaced with a neuroscientific psychology⁵⁰⁴.

Thinking again about the problems of freedom of the will mentioned above it is clear that they involve the kind of concepts that the Churchlands think are involved in our folk psychological framework. There are questions about *knowledge* of the future, there are questions about *decisions* being made by human beings, and questions about human beings *intending* to do things and *willing* that things should be the case are implicated. Questions about rationality are also clearly closely involved in discussion of human beings making choices or decisions (freely). So, concepts such as *belief*, *desire*, *thought*, and *reason* are tied up with questions about freedom of the will. According to the Churchlands these concepts from folk psychology are vacuous and so the formulation of traditional philosophical problems about freedom of the will involve vacuous concepts, on their view.

In a recent article Patricia Churchland and Christopher Suhler have turned to the notion of *control*. In order to understand the notion of control and the implications of self-control within situations where human beings might be held morally or legally responsible Churchland and Suhler think that we should not rely on our ordinary understanding of the notion but should instead formulate a neurobiological model of

⁵⁰¹ In 'The Impact of Neuroscience on Philosophy' Patricia S. Churchland says that "[t]hough introspection [the preferred method of folk psychologists] is useful the brain is not rigged to directly know much about itself, such as why we are depressed or in love or that factors such as serotonin levels influence our decisions", p. 409.

⁵⁰² The question of progress in psychology is briefly addressed in the first chapter of this thesis (section 1.5) – as is reductionism (section 1.2).

⁵⁰³ P. M. Churchland, 'Folk Psychology', in Guttenplan (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, Blackwell: Oxford

⁵⁰⁴ Patricia Churchland says that "once folk psychology is held at arm's length and evaluated for theoretical strength in the way that any theory is evaluated, the more folkishly inept, soft and narrow it seems to be", in *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind/Brain*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1986, p. 395.

control⁵⁰⁵. This fits with Churchland's earlier contention that ordinary psychological notions should be eliminated and replaced with sharper notions more suited to advanced scientific theories.

In this chapter I intend to discuss Churchland and Suhler's article and then present some Wittgensteinian criticisms of the arguments they make in it. My purpose is to demonstrate the usefulness of a Wittgensteinian approach to social and political philosophy. I also hope that I make plausible that problems of freedom of the will are conceptual problems although, as mentioned earlier, it would be impossible to discuss all of the problems in a brief chapter.

6.2 Churchland and Suhler on Control

In their article 'Control: conscious and otherwise' Churchland and Suhler try to give a clear (re)definition of 'control' in response to concerns raised by what is known as the 'Frail Control hypothesis'. In recent years philosophers and social psychologists have drawn attention to the fact that environmental factors can have a large influence on the way that people behave and the choices they make in ways that they are unaware of. For example, according to Isen and Levin "[p]assersby who had just found a dime were twenty-two times more likely to help a woman who had dropped some papers than passersby who did not find a dime"⁵⁰⁶ and another similar study has found that when people are in orderly surroundings they are much less likely to litter than when they are in disorderly conditions⁵⁰⁷. The philosopher John Doris has drawn on a range of studies like these to argue that actions can be excused much more frequently than previously assumed because these studies show that choices are strongly

⁵⁰⁵ Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. L. 'Control: conscious and otherwise', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, Vol. 13, No. 8, 2009, pp. 341-347.

⁵⁰⁶ Isen, A. M. and Levin, P. F. 'Effect of feeling good on helping: cookies and kindness', *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 21, 1972, pp. 384-388, cited in Doris, J. M. and Murphy, D. 'From My Lai to Abu Ghraib: the moral psychology of atrocity', *Midwest Stud. Philos.* 31, 2007, p. 34.

⁵⁰⁷ Keizer, K. *et al.*, 'The spreading of disorder', *Science* 322, pp. 1681-1685.

affected by circumstances in ways people are unaware of and if that is so then the people in question have an excuse for their action⁵⁰⁸.

In opposition to Doris, Churchland and Suhler argue that if we take into account data from neurobiology and evolutionary theory, as well as behavioural and clinical data, we can arrive at an account of control where people can be held responsible for their actions despite having been influenced by circumstances unknowingly. One of their conclusions is that “consciousness is not a necessary condition for control” and they think that empirical data supports that conclusion. Moreover, they think that it is a virtue of their account that “it is agnostic as to whether the underlying processes [supporting control] are conscious or nonconscious”⁵⁰⁹.

The kind of data that Churchland and Suhler deem to be relevant to their conclusion is data from neuroscience such as studies which have shown that low serotonin levels are associated with impulsive and violent behaviour and evidence that the dopamine system plays a role in the development of normal social and cognitive abilities, including the development of social skills⁵¹⁰. Social skills, in turn, are implicated in human beings exercising control. Human beings have to be able to suppress desires (to fight, cheat, etc.) in order to function well in society. Individuals who are able to restrain themselves appropriately, who are able to control impulses and desires, as well as things like when to urinate and defecate, are better able to get on in the world and can be held responsible for breaking social norms or laws. One of Churchland and Suhler’s examples is the case of the man who wets his pants through fear when he is about to be executed⁵¹¹. The story Churchland and Suhler tell is that man wets his pants because his brain reacts to stress with a rise in CRF,

⁵⁰⁸ See Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. L. ‘Control: conscious and otherwise’, *Trends in Cognitive Science*, Vol. 13, No. 8, 2009, p. 342 and Doris, J. M. ‘Persons, situations, and virtue ethics’, *Nous* 32, pp.504-30.

⁵⁰⁹ Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. L. ‘Control: conscious and otherwise’, pp. 341-342.

⁵¹⁰ Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. L. ‘Control: conscious and otherwise’, p. 343. Churchland and Suhler cite Diamond, A. ‘The early development of executive functions’, in *Lifespan, Cognition: Mechanisms of Change* – Bialystok, E. and Craik, F. eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 70-95 in support of their claim about dopamine and they cite Ferrari P. F. *et al.* ‘Serotonin and aggressive behavior in rodents and nonhuman primates: Predispositions and plasticity’, *Eur. J. Pharmacol.* 526, pp. 259-273 in support of their claim about serotonin.

⁵¹¹ Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. L. ‘Control: conscious and otherwise’, *Trends in Cognitive Science*, Vol. 13, No. 8, 2009, p. 344.

glucocorticoids, epinephrine and norepinephrine, which disrupts the normal levels of neurochemicals in his brain⁵¹². As a result of considering cases like these Churchland and Suhler suggest that the meaning of 'control' might be sharpened. Their model of control has two components:

"The first component is anatomical, specifying that the brain regions and pathways implicated in control are intact and that behaviour is regulated by these mechanisms in a way consistent with prototypical cases of good control... The second component is physiological, and includes the molecular mechanisms whereby control is regulated... functionality requires that the levels of various neurochemicals – neurotransmitters, hormones, enzymes and so on – are maintained normally... [T]he account just sketched does not set the unreasonable standard that every relevant neurochemical must be at its ideal level or even within its normal range. Instead, the physiological requirement for being in control is defined in terms of a hyper-region in an n-dimensional 'control space'."⁵¹³

This model of control is then deployed in opposition to another model of control – the neo-Kantian one. According to the neo-Kantian picture we reason before we make free decisions and we can be held responsible only for decisions we have made freely. Moreover, that reasoning must be transparent to us, otherwise it would be a mere cause, "...a reason must be conscious to be a reason at all. Control...is...limited to those cases where most or all evidence, reasons, weighting of reasons and so forth that contribute to a choice are consciously accessible"⁵¹⁴. According to Churchland and Suhler, however, the role of conscious awareness of reasons in considering whether an action is controlled is not something that can be determined a priori (through "stipulation, intuition, or semantics") because deciding whether an action is controlled, relative to neurobiological criteria, is a matter of scientific discovery⁵¹⁵.

⁵¹² Ibid., p. 344.

⁵¹³ Ibid. pp. 343-4.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. p. 345.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid. p. 345.

Churchland and Suhler then give some further examples in an effort to show that their model of control is more plausible than the neo-Kantian one. They argue that the development of skills is often implicated in controlled action and that the development of skills also leads to conscious activity playing less of a role in relevant actions. For example, the development of social skills means that acting nicely, politely, or appropriately becomes second nature and people who have those social skills do not need to consciously work out what to do in many situations. Adults do not have to reason in order not to break wind in polite company and they do not have to consciously figure out that they should shake hands with someone when they meet them⁵¹⁶. Commenting on the way in which social skills become habitual Churchland and Suhler say that “habit and routine serve to spare the brain the energetic costs of close attention”⁵¹⁷ and they also suggest that the skills underlying habitual actions provide us with an alternative to the neo-Kantian model, with skills taking the place of reasons: “cognitive, motor, and social skills...are often invoked in later explanations of actions and are certainly robust enough in their guidance of action to be considered genuine reasons...the idea that reasons and control can be (and often are) nonconscious...is consistent with the data”⁵¹⁸. So, as mentioned above, Churchland and Suhler feel justified in concluding that consciousness is not necessary for control. Their new model of control allows us to get around the problems presented by the Frail Control hypothesis and gives us a sharper definition of control for future studies of the phenomenon, on their view.

6.3 Problems with Churchland and Suhler’s argument

6.3.1 Consciousness

One problem with Churchland and Suhler’s argument is that they do not clearly distinguish between forms of consciousness and nor are they clear about the various things that we might be conscious *of* in the kinds of cases they discuss. Churchland and Suhler discuss many cases but their focus is on the kinds of cases mentioned above, of

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. p. 345.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. p. 345.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. p. 345.

people being more generous after finding a coin or of people being more likely to litter in messy conditions, which are seemingly relevant to the frail control hypothesis. In the case of someone littering in a messy area it is clear that the person is conscious in at least one sense. The person doing the littering is not asleep, not dead drunk, not knocked out, not in a coma. They are conscious in that they are *awake*, what Maxwell Bennett and Peter Hacker call ‘intransitive consciousness’⁵¹⁹. When Churchland and Suhler say that “consciousness is not a necessary condition for control” presumably they do not have intransitive consciousness in mind. It is clear that in the case of someone finding a coin and then being generous and the case of someone littering in a ‘disorderly’ area that the people in question are awake. It may be that we can sometimes hold people responsible for things that they do in their sleep but this does not seem to be what Churchland and Suhler have in mind⁵²⁰.

