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The Influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein in Political Theory

By

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## Abstract

### The Influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein in Political Theory

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

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This dissertation is inspired by the small but growing number of political and social theorists whose works have been highly influenced by the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. These authors developed their theories at least in part by taking Wittgenstein's thought to have normative implications on methodological and substantive issues in political and social theory. The aim of this dissertation is to narrate and analyse the influence of Wittgenstein in political theory as a contribution to the intellectual history of twentieth century political thought. To that end, Hanna Pitkin's "Wittgenstein and Justice" and James Tully's "Public Philosophy in a New Key" present an exemplary (in both senses of the word) pair of works that allow us to compare contrasting approaches to using Wittgenstein's ideas and methods.

The dissertation begins with an introductory chapter that sets out the main problem: Ludwig Wittgenstein's influence in political theory is fairly under-narrated and under-analysed, especially in a dissertation-length project. The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief historical overview of this identified gap in the literature. The second chapter provides a brief introduction to the concepts and methods of Wittgenstein's later work, as well as an explanation of some of his basic philosophical commitments since the "Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus". The third chapter is an exposition and analysis of Hanna Pitkin's social thought in Wittgenstein and Justice. I show how Pitkin built her social theory by taking Peter Winch's and J. L. Austin's methodological work to complement and expand the fundamental ontological and epistemological precepts she draws from Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The fourth chapter is an exposition and analysis of Pitkin's political thought in "Wittgenstein and Justice". I show how she built her political theory by taking Wittgenstein's ontology to flesh out and expand the fundamental political values she draws from Kant and Arendt.

The dissertation continues with James Tully. The fifth chapter is an exposition and analysis of James Tully's social thought in "Public Philosophy in a New Key". I show how the social theory of James Tully is primarily inspired by the post-structuralist works of Michel Foucault and the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. The sixth chapter is an exposition and analysis of James Tully's political thought in "Public Philosophy in a New Key". I show how Tully's belief that the role of public philosophy is to address public affairs cashes out in i)

critical surveys of practices and languages that set the context of practical social and political problems and their proposed solutions, and ii) historical or genealogical surveys that place those languages and practices in their larger contexts in order to see how forms of subjectivity are shaped by historically specific trends in thought and action.

I end the dissertation with a concluding chapter that compares my findings about Pitkin and Tully under the light of Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical commitments and his beliefs regarding the second-order nature of philosophy. I argue that Pitkin, in sailing too close the modernist wind, takes a narrower view of the political than Wittgenstein's social ontology might suggest. And therefore, Tully's work, by being more resolutely anti-theoretical and anti-foundational, is more consonant with Wittgenstein's ethos. My final evaluation of Pitkin's and Tully's Wittgensteinian political theories will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of their diverging approaches, while holding on to the caveat that we need not agree with everything Wittgenstein has laid out in order to find something useful from him that can help in our work.

*To my late father*

# Contents

1	Introduction: The Man, The Philosopher, and His Influence	1
2	Wittgenstein's 'Pictures'	20
3	The Social Thought of Hanna Pitkin	37
4	The Political Thought of Hanna Pitkin	56
5	The Social Thought of James Tully	78
6	The Political Thought of James Tully	96
7	Conclusion	114
	References	130
	Bibliography	132

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### The Man, The Philosopher, and His Influence

#### I. Philosophy and Politics

The relationship between philosophy and political theory is an intimate one. Plato, Hobbes, Kant and Mill are only some of the many practitioners who have made great contributions to the canon of both disciplines. Yet, of course, given that political philosophy is the great intersection of the two broad disciplines, it would have been enough for Plato to have written *The Republic* alone and for Mill to have only written *On Liberty* for them to be considered both great philosophers and great political theorists. As political philosophers, their influence in political theory comes from the inside. The story of Ludwig Wittgenstein's influence in political theory however, is a little more complicated. Apart from some limited writings on ethics and cultural interpretation, Wittgenstein never wrote directly about politics. Whatever influence political theorists have claimed to have come from him, it did not come from any substantive ideas of his about politics; Wittgenstein never wrote about justice, equality, war or any other classically political subject. Hence, it is of no surprise that while he is often described as a philosopher of language or logic or psychology or mind, he was never regarded as a political philosopher. Even his personal life seemed to have largely been led with political apathy, in stark contrast to his mentor, Bertrand Russell, who was a political activist in the public eye. Ludwig Wittgenstein's influence in political theory therefore requires some explanation and in this and the chapters to follow, I will attempt to give just such an explanation. We begin in this chapter with a brief historical survey of Wittgenstein the man, the philosopher, and the source of inspiration for a small but slowly increasing number of political theorists.

#### Wittgenstein and Philosophy

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein was born to Karl and Leopoldine Wittgenstein in Vienna on 26 April 1889. Blessed to have been born into one of the richest families in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, his vast family home was at the centre of artistic and cultural life in Vienna at the time. Johannes Brahms, Gustav Mahler, Josef Labor, Richard Strauss and others were often seen visiting the family's salons. The youngest of nine children, Ludwig Wittgenstein showed much of the same promise for music from an early age as many of his older siblings. His interests however, soon came to be focused on engineering rather than music – a choice that followed in his industrialist father's footsteps. But, having failed in his provincial *Realschule* (secondary school) to obtain sufficient qualifications for university in 1906, Wittgenstein was sent to a technical college in Berlin-Charlottenburg. It took only three terms before Wittgenstein decided he would be happier learning aeronautical engineering in England and so he left in the summer of 1908 to fly experimental kites at the Upper Atmosphere Research Station in Derbyshire. Later that year, he would enrol as an aeronautical engineering student at the University of Manchester.



Wittgenstein's interest in aeronautical engineering was genuine, but insufficient to hold his intellectual attention for too long. As he studied engineering, he became more interested in mathematics and as he studied mathematics, he became more interested in its foundations and the philosophers who studied them. He began to read Russell and Frege and it was the latter, incidentally, who advised him to study under the former. In 1912, Wittgenstein registered as a student at Cambridge. He would spend only five terms there before building himself a hut in Norway in order to philosophise in solitude. There, he began writing the first lines of what was later to become his first book, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*<sup>1</sup> – the only monograph with which he was sufficiently satisfied to publish in his lifetime. The *Tractatus* though, had to largely be written during Wittgenstein's military service for Austria during the Great War. It was finally published in 1921 in German and in 1922 in English, but having (erroneously) thought that he had literally solved all the problems of philosophy with it, Wittgenstein decided against returning to a university setting and began a career as a teacher in the small Austrian village of Trattenbach, not far from Vienna. This career would last only six years. By most accounts, Wittgenstein was an overly strict schoolteacher who was not good with young children, on whom he would mete out harsh corporal punishment. By 1926, Wittgenstein had resigned to pre-empt official sanction and returned to Vienna.

It was not too long before the pull of philosophy was too much for Wittgenstein to resist. While he had been in continual contact with F. P. Ramsey after the war in order for the latter to translate the *Tractatus*, it was the invitation by Moritz Schlick at Vienna University to speak to the members of the Vienna Circle which finally drew him back to work in philosophy. While never a member himself, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was much admired by this group, who saw it as consonant with or as supporting their logical positivism. He would meet the members only occasionally, but this contact encouraged him to return to Cambridge in 1929, where after the award of his doctorate in 1930 Wittgenstein would begin his career in academia proper. This period was a very productive one for Wittgenstein, and his work showed a gradual shift, interrupted by the Second World War, from the formalist, mathematical style of the *Tractatus* to the piecemeal, anthropological flavour of the *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>2</sup> which he wrote in 1947. Nevertheless, none of these works written after the *Tractatus* were published before his death in 1951.

These short biographical notes might already suggest that Wittgenstein had a rather unusual personality. He was serious about philosophy, but so serious that he could not fully abide by the letter of the professional requirements of his university. He looked upon these administrative rules as nothing but obstacles to unrestricted philosophising. He was also so fastidious about his work that he found it hard to finalise manuscripts for publication before his death. He seemed to have liked the idea of teaching, but did not like adhering to a proper syllabus, often lecturing on his latest though incompletely formed and certainly untested ideas. He attracted a small loyal following at the same time as he alienated other people. His strange manners, which often bordered on the rude, were tolerated by his colleagues and his students in view of his perceived high intelligence. He was regarded by some as no less than a genius and it is this image of Wittgenstein as the flawed genius that gives us the popular impression we still

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<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, (London and New York: Humanities Press, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations* (3rd ed.), translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1973).

have of him today. In fact, so strong was this image of the unapologetic genius and so pithy the manner in which he wrote that some of his critics have attributed the persistence of his ideas to a sort of cult of personality. To put it in his own terms, it seemed to some that Wittgenstein scholars have been so bewitched by the strength of his personality and his brilliant image that they would deny the latest developments in philosophy simply for being contrary to Wittgenstein. Some might even agree with A. C. Grayling when he argued that the continuity of Wittgenstein's influence in philosophy has only been possible through loyalty and the induction of new disciples in what Grayling has called, "a kind of apostolic succession"<sup>3</sup>.

Whether the above accusation about succession is true is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it does seem reasonable to agree with Wittgenstein's critics in that his relatively modest influence in philosophy does not square with the high reputation and name recognition. Firstly, though it can be said that his *Tractatus* was of some influence on the Vienna Circle, this was neither very significant nor very long lasting. The members of the Vienna Circle shared Wittgenstein's aim of expelling the speculative metaphysics of the traditional problems in philosophy and like the early Wittgenstein they favoured an empirical positivism that could be soundly grounded in logic. Like the early Wittgenstein, they believed that the truths of ethics and religion cannot be given meaningful expression in language, but the truths of empirical science can be reliably expressed. But unlike the early Wittgenstein, who never intended to do away with ethics and religion altogether, the members of the Vienna Circle tended to dismiss the role of ethics and religion once they believed they had established that neither had a place in empirical discourse. While the members of the Vienna Circle looked upon the *Tractatus* as a parallel expression of their logical positivism, their own work was developed independently and generally avoided the ultimately transcendental direction of the *Tractatus*. It should also be noted that while logical positivism was an influential school in academic philosophy in the 1920's and 1930's and its general point of view has survived in some subfields of philosophy like formal logic, logical positivism as a school has had few committed adherents in philosophy departments beyond the Second World War. Secondly, while there are a number of prominent names in Wittgensteinian studies today, especially in the study of the *Investigations*, their number is relatively small and their ability to convince non-Wittgensteinians rather limited. For example, in the philosophies of psychology and mind, Wittgenstein is noted for his anti-scientism and anti-mentalism, however, these points of view are by no means the position of the majority of scholars. But perhaps, the most unpopular idea from the later philosophy of Wittgenstein is his anti-theoretical conception of philosophy as 'mere' therapy. Most contemporary philosophers do not accept Wittgenstein's claim that all philosophical problems are a result of linguistic confusions and that they could subsequently be solved by dissolution rather than by finding a solution. Most philosophers today are hard at work at building intricate theories to suss out elegant answers to philosophy's traditional problems.