Given that Churchland and Suhler are not concerned with intransitive consciousness it seems they must be concerned with one or another form of transitive consciousness – being conscious *of* something or other. In the kinds of cases used to advance the frail control hypothesis what the people are supposedly not conscious *of* is the influence that their circumstances have on their behaviour. But what Churchland and Suhler do not discuss is the various other things that the participants may well have been conscious of and that would be relevant to determining whether the person could be held responsible for their actions. Take the littering case, for example, where more people dropped litter (a flyer that had been attached to their bicycle) in a ‘disorderly’ condition (where there was graffiti beside the bicycle rack and a sign prohibiting graffiti) than in an orderly one (with no graffiti)⁵²¹. In that case at least two things seem clearly relevant: whether the person was conscious that they were

⁵¹⁹ Bennett, M. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 244.

⁵²⁰ Note: it is not totally obvious that Churchland and Suhler are not talking about intransitive consciousness. In her recent book, *Touching a Nerve: Our Brains, Our Selves* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013) Churchland comments on whether consciousness is necessary for speech. She concludes that it is necessary for speech because “you cannot have a conversation while in deep sleep or in a coma”, p. 198. A few pages later she notes that Jaak Panksepp claims that “being conscious enables the acquisition of language, not the other way around” and says that “[i]f you are not conscious, in any of the various ways that a person can be nonconscious (for example, in deep sleep) you are not going to learn much of anything...” p. 204. Here she clearly has *intransitive* consciousness in mind.

⁵²¹ Keizer, K., Lindenberg, S., and Steg, L. ‘The Spreading of Disorder’, *Science*, Vol. 322, 2008, pp. 1682-3.

littering in dropping the flyer (presumably they were) and whether the person was conscious that they should not litter (again, presumably they were). In that case it seems we would hold the person responsible for littering. We would say they knew what they were doing, knew that it was wrong, and had no good reason to break the prohibition on littering. It may be that circumstances serve to mitigate responsibility but cases like the littering case do not do anything to demonstrate that our ordinary ways of holding people responsible for actions are in need of revision – that people were not in control of their littering behaviour. That people were influenced by being in an area where anti-graffiti norms were broken does not demonstrate that they were not in control of their actions in dropping litter and nor does it imply that they ceased to be conscious of norms prohibiting littering.

Churchland and Suhler might object that although they do not discuss the various other things that people might be conscious *of* in the littering situation they do at least make it clear that it is transitive consciousness that they have in mind. In making their case they make it clear that they are responding to a neo-Kantian perspective where control (and also presumably responsibility) “is...limited to those cases where most or all evidence, reasons, weighting of reasons and so forth that contribute to a choice are consciously accessible”⁵²². However, they discuss the Kantian perspective under the heading of ‘the role of nonconscious processes’⁵²³ and say that they are agnostic about whether the processes underlying control are conscious or nonconscious⁵²⁴. So, there is unclarity surrounding what they mean by ‘consciousness’ in discussing the Kantian view. It is, at the very best, unclear how it could be that processes could be awake (i.e. be intransitively conscious) or conscious of things (transitively conscious). As Wittgenstein points out: “only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has

⁵²² Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. L. ‘Control: conscious and otherwise’, *Trends in Cognitive Science*, Vol. 13, No. 8, 2009, p. 345. The Kantian view clearly concerns consciousness *of* various things and so it is concerned with transitive consciousness.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p.345.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 341-2.

sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious”⁵²⁵ . The processes underlying control do not resemble or behave like human beings in the relevant respects. They do not open their eyes and look at things (they do not have eyes), they do not (and cannot) do things like sit up in bed, or say things, and so we cannot make sense of the claim that they might be conscious. Contrary to what Churchland and Suhlert say, it is not a virtue of their account that they are agnostic about whether processes underlying control are conscious, it is a sign of confusion.

However, in their critical discussion of the neo-Kantian perspective Churchland and Suhlert do not always talk about the processes underlying control. They at least sometimes talk about human individuals, their skills and habits, as well as what they – human beings - are conscious or not conscious *of*. They talk about the role of the development of social skills, of social skills becoming second nature, in the controlled behaviour of human beings. They do so in order to make the point that controlled behaviour (that people might be held responsible for) is not always preceded by (conscious) deliberation. For example, they say that “adults do not have to consciously remind themselves not to break wind in polite company or to shake hands upon meeting someone”⁵²⁶. Churchland and Suhlert are surely correct about this. We do not always deliberate and are not always aware of deliberating before doing something controlled for which we might be held responsible. However, what Churchland and Suhlert have not taken into account is the distinction between *dispositional* and *occurrent* transitive consciousness. Max Bennett and Peter Hacker describe the ways in which we speak about people being conscious *of* various things and make the distinction between dispositional and occurrent transitive consciousness in their book *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*:

When we say of a person that he is conscious of his ignorance or expertise, or conscious of his superior or inferior social status, we are typically speaking of a *disposition* or *tendency* he has to be conscious...of these things...*Occurrent*

⁵²⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Revised by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, §281.

⁵²⁶ Churchland, P. S. and Suhlert, C. L. ‘Control: conscious and otherwise’, *Trends in Cognitive Science*, Vol. 13, No. 8, 2009, p. 345.

consciousness by contrast, is a matter of currently being conscious of something or conscious that something is thus-and-so.⁵²⁷

Given that we recognise this distinction it may be that in the cases Churchland and Suhler describe the people concerned are not *occurrently* conscious of their reason for not breaking wind in polite company but that nonetheless they are *dispositionally* conscious of it. We might say that they are aware or conscious of what they should do in such situations even if they are not conscious of any deliberation (and do not deliberate) about whether they should or should not break wind. Similarly, someone might well not deliberate about whether to shake somebody's hand before doing it upon meeting them but we might nonetheless say that they were conscious (*dispositionally*) of what they should do upon meeting someone. What this means is that although Churchland and Suhler have come up with cases that seem to clash with the neo-Kantian picture⁵²⁸ they have not demonstrated that "consciousness is not a necessary condition for control" if we allow that intransitive consciousness and dispositional transitive consciousness count as consciousness.

That is not to say that Churchland and Suhler are wrong, of course. It could be that they only mean 'occurrent transitive consciousness' by 'consciousness' or that they mean something else altogether by 'consciousness'. Given that Churchland is an eliminativist presumably she thinks that our ordinary concept of consciousness is to be eliminated and replaced by a concept from neuroscience. But the fact remains that it is not clear at all what Churchland and Suhler mean by 'consciousness' and so it is, at best, unclear whether they are correct. As we have already seen they think that 'conscious' and 'nonconscious' might be applied to processes and it is unclear whether sentences like 'such-and-such a process is conscious' could mean⁵²⁹. To further complicate matters Churchland, in her recent book *Touching a Nerve: Our Brains, Our*

⁵²⁷ Bennett, M. and Hacker, P. M. S., *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, p. 248.

⁵²⁸ It is not clear that their cases do actually work as counter-examples to the neo-Kantian account. The neo-Kantians, according to Churchland and Suhler, say that reasons must be 'consciously accessible' in order for an action to count as one that is under someone's control (p.345). This seems confused to me but it does not obviously mean that the reasons must have been contemplated or that deliberation/working out must have taken place prior to the action.

⁵²⁹ Elsewhere, Churchland suggests that "the results of sensory processing" might "become conscious" (*Touching a Nerve*, p. 204) but as with the case of processes we can respond with Wittgenstein's reminder that only of a living human being or what resembles one can we say that it is conscious.

Selves, uses 'consciousness' in a neo-Cartesian sense. Descartes extended the concept of 'consciousness' to encompass 'thoughts' of various kinds, including sensation, perceptual experience, cogitation, and volition. Similarly, many modern philosophers, when they speak of 'consciousness' are talking about a range of different 'experiences' and so philosophers discuss things like 'what it is like to see red' under the banner of 'consciousness'. When Churchland discusses philosophical claims that consciousness is fundamentally mysterious she seems to have something like this use of 'consciousness' in mind, since she presents the problem as being "how the brain gives rise to thoughts and feelings"⁵³⁰ (not as being about the relation between brain states/processes/events and being *awake* or *conscious of* things or *conscious that* something is the case). Similarly, when Churchland is discussing whether animals might be conscious she first cites evidence that other mammals experience "emotions, hunger, pain, frustration, and hot and cold, for starters" in support of the claim that they can be conscious. Whether they wake up, look around themselves, and are clearly aware of things in their environment are not mentioned in the list although Churchland does go on to suggest that studying animal brains when they are awake, asleep, or in a coma might settle the issue⁵³¹. This is getting things the wrong way around. We could only have knowledge of the brain states, events, or processes necessary for consciousness if we first knew what consciousness was. Tests on human beings or animals to determine what their brain is doing while they are conscious or unconscious are performed on them using our ordinary behavioural *criteria* for consciousness, for being asleep, for being in a coma, and so on. We know when animals are conscious by looking at *them* and seeing if they are moving around or if they have their eyes open and are responding to things in their environment, not by looking at their brains (although looking at images of their brains from a distance might count as *evidence* that they are conscious, asleep, or in a coma, given what we know about how brains are when creatures are conscious or unconscious). As indicated above, it is human beings and creatures that resemble them in relevant respects that we say are conscious, not their brains. We do not need to look at the

⁵³⁰ Churchland, P. S. *Touching a Nerve: Our Brains, Our Selves*, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013, p. 56.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.* p. 204.

brains of creatures to determine whether they can be conscious we should look at the creatures themselves (and it is clear that many creatures are conscious a lot of the time).

But even in cases where Churchland and Suhler use the word 'conscious' in connection with human beings they use it in a peculiar way. So, for example, they say that, "[w]hen social niceties become 'second nature', one does not have to *consciously* work out what to do..."⁵³². Here it is unclear what the role of the word 'consciously' is. Do they just mean that when social niceties become second nature one does not have to work out what to do? Similarly, they say that "...adults do not have to *consciously* remind themselves not to break wind in polite company"⁵³³ but what could this mean except that adults do not have to remind themselves not to break wind in polite company?