## **Wittgenstein and Political Studies**

From the above notes on his life and the reception of work, it is doubly puzzling why someone like Wittgenstein would have a somewhat significant influence in political theory. Firstly, while Wittgenstein felt a sense of duty to involve himself in the two world wars, he otherwise spent little time concerning himself with the politics of the day. Secondly, his status in

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<sup>3</sup> Grayling, A. C.. *Wittgenstein: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pg.129.

his own discipline is quite uncertain. While his name is widely recognised in philosophy, his followers today would not amount to much more than a niche in academic philosophy as a whole. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's influence in social and political studies is still notable. Firstly, if we give some credit to Wittgenstein for influencing logical positivism, then we might also give him some small amount of credit for the rise of the behaviouralist movement. The behaviouralists in the political and social sciences were inspired by logical positivism's assertion of the epistemic priority of empirical statements. This was used to justify dismissing the worth of value judgments in hope of making the social sciences more scientific. More importantly, even while there are very few pure behaviouralists left in the social sciences a more general form of positivism has had a much wider and deeper impact on political science and other social sciences since WWII. Secondly and quite ironically, the later philosophy of Wittgenstein, in asserting the intersubjectivity and conventionality of meaning, was picked up by some social and political theorists as justifying a contextualist and/or historicist approach to social and political studies. While their number might still be relatively small, they straddle a relatively wide swath of the subdivisions of political theory. Normative political philosophy, philosophy of history and philosophy of social science stand out as three significant subfields where contextualist Wittgensteinians have made notable contributions. Further afield, the influence of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein can also be seen in other social sciences such as anthropology<sup>4</sup> and literary theory<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the indirect influence of the *Tractatus* on contemporary empirical political science, this dissertation will focus primarily on the direct influence of Wittgenstein's later philosophy in political theory – more specifically, in the subfield of normative political philosophy. It is there where Wittgenstein's influence in political studies is the most concentrated. Nonetheless, his impact is similar in other political theory subfields such as the philosophy of social science and the philosophy of history. In general, Wittgensteinian political theorists representing various subfields have developed their work at least in part by taking Wittgenstein's thought to have normative implications on methodological and substantive issues in political theory. Normative implications which have not only given a distinctive Wittgensteinian perspectival flavour to this school but help usher in a linguistic turn in political theory. How this could be, is a fair question given what we have just discussed regarding Wittgenstein's predilection for solitude and his almost exclusive relationship with more basic philosophical questions such as those on language and knowledge. As we shall see in Part II below, the most common answer is that various political theorists have taken Wittgenstein's later writings about language as presenting a novel holistic social ontology upon which they could justify their political ontologies and whatever normative methodological or moral principles they develop out of them.

That Wittgenstein's view of language in his later works has been taken as presenting a social ontology seems quite natural because his method of investigation is at base an anthropological one. Owing this shift from the strictly analytical view of his early period to conversations with his Cambridge colleague, Piero Sraffa<sup>6</sup>, Wittgenstein's later approach looked upon language as a distinctive part of the natural history of human beings as a form of life, that is to say, as a particular species of embodied beings embedded in a particular physical world. The

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<sup>4</sup> See Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> See Gibson, John and Wolfgang Huemer (eds). *The Literary Wittgenstein*, (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Monk, Ray. *The Duty of Genius*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1991), pg. 260.

*Tractatus* is famous for its formalist and abstract view of meaning that standard readers ultimately interpret as being dependent on a transcendental metaphysics. However, in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein attempted to ground the meaning of words in their actual usages in the course of human life. Wittgenstein tried to show that words are embedded in the multiplicity of what he called ‘language games’, where speech is constitutive of the many practices and activities that we play out in simply living our lives. These linguistic practices or activities Wittgenstein calls ‘language games’, to emphasise the fact that, “the speaking of a language is part of an activity, or a form of life,” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §23) and is not merely a facilitator of it added later. For Wittgenstein, human beings are language-speaking social animals, and it is upon this basic anthropological precept that he bases his subsidiary observations and concepts about language. To political theorists, Wittgenstein’s later works therefore present a picture (if not a theory) of the deep structure of spoken and non-spoken human interrelations – one whose novel features result in novel normative implications in the methods or substance of political theory. These novel normative implications are at the centre of this dissertation. Much of dissertation will be spent explaining how and why political theorists have used Wittgenstein’s later ideas and concepts to fill out or justify their methodological and substantive views. In general, concepts like the above mentioned ‘language games’, as well as others such as ‘perspicuous representation’ and ‘form of life’ are taken as ontologically thick concepts which help contemporary political theorists justify thick social ontologies that often play on the post-foundationalist nature of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. These concepts are the basic conduits, as it were, through which Wittgenstein’s particular philosophical approach brings its highly distinctive perspective and vocabulary to political theory.

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein-inspired political theorists have done more than to simply appropriate novel concepts that Wittgenstein invented. Firstly, some of them take on a similar anthropological style of inquiry, basing their political writings on situated subjects rather than the abstracted subject of more Kantian projects. Secondly, this shift towards situated rationality as a basic principle also represents a shift away from abstract universal theories. Many Wittgenstein-inspired theorists take Wittgenstein’s anti-theoretical appeals as justifying distinctively post-modern (in the most general sense) methods such as genealogies and immanent critiques, shying away from building comprehensive abstract universal theories. Related to this, thirdly, most of them use the post-analytic and post-foundationalist nature of Wittgenstein’s later work to justify similarly post-analytic and post-foundationalist conceptions of politics. For example, the concept of language games is often used to justify taking political speech as a constitutive part of political practices. It is also sometimes used to justify a basic agonistic view of politics as opposed to traditional methodological individualism.

These general forms of Wittgenstein’s influence, however, are less controversial than the one aspect of Wittgenstein’s philosophy which both distinguishes him from and also makes him so unpopular among philosophers in the analytic tradition. Even from his earlier period, Wittgenstein believed that all philosophical problems were the result of confusions in or of language. This meant that these problems can be solved or rather dissolved by uncovering the linguistic confusion at the heart of a particular problem. In the earlier period, this largely meant understanding that non-empirical statements were nonsensical. In the later works however, Wittgenstein’s new post-foundationalist understanding of language led him to see philosophy as a therapeutic practice. To the later Wittgenstein, philosophy main role was not to build theories but as a rehabilitative process that cures us from viewing language erroneously. For some political theorists, this view formed a justificatory basis for post-modern methods, but it also

sometimes provided justification for leftist anti-conservative views which liken this rehabilitation with a progressive sense of political renewal. For these theorists, the idea of philosophy as therapy drives their normative reading of Wittgenstein. After all, in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein was not exclusively descriptive and explicitly fought against the Augustinian picture of language learning.

Yet, at the same time, Wittgenstein does sometimes call for philosophy to play an exclusively descriptive role. In the *Investigations* he writes, “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; in the end it can only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.” (PI, §124) On one hand, this might simply mean that philosophical therapy only changes the view one has of language and leaves linguistic practices as they are. But, on the other hand, a different viewpoint does not leave everything as it is, especially when considering Wittgenstein’s own writings on seeing aspects and his role in the linguistic turn in philosophy. A change in point of view changes everything even as it touches nothing. For some theorists, the idea of a therapy, indeed any general normative principle, cannot be supported by a resolutely descriptive and anti-theoretical reading of the Wittgenstein’s later works. For these theorists, Wittgenstein’s role was only in giving us conceptual tools that granted us more analytical power; our normative drive must originate elsewhere. Hence, while much of this dissertation will be spent explaining how and why political theorists have used Wittgenstein’s ideas and concepts, the larger issue about what the proper role of philosophy is taken to be will not be neglected. Political theorists who start with Wittgenstein’s ideas sometimes come to conclusions that are at least in tension if not at odds with each other. This would not surprise anyone, of course, but what accounts for these differences remains a question. Near the end of this dissertation, I will consider the varying influence of Wittgenstein’s view on the role of philosophy as one possible answer. While the political theorists who have used Wittgenstein’s work inherited a common vocabulary and anthropological flavour from his writings, they do so while working on different philosophical projects with different overall philosophical aims.

## **II. A Historical Sketch of Wittgensteinian Political Theory**

In Part I above, we saw some general notes on the personal and intellectual biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein, including some brief notes on the general uses to which scholars have put ideas from his later works. Here in Part II, we will look at his influence in political theory in more detail through a brief historical survey of the three political theory subfields identified above: philosophy of history, philosophy of social science and normative political philosophy. Although this dissertation will concentrate on the last of the three subfields, it is hoped that a brief historical survey will give readers a rough idea of the breadth and variety of Wittgenstein’s influence. It is also hoped that this will uncover some of the commonalities in this influence that we might reasonably expect to see in uses of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy in other subfields or other social science disciplines. Additionally, I hope to uncover what is distinct in utilising Wittgenstein’s ideas in normative political philosophy. This will inform a deeper discussion of the subfield in later chapters.

## The Linguistic Turn

It was briefly discussed above how Wittgenstein's influence in political theory comes mainly from his ideas about the nature and features of language and this encouraged the linguistic turn in the discipline. But, what was omitted was how this was a consequence of a prior linguistic turn in philosophy itself, that is to say, in metaphysics and epistemology. Prior to the twentieth century, philosophers were directly interested in the world and its objects and only indirectly interested in the language that for them merely denoted the objects. For them, the problems of philosophy arose from problems in our own common sense reasoning or from our empirical experience of the world. Whether they were idealist or realist, philosophers prior to the twentieth century tended to believe that words denoted or stood in for a separate reality – transcendental or actual. They had no interest in studying language itself as a guide to epistemology or metaphysics. At the beginning of the twentieth century however, philosophy became more interested in language and its relationship to philosophy. As Richard Rorty famously put it, philosophers began to think, “that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use.”<sup>7</sup> (While the term ‘linguistic turn’ was first coined by Gustav Bergmann<sup>8</sup>, it was Rorty who brought the idea to prominence in the intellectual history of philosophy.) Whether they championed ordinary language or attempted to build an ideal one, philosophers after the linguistic turn tended to believe that confusions in language were the real source of philosophical problems.

Wittgenstein's role in this linguistic turn was quite central and both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* are said to have heavily influenced the ‘turn’. Peter Hacker, for example, argued that the *Tractatus* was the primary work that took philosophy on its linguistic turn<sup>9</sup>. By setting the limits of language (as the boundaries between sense and nonsense), the *Tractatus* also set the bounds of logic accordingly. By setting the positive task of philosophy as logical clarification through the analysis of propositions, the *Tractatus* gave linguistic analysis a privileged place in philosophy. And by setting the negative task of philosophy as the weeding out of nonsensical metaphysical statements, the *Tractatus* showed how language limits our ability to philosophise. Unlike the work of his predecessors like Bertrand Russell and Frege, the above points showed that Wittgenstein's analysis in the *Tractatus* was primarily linguistic rather than formally logical. The expressions of our language may contain a hidden logical syntax, but it is imperfect because our language is imperfect and it will remain so until our language is subsequently perfected as Wittgenstein attempted to do in the *Tractatus*. But according to Hacker, the linguistic turn was not complete until the *Investigations*, where Wittgenstein repudiated this position and defended ordinary language as being in perfect logical order as it stands. This abandonment of perfectionism still meant, however, that philosophical problems arose because of confusions about and in language. But, instead of building an ideal language to help us dissolve those

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<sup>7</sup> Rorty, Richard (ed.). *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1967]), pg. 3.

<sup>8</sup> See Bergmann, Gustav. *Logic and Reality*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> Hacker, P.M.S.. *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pg. 36.

problems, Ordinary Language philosophers believed all that is required is a clarification of the language that is already there.

So, while the *Tractatus* helped create an ‘ideal language’ tradition of philosophers seeking to create an ideal language or ideal speech situations, the *Investigations* was quite important to the development of ‘ordinary language’ philosophy, sometimes simply called ‘Oxford philosophy’ due to the influence of Oxford philosophers like Gilbert Ryle, J. L. Austin, P. F. Strawson and others. In believing in the adequacy of ordinary language for philosophical use, ordinary language philosophy paid attention to the linguistic expressions that we ordinarily use. This methodological commitment unifies quite a diverse field of philosophers, and one of the things they have in common is an expanded view of language beyond truth-functions and its denotational role. In general, following later Wittgenstein, ordinary language philosophers look to the actual uses of a word to explain its meaning. Thus, no proposition is in itself analytic or synthetic, judgment has to be reserved until the way it is actually used is studied. The same would apply to whether a proposition was necessary or contingent; its meaning and its truth is not determined by how its content matches reality. This metaphysical deflationism was quite in step with Wittgenstein’s later works. Like the later Wittgenstein, ordinary language philosophers believed that metaphysical speech distorted the ordinary uses of language and philosophical problems arose from these distortions. But, perhaps more importantly, they tended to believe that metaphysics was simply irrelevant in a world without hidden essences that required excavation.

Nevertheless, the ordinary language philosophers were not as anti-theoretical as Wittgenstein was in his later period. They wanted to show how Wittgensteinian ideas such as a use theory of meaning could contribute positively to philosophical theories. While Ordinary Language philosophy was linguistic in its approach, it was less interested in justifying its views on a metaphilosophical level and more interested in applying its view to contemporary philosophical problems such as the nature of human action and its relation to human speech. This would turn out to mean that while ordinary language philosophy had many important differences with Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, its significant consonance with Wittgenstein’s later ideas meant that it would also have a significant influence on Wittgensteinian political theorists such as Hanna Pitkin and Quentin Skinner. Pitkin for example, took some of J. L. Austin’s ideas and methods as natural extensions of Wittgenstein’s. In attempting to answer the question of human action for instance, ordinary language philosophy was a major link between the linguistic turn in philosophy and the linguistic turn in political theory (in the analytic tradition).

Following the linguistic turn in philosophy, political theorists also took to re-examining the basic philosophical commitments undergirding their methodology, that is to say, their basic social scientific principles. Just like their counterparts in philosophy departments, political theorists in politics, history, and other departments were also responding to the influence of the positivism that came on the back of the success of the natural sciences in the popular imagination of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Just like in philosophy departments, there was a cultural and intellectual pressure to make their disciplines more ‘scientific’ in the hope of becoming more epistemologically ‘modern’ and thus, more socially valuable. As a reaction to this naïve scientism however, political theorists turned to the developments in the philosophy of language for inspiration, and as we have been discussing, a not insignificant part of that influence came from Wittgenstein’s later work. In the sections to follow, we will look more closely at this historical influence in the philosophy of history, the philosophy of social science and normative political philosophy. Nonetheless, it should be noted that since Wittgenstein’s influence in political theory, comes largely from the most basic ideas about human beings and

philosophical methods, there is some significant overlap among the subfields. For example, philosophers of history and normative political philosophers will often make observations and assertions based on their particular understanding of the nature of social studies, in other words, based on a particular position in the philosophy of social science.

## **Philosophy of History**

That the linguistic turn in the political and social sciences was influenced by the linguistic turn in philosophy by no means meant that Wittgenstein's influence was exclusive or always direct. In the case of the philosophy of history, the linguistic turn in the subfield owes much to the work of R. G. Collingwood at Oxford. While a contemporary of Wittgenstein, there is little historical evidence to suggest that Collingwood was directly or indirectly (through Gilbert Ryle with whom he was well acquainted) influenced by Wittgenstein's work as he developed his theory of history in the 1930's. Nevertheless, much of what Collingwood independently wrote in his seminal *The Idea of History* is seen by later readers to be very much consonant with Wittgenstein's later ideas, inspired by a similar anti-positivist motivation. For example, Collingwood uses a similarly anthropological and language-centred approach. Fighting against the influence of scientific positivism in the discipline of history, Collingwood argued that historical knowledge required a kind of interpretation that scientific facts do not. In understanding a historical artefact, the beliefs and motivations surrounding the artefact is essential for our understanding the historical importance of the artefact. This means that historical understanding is dependent on understanding human ideas while that is not the case in scientific understanding. The same is true of historical events. In order to understand them, we need to understand them as the results of human action, but since human action is intentional in nature, history is therefore the mind studying and knowing itself. To understand human action we have to understand both the observable facts "outside" and the thoughts "inside"<sup>10</sup>. "For history, the object to be discovered is not the mere event, but the thought expressed in it."<sup>11</sup> This holist post-analytic position is often taken by Wittgensteinian contextualists as justifiable from a Wittgensteinian point of view, for as Wittgenstein suggested, while there is a temptation to explain perception as pure experiences (and while this might be true of colours and shapes), we do not see objects as objects without prior theories (PI, Part II, xi).

In the 1960's, the historians of the Cambridge School of intellectual history developed Collingwood's holism into a more explicitly contextualist approach. Taking the cue from Collingwood, historians such as Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock and John Dunn also found themselves defending a more interpretive brand of historical methods against the reductionist tendencies of positivist or realist historians. Generally, they did this by putting primary emphasis on the intellectual context of a particular historical work of writing. In order to understand the 'inside' thoughts of a historical author, we still have to understand them in (or against) the intellectual context in which she wrote. For her thoughts do not arise out of a vacuum, they are at least conditioned by the traditions and conventions of (political) thought and writing practices in which the author finds herself embedded. It was Quentin Skinner however, who developed his contextualism out of an explicit later Wittgensteinian ontology. Skinner for example, took Wittgenstein's position that meaning is based on the actual uses of a word to justify the

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<sup>10</sup> Collingwood, R. G.. *The Idea of History*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), pg. 214.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 214.



hermeneutical study of texts and concepts. By studying the surrounding human practices and the language games that they embedded in, one can come to a full understanding of a historical text. Following Austin's speech-act theory<sup>12</sup>, Skinner viewed historical works of political thought as particular kinds of actions (usually) in opposition of contemporaneous conventions in political thought.

Skinner and the other Cambridge School historians, in giving primacy to human thought and its linguistic expression in historical works, were idealists who rejected scientific positivism in historical methods. They attacked positivistic reductionism for its omission of context and its subsequent claim that texts can be understood as standalone pieces. However, they also found themselves opposing traditional historiography and its commonly anachronistic and logically questionable practices. In his article, *Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas*<sup>13</sup>, Skinner attacked the traditional perennialism in the discipline that viewed historical political works as always contesting the same fundamental political questions or discussing the same perennial concepts. Skinner was writing in opposition to historians such as Peter Merkl<sup>14</sup> who continued in the tradition of Arthur O. Lovejoy<sup>15</sup>, whose approach is accused of the reification of concepts. For Skinner, since the meaning of texts and concepts are determined by social conventions, then they are always situated in the dialogical intersubjectivity of what Wittgenstein called 'language games'. From Wittgenstein's post-analytic ideas about language, Skinner could justify his holistic hermeneutics as well as his dynamic view of history where conventions are open to challenge, though the latter is usually taken as only implied by Wittgenstein.