These objections are not decisive objections against Churchland and Suhler's conclusion. In fact, these examples do seem to be quite good examples of people doing things that are under their control, that they might be held responsible for, where they were not occurrently conscious of any reason for doing so. Churchland and Suhler are right that people do not always have to work out what they are doing before acting in order for what they are doing to count as an action that they might be held responsible for (and where they might be said to be in control of what they are doing). They are right that adults do not have to remind themselves not to break wind when they are in polite company. People do sometimes act spontaneously. They sometimes act without deliberating. But we nonetheless sometimes, rightly, hold them responsible for the things that they do spontaneously where they do not deliberate. It is worth noting here too that acting spontaneously does not mean acting without reason. It may be that someone acts spontaneously and gives you their reason for doing so after the event. As Peter Hacker notes, "[t]o give one's reasons for V-ing is not the same as reporting on one's reasoning"⁵³⁴. No reasoning need to have taken

⁵³² Churchland, P. S. and Suhler, C. L. 'Control: conscious and otherwise', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, Vol. 13, No. 8, 2009, p. 345 (my italics).

⁵³³ Ibid. p. 345 (my italics).

⁵³⁴ Hacker, P. M. S. *Human Nature: The Categorical Framework*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, p. 221.

place in order for you to be said to have a reason for acting or for you to be able to give a reason after the event.

6.3.2 Reasons, Control, and Responsibility

However, to say that Churchland and Suhler's conclusion is, roughly speaking, correct, is not to say that the way they got to the conclusion was not muddled or mistaken in some ways. We have already seen that Churchland and Suhler's use of the term 'conscious' is confused and confusing. There are further (conceptual) confusions in what they have to say about the notion of control and the implications of what they say for the frail control hypothesis. The trouble in this case comes from the fact that they use 'control' in its ordinary sense(s) when they are discussing various cases relevant to the frail control hypothesis but switch to their 'neurobiological account of control' when making their arguments. When arguing against the neo-Kantian requirement that people's reasons must be transparent to them in order for them to be said to be in control of their actions Churchland and Suhler talk about the automatization of skills involved in driving, reading, gardening, and getting along with people. In the case of driving we understand control in terms of having influence or sway over a car; directing it where we want it to go. We typically determine whether somebody is in control of their car by looking at the car and seeing if it is steadily on course (not skidding around or swerving when the driver does not want it to). Our criteria are not neurobiological. We do not look at a person's brain to decide whether they are in control of a car. And if a person's brain satisfies the neurobiological criteria offered by Churchland and Suhler but the car skids off the road and crashes we take the fact that the person lost direction of the car to be decisive in deciding whether they were in control rather than the condition of their brain. Of course, a person might deliberately crash their car and so they might be said to be in control of the car despite having crashed but in that case our criteria for deciding whether the person was in control are behavioural. If the person said that they were going to crash the car in a certain way and then did that then we would say that they were in control when they crashed the car. That is not to deny that there is any connection between the state of a person's brain and their control over things like cars. We know very well that the effect

of alcohol on brain chemistry makes people lose control but again, we do not decide whether they are in control by looking at their brains but by looking at what they are doing. We could only learn of the effects of brain chemistry on control by already having independent criteria for deciding when somebody is in control or not. So, the concept of 'control' involved in the case of driving the car is not the same concept as the one devised by Churchland and Suhler. Moreover, it may well be that there is conceptual diversity amongst the cases. It is not obvious that the concept of control involved in the car case, where a person has control over an inanimate object is the same as in the kind of cases Churchland and Suhler mention where people are controlling themselves in social situations. We might distinguish cases of control over inanimate objects, like cars, from cases where what is in question is *self-control*, i.e. the ability to not show one's feelings and to refrain from doing things that your feelings make you want to do. Another concept that Churchland and Suhler mention is executive control, the ability to carry out complex goal-directed behaviour. Churchland and Suhler equivocate between these various senses of 'control' and their own neurobiological concept.

Churchland and Suhler present their neurobiological concept, where "neurobiological criteria...define the boundaries of control" as being a sharpening of the ordinary concept. However, the ordinary concept is not logically or conceptually related to brain states at all. We have recognised when people are in control of themselves or of objects for millennia, long before the empirical discoveries noted by Churchland and Suhler were made. People have held back from expressing their emotions, have held others responsible for their actions, and engaged in goal directed behaviour throughout human history. As noted above, we could only make empirical discoveries about the contingent relationships between people's brains and their controlled and goal directed behaviour if we already had a concept of control in place. So Churchland and Suhler's concept is not a refinement of the ordinary concept at all. So, any conclusions they draw about control using that concept will not in fact be about control but about control*. But if they were going to challenge the frail control hypothesis and the neo-Kantian picture they would need to make their argument using our ordinary notion of control and related action concepts. It is those concepts that are

related to the concept of responsibility and that are relevant to whether we should hold people responsible or not.

I earlier mentioned Wittgenstein's grammatical observation that "only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious". Max Bennett and Peter Hacker use the term 'the *mereological fallacy*' to label arguments which break this grammatical rule. Mereology is the study of relationships between wholes and parts of things. They use the term 'mereological fallacy' because it while it makes sense to attribute psychological attributes to a human being or to something that resembles one (a whole creature), there is no such thing as a part of a human being (such as their brain or their neurons) having psychological attributes. As Bennett and Hacker note, psychological attributes "have no intelligible application to the brain"⁵³⁵. One of the major conceptual errors made in Churchland and Suhlert's paper is to commit this error. For example, they argue that the 'Zeigarnik effect' implies that "nonconscious processes continue to keep the goal high in priority until resumption of the goal-related action"⁵³⁶ but while humans can prioritise the goals they want to pursue it makes no sense to say that their nonconscious processes do. Similarly, they say that "habit and routine serve to spare the brain the energetic costs of close attention"⁵³⁷, but while we know what it is for a human being to pay close attention to something we have no idea what it would be for a brain to pay close attention to something. I'm sure that Churchland and Suhlert would object to being associated with Cartesianism but central to their argument is a kind of neo-Cartesianism. They have replaced mind-body dualism with brain-body dualism. They want to do away with our ordinary psychological concepts in explaining what we do and replace them with neurophysiological ones. However, in making their arguments they equivocate between the ordinary concepts and neurophysiological ones because although they profess to wanting to be rid of our ordinary psychological concepts they cannot make

⁵³⁵ Bennett, M. R. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, pp. 68-74.

⁵³⁶ Churchland, P. and Suhlert, C. 'Control: Conscious and otherwise', p. 343.

⁵³⁷ Ibid. p. 345.

arguments about control, decisions, and responsibility without them⁵³⁸. They argue that the role “awareness of specific factors must have for an action to be considered controlled, relative to neurobiological criteria, is not a matter of stipulation, intuition or semantics, but scientific discovery” but this is confused. To engage with their opponents they must use the ordinary concept of ‘control’ and in that case it *is* a matter of semantics whether it is possible to be in control and be held responsible without reasoning (transparently). If we are thinking about what is possible with regard to control (as opposed to control* (Churchland and Suhlert’s neurophysiological notion)) then empirical evidence about brains is irrelevant to our considerations but mapping the grammar of our ordinary concepts of ‘control’, ‘responsibility’, ‘reasoning’, and ‘deliberation’ is not. This is where Wittgenstein’s grammatical observations are helpful in untangling conceptual muddles.

6.4 Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that philosophical accounts of the conditions under which we hold people responsible at least sometimes involve conceptual confusions. Accounts of the conditions under which people can be held responsible for their actions have clear implications for political philosophy and Wittgenstein’s work can help us to get clear about the use of the relevant expressions. In particular attention to Wittgenstein’s remark that “only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious”⁵³⁹ could be very useful in untangling confusions present in the work of philosophers, political theorists, and neuroscientists.

⁵³⁸ I think there are other conceptual confusions present in Churchland and Suhlert’s paper. They conflate habits and reasons for no good reason (p. 345). However, there is not space here to discuss that. Bennett and Hacker’s book, mentioned earlier, has a good set of arguments against the eliminativist project (pp. 366-377, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*).

⁵³⁹ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §281.

Chapter 7 - Wittgenstein and Justice

7.1 Introduction

This chapter divides into two main parts. The first part will examine Wittgenstein's relevance to problems concerning justice insofar as his philosophy involves getting clear about concepts. Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks could help us to get to grips with philosophical problems about justice by helping us to get clear about the concept of justice and thereby aiding our understanding. The second part of the chapter moves beyond concerns with getting clear about the concept of justice and asks whether Wittgensteinians have reason to criticise particular conceptions or theories of justice that are currently in circulation and whether Wittgensteinians should favour particular conceptions or theories of justice.

7.2 Getting clear about the concept of justice

It is possible that the texts of past philosophers might help us to resolve conceptual problems about justice. However, there are various problems with this. One problem is that some past philosophers wrote in languages other than our own and the translations that we have of their work might obscure the fact that they employed different concepts to us. For example, Hanna Pitkin points out that the ancient Greeks used the word *dike* and had no equivalent to our word 'justice'. *Dike* "came to mean 'justice' and to measure the rightness of human action" but it "originally meant simply 'the way': a descriptive account of how things in fact were, or were done"⁵⁴⁰.

It was *dike* or *dikaiosyne* that Plato wrote about in *The Republic*. The words are usually translated as 'justice' in English translations of Plato's work but according to the translator Ernest Barker that is not a very good translation. The Greek word *dike*, according to Barker, "...includes the ethical notions (or some of the ethical notions)

⁵⁴⁰ Pitkin, H. F. *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, p. 273.

which belong to our word 'righteousness'"⁵⁴¹ and Pitkin thinks that if we get a better sense of what the Greek expression means then some of Plato's claims become more plausible. For example, whereas it strikes us as odd to say that justice is the 'master virtue', encompassing all other virtues, we can at least see where someone is coming from if they say that righteousness is the 'master virtue', containing all others⁵⁴².

So careful attention to the use of the word 'justice' in translations of Plato's works might lead to confusion if we think of his term as being equivalent to the way we use 'justice' now, in English. However, that is not to say that studying Plato's work is of no use at all in shedding light on our concept. If we are aware that Plato used the word *dike* and we are clear about what it means then studying Plato's work might shed light on our own term, 'justice', by way of contrast or by highlighting differences. This was one of Wittgenstein's techniques in helping us to gain clarity about the meaning of expressions. When Maurice Drury asked Wittgenstein what he thought of Hegel Wittgenstein said that "Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different. I was thinking of using as a motto for my book a quotation from *King Lear*: 'I'll teach you differences'"⁵⁴³.

Wittgenstein's comments on Plato's discussion of concepts that are only distantly related to justice might also help to shed light on the concept of justice. In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein said that philosopher's attempts to get clear about the use of certain expressions had been held back, "shackled", by "[t]he idea that in order to get clear about the meaning of a general term one had to find the common element in all its applications"⁵⁴⁴. The particular case that Wittgenstein uses as an illustration here is Socrates' discussion with Theaetetus concerning the concept of knowledge in Plato's *Theaetetus*⁵⁴⁵. Wittgenstein notices that when Socrates discusses the question 'what is

⁵⁴¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, tr. by Sir Ernest Barker, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 362 (cited on p. 306 of Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice*).

⁵⁴² Pitkin, H. F. *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pp. 306-7.

⁵⁴³ Drury, M. O'C. 'Conversations with Wittgenstein', in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Rush Rhees (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 157.

⁵⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁴⁵ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 146c-147c.

knowledge?’ he commits the error of thinking that answering it would involve finding the common element involved in all cases of knowledge. Socrates, Wittgenstein says, “does not even regard it as a *preliminary* answer to enumerate cases of knowledge” and yet, Wittgenstein says, this would be satisfactory in the case of a term like ‘arithmetic’⁵⁴⁶. To understand what arithmetic is it would be useful to investigate a finite cardinal arithmetic, even if this doesn’t tell us about every use of the term ‘arithmetic’, and to then go on to look at other cases. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein makes a similar case about the use of the term ‘game’. There is no single defining common feature of all games, just “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing”⁵⁴⁷. The lesson from all of this in terms of coming to get a clear idea of what ‘justice’ means is that we should be careful not to assume that there must be some single defining feature in common to all cases of justice. It seems unlikely that we would be able to find a common feature given that we talk about just men, just acts, just outcomes, just states of affairs, distributive justice, procedural justice, social justice, civil justice, and so on. Indeed, David Wiggins notes that Aristotle distinguished at least four kinds of justice; “...justice of allocations, ...justice of rectifications, ...commercial justice, ...equity” - to which neo-Aristoteleans could add “justice of penalties, ...economic justice, ...fiscal justice, administrative justice ...”⁵⁴⁸ and Wiggins claims that “[t]here is no serious question of deducing any one of Aristotle’s kinds from any of the others or of deducing all four from a more fundamental idea”⁵⁴⁹.

Returning to Wittgenstein’s discussion of games; Wittgenstein also talked about games in relation to language when he was trying to clarify what ‘language’ is. One of the most well-known pieces of terminology to come out of Wittgenstein’s later work is the term ‘language game’. In rejecting his own earlier emphasis on assertoric uses of language in the *Tractatus* and his early claim that assertoric sentences depict

⁵⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 20.

⁵⁴⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, §66.

⁵⁴⁸ Wiggins, D. ‘Neo-Aristotelean Reflections on Justice’, *Mind*, Vol. 113, 451, July 2004, p. 479.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 479.

states of affairs Wittgenstein pointed to the many different uses of language when he discussed it in his later work. So, in the *Philosophical Investigations* he asks us to “[c]onsider the variety of language-games in the following examples and in others:

- Giving orders, and acting on them –
- Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements –
- Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) –
- Reporting an event –
- Speculating about the event –
- Forming and testing a hypothesis –
- Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams –
- Making up a story; and reading one –
- Acting in a play –
- Singing rounds –
- Guessing riddles –
- Cracking a joke, telling one –
- ...Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.”

One of the points in using the term ‘game’ here is to emphasise that we do a variety of different things with language. Language games are diverse in a similar way to which games are diverse. There is no single common feature to all language games just as there is no single common feature to all games. What Wittgenstein also wanted to emphasise was the fact that language is spoken in the course of a variety of different kinds of activities that we engage in as we live our lives: “the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.”⁵⁵⁰

Thinking in this way about the various different things we *do* with language and about the various regions of discourse and how they are embedded in our lives draws us away from the temptation to assimilate uses of language and to think in simple

⁵⁵⁰ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.

terms about words as naming objects and sentences as describing states of affairs. 'Justice' is a noun but that does not mean that we should think about it as a name for an object. Taking on board Wittgenstein's observations about the variety of language games should leave us open to the possibility that we might do various different things with the word 'justice' (it is used in a variety of different language games) and that sentences including the expression might have different logical characteristics to sentences including other kinds of expressions, used in other language games. This is what Hanna Pitkin argues in *Wittgenstein and Justice*. There she contrasts the use of 'justice' with the use of 'delicious' and of 'green'. She points out that we would have different responses to other cultures when it comes to their examples of such things (an example of something that is *just*, an example of something that is *delicious*, an example of something that is *green*). A person from another culture might provide a different example of something delicious (e.g. rotten whale blubber) than someone from our own culture would provide (e.g. chocolate ice cream). Indeed, people within a single culture provide many different examples of what they say is delicious and they disagree about whether those things are delicious but we nonetheless do not think that the people in question are necessarily using the word incorrectly. If they enjoy what they are eating, have more, recommend it to other people, and we have no reason to think they are being insincere then we recognise that the person eating, say, whale blubber, really does think that it is delicious. It is possible that they are using the concept 'delicious' just as we do. However, if someone provides a colour sample different from our colour samples for green things, for example a colour sample that we would call 'blue', then we would say immediately that they were not using our concept 'green'. There are then clear logical differences between our colour language and our language concerning matters of taste. Our use of the term 'justice' is in some ways similar to our use of the word 'delicious'. It is possible that we could accept an example unlike any that we had seen before as an example of justice – an example from another culture or from our own. However, we would not be as lax in the case of justice as we would about examples of things that are delicious⁵⁵¹. As Pitkin says, "not

⁵⁵¹ Peg O'Connor makes the point that we should be very careful to distinguish matters of taste from moral matters and criticises C. L. Stevenson for failing to clearly distinguish the two in her (Wittgenstein-inspired) book *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life* (University Park PA: The Pennsylvania State

merely *any* standards will qualify as standards of justice; not merely any example will be an example of justice. If a speaker considers a certain situation just, he must in principle be prepared to show us *how* it is just, what is just about it.”⁵⁵² Justice is the kind of concept that “involves standards and the possibility of judgement and justification (as the etymology would suggest)”⁵⁵³.

As Pitkin suggests, learning about the etymology of a word might help us to get clearer about its meaning. However, we should perhaps be a bit wary of Pitkin’s claims that “a word’s former meanings are the root sources of its present ones” and that “the older meaning is in a way still present in the newer one”⁵⁵⁴, since this ties the meaning of a word too closely to its etymology. Wittgenstein remarked that, “[f]or a large class of cases of the employment of the word ‘meaning’ – though not for *all* – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language”⁵⁵⁵. Although etymology can help us to get clearer about the meaning of a word by helping us to recognise its ties with other words (or just earlier meanings of the same word) that might shed light on the meaning of the word in question it is obviously not the case that a word just means what its etymological root means (and, of course, Pitkin does not claim *this*). Etymology does not give us meaning whereas explanations of the meaning of the word, often in terms of the word’s use in the language, do give us the meaning of a word. An illustration of how far apart a word can come from etymology is the case of surnames. English people (and people in many other countries) often have surnames that come from words for occupations. People in England have names like Sarah *Baker*, Jonathan *Weaver*, or Polly *Gardener*. However, their surnames are not used as words for occupations when referring to people using their surnames. ‘Baker’ does not mean ‘a person whose trade is making bread and cakes’ when it is used as a

University Press, 2008). There she says that “differences in morality cut deeper or go beyond differences in taste, and we are inclined to say that we can have better or worse answers or resolutions to these conflicts, Something more is at stake in moral disagreements than just taste” (p. 146).

⁵⁵² Pitkin, H. *Wittgenstein and Justice*, p. 182.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁵⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §43.

surname. Indeed, it is not clear that it means anything at all when used as a surname.⁵⁵⁶

However, in the case of the word 'justice' I think it is useful to look at the root of the word and words with common roots. If we examine the etymology of 'justice' we see that it is closely related to words like 'law', 'right', 'judge', and 'judgement' and it is clear that even today justice has something to do with legal systems, judges passing judgements, and with questions about what is right, or what the right thing to do is. What a Wittgensteinian might well also do is to look at words that are closely related in meaning (whether related etymologically or not). In the case of 'just' they might compare words such as 'fair', 'equitable', 'honest', 'right', 'impartial', 'getting what is due', 'desert/deserved'. If we are having difficulty with grasping the meaning of the word 'justice' then what we might need is a *surveyable representation* – an overview of the use of the word and its relation to other words – which might help us to see the meaning clearly by seeing how its use differs from other words. As Wittgenstein said, “[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*.”

So, in summary, Wittgenstein might be of help in philosophical discussions about justice by helping us to achieve clarity about our concepts. We can do that in various ways: by being sensitive to the fact that philosophers in the past may have used words differently to the way we do now, by being aware that we should not look for a single common element in all instances of justice, by being sensitive to the fact that 'justice' has a role in different language games, by examining the etymology of the word, and by producing an overview of the word 'justice' in relation to words like 'fairness', 'impartiality', 'judge', 'judgement' and so on. I do not take this list to be exhaustive and following these recommendations may not result in the understanding

⁵⁵⁶ Compare §3.323 of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*: “In the proposition, ‘Green is green’ – where the first word is the proper name of a person and the last an adjective – these words do not merely have different meanings: they are different symbols.” (Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge, 1974, p.16).

that we need. There might be other things we can do but these are at least some of the things we can do suggested by Wittgenstein's work⁵⁵⁷.

7.3 Does Wittgenstein's philosophical work suggest that we should favour particular conceptions of justice?

We might think that given that Wittgenstein's work is primarily concerned with concepts, moreover that it is a descriptive activity – describing grammar, rather than presenting explanations or theories – that Wittgenstein would not have anything to say to us about which conceptions or theories of justice we should accept. However, we have already seen in the first section that Wittgenstein demonstrated that we should not expect words to refer to things with a single feature in common and we have also seen that we have reason to doubt that instances of justice have a single feature in common. This gives us some reason to reject Plato's theory of justice. Indeed, if we think that the problems with Plato's 'theory' are really conceptual or grammatical then we have reason to think that it is not really a *theory* at all. Where Plato's work is a search for definitions it seems that his concerns are conceptual rather than theoretical (it does not concern empirical matters or hypotheses). It is not a *theory* that 'justice' means what it does and if we follow Wittgenstein then we would think that what is needed is a description of the relevant region of grammar, a surveyable representation, rather than a theory of any sort, in order to gain understanding of the relevant concepts⁵⁵⁸.