The Cambridge School of intellectual history remains an influential school of historiography today, but its philosophy is still a product of its time. While Skinner took the later ideas of Wittgenstein to build theory on the intersubjective nature of historical studies, like Collingwood before him, his project is still basically a modernist one (in the most general sense). For Skinner, the meaning of a text is *fixed* or *determined* by the context in which it was written and as such one can establish certain empirical facts about a text which in turn enables one to prove a particular interpretation right or wrong.<sup>16</sup> This, he believes, allows him to delineate the foundational method of historical interpretation. In this way, Skinnerian historiography continues Collingwood's neo-Kantian commitment to building foundational theories and takes little heed of the later Wittgenstein's appeal against building first order theories.

As we will also see in the next two sections, Wittgenstein-inspired political theorists after the 1970's are more commonly post-foundationalist than their first wave predecessors. So while Mark Bevir, for instance, is sometimes called a Skinnerian historiographer, his 1999 text, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, exhibits strong postmodern (in the most general sense) commitments in historical methods. Bevir's project is a post-analytic one, suspicious of given truths and aimed at rejecting modernist foundationalist theory building. While context is still important for Bevir, he argues that texts are merely conditioned by their contexts and as such no

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<sup>12</sup> See Austin, J. L.. *How to Do Things with Words*, edited by J.O. Urmson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

<sup>13</sup> Skinner, Quentin. "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" in *History and Theory*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1969).

<sup>14</sup> See Merkl, Peter H.. *Political Continuity and Change*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

<sup>15</sup> See Lovejoy, Arthur O.. *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

<sup>16</sup> Skinner, Quentin. "Motives, Intentions and Interpretation", in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, edited by James Tully, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pg. 76.

empirical facts about a text are sufficient in determining its true historical meaning.<sup>17</sup> And since no singularly true historical meaning can be derived, Bevir is mainly concerned with deriving conceptual commitments to historical method from the concepts that we use to operate in the world. This still allow us to qualitatively compare different interpretations of the same text, but there can be no determination of one singularly true method.<sup>18</sup> Bevir does not only find epistemological justification from the later ideas of Wittgenstein such as language games, he is also motivated by the post-analytic and post-foundationalist implications of those ideas.

## Philosophy of Social Science

As the linguistic turn in philosophy produced its influence on the philosophy of history, so was it similarly true for the philosophy of social science. We have seen how R. G. Collingwood independently worked on a holistic anti-positivist view of historical studies but his writings would also have an influence on philosophers of social science. Philosophers of social science who were inspired by Wittgenstein, tended to interpret and use Wittgenstein's ideas as implying a view social science as a primarily if not exclusively historical endeavour. If social science is an intersubjective realm of understanding human thought and its expression, then the interpretative requirements in its study would mean that linear and determinist projection into the future is logically out of order. Still, the Wittgensteinians were not alone in this anti-positivist reaction. Political theorists such as Eric Vogelín<sup>19</sup> and Sheldon Wolin<sup>20</sup> also took part in the effort against the encroachment of scientific positivism in the social sciences. For Vogelín, all political orders are built upon and supported by a particular transcendent order, but the experience of transcendence can never be fully analysed by the current methods of the natural sciences. For Wolin, the political community would desire to move past revealed knowledge, but the process of politics is still an agonistic one and this means that something *unpredictably* novel is always a possibility. So, for both of these authors, the methods of the physical sciences and its desire for predictive power cannot fully access the meaningfulness of political and social life.

Still, the seminal Wittgensteinian statement against the encroachment of positivism in the social sciences was Peter Winch's 1958 *The Idea of a Social Science*. Like Wolin, Winch was concerned with ridding social science of what he saw as its naïve scientism. In order to do that, he argued that we need a proper conception of philosophy in order to build a theory espousing the correct view of social science. In fact, he claimed that to be clear about one amounts to being clear about the other, because the social sciences are a similarly 'self-conscious' philosophical discipline. For Winch, philosophy can be a first-order discipline of enquiry, that is to say, philosophy, like the scientific method, is able to directly uncover truths about the world. Philosophy is not limited to a second-order role of conceptual analysis in service of other first-order disciplines, what he calls the 'underlabourer' conception of philosophy.<sup>21</sup> For Winch, using Wittgenstein's primary concern with language and his ideas about 'rule-following', one is able to reason that the various modes of life (e.g. social, politics, and religion) and the discourses they

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<sup>17</sup> Bevir, Mark. *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pg. 91.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 125.

<sup>19</sup> Vogelín, Eric. *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

<sup>20</sup> Wolin, Sheldon. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

<sup>21</sup> Winch, Peter. *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1990 [1958]), pg. 3.

produce are governed by their own particular logics and thus, human rationality is compartmentalised into relatively incommensurable divisions. This means that the meaningfulness of human action is dependent on the context of the contingent background rules governing a particular type of discourse or mode of life. Human action is therefore mostly explained by reasons, and reasons, he further argued, were not causes.

If the study of social science has mainly to do with studying reasons, it also means that social science is an inherently normative type of inquiry. This further meant that to formulate quantified statistical generalisations in social science is to misunderstand the true nature of social science. Even if they could produce some statistically successful social scientific laws, those laws would bring us no closer to understanding the nature of social human life. The consequence of all this is a very different method of inquiry. Instead of the empirically-induced statistical modelling and predictions that are the bread and butter of positivist social science, social scientist must take on an interpretive investigation, one that is inescapably subjective, yet rational given the non-causal characteristics of the subject matter. Winch's first-order philosophical method however, meant that it was not likely that he was going to be metaphysically deflationist, as were his ordinary language philosophy counterparts. For Winch, philosophical problems did not exclusively arise from particular misuses of language and the solutions to these small issues were not very informative. Like the positivists who misunderstand, at a fundamental level, the true nature of social human life, so do ordinary language philosophers inadequately understand the true relationship between language and the human beings who use it. Investigating this relationship is the task of the philosopher and the social scientist and it can teach us things about the human form of life as a whole that no kind of empirical investigation can.

Peter Winch's statement on the relevance of Wittgenstein for social studies was a highly influential one, even beyond the specific subfield of the philosophy of social science. By applying Collingwood's idealism (in making human thought primary in studying human life) to Wittgenstein's anthropological study in language, Winch can be taken to have derived a Wittgensteinian social ontology from Wittgenstein's later philosophy, even though Wittgenstein himself never touched upon social ontology directly. While many Wittgensteinian theorists since have rejected parts of Winch's social ontology such as its radical cultural relativity and its strong intentionalism, the basic structure of his ontology is present in many later authors such as Mark Bevir above and Hanna Pitkin below.

In the philosophy of social science, A. R. Louch's 1966 *Explanation and Human Action* followed Winch's ontological lead, but endeavoured to follow Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical precepts more closely. Like Winch, Louch's "main intent has been to show that the idea of science of man or society is untenable."<sup>22</sup> Like his predecessor, Louch used Wittgenstein's ideas about language to argue that explanations of human action are always value-laden and that consequently the atomistic empiricism of positivist social science was logically out of order given this value-laden nature of the subject matter. Human actions are based on ad hoc reasons and so the explanation of human actions must also be ad hoc. For Louch, necessity and generality are features simply to be excluded from social scientific explanation. Nonetheless, these ad hoc explanations still have purchase in the context and situation in which they are used. Unlike Winch, however, Louch was a little more comfortable with the anti-foundationalism implored by the later Wittgenstein as well as his emphasis on the inherently vague and

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<sup>22</sup> Louch, A. R.. *Explanation and Human Action*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pg. viii.

ambiguous nature of many features of language. For Louch, Winch presented the idea of human conventions as if there were clear and distinct boundaries around and between them, but human conventions are at base ambiguous and have areas of overlap where two conventions can turn out to be internally related to each other<sup>23</sup>. The explanation of the human convention of religious practice for example, is not the exclusive turf of theologians. Sociological and anthropological explanations of religion are also valid. Louch also joined others in criticising Winch's apparent cultural relativity. While Winch's theory teaches us how to study the internal features of cultures and modes of life, they undermine sociology's disciplinary interest in inter-cultural and inter-modal comparisons, not least because conflicts between cultures and modes of life are common. While Winch emphasised the meaningfulness of human action and its place within a 'form of life', Louch emphasised Wittgenstein's stress on diversity and his rejection of the craving for generality.

Nonetheless, Louch's post-foundationalist theory, while committing him against belief in a single foundational method, still allowed him to a broad view of social science that would accept a multiplicity of different methods under its tent. Nigel Pleasants on the other hand, cannot, "regard the idea of a Wittgensteinian *theory* (of anything) as irreparably oxymoronic,"<sup>24</sup> and in this way, he commits to Wittgenstein's appeal against building theories more resolutely than any other Wittgensteinian theorist, placing heavy emphasis on Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as an activity. In his 1999 *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory*, Pleasants argues against Winch and what Pleasants describes as his Kantian project. Noting that Wittgensteinian theorists like Winch have suggested that the later philosophy of Wittgenstein offers a theory of language or a social ontology that can form the logical and epistemological foundations for a social or political theory, Pleasants argues that this line of interpretation should be rejected in view of Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical stand. Wittgenstein, he points out, rejected theory-building in favour of descriptive surveys that gave perspicuous views rather than built structures. Also absent in the philosophy of later Wittgenstein, are any metaphysical views like idealism. For Pleasants, Wittgenstein was strictly a deflationist thinker, who reserved for philosophy only the 'underlabourer' conception that Winch rejected. Pleasants further argues that Winch's Kantian project goes against Wittgenstein's denial that philosophy can offer a deeper ontology, a deeper view of social reality. As such, Pleasants is very sceptical of the explanatory power and critical efficacy of critical social theories that rely on particular ontological views. He suggests that the only form of critique available to a resolute Wittgensteinian is an immanent one that judge social theories against their own standards and criteria<sup>25</sup>. In view of Pleasants' position, Louch's post-foundationalism only partly adheres to Wittgenstein's meta-philosophical teachings. Pleasants' position is the most anti-theoretical application of Wittgenstein's later philosophy we have seen thus far.

## Normative Political Philosophy

By 'normative political philosophy' I mean to pick out the tradition in political theory that is centrally concerned with making arguments about the moral conditions of collective

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pg. 178.

<sup>24</sup> Pleasants, Nigel. *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pg. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pg. 10.

political life. Classically speaking, this usually cashes out in a preoccupation with such ethics-laden concepts such as justice, equality, freedom, etc. Having a much larger general membership than the two subfields above, it is unsurprising that among Wittgensteinian political theorists, the largest number is to be found in normative political philosophy. Yet, because of the ethics-related nature of this subfield, this subfield also perhaps presents the largest leap in reasoning from Wittgenstein's ostensibly *descriptive* philosophy of language. Even though Wittgenstein did deliver a lecture on ethics<sup>26</sup> and some scholars have argued that the *Tractatus* was written for a larger moral purpose, both works are limited to a visionary form of ethics that is more likely a product of solipsism than a consciousness of the irreducibility of the collective. Much like the philosophers of history and social science above, Wittgenstein normative political philosophers have instead taken their cue from an inferred social ontology in Wittgenstein's later work.

As briefly mentioned above, Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science* was very influential on a number of Wittgensteinian normative political philosophers. Even though his book was not political per se, the social ontology that he inferred from Wittgenstein was a prominent point of departure for many normative political philosophers even as they modified Winch's ontology to suit their own purposes. Yet, at the same time, some authors took more than a purely ontological view from Winch. As we discussed above, one of the issues with *The Idea of Social Science* was its ostensible relativism. In conflating Wittgenstein's idea of a general human 'form of life' with its various subdivisions or modes (e.g. science, religion, etc.), Winch constructed a social ontology in which each mode of life was incommensurable with any other and therefore each can strictly only be judged immanently by its own internal standards and rules. While Winch made this move in order to defend modes of life like religion from scientific criticism, it inspired some scholars to think of Wittgenstein as a conservative thinker by default, because if this radical relativism is true, then political progressivism cannot be justified. Winch had made Wittgenstein look like a status quo conservative. The association of Wittgenstein with conservative scholars such as J. G. A. Pocock also helped encourage this conservative trend in Wittgensteinian political theory.

Alternatively, the work of Stanley Cavell is often invoked by left-leaning Wittgensteinian philosophers that include feminist scholars such as Sabina Lovibond<sup>27</sup>, Naomi Scheman and Peg O'Connor<sup>28</sup>, and others such as Hanna Pitkin and Stephen Mulhall<sup>29</sup>. Although Cavell took himself to be mainly concerned with writing moral philosophy (as opposed to political philosophy), the ethical inferences he made from Wittgenstein's emphasis on ordinary language and the ordinary speaking self was useful to political philosophers seeking to link Wittgenstein's work with their normative political arguments. To Cavell, Wittgenstein's ideas about ordinary language give us occasion for critical reflection. From an examination of the language games we play with moral concerns, Cavell argued that human moral discourse is a rational activity not because it follows deontological precepts but because it follows rules that, "lead to a knowledge

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<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "Lecture on Ethics", in *Philosophical Review*, no. 74 (1965), pp. 3-12.

<sup>27</sup> See Lovibond, Sabina. "Meaning What We Say: Feminist Ethics and the Critique of Humanism" in *New Left Review*, No. 220, (1996), pp. 98-115.

<sup>28</sup> See Scheman, Naomi and Peg O'Connor (eds.). *Feminist Interpretations of Wittgenstein*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> See Mulhall, Stephen. *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

of our own position, of where we stand; in short to a knowledge and definition of ourselves”<sup>30</sup> But since discourse is dialogical, the point of our moral discourse is both a therapeutic effort to know ourselves and a vulnerable mutual exposure of each other’s limited, imperfect selves. This mutual exposure however, is often prevented by the conventional aspects of our culture that tend to cover over differences and inequalities. It is only by having an honest ‘conversation of justice’ that we can better see the heterogeneity of our society and give opportunities for dissent to those whose different nature or quality have been heretofore suppressed or ignored and thought of as underserving of proper recognition<sup>31</sup>.

One of Cavell’s earliest followers was Hanna Pitkin, whose *Wittgenstein and Justice* leaned heavily on Cavell’s unpublished doctoral dissertation. Like Cavell, Pitkin was concerned with uncovering moral issues that lie hidden under sedimented social and linguistic practices. This gives us the opportunity to view our conventional way of looking at moral problems as only one option among many, which is important because we tend to be enthralled by conventional ‘pictures’ of dealing with politics. For Pitkin, the human form of life is a wild assemblage of interconnected modes of life and ordinary language games of speaking and doing and this condition is pregnant with possibilities for change. But while Pitkin is noted for following in the leftist tradition of Stanley Cavell and for marshalling his ontological interpretation to combat conservative readings of Wittgenstein, her importance in Wittgensteinian political theory is also due to the systematic treatment she gave to the topic, which made Wittgenstein’s thought much more accessible to non-specialists in the field. In spite of this, her systematic treatment of Wittgenstein makes her vulnerable to criticism from post-foundationalist and anti-theoretical Wittgenstein scholars. Arguing that Wittgenstein’s technique is not “just one more technique” or methodology because method often dictates content<sup>32</sup>, Pitkin’s project forms the basis of a foundational modernist (in the most general sense) theory even though she argues that a Wittgensteinian political theory would eschew such foundationalism and systemisation.

Wittgensteinian normative political philosophy after Cavell and Pitkin became more diverse, but much of it still owes a significant amount to them. The emergence of re-articulated conservative readings of Wittgenstein in the 1980’s came in the wake of Pitkin’s anti-conservative attacks. Authors like David Bloor and J. C. Nyiri went further than Winch’s implicit (but disavowed in the preface to the second edition) conservatism to argue that Wittgenstein’s style, tone and biographical background suggest that he was a conservative thinker. According to Nyiri, we can infer from Wittgenstein’s social contacts, the background historical moment and his habits of thought that he was a conservative<sup>33</sup>. Bloor, on the other hand, found a special role for faith, authority and community in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless, Cavell’s and Pitkin’s leftist interpretations continued to influence leftist theorists. Authors like Chantal Mouffe and Robin Holt follow Pitkin’s example by using Wittgenstein’s philosophy as an instrument to criticise and modify classical individualist liberal approaches to

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<sup>30</sup> Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1979), pg. 312.

<sup>31</sup> Cavell, Stanley. *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), ch. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. xxv and 21.

<sup>33</sup> Nyiri, J. C.. “Wittgenstein’s Later Work in Relation to Conservatism”, in *Wittgenstein and His Time*, edited by Brian McGuinness, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), pg. 48-49.

<sup>34</sup> Bloor, David. *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge*, (London: Macmillan, 1983), pg. 162.

politics. For both Mouffe and Holt, Wittgenstein's concept of language games help us conceive of democratic values and procedures as products of the myriad of conventional language games in which individuals gain their democratic identity and beliefs rather than as products of free rationalist decision-making procedures such as contract theory. For Mouffe, this justifies a radical vision of democracy as non-utopian agonistic dialogue<sup>35</sup>. For Holt, it justifies a vision of "ordinary human rights" that will resist the reification of liberal universalist theories.<sup>36</sup>

One strand of Wittgensteinian normative political philosophy that rivals the Cavell-Pitkin tradition is a more self-consciously historical one that often credits Quentin Skinner and Charles Taylor as pioneering their broadly contextualist approach. Authors such as James Tully, David Owen<sup>37</sup> and Jonathan Havercroft<sup>38</sup> focus their attention on Wittgenstein's ideas about 'perspicuous representation' and 'seeing aspects'. For Owen and Tully, Wittgenstein's method of 'perspicuous representation' dovetails nicely with genealogical methods such as Michel Foucault's that are aimed not at developing a normative theory to solve general theoretical problems of governance, but at disclosing "the conditions of possibility of this historically singular set of practices of governance and of the range of characteristic problems and solutions to which it gives rise,"<sup>39</sup>. But in linking a traditionally critical theory approach to Wittgenstein, Tully also reads a stronger post-foundationalist anti-theoretical commitment from Wittgenstein's writings than Pitkin was prepared to do. He argues that no particular type of critical reflection can be foundational and we should, "get on with the common task of using our countless techniques of critical reflection to assess the pressing political problems of our age."<sup>40</sup> His own technique is based on a Wittgensteinian social ontology, but he is prepared to accept that it is one among many valid techniques and he offers his works as *defeasible* sketches of historically contingent features of our political landscape. His work, collected in the two volume *Public Philosophy in a New Key* represents a postmodern (in the most general terms) departure from earlier works like Pitkin's.

### III. A Guide to the Dissertation

It is true that as a whole the proportion of Wittgensteinian political theorists is relatively small, but the absolute number of them is now far too large to give them all equal treatment in a single volume of work. Instead, this dissertation will focus largely on Wittgenstein's influence in normative political philosophy, represented by two major works that can suitably exemplify the two historical waves of interest in Wittgenstein. As we have seen above, the first wave of Wittgensteinian political scholars were interested in the potential of Wittgenstein's ideas in paving the way for a new kind of social studies that could resist the encroachment of certain

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<sup>35</sup> Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox*, (London and New York: Verso, 2000), pg. 11.

<sup>36</sup> Holt, Robin. *Wittgenstein, Politics and Human Rights*, (London: Routledge, 1997), pg. 56.

<sup>37</sup> See Owen, David. "Genealogy as Perspicuous Representation", in *The Grammar of Politics*, edited by Cressida J. Heyes, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> See Havercroft, Jonathan. "On Seeing Liberty As", in *The Grammar of Politics*, edited by Cressida J. Heyes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Tully, James. "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity", *Political Theory*, vol. 30, no. 4 (August 2002), pg. 534.