⁵⁵⁷ For a very rich account of the concept of justice, inspired by Wittgenstein, see Peg O'Connor's *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, particularly the last chapter (pp. 137-168).

⁵⁵⁸ See *Philosophical Investigations* §109, "...we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place...", and §128 "If someone were to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them". Note: we might also object to philosophical theories being called theories on grounds other than thinking of them as just being concerned with concepts or grammar. Wittgenstein was opposed to scientism in philosophy and thought that we should be sensitive to differences between different language games. If we think of theories as being just like scientific theories, or as, say, being particularly concerned with causation, then it seems mistaken to call accounts of justice theories. 'Justice' is an expression that is not at home in scientific language games and an expression that is clearly tied up with reasons and justification rather than with causal relationships between physical objects.

But ruling out Plato's take on justice still leaves us with quite a lot of different kinds of theories or conceptions of justice to choose amongst. Can Wittgenstein be of more help in deciding upon an account of justice from amongst the current accounts (or in formulating a new one)? One approach to narrowing down the field is to look at what Wittgensteinians in the past few decades have had to say about justice. Wittgenstein himself had very little to say about justice in particular, although he did make remarks about both political and ethical matters that might help to point us in the right direction. However, various Wittgensteinian philosophers *have* had something to say about justice – inspired by their interpretations of Wittgenstein's work.

In his paper 'Wittgenstein vs. Rawls' Rupert Read observes that liberal political philosophy is currently dominant and that many Wittgensteinians and philosophers inspired by Wittgenstein's work have followed the trend⁵⁵⁹. Read notes that Richard Rorty, Stanley Cavell, and Burt Dreben have all praised Rawlsian liberalism. Wittgensteinians such as Alice Crary and James Conant who have deep disagreements with Rorty nonetheless make clear that they agree with him in their liberalism⁵⁶⁰. In Chapter 4 I argued that although Rorty was influenced by Wittgenstein, Rorty's liberal conclusions do not follow from Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks⁵⁶¹. I also suggested that Richard Eldridge's Cavellian arguments in favour of a liberal Wittgenstein were mistaken, and criticised Alice Crary's claim that lessons learned from her interpretation of Wittgenstein are "reflected in forms of social life that

⁵⁵⁹ Read was certainly not the first to use Wittgenstein in criticising Rawls. For example, back in 1990, Peter Winch developed a Wittgensteinian critique of the social contract tradition using insights from Hume's critique of that tradition. Winch draws out confusions from traditional philosophy about the role of practical reason in political theorising in his 'Certainty and Authority', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 28, pp. 223-237, 1990. Winch argues that "The 'veil of ignorance' that characterizes this 'position' [the 'original position' as described by Rawls] runs foul of Wittgenstein's point that what is 'reasonable' cannot be characterized independently of the *content* of certain pivotal 'judgements'." (p. 235).

⁵⁶⁰ Read, R. 'Wittgenstein vs. Rawls', in V. Munz, K. Puhl, and J. Wang (eds.) *Proceedings of the Kirchberg Wittgenstein Symposium 2009: Language and World*, Frankfurt: Ontos, 2010, p. 93.

⁵⁶¹ Chapter 4 was developed from my paper 'Was Wittgenstein a Liberal Philosopher?', *Teorema*, Vol. 36, Issue 1, 2017, pp.71-4.

embody the ideals of liberal democracy”⁵⁶². So, given that I have already argued that arguments from Rorty and Cavellians like Eldridge in favour of a Wittgensteinian liberalism (Rorty) or Wittgenstein being a liberal (Eldridge) are mistaken, I will focus on Rawlsian liberalism in this chapter. Would Wittgenstein have been a Rawlsian? Do Wittgenstein’s philosophical remarks provide any support for Rawlsian liberal account of justice?

7.3.1 Did Rawls put the question marks deep enough?

One possible way of arguing against Rawls is to take the Wittgensteinian approach of questioning what are presented as foundational assumptions or first principles. Wittgenstein said that “one keeps forgetting to go down to the foundations. One doesn’t put the question marks *deep* enough down.”⁵⁶³ Both Rupert Read and Amartya Sen take this approach, although their arguments are different⁵⁶⁴.

In a series of papers Read has argued against Rawls’ conception of justice and against liberal conceptions of justice more generally⁵⁶⁵. Read argues that Rawls has not put question marks deep enough down in that Rawls assumes the primacy of justice. Rawls famously claimed that “[a] theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust”⁵⁶⁶. Read thinks

⁵⁶² See Eldridge, R. *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997, Eldridge, R. ‘Wittgenstein and the Conversation of Justice’ in Cressida Heyes (ed.) *The Grammar of Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, Crary, A. ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought’, in Crary, A. and Read, R., *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, 2000, p.141 and Vinten, R. ‘Was Wittgenstein a Liberal Philosopher?’, pp. 67-71 and pp. 74-5.

⁵⁶³ Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, (Revised edition, G. H. von Wright, ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 71e.

⁵⁶⁴ Similarly, Peg O’Connor argues that moral realism and moral antirealism both fail because they share common, mistaken, assumptions (pp. 43-60, *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*).

⁵⁶⁵ See, for example, Read, R. ‘Wittgenstein vs. Rawls’, in V. Munz, K. Puhl, and J. Wang (eds.) *Proceedings of the Kirchberg Wittgenstein Symposium 2009: Language and World*, Frankfurt: Ontos, 2010, Read, R. ‘Why the Ecological Crisis Spells the End of Liberalism: The “Difference Principle” is Ecologically Unsustainable, Exploitative of Persons, or Empty’, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 22, 2011, and Makoff, R. and Read, R. ‘Beyond Just Justice – Creating Space for a Future-Care Ethic’, *Philosophical Investigations*, 40: 3, 2017.

⁵⁶⁶ Rawls, J. *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: OUP, 1971, p. 3.

that this statement from Rawls is “the trick that biased the pitch before we even noticed the game had begun”⁵⁶⁷ and he cites §308 from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* where Wittgenstein talks about how philosophical problems arise because “[t]he first step...escapes notice...But that’s just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter... (the decisive moment in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that seemed to us quite innocent)”. In that context Wittgenstein was talking about behaviourism but the same thing could be said of Rawls’s argument. Rawls assumes that justice is the first virtue without seriously considering alternatives. However, given that there are serious problems with taking justice to be primary in the way that Rawls does alternatives should be considered.

What are the problems with the Rawlsian account of justice just referred to above? Many of the problems arise from the fact that Rawls gives a contractarian account where representatives of free and equal citizens reason with one another and agree upon principles. Justice is connected to making judgements and so the parties involved in agreeing upon principles must be rational creatures capable of making judgements. However, this excludes various people and also excludes other creatures. As Rupert Read notes in his paper ‘Wittgenstein vs. Rawls’, “assuming justice to be the first virtue of social institutions creates real difficulties in taking seriously the claims of those with whom we cannot have a conversation...animals, the very ill, the very young, the very disabled, and the unborn”⁵⁶⁸. One thing to notice about these problems is that although they have been introduced here in the context of Wittgensteinian concerns about making unwarranted assumptions these criticisms have been made by non-Wittgensteinian philosophers in the past and there is nothing particularly Wittgensteinian about them. For example, Martha Nussbaum has written extensively about problems with Rawlsian contractarianism excluding animals and the severely disabled, as well as about problems with extending Rawlsian contractualism beyond national borders (and into the future)⁵⁶⁹.

⁵⁶⁷ Read, R. ‘Wittgenstein vs. Rawls’, p. 99.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 100.

⁵⁶⁹ See, for example, Nussbaum’s *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Read takes his criticisms of Rawls in a more Wittgensteinian direction by focussing particularly on the unborn, on future generations. In this case the problem with Rawls's contractualism is not merely that future generations are not a part of any (fantasised) discussion but that they *cannot* be. As Read points out, in the case of future people, "there could not possibly be a contract (in part because our decisions will partly decide which future people there *are!*)"⁵⁷⁰. The absurdity of the notion of a contract with future peoples parallels the absurdity of the idea of a private language, according to Read: "...the 'contract' of Rawls and his predecessors is a contract with nobody, a contract 'private' to its purveyors. There is no real contract, and *there could not possibly be* a contract with future people"⁵⁷¹. The focus in contractarianism on discussion and decision-making between contemporaries means that it treats future generations as a special case which we consider after everything else is straightened out. But given that we live in a world where issues like climate change are enormously important; issues which clearly involve future generations; it seems as though contractarians are wrong to treat future generations as a secondary case⁵⁷².

But Read does not just discuss future generations in undermining Rawlsian claims about the primacy of justice. In a paper that he wrote with Ruth Makoff they show very clearly how the parent/child relationship reveals limitations of talk of justice. A few obvious points about the relationship between parent and child show that contractarian models do not fit it at all. First of all, when it comes to very small children it makes no sense to think about negotiating, discussing the distribution of goods, or forging contracts. Very young children cannot speak and when they do start to speak we cannot consider them fully rational for some time. There is a clear power imbalance between parent and child, with the parent holding a great deal of power in the relationship and the child having very little. Cool, self-interested discussion about fairness is not suitable for the task of thinking about how parents should act towards children. Rawls and Makoff point out that Rawlsian contractarianism leaves us in a position where the powerful dictate to the powerless. Somebody who is self-interested

⁵⁷⁰ Read, R. 'Wittgenstein vs. Rawls', p. 101.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid. p. 102.

⁵⁷² Read, R. 'Wittgenstein vs. Rawls', p. 102 and also Makoff, R and Read, R. 'Beyond Just Justice – Creating Space for a Future-Care Ethic', *Philosophical Investigations*, 40:3, July 2017.

and motivated only by cool fairness would not be likely to be fair “when one controls the very conditions of existence of the other”⁵⁷³. What is needed is a warmer motivation than the kind of cool fairness we find in the contractarian tradition. If we *care* about children and about generations yet to come then we might really be fair. But what this means is that justice or fairness is not primary. We are just or fair *because* we care. Justice-first contractarianism, as found in Rawls’s work, does not supply us with the conceptual tools for thinking about relationships between parents and children or for thinking about the relationships between ourselves and future generations. A more plausible candidate for a primary virtue is love or care.