<sup>40</sup> Tully, James. "Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection", in *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, edited by Cressida J. Heyes, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pg. 18.

forms of positivism. Yet, they were relatively unmoved by Wittgenstein's post-foundationalist and anti-theoretical appeals. Past the 1970's, the second wave of Wittgensteinian political theorists were less worried by positivism and more engaged in opposing the Kantian tradition of foundationalist, comprehensive theory-building. Like anti-positivism, this was also predicated on a rejection of methodologies that are based on the recovery of the essential nature of objects and concepts, but their anti-foundationalist and anti-theoretical philosophical commitments go even further. The second wave of Wittgensteinian theorists found themselves more interested in the generally post-modern methodological implications of Wittgenstein's later work. They were more likely to emphasise Wittgenstein's anti-formalism.

Wittgenstein however, was not alone in influencing this post-foundationalist turn in Anglo-American philosophy. Also influential were the rise of non-Wittgensteinian post-analytic philosophy and the rejuvenation of American pragmatism in the 1960's through the works of philosophers such as Hilary Putnam, W.V.O. Quine and Richard Rorty. Post-analytic philosophy had a significant impact on the epistemological bearings of other philosophically-minded disciplines like social and political theory. This post-analytic trend also spurred greater acceptance and appreciation of post-modern Continental philosophy and political theory in Anglo-American universities. Second wave Wittgensteinian political theorists are only one strand of a general post-modernism that is increasingly influential in humanities and social science departments.

It was because of the above considerations that this dissertation will concentrate on Hanna Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice* and James Tully's *Public Philosophy in a New Key*. As one of the earliest statements on Wittgenstein's usefulness in normative political philosophy, *Wittgenstein and Justice* is a highly influential pioneering text in this genre. First of all, its exposition on Wittgenstein's later work allowed non-specialists easier access to his philosophy and secondly, it paved the way for others to use Wittgenstein's ideas in their normative political theories. And as one of the latest major works of Wittgensteinian political theory by a major author, *Public Philosophy in a New Key* is an important statement on the progress Wittgensteinian political theory has made. These works present an exemplary (in both senses of the word) pair of texts that will allow us to compare contrasting approaches to using Wittgenstein's ideas and methods.

As a guide to this dissertation, we have already seen in this, our first chapter, how Ludwig Wittgenstein's influence in political theory is fairly limited in size but somewhat notable in contribution. The purpose of this chapter was to give a brief historical overview of Wittgenstein the man, the philosopher and the source of inspiration for a relatively small number of political theorists. We have examined the history of the dilemmas in political theory which had pushed theorists to consider Wittgenstein's work for an alternative approach to the discipline. In the philosophy of history, we began with R. G. Collingwood as a formative influence before tracing the development of the Cambridge School of Intellectual history through its two main Wittgensteinians, Quentin Skinner and Mark Bevir. In the philosophy of social science, we traced the increasingly anti-theoretical influence of Wittgenstein from Peter Winch to A. R. Louch and through to Nigel Pleasants. In normative political theory, we saw how the moral philosophy of Stanley Cavell's 'conversation of justice' had a large impact on later Wittgensteinians, especially Hanna Pitkin who would go on to author one of the founding texts in Wittgenstein-inspired normative political philosophy. We then saw how Wittgenstein's later ideas were also utilised by some to supplement the methods of Continental critical political theory, with the example of James Tully's idea of a 'public philosophy' that combats unfreedom



with defeasible critical and genealogical studies. It is hoped that this chapter will set the historical context for the detailed exposition and analysis of Pitkin's and Tully's texts later chapters.

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 will provide a brief introduction to the key concepts in Wittgenstein's later work, as well as an explanation of some of his philosophical commitments since the *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus*. The focus of this chapter is conceptual rather than historical and it will provide a survey of commonly used Wittgensteinian terms such as 'language game', 'perspicuous representation', 'form of life' and 'rule-following'. I will attempt to analyse both what Wittgenstein meant by these terms as well as the general usage these terms have been applied to by political theorists influenced by him.

Moving past the surveys, Chapter 3 will provide an exposition and analysis of Hanna Pitkin's social thought in *Wittgenstein and Justice*. I will attempt to show how Pitkin built her social theory by taking Peter Winch's and J. L. Austin's methodological ideas to complement and expand the fundamental ontological and epistemological precepts she draws from Wittgenstein's later philosophy. I will try to show that, at root, Pitkin's anthropological epistemology is suspicious of positivist attempts to sort and sterilize the organic and messy parts of social life. But while she claims to take from Wittgenstein a new way of looking at politics, I will try to show how *Wittgenstein and Justice* is still a modernist text (in the most general terms). While Pitkin argues against a number of modernist tropes in the study of the social and political, I will attempt to make apparent how she brought the modernist tendency of theory building to Wittgenstein's anti-systematic thoughts on language.

Continuing with Pitkin, Chapter 4 will provide an exposition and analysis of her political thought in *Wittgenstein and Justice*. I attempt to show how she built her political theory by taking Wittgenstein's ontology to flesh out and expand the fundamental political values she draws from Kant and Arendt. Hopefully having succeeded in Chapter 3 in showing how Pitkin's project is modernist I will attempt to show in Chapter 4 how Pitkin's political theory seems to go against her own suggestion that a Wittgensteinian political theory would be accepting of plurality and suspicious of broad, systematic generalisation. I hope to show how Pitkin tried to extrapolate from the Western political experience to the exclusion of the multiplicity of political experiences around the world, and that this attempt is not thoroughly consonant with a holist Wittgensteinian epistemology.

Chapter 5 will turn to James Tully and his social thought in the two volume work, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*. I will attempt to show how the social theory of James Tully is primarily inspired by the post-structuralist works of Michel Foucault and the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. I will attempt to show that Tully takes Wittgenstein's epistemology and social ontology as justification for the critical methodology he takes from Foucault, such as the genealogical method that utilises practical reasoning to wean the reader from sedimented forms of social practices and judgments. However, I will attempt to argue that in conflating two admittedly quite similar concepts Tully is at risk of imbuing more plasticity into collective human life than Wittgenstein was likely ready to suggest.

Continuing with Tully, Chapter 6 will provide an exposition and analysis of his political thought in *Public Philosophy in a New Key*. I will attempt to show how Tully's belief that the role of public philosophy is to address public affairs cashes out in i) critical surveys of practices and languages that set the context of practical social and political problems and their proposed solutions, and ii) historical or genealogical surveys that place those languages and practices in their larger context in order to see how forms of subjectivity are shaped by historically specific

trends in thought and action. This will hopefully allow me to argue more convincingly that while Tully's studies fit under the rubric of interrogating Foucauldian 'limits', they do so without violating the more general and epistemologically basic limits of Wittgenstein's concept of 'pictures'. I will attempt to justify Tully's methods by suggesting that he has not sought to change anything which might be part of the facticity of our being in the world.

I will conclude this dissertation with Chapter 7, where after a brief review of the progress made so far, I will compare my findings about Pitkin and Tully under the light of Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical commitments and his beliefs regarding the second order nature of philosophy. I will attempt to argue that Pitkin, in sailing too close the modernist wind, takes a narrower view of the social and political than Wittgenstein's social ontology might suggest. And therefore, Tully's work, by being more rigorously anti-theoretical and anti-foundational, is more consonant with Wittgenstein's ethos. Nonetheless, it will be important to concede that Pitkin's epistemology is more consonant with Wittgenstein's than Tully's. My final evaluation of Pitkin's and Tully's Wittgensteinian political theories will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of their diverging approaches, while holding on to the caveat that we need not agree with everything Wittgenstein has laid out in order to find something useful from him that can help in our work.

## CHAPTER 2

### Wittgenstein's 'Pictures'

In the previous chapter, we saw how Wittgensteinian political theorists responded to the encroachment of scientific positivism in the social sciences and latterly the Kantian tradition of foundationalist theories by turning to Wittgenstein's post-analytic and post-foundationalist philosophy. Ideas such as 'language games' and 'perspicuous representation' were instrumental in turning some political theorists away from traditional methodological individualism and latterly from the desire to build comprehensive universal theories. In this chapter, we turn our attention to what those Wittgensteinian terms actually entail in the specifics. This chapter will provide a *conceptual survey* of the main Wittgensteinian concepts and ideas from which a number of political theorists including Hanna Pitkin and James Tully have drawn heavily in their work. Nevertheless, these terms are not commonly used in the literature of political theory where the authors who work with or on Wittgensteinian concepts and ideas remain a small minority. Clarifying these terms now will allow greater accessibility for non-specialists reading the chapters to follow. These concepts have variously been used to inform both methodological and substantive issues in political theory and in the later sections of this chapter the attempt will be made to give some introductory remarks how so. This survey is also aimed at a pre-emptive clarification for some of the confusions that might arise in later chapters as we delve deeper into the two individual authors' own work, as many of the differences between them stem from different ways of interpreting the same Wittgensteinian terms.

The terms that concern us most here are Wittgenstein's conceptions of '*language games*', '*family resemblance*', '*form of life*', '*perspicuous representation*' and '*philosophy as therapy*'. The attempt will be made to narrate these ideas in as linear a fashion as possible, however since these ideas are interrelated, it would be impossible (if not actually unhelpful) to explain them without reference to at least one of the others. This aside, it will be useful to begin with a few words on Wittgenstein's earlier work, in order to better show both how he came to conceive these later ideas and the vintage of some of his fundamental philosophical commitments.

#### The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*

In writing the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, first published in German as *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*<sup>1</sup>, Wittgenstein attempted nothing less than the dissolution of all the problems of philosophy. He believed that this Herculean task was possible because he was committed to the idea that philosophical problems can be solved - or dissolved more accurately - by paying closer attention to what language really is and how it really works. This is because "the method of formulating these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language."<sup>2</sup> That is, the problems arise because we misapply words and concepts in our theorising. By straying beyond the limits of language, we stray beyond the limits of logical thought, and although these thoughts have the form of genuinely valid ideas what we are really

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<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung", in *Annalen der Naturphilosophie*, vol. 14, (1921).

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, (London and New York: Humanities Press, 1961), pg 3.

doing at this point is entertaining nonsense. So by paying closer attention to language and its limits Wittgenstein wanted to clearly delineate the dividing line between sense and nonsense, in order that we can know when to stop theorizing and prevent our falling into nonsense. Thus, if we understand language properly, we will be able to see that classic philosophical problems are not problems at all - at least not problems that we can legitimately argue about and discuss in logical or rational fashion - but mirages created out of our linguistic confusions.

Wittgenstein's linguistic approach to philosophy did not of course arise out of a vacuum. As we saw in the previous chapter, the start of this 'linguistic turn' is largely attributed to the work of Cambridge philosophers at the beginning of the twentieth century. To Cambridge philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, philosophy as a discipline needed to take a step back from the direct study of ideas, to become more conscious of its medium, language. Wittgenstein inherited this philosophical approach and it is common to both his earlier and later work, the idea re-emerging in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In both periods, Wittgenstein wanted to study the limits of thought by studying the limits of language. What is hugely different between the two periods however, is what Wittgenstein understood the overall underlying logic of language to be.

The task that was set out for Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* therefore, was to delineate just what the overall logic of language was and in this he was primarily influenced by the works of Gottlob Frege<sup>3</sup> and Bertrand Russell<sup>4</sup>. From them he inherited two philosophical commitments, the notion that language does indeed have a singular essence and that we can discover what it is through close analysis. Close analysis will uncover the deep structure of language and hence how it is related to the world we purport it describes - more specifically, it will uncover how meanings are attached to our utterances such that our utterances are not merely various patterns of sound, or shapes on a page. This in turn will allow us to philosophise with unprecedented clarity and surgical precision. But Wittgenstein inherited more than this: Following the logical atomism of Russell, the *Tractatus* is both highly reductionist and mathematically-inspired, with the intention of making logic simpler and more pervasive and as a consequence, more powerful. According to this view, all true facts about the world are ultimately reducible to unit particulars that exhibit simple qualities but which are themselves irreducible to even simpler constituents. This structure is mirrored by our language, where all true propositions can be reduced to true, simple linguistic atoms. The requisite philosophical method from this view is therefore to analyse propositions by reconstructing their complex and compound structures wholly in terms of their unit particulars. From there, one may take apart the construction to inspect for consistency and proper logical relationships among its parts. Any confusions or mistakes can therefore be isolated and dealt with, with ground-breaking precision. Philosophy was to be elevated to near-science.

Following these influences, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein submits that both language and the world have innate structures that logically mirror each other. Very crudely, the world consists of the totality of facts, (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, no. 1.1) facts consist of states of affairs (TLP, no. 2), and states of affairs consist of simple objects (TLP, no. 2.01-2.02). As for language, it consists of propositions (TLP, no. 4.001) which themselves consist of 'elementary propositions' (TLP, no. 5), which in turn are made up of names which are linguistic simples (TLP, no. 4.22-4.24). It might already be obvious how Wittgenstein means for each level of each

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<sup>3</sup> See Frege, Gottlob. *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*, 2 vols., (1893, 1903).

<sup>4</sup> See Russell, Bertrand and A.N. Whitehead. *Principia Mathematica*, 3 vols., (Cambridge University Press, 1910, 1912, 1913).

hierarchy to mirror one level on the other. At the top, language mirrors the world and at the bottom, names mirror objects. This, in essence, is how Wittgenstein's 'picture' theory of language works. When we think about something in the world (a fact), that logical picture finds expression in a proposition and the elemental parts of that proposition correspond to the objects of the thought (TLP, no. 4.0312). It is in virtue of this correspondence (a denotative link) between names and objects that propositions have sense and language successfully describes the world. "A proposition is a picture of reality," (TLP, no. 4.01).

The immediate problem here of course is that the above implies that the propositions that have sense are only those that describe facts of the world (whose constituent signs picture objects in the world), but philosophical propositions including those in the *Tractatus* itself are logical propositions which are tautologies (whose truth values are independent of how things are in the world) and by the lights of Wittgenstein's own argument, nonsense. By his own argument, only empirical propositions, that is, propositions of natural science have sense in language (TLP, no. 6.53). Wittgenstein attempted to extricate himself from this contradiction by way of a bootstrapping argument, asking his reader to "transcend" the propositions of the *Tractatus* and to "throw away the ladder after he has climbed it," (TLP, no. 6.54).

Whether this attempt at self-extrication is convincing or not, here what interests us more are the implications of this model of language on normative values, because just like the logical propositions in the *Tractatus*, the propositions of ethics (and religion and aesthetics) do not describe facts in the world, and are therefore just as nonsensical. If nothing sensible can be said about what lies outside the world of facts, then to speak of ethics is to speak nonsense (TLP, no. 6.41). This is not to say that morality itself is nonsensical, only attempting to speak about it is, for morality itself transcends linguistic expression (TLP, no. 6.421). Thus, according to Wittgenstein, "There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical," (TLP, no. 6.522). In other words, ethics cannot be spoken about without falling into nonsense, what is ethical can only be *shown*. This seems to imply scepticism about the meaning of all ethical speech and by extension, all of normative political theory, but this is accurate only when such speech attempts to say something about the facts of the world. According to Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus*, ethical matters make no difference to the facts of the world but instead alter "the limits of the world" - changing how the world appears to us as moral agents (TLP, no. 6.43). What is salient about ethics is not its effect on how facts populate the world, but its effects on the disposition of the moral agent (TLP, no. 6.422). Conversely, contingent facts about the world cannot affect the content of ethics.

Thus, while Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was fundamentally an attempt to expel the speculative metaphysics of classic philosophical problems from the discipline, at the same time it also put normative discourses in a vulnerable position. His solution was to smuggle ethics and religion back into the world of facts but not back into factual discourse, floating in some sort of mysterious philosophical purgatory. The truths of ethics and religion cannot be given meaningful expression in language, but they can be understood by direct comprehension by observing the world of facts. So, one can in a way transcend the limits of language, not by speaking beyond those limits, but by bypassing language altogether. Thus, unlike the scientific positivists of the Vienna Circle who tended to dismiss ethics and religion after they are placed outside the domain of factual discourse, Wittgenstein remained concerned with giving ethics and religion a place in human life.

We are still left however, with the question of how we should actually live our lives ethically. How are we simply to 'see' the right and wrong things to do? Ethical values seem to

‘manifest’ themselves differently to different agents. But here, we seem to come up against the limits of Wittgenstein’s intentions in writing the *Tractatus*. Such questions are empirical questions, determining the practical aspect of how we are to act in the world, while the task of philosophy, in Wittgenstein’s view, is an exclusively conceptual one in determining the logical conditions under which speech about the world can have meaning. He concludes, “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence,” (TLP, no. 7). And this philosophical commitment he kept, even when his views about the nature of language changed.

## The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein

Soon after ‘solving all the problems of philosophy’, Wittgenstein left the world of academia in 1919 to be a simple schoolteacher in the small Austrian village of Trattenbach<sup>5</sup>, having always idealised the working class life. However, the contact he kept with Moritz Schlick and others of the Vienna Circle from 1925 onwards not only rekindled his philosophical interests but also led him to believe that he had not indeed solved all the problems of philosophy. In 1929, he returned to Cambridge and following the award of his doctorate, Wittgenstein applied for a five-year fellowship at the university’s Trinity College<sup>6</sup>. The manuscript he submitted for this purpose in 1930 was later published in 1964 as *Philosophische Bemerkungen*<sup>7</sup> and it is here where we see Wittgenstein begin to turn away from logical atomism. Slightly later in *Philosophical Grammar*, a posthumous collection of his writings from 1932, we see further attacks on logical atomism by questioning its traditional psychological assumption that using and understanding language are mainly underlined by mental processes. He argues that using and understanding language is an ability or a skill much like playing chess, which one can say one knows how even when one is not at the moment playing and therefore not having the requisite mental processes one has while playing.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, *Philosophical Grammar* is largely important as a transitional work, whose many preliminary ideas were later filled out in the *Philosophical Investigations*, where the rejection of his positions in the *Tractatus* was made more explicitly.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein’s position was that language had a singular logic or essence which he could discover and explain in a comprehensive unitary theory based on the picturing relationship between names and objects. This was possible because it was believed that the objective framework of any possible language was fixed in advance - the structure of reality determines the structure of language. Both these doctrines however, were abandoned in the *Investigations* and their abandonment represents the two most fundamental doctrinal changes between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. Instead of trying to anchor language in the objectivity of the external world, Wittgenstein came to believe that any justification for language must lie within itself and not some independent point outside of it. The demand for objectivity is misplaced because it is our language that determines our view of reality and not the other way around. So, instead of looking outside, one must look inside, at language itself. And if one looks, one will see that language does not have a single logic or essence, but a myriad of them meant to facilitate language use in a plethora of different social activities. There are as many different

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<sup>5</sup> Monk, Ray. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pg. 193.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 298.

<sup>7</sup> Published in English in 1975 as *Philosophical Remarks*.

<sup>8</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Grammar*, edited by Rush Rhees, translated by Anthony Kenny, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), no. 50.

ways in which language works as there are many different linguistic activities that we take part in or could invent. Accordingly, the meaning that an utterance has does not arise from the denotative link between names and objects, but from the specific context of its use<sup>9</sup>, and so under different contextual activities, the same utterance can have different meanings.

The *Tractatus* was more than a denotative theory, it also embodied the assumption that logic of a mathematical kind was the natural and fitting tool to completely analyse and describe language. In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein abandoned this oversimplification in favour of a view of language that recognised its radical variety. For instance, in the *Tractatus*, only sentences that are propositions have meaning, that is, only sentences that declare something about the state of the world. Linguistic utterances then have meaning only in so far that they also have truth-functions. This ignores a vast collection of human utterances as meaningless; utterances that order, obey, praise, censure, inspire or trick cannot be accounted for. On the other hand, in the *Investigations*, language is a boundless collection of activities, each with its own logic. While different linguistic forms may sometimes overlap in their individual logic, no one logical strand threads through them all, and this diversity reveals a radically different structure of language than in his early work. No one theory can explain the connections between all the forms of language; they are connected in a far more elusive way than the *Tractatus* had alleged. They are connected more like different types of games or like the different faces of individuals from the same family. And since this is true, no comprehensive singular theory can explain the entirety of language and therefore attempts at doing so are philosophically out of order.