Read provides good reasons for questioning Rawls’ assumption of the primacy of justice. I will now move on to looking at Amartya Sen’s arguments against Rawls. Amartya Sen provides reasons for thinking that the Rawlsian assumption about the priority of identifying a fully just society is mistaken. Rawls makes this assumption in taking the main question to be answered to be ‘What is a just society?’ Sen, on the other hand, argues that the identification of a fully just society (the Rawlsian ‘transcendental’ approach to justice) is neither necessary nor sufficient for making comparisons between societies and ranking them as more or less just (the comparative approach to justice). Moreover, we constantly face questions about how to advance the cause of justice in our everyday lives and these kinds of comparative questions are urgent.

A Rawlsian might well agree that it is urgent to discuss and act upon cases of injustice to make things more just but suggest that clarity in answering the question ‘what is a just society?’ is necessary to make judgements about what would make a society more just or that it might be a way of helping us to get clear about comparative judgements. However, Sen questions whether we need a clear picture of the most just society in order to make the kind of comparative judgements that we do. We happily say that a country where slavery has been abolished thereby became more just than it was with slavery. Sen illustrates his position with analogies from aesthetics. He points out that in judging paintings we do not need to identify the best painting in order to argue the case that one painting is better than another: “In arguing for a Picasso over a Dali

⁵⁷³ Makoff, R. and Read, R. ‘Beyond Just Justice’, p. 248.

we do not need to get steamed up about identifying the perfect picture...which would beat the Picassos and the Dalis and all other paintings in the world”⁵⁷⁴ and nor does identifying the best picture (if such a thing were possible) tell us how to make comparative judgements about other pictures: “...the fact that a person regards the Mona Lisa as the best picture in the world does not reveal how she would rank a Gauguin against a Van Gogh”⁵⁷⁵. Sen recognises that this is not a proof that comparing societies in terms of justice works in the same way that comparative judgements about art does. One problem is that we might not be able to form any idea of what a perfect picture is. However, Sen points out that even when making comparative judgements in other regions of discourse where there is clearly a ‘top’ example – such as judgements about the heights of mountains – we do not need the top case in order to make a judgement about two others. We do not need to understand that Everest is highest or know the height of Everest in order to compare the heights of Kanchenjunga and Mont Blanc⁵⁷⁶. This, again, is not proof that identifying the perfectly just society is not necessary to make comparative judgements about justice but it does at least undermine the claim that it can safely be assumed to be the case. Rawls needs some kind of a justification for taking the principal question to be ‘what is a just society?’ but he lacks a justification for that.

In conclusion, Wittgensteinians (and others) have good reason to think that Rawls has not put the question marks down deep enough. His whole enterprise rests on shaky assumptions. Rupert Read also provides other reasons for Wittgensteinians to be wary of Rawls which I will briefly mention here. Rawls introduces what he is doing as a *theory* and Wittgenstein did not think that philosophy, at least as he understood it, was theoretical⁵⁷⁷. Rawls work has a scientific flavour, whereas

⁵⁷⁴ Sen, A. ‘What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?’, *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 103, No. 5, 2006, p. 222.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 221.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 222.

⁵⁷⁷ See, for example, *Philosophical Investigations* §109 where Wittgenstein says that “...we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place”. Wittgenstein also had this to say in the *Blue Book*; “Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real

Wittgenstein was opposed to scientism. Wittgenstein describes the kind of confusion philosophers fall into as pictures holding them captive⁵⁷⁸ and Read thinks that Rawls is held captive by a set of pictures “of people as at base individuals, juridical objects; of social institutions as (like) law; of political philosophy as (like) science”⁵⁷⁹.

7.3.2 José Medina’s Portrayal of Wittgenstein as a Rebel and Epistemic Justice

Wittgenstein’s philosophical remarks do not seem to support any kind of liberal political philosophy. Rupert Read has made a good case that, at the very least, Wittgenstein’s philosophical remarks are in tension with Rawlsian philosophy and I have already argued in the fourth chapter of this thesis that Wittgenstein’s remarks do not support the ‘liberal ironism’ of Rorty and nor do they support certain varieties of liberalism inspired by Stanley Cavell. However, there is a more left-wing strand of thought which looks to Cavell for inspiration in the philosophical work of Chantal Mouffe and José Medina. They argue for a form of pluralistic democracy where dissident voices can be heard and given the credibility they deserve⁵⁸⁰. The focus here will be on Medina’s work in particular but Medina argues in favour of the roughly the kind of radical and plural democracy which Mouffe favours (despite also having some differences with both Cavell and Mouffe)⁵⁸¹. Medina’s work has often focussed on cases of epistemic injustice. He argues, for example, that there is injustice in situations where people do not have equal access to knowledge practices, where people cannot participate in knowledge practices as equals, where people’s testimony is not given the

source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness” (Wittgenstein, L. *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, p. 18).

⁵⁷⁸ PI §115 “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”.

⁵⁷⁹ Read, R. ‘Wittgenstein vs. Rawls’, p. 102.

⁵⁸⁰ See, for example, Mouffe, C. *The Democratic Paradox*, New York: Verso, 2000 and Medina, J. *The Epistemology of Resistance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁵⁸¹ See pages 19-24 of Medina, J. ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel: Dissidence and Contestation in Discursive Practices’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 18: 1, pp. 19-24 where Medina discusses his agreements and disagreements with Mouffe and Cavell.

weight it deserves, where people are unfairly denied the resources needed to understand themselves, and in cases where people are not treated with sensitivity because their oppression is ignored or not understood. He suggests that we should build a society where people take on their responsibilities to understand the communities around them, where there is space for people to disagree about norms and rules and to be taken seriously when they make challenges, and where we tackle the kind of bigotry that is intertwined with epistemic injustices. However, he does not propose an ideal. He argues that we should be sensitive to changing circumstances, that we should always be open to changing our norms, and he describes his position as a kind of ‘meliorism’ – committed to making things better without having a picture of some society being the best⁵⁸². This sounds much closer to someone like Sen, with his comparative approach to justice than to Rawlsian transcendentalism.

In ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel: Dissidence and Contestation in Discursive Practices’ Medina argues that Wittgenstein’s remarks about meaning and rules have implications for political philosophy. He tries to make a case that Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* stresses contestation and rebellion as having a crucial role in our normative practices. Although it seems that Wittgenstein emphasises agreement and appears to give philosophy a conservative role⁵⁸³, it is important for Wittgenstein’s account of language and philosophy that rules can be broken, that they can change, and that we can rebel against them. According to Medina, in Wittgenstein’s discussion of rules, agreement, and disagreement, “the dialectical relation goes both ways...there is a relationship of mutual dependence and support between agreement and disagreement; and, therefore, agreement too depends on and presupposes disagreement, contestation and the possibility of rebellion.”⁵⁸⁴

Medina notes that even while Wittgenstein stresses the importance of agreement in practices he always highlights that there is room for disagreement. For example, in §241 of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein challenges the view (or confused

⁵⁸² See Medina, J. *The Epistemology of Resistance*, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁸³ For example, *PI* §124 “Philosophy...leaves everything as it is”.

⁵⁸⁴ Medina, J. ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel: Dissidence and Contestation in Discursive Practices’, p. 3.

picture) that human agreement decides what is true or false. He observes that “[w]hat is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in forms of life”. Agreement in language, agreement about what makes sense (“agreement in definitions” (PI §242)), is essential for us to make our opinions understood. In order for us to put forward a claim as true we must make sense. Our disagreements over matters of opinion rest upon agreement over linguistic norms. Medina also notes that there is also a kind of balance between agreement and disagreement in the situation where someone is trying to understand a completely unknown language. There it would be difficult to understand the people, especially given the variation (‘disagreement’) in the ways that they behave. In that situation Wittgenstein says that “[s]hared human behaviour is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language”⁵⁸⁵. ‘Agreement’ in ways of behaving – ways of behaving that we have in common, such as smiling when happy, frowning or crying when sad, looking to where a finger is pointing (rather than at the pointing finger), etc. – help us to make sense of the great variation in human behaviour. In both of these remarks from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* we can see that certain kinds of agreement and certain kinds of disagreement are interrelated.

However, it is not only the case that agreements of one sort and disagreements of another are interrelated. The central point that Medina wants to make about agreement and disagreement, as I understand it, is that where we can make sense of saying that there is agreement we must also be able to make sense of saying that there is disagreement. This is presumably what he means when he says that the relation of dependence between agreement and disagreement is mutual. We might agree in language but we might also disagree in language. Disagreement does not only arise between our opinions and in our behaviour, it can also crop up in disputes over meanings and rules. Disagreement, contestation, or rebellion, could possibly arise wherever agreement, acceptance, or compliance is found.

⁵⁸⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §206. Medina cites both §241 and §206 on page 6 of his ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel’.

A possible problem with this view is that if agreement is a condition of language then it seems to follow that we could not imagine disagreement. If that condition was not met then we would not have a language in which to disagree. However, as Peter Hacker has argued, this reasoning is erroneous. In his commentary on the *Philosophical Investigations* Hacker points out that the reasoning in this case is similar to the fallacy committed by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* when he argued that objects must be sempiternal because it must be possible to describe a state of affairs in which everything destructible is destroyed. Wittgenstein's mistake here, Hacker argues, is that "it does not follow, from the possibility of such a description, that it must be possible *in that state of affairs* to describe how things are". Similarly, in a state of affairs where agreement in language has completely broken down there could not be disagreement – disagreement and agreement fall together. But it does not follow that in the present, where we do have agreement in language, that we cannot imagine disagreement. Hacker explains that "given that we agree, for example, in our colour-judgements, we can describe such changes in us as would lead to a radical disagreement in our applications (LPE 306⁵⁸⁶). But, of course, beyond a certain point we could not say: 'They disagree in their use of colour-words', for these words would no longer *be* colour words...Only the shell of colour concepts remains, for confusion has supervened (PPF §§346, 348⁵⁸⁷)"⁵⁸⁸. This disposes of the problem raised at the beginning of this paragraph and the passages cited by Hacker show clearly that Wittgenstein held the position Medina ascribes to him. Wittgenstein clearly thought that disagreement over linguistic norms was possible and also thought that a host of other kinds of disagreement was possible.

In addition to stressing the ubiquity of the possibility of disagreement, Medina highlights and agrees with Wittgenstein's account of language as a *historical* and

⁵⁸⁶ 'LPE' is the abbreviation that Hacker uses for 'Wittgenstein's Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense Data"', which can be found in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951* (edited by J. Klagge and A. Nordmann, Hackett: Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1993).

⁵⁸⁷ 'PPF' is Hacker's abbreviation for *Philosophy of Psychology: A Fragment* which was published in the 4th edition of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

⁵⁸⁸ Baker, G. P. and Hacker, P. M. S. *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, Second edition, extensively revised by P. M. S. Hacker, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 229.

mutable phenomenon. In §23 of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein emphasises the diversity in what we call ‘words’, ‘signs’ and ‘sentences’ and remarks that not only is there great diversity but the kind of diversity we have in language changes over time: “...this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten”. Medina characterises these changes in language in terms of agreement and disagreement: “new agreement [emerges] out of disagreements” and “established agreement [submerges] into new disagreements”⁵⁸⁹. The fact that language has a history and that it changes over time (sometimes in unpredictable ways) is also emphasised in Wittgenstein’s comparison of language to a city developing over time⁵⁹⁰.

Medina thinks that Wittgenstein’s remarks that are known as the ‘private language argument’ add to his case for Wittgenstein being a rebel. The private language argument makes clear that when there is normativity around there is also contestability. The private linguist faces the problem that they cannot give their use of a sensation word a private grounding (through, e.g. a private ostensive definition). They cannot demonstrate that they are using the sensation word correctly because there is no criterion of correctness if what they are relying on is just a kind of inner pointing or inner focussing. As Wittgenstein says, “whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can’t talk about ‘correct’”⁵⁹¹. We know that someone is in pain through their public behaviour – their cries of pain, their winces, and the things that they say. Our sensation words are part of a public language with public criteria. But this does not mean that the correct use of words is just down to the public – decided on by the community. As Medina notes, there is something similar to be said about the public/community case as in the case of the private linguist. What is right or correct is not whatever *seems* right or correct to either the private linguist *or* the community. We must be able to distinguish what is right/correct from what seems right/correct at the community level as well as at the individual level

⁵⁸⁹ Medina, J. ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel’, p. 6.

⁵⁹⁰ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §18.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.* §258.

and we can make sense of collective mistakes too⁵⁹². Meaning is a normative notion and that means that we have *standards* by which we ‘measure’ the correctness of uses of language which we might fall short of.

7.3.3 An Assessment of Medina’s Account of Rules, Language, and Justice

7.3.3.1 What does Medina get right?

Medina’s account of Wittgenstein’s philosophical remarks about rules and language emphasises mutability, history, contestability, disruption, and transformation. Medina wants to challenge the view that our practices might be completely uniform or homogeneous. There is much that is correct in his account. It is clear from the passages Medina cites that Wittgenstein saw language as something mutable and as something that did in fact change. Language changes not only through new terms being introduced and old ones becoming obsolete but through rules being broken or changed. A term might take on a new meaning as the rules for its use are altered. Whole new practices with their own rules might come into existence and others may disappear. Wittgenstein also clearly thought that rules could be challenged or broken in a variety of ways. In his account of rule-following Wittgenstein discusses a variety of ways in which someone might go wrong in writing the series of natural numbers as they learn the series. They might produce a *random series*, and communication might break down, they might make a *mistake*, or they might make a *systematic mistake* (misunderstand)⁵⁹³. Moreover, it is not only the case that people might go wrong or misunderstand when learning about mathematics, they might also *challenge* the rules of mathematics when they have learned the rules. They might propose changes to the way in which mathematics is done⁵⁹⁴. And of course, it is not

⁵⁹² See pp. 9-10 of Medina’s ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel’. Medina cites various passages from the *Philosophical Investigations* in support of his argument - §§258, 265, 279, 311.

⁵⁹³ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §143.

⁵⁹⁴ Wittgenstein mentions changes in mathematics in §23 of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

only in mathematics that we have rules. We play games according to rules⁵⁹⁵, our civic and political life is governed by norms and rules. We can break rules, challenge rules, bend or stretch rules, disobey rules, violate rules, rules have exceptions and some rules we say are just rules of thumb. Medina recognises that there is great diversity in rules in terms of the homogeneity and heterogeneity they admit⁵⁹⁶, and he also thinks that there are big differences in our normative practices in terms of contestability: “not all practices admit of the same degree of contestability”, he says⁵⁹⁷.

So, Medina’s account of Wittgenstein is very plausible. There are details of it that are controversial but I will not get into those controversies here. For the sake of argument let us assume that Medina’s account of Wittgenstein is at least broadly speaking correct. He is right about Wittgenstein seeing language as being rule-governed, and he is right about it being mutable and having a history. Medina correctly argues that Wittgenstein recognised a variety of rules and a variety of ways in which we might go wrong about them, break them, or contest them. The focus of this chapter is justice and the principal problems with Medina’s argument are not with the account of Wittgenstein that he presents but with the political conclusions he draws from it.

7.3.3.2. What do Medina and Mouffe get wrong?

The passage in Medina’s paper that I want to challenge comes towards the end of ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel’. The first stage of Medina’s argument is relatively uncontroversial. From his account of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language and rules he concludes that “[t]he lesson to be learned from Wittgenstein’s discussions is that we should reject any appeal to a final and homogeneous consensus that fixes the

⁵⁹⁵ Wittgenstein mentions chess (§17, §31, §33, §49, §66, §108, §136, §151, §197, §199, §200, §205, §316, §337, §365, §563, §567), ring-a-ring-a-roses (§66), noughts and crosses (§66), tennis (§66, §68), football (‘Philosophy of Psychology: A Fragment’, xiii) , volleyball (PPF, xiii).

⁵⁹⁶ Medina, J. ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel’, p. 23.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 17.

normativity of our practices.”⁵⁹⁸ It is clear that Wittgenstein did not think that standards of correctness, standards concerning what is right, or behavioural norms were either fixed once and for all or homogeneous, and nor did he think that a consensus determined what is correct, incorrect, right, or wrong. Wittgenstein talked about various ways in which norms might change, bedrock might shift, and rules might be challenged or broken.

However, Medina goes on to claim that the Wittgensteinian view he has outlined has political implications. He agrees with Mouffe in thinking that Wittgenstein’s remarks would make democratic thinkers more open to the kind of pluralist society she envisions. This would be a society that avoids striving for consensus and instead allows expression of a variety of conflicting viewpoints. Mouffe thinks that attempts to bring about a democratic consensus are misguided and that “this is something that Wittgenstein, with his insistence on the need to respect differences, brings to the fore in a very powerful way”⁵⁹⁹.

Despite claiming that she does not want to “extract a political theory from Wittgenstein, [or] to attempt elaborating one on the basis of his writings”⁶⁰⁰ Mouffe nonetheless thinks that Wittgenstein’s remarks point to “a *new way of theorizing* about the political”⁶⁰¹ and she thinks that Wittgenstein’s remarks should incline us to be sympathetic to her vision of a radical and plural democracy. She cites two remarks from *On Certainty* that she thinks support her vision. (i) The first is Wittgenstein’s remark that “Giving grounds...justifying the evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language game”⁶⁰². This, she says, “allows us to grasp the conditions of emergence of a democratic consensus”⁶⁰³.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 23.

⁵⁹⁹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p.77 cited in Medina, J. ‘Wittgenstein as a Rebel’, p. 24.

⁶⁰⁰ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 60.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, p. 61.

⁶⁰² Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, §204

⁶⁰³ Mouffe, C. *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 70.

As she interprets Wittgenstein, “agreement is established not on significations but on forms of life”, and this, she says, distinguishes Wittgenstein’s philosophy from Habermas’s⁶⁰⁴. Mouffe argues that the significance of this is that it reveals the limits of every consensus. (ii) This is where she again cites Wittgenstein’s remarks in *On Certainty*. Wittgenstein remarked that “Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic⁶⁰⁵. I said I would ‘combat’ the other man, - but wouldn’t I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*.”⁶⁰⁶

Mouffe finds what she thinks are further remarks in favour of her conception of democracy in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein famously noted that there is not a single feature that is common to all and only games. ‘Game’ cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Instead what we find is “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small”⁶⁰⁷. Mouffe thinks that Wittgenstein’s take on games suggests that “we should acknowledge and valorise the diversity of ways in which the ‘democratic game’ can be played, instead of trying to reduce this diversity to a uniform model of citizenship”⁶⁰⁸.

There are various problems with Mouffe’s arguments and, by extension, with Medina’s. Mouffe claims that Wittgenstein insists “on the need to respect differences” but she does not provide a reference to Wittgenstein’s work to clarify what she means by this. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein implores us to “call to mind the differences between the language games [‘I describe my state of mind’/‘I describe my room’]”⁶⁰⁹, he notes that there are differences of degree in the response that one

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, §611.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid. §612.

⁶⁰⁷ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §66.

⁶⁰⁸ Mouffe, C. *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 73.

⁶⁰⁹ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §290.

might give to the question ‘were you really angry?’⁶¹⁰, and in what has now been denominated *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* he says that we can “discern conceptual differences” between the various responses to the question “does he *hear* the plaint?”⁶¹¹. According to Maurice Drury Wittgenstein said of Hegel that he “...seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different” and Drury recalls that Wittgenstein had considered using a quotation from *King Lear* – “I’ll teach you differences” – as a motto for his book⁶¹². In all of these cases the ‘differences’ referred to are categorial or conceptual differences and this fits with his conception of philosophy - where the problems are not empirical problems but problems which are “solved through an insight into the workings of our language”⁶¹³. The differences he discusses are differences between concepts or between language games - *not* the kind of differences Mouffe presumably has in mind – differences between citizens in a democracy. Wittgenstein’s attention to differences had nothing to do with, say, respecting people from other (different) countries, or respecting people regardless of their sexuality, or respecting people with different political affiliations. ‘Democracy’ is not a term that appears in the *Philosophical Investigations* at all and the book does not have citizenship or justice amongst its concerns. Mouffe claims, following Cavell, that holding people responsible for their claims was a central concern of Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* but if this is so then it is odd that the word ‘responsibility’ does not appear in it at all, and nor to words like ‘obligation’ or ‘duty’. Wittgenstein *was* occupied with rules, definitions, and language – and the various ways in which we might go wrong, make mistakes, and violate rules where language was concerned. *Normativity* was undoubtedly a central concern of Wittgenstein’s but not in a way that obviously supports Mouffe’s arguments. So, it seems that Wittgenstein’s remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* do not support

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. §677.

⁶¹¹ PPF §§229-30, p. 220e.

⁶¹² Drury, M. O’C. ‘Conversations with Wittgenstein’, in Rush Rhees (ed.) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 157.

⁶¹³ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.

Mouffe's suggestion that Wittgenstein's work suggests that we should respect differences between democratic citizens.

Perhaps what Mouffe had in mind was Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty*. There Wittgenstein talks about the possibility that '2 X 2 = 4' might have a *different* meaning or be nonsensical in Chinese⁶¹⁴, asks whether knowing that here is a hand is *different* in kind from knowing the existence of the planet Saturn⁶¹⁵, and elucidates the *differences* between belief and knowledge and between knowledge and certainty. He compares *differences* in the meaning of words to *differences* in the functions of officials⁶¹⁶, talks about a king being brought to look at the world in a *different* way⁶¹⁷ and about the difference between 'us' and someone who says "I don't know if I have ever been on the moon: I don't remember having been there"⁶¹⁸.

On Certainty seems like a more hopeful place to start if what we are developing is an account of differences between people insofar as they are political animals because some of the cases discussed there clearly concern the kind of differences in belief that we might want to think about in thinking about political discussion. A lesson we can learn from Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* is that people do not just have disagreements of opinion, where each of the people in the conversation are speaking the same language, have the same kind of evidential standards, and have been raised in the same practices. Sometimes people speaking to each other come from an entirely different background, have different concepts, and have learned their language through engaging in different kinds of practices. The fact that differently situated people – kings, officials, people from other countries – come into conflict in a variety of ways in *On Certainty* suggests that it is relevant to political discussions. Once we start thinking about these kinds of questions we might well have to revise our

⁶¹⁴ Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, §10.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. §20.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. §64.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. §92.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. §§332-8.

conception of rationality and conceptions of rationality are clearly relevant to constructing political visions⁶¹⁹.

As mentioned earlier, Mouffe cites passages from *On Certainty* which stress that we might not be able to justify our beliefs to another person and that we might have to resort to other means, such as persuasion in order to change someone's mind. These remarks are indeed important for political philosophy. We should recognise that political disagreements might take different forms and that rebellion might not just involve a straightforward disagreement over a matter of opinion where each side would accept the same things as counting as evidence that might settle the matter. To this extent Mouffe is correct. If we want to gain an understanding of people unlike ourselves then we should recognise that their different practices might be tied up with different moral standards, different evidential standards, and different concepts. However, this does not imply that we should 'valorize' alternative ways of playing 'the democratic game' as Mouffe suggests. Wittgenstein's work does not imply that we should aim at democratic pluralism. His work, as he said, was descriptive and angled at enhancing our understanding, not prescriptive. The understanding that we reach having taken Wittgenstein's insights about language games, rationality, argumentation, certainty, and persuasion on board might incline us towards a particular social arrangement but it is not obvious that it does. Recognising that people might behave in different ways, have different evidential standards, and have different concepts does not imply that we should encourage people to behave in different ways, to have different evidential standards, and to have different concepts.

7.4 Conclusion

Having discussed Mouffe's take on Wittgenstein I will now return to Medina's account of Wittgenstein to make a few remarks. Medina recognises that rules and

⁶¹⁹ Peter Winch makes a good case that the social contract tradition, from Hobbes to Rawls, is dogged by problems with conceptions of practical rationality in the tradition. It seems plausible that Wittgenstein's work can be used in critiques of certain political theories – highlighting conceptual confusions in them – but less plausible that it can be used to develop a political theory in competition with the ones it critiques (Winch, P. 'Certainty and Authority', 1990).

practices are diverse and that rules in some regions of discourse are more contestable than others. However, I do not think that Medina makes enough of differences between rules. We have a variety of different kinds of rules of language, we play games according to rules, there are rules that people obey in public spaces, private clubs, and in religious orders. One difference to note that is relevant to Medina's account is that it does not make sense to speak of *rebellion* in all of the cases where rules are flouted, ignored, or broken. Medina presumably wants to incline us towards considering Wittgenstein's work as particularly suited to his vision of a radical democracy by speaking of rebellion and of Wittgenstein as a rebel. But thinking about many of the cases where rules are flouted, ignored, broken, or misunderstood, rebellion is not in the air at all. We can easily understand what would be involved in someone rebelling against a prohibition on smoking at school but it is less easy to understand what would be involved in rebelling against 'pink is lighter than red'. We can comprehend what someone is saying when they claim that a rule like 'no women on the golf course' is unfair but it is less obvious what is going on when someone claims that it is unfair that 'a bishop moves diagonally remaining on the same coloured squares' in chess. That is not to say that we cannot conceive of some kind of conflict or of changes to rules in the cases of colour-language and of chess. There are, as a matter of fact, different sets of colour concepts in different parts of the world today, and people do disagree over the colour of things sometimes (perhaps due to differences in biology). We could imagine the rules of chess being altered to some extent, although it is unclear how much they could be altered with us still being willing to call the game 'chess'. But what is significant here is that the contestability or changeability amounts to something different in the different cases. 'Rule' is a family resemblance concept and it is unclear whether conclusions that we draw about contestability in one region of discourse will carry over to another⁶²⁰. What does seem clear is that wherever we

⁶²⁰ Peter Hacker makes some good points about the diversity of rules in discussing the notion of logical syntax and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in his paper 'Was he Trying to Whistle it?'. There he points out that "not all rules prohibit something that can be done but should not be done [such as the rule against murder]. And one can follow or fail to follow rules even when they do not prohibit something that can be done – as when one follows the rules for making contracts. Failure to follow such rules does not result in illegal contracts, rather it results in invalid contracts." (Hacker, P. M. S. 'Was he Trying to Whistle it?', in *Wittgenstein: Connections and Controversies*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, pp. 118-122).

can talk about rules we can talk about some kind of contestability (as well as about change, historical development, and mistakes being made) but that is not to say that a society in which rules are in fact contested is desirable. To decide upon whether it is in fact desirable we would have to spell out exactly what we meant by 'a society in which rules are contested'. Even in the cases most fitting to Medina's argument – rules which can be rebelled against, the fact that rebellion is possible implies nothing about it being something desirable or something that we should do. Wittgenstein's comments about rules do not obviously imply anything about the shape that society should take.

CONCLUSION

The question that I set out to answer in this thesis was: what are the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for social philosophy? In order to answer that question I first looked at prior questions about the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy and the nature of the social sciences. It is difficult to get an idea of what Wittgenstein's philosophy might imply without first having a sense of what Wittgenstein's philosophy *is*. My conclusions in the first chapter were that the kind of philosophy Wittgenstein engaged in involved grammatical investigations which aim at dissolving (conceptual) confusion; at dissolving philosophical problems. As such, philosophy aims at broadening our understanding rather than at adding to our stock of knowledge. This distinguishes philosophy, as Wittgenstein practised it, from social sciences on the one hand, and natural sciences on the other. Social and natural sciences are cognitive disciplines that aim at knowledge.

In the second chapter I delved deeper into these questions by asking whether Wittgenstein was some kind of relativist. I concluded that Wittgenstein is not an alethic relativist, an ontological relativist, or a cognitive relativist. However, it is reasonable to say, as several Wittgensteinians do, that Wittgenstein was a conceptual relativist. Political philosophers have objected to Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks on the grounds that his view leads to relativism. However, my arguments in this chapter suggest that to the extent that Wittgenstein was a relativist, his relativism was reasonable.

Chapters three, four, and five are concerned with ideology. The third chapter discusses conservatism, the fourth chapter discusses liberalism, and the fifth chapter discusses socialism and Marxism. In all three cases I argued that Wittgenstein did not subscribe to the ideology in question. Wittgenstein did hold some conservative attitudes but not enough that he might be considered a conservative. He also held some views associated with socialism but was not a socialist. His philosophical remarks do not have conservative, liberal, or socialist/Marxist implications.

In the final chapters I looked at whether Wittgenstein's remarks might help us to deal with certain problems in political philosophy. I argued that his philosophical

remarks could help us to dissolve problems about freedom of the will and in particular I argued that Churchland and Suhler's work on control and responsibility was riddled with confusions. Wittgenstein's work can be helpful in getting to grips with problems concerning freedom and responsibility by deepening our understanding of the problems and helping us to achieve clarity. His remarks can also help us to achieve clarity about questions of justice although they do not imply that we should adopt a particular conception of justice.

So, given all of this how should we answer the original question? What implications do Wittgenstein's remarks have for political philosophy? Many of the conclusions that I have come to are what might be called negative conclusions – I have ruled certain things out. I think we can conclude that Wittgenstein was not committed to any of the ideologies discussed. Despite the fact that Wittgenstein's remarks do not lead us to a particular conception of justice I think that his remarks do help us to rule out certain conceptions of justice and in fact I think that they can help us to rule out quite a lot. Arguments from Peter Winch, Rupert Read, and Amartya Sen, which draw on Wittgenstein's work rule out the dominant, Rawlsian, conception of justice. Winch's arguments about practical rationality also suggest that much of the contractarian tradition from Hobbes onwards is confused. Wittgenstein's remarks could help us to do quite a lot of this kind of thing in political philosophy – it can help us to see conceptual confusions in the work of political philosophers and so it can undermine quite a lot of work in political philosophy.

But I think that there is a positive aspect to Wittgenstein's philosophy as well. His philosophy does not only destroy houses of cards, it helps us to develop a deeper understanding of political issues. His accounts of belief, rationality, justification, knowledge, and certainty can help us to understand the nature of disputes between people from different political and religious backgrounds. This kind of understanding is very much needed in the contemporary world of politics!

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