This difference in his conception of the essence of language would predictably spawn a different fundamental philosophical method, for no longer could Wittgenstein build a neat, unitary theory from the plethora of linguistic activities and their variously different grammars. In fact, he came to see the attempt to build first-order philosophical theories to solve philosophical problems as not only the mistake he made in the *Tractatus*, but as the fundamental problem of all of philosophy. So while linguistic analysis is still the key to solving philosophical problems, it cannot be utilised in first-order philosophical theories but only in second-order philosophical descriptions. He says, "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain," (*Philosophical Investigations*, §126). The result is the abandonment of the linear structure of the *Tractatus* for a patchwork of descriptive comments in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the latter containing no sweeping generalizations and hardly any categorical assertions. Instead, it collates detailed descriptions of ordinary language use, peppered in between dialogues with an interlocutor. These dialogues in turn are not presentations of deductions from an abstract logical theory setting forth the structure and limits of language, but a series of admonishments and imperatives for an empirical investigation. 'Don't say: "There *must* be something common... but *look and see*...."' (PI, §66). An *a priori* investigation of human language no longer seems appropriate. In its place, Wittgenstein attempted an empirical investigation with careful descriptions of actual linguistic practices, resulting in something that looks like science but is clearly not science. He gave us the dots but refused to connect them. His aim was no longer to build a theory but through a series of descriptive comments, wean the reader from the cognitive biases that lead us to misunderstand language. He claims, "The Philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness," (PI, §255).

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<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1973), §43.

We should remind ourselves here that even though in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein had a radically different idea of how language works, he was still committed to the idea that linguistic analysis is the key to solving all philosophical problems, for he still believed that our philosophical problems arise from linguistic confusions. He says, “Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing away misunderstandings. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language,” (PI, §90). So while in the *Tractatus*, we fall into error as philosophers when we try to say things that have no basis in the world of facts, in the *Investigations*, we fall into error when we carelessly use words and concepts outside of their regular, customary contextual uses. The main problem is still linguistic error, but since the standard of justification for meaningful linguistic expression has shifted from the outside to the inside, the main philosophical failing was no longer the failure to meet external standards but the failure of flouting internal rules.

The above also means that ethics and religion need no longer be given a transcendental treatment as language was now no longer a dichotomy of factual and non-factual discourses. In place of this dichotomy is a linguistic naturalism where all forms of discourse arise out of human life and thought, without an independent basis outside of that. Hence ethics and religion can be grounded in the very language they find expression in and in the very practices they reside in. This perhaps may not sound so extraordinary but what was more controversial was his treatment of scientific discourse and logic in the same way. So now it was the turn of factual discourse to be put in a vulnerable position.

## Language Games

We have already observed that language cannot be reduced to declarative sentences alone. Not all, in fact only a fraction of our utterances, have truth values. There is after all an indefinite number of ways we can construct sentences, be they assertions, questions or commands. But “this multiplicity is not something fixed,” and new ways of speaking come into existence while others fade away as the activities and practices of which they are constitutive change (PI, §23). These linguistic practices or activities Wittgenstein calls ‘language games’, and he does so to emphasise the fact that, “the speaking of a language is part of an activity, or a form of life,” (PI, §23). Language games are literally games in that they are ritualised exchanges between people for certain purposes and this is why Wittgenstein believes that linguistic meaning lies for the most part in the *use* of words and sentences. “For to imagine a language one must imagine how it is used; and that means to imagine not only how speech is integral to certain activities but also how these activities are integral to the lives of the speakers...,” (PI, §25). For this reason, Wittgenstein’s concept of a language game denotes both the linguistic utterances and the activities into which those utterances are woven (PI, §7).

We are not however, to infer anything frivolous from the term ‘game’. Here the term ‘game’ not only helps us picture language as an activity and not merely as an abstraction, but it also reinforces the idea that there is an irreducible multiplicity of linguistic activities. As we will see in more detail below, Wittgenstein uses the concept of ‘games’ to show that there is inherent vagueness in some concepts that make them irreducible to singular essences; that there is no single common thread that unifies all the instances of many of the concepts we use. Just as there is no one trait that is essential to all those things we call games, there is no one underlying logic



that undergirds all of language. Each language game has a particular logic all to itself, though there may of course be overlaps among language games.

The above is essentially why Wittgenstein begins the *Investigations* with a passage from St. Augustine's *Confessions*. He means to criticise not only the reductionist denotative theory of language he constructed in the *Tractatus*, but other similarly inspired theories. In that short passage, Augustine describes the process of language learning as one that consists of a succession of ostensive definitions of objects. He describes the first person experience of a language learner who learns the names of objects by grasping the intention of others to name such objects by gesturing at the objects while uttering a sound. Such a description of language is consonant with logical atomism since ostensive definition depends upon a one-to-one fact-object picturing relationship. Augustine's language learner learns language by grasping the denotative link between objects and utterances. However, while this picture of language learning may be sufficient when teaching a second language to an adult who only speaks her mother tongue, it does not seem sufficient when teaching a child her first language. For why should a first-language learner take the teacher to be pointing to the object in itself, rather than its colour, its smell, its size, or its position? Perhaps the teacher is pointing out those things that belong to her? An adult language learner having a different pre-existing language may already be initiated into the language game of naming things, but a young child would not have been. To a first time language learner, the prerequisite background knowledge of the practice of naming things is unavailable. This example shows how intimately woven practices and utterances are. Human language can only be understood in a distinctly human context, which is what the concept of a language game teaches us.

Yet, we cannot use 'meaning is use' as Wittgenstein's definition of linguistic meaning, because Wittgenstein does not make singular use of that term in the *Investigations*. The term 'use' was not itself meant to be a singular definition that could capture the meaning of all and any linguistic utterance. Sometimes he speaks of meaning as the functions of words (PI, §11) and sometimes as the goal of an interaction (PI, §8). Words are employed in various different ways in various different language games and so the mastery of a language involves the ability to consistently and appropriately employ words in the customary ways they are employed in the different language games of which they are constitutive. Hence, as claimed above, a first time language learner needs to first learn the customary ways in which one points and names objects before she can understand and participate in learning by ostensive definition. "[T]he teaching of language is not explanation, but training," (PI, §5) in an activity and so learning a language is not about being able to grasp the essence of words and concepts, and their denotative links but about being able to master a technique (PI, §198-99).

From the above, one might be tempted to retort, 'how else would one train except by grasping an explanation?' But an explanation alone cannot prepare one in being able to consistently and appropriately employ words in the customary ways they are employed in different language games. Words are not merely the names of things and when we use language we are often performing an action or at least intending to have some sort of an effect on the listener; we do things like order, praise or direct with language. This quasi-performative role of language requires the language user to not only understand 'what' but to understand 'how', much like how one cannot learn how to effectively drive a car from studiously reading the manual. More importantly, explaining the meaning of a word is nothing more than formulating an interpretation of a sign – formulating "a rule determining the application of the rule" (PI, §84). But the explanation itself is nothing magical that can only be understood in one way and thus it

requires interpretation itself. We consequently need an explanation of the explanation and so on, and we can soon see that this threatens an infinite regress. “[A]ny interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretation by themselves do not determine meaning” (PI, §198). But we regularly do not need to rely on secondary explanations. We learn the meanings of words the same way we learn that a pointed finger points in the direction from base to tip and not the opposite way (PI, §185), we learn it by learning the convention that regulates the language game of pointing as communication. Additionally, an explanation of a word cannot possibly cover the unlimited applications that a word has, but it is exactly this ability to understand the same word in never before heard contexts and to use it in never before encountered situations that is a mark of a truly competent speaker of a language. We cannot learn language merely by rote; linguistic ability is a creative faculty that requires skill, practice and innovation, which is yet another reason why the term ‘language *game*’ is apt.

We now turn to the use of the concept of language games in political theory. We saw in the previous chapter how Wittgenstein’s influence in political theory first came at a time when the discipline was experiencing a linguistic turn. A number of political theorists who sought to clarify political language and political written works turned to Wittgenstein for conceptual tools. The concept of language games is one of the most commonly used exactly because of the intimate connection between language and practice that it gives proper credit to. If the meaning of utterances lies largely in the use of such utterances, and if speech is inextricably linked to the practices and activities they are constitutive of, then whether it is in the critique of written works in political thought or in the critique of spoken political discourse, the concept of language games allows theorists to ground political speech in political action or to analyse political speech *as* political action. And since political speech is constitutive of political activity, it cannot be understood exclusively in terms of linguistic meaning (i.e. dictionary meanings) but only as integrated into the political practices and activities of the speakers as political actors.

## **Form of Life**

We saw above that the meaning of a word does not consist in the one-to-one match between the word and its referent, but rather in the multiplicity of its use in the many language games of which it is constitutive. Language is interwoven with the activities and practices of human beings. Language then is not something autonomous of how we live our lives, it cannot be analysed separate from considerations of the things we do. Words and sentences only have meaning within the context of our practices in dealing with society and the world in general. Language is constituted by and at the same time constitutive of the form of life we lead. As individuals it is both created by us (in part) but also given to us. And it is this very rootedness that makes the most basic regularities (what Wittgenstein calls ‘grammar’) in language games difficult to identify explicitly. Much of our training in language is unspoken, and it needs no words because it is rooted in our form of life – we simply do what we do and unconsciously act according to these regularities. Regularities “which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes,” (PI, §415).

What Wittgenstein meant by ‘form of life’ however, is not perfectly defined. By most secondary accounts, it seems that Wittgenstein was gesticulating at the natural regularities that seem to exist in human life and its activities. As Hanna Pitkin puts it, “...human life as we live and observe it is not just a random, continuous flow, but displays recurrent patterns, regularities,

characteristics ways of doing and being, of feeling and acting, of speaking and interacting.”<sup>10</sup> And A.C. Grayling in turn says, “it is the underlying consensus of linguistic and nonlinguistic behaviour, assumptions, practices, traditions, and other natural propensities which humans, as social beings, share with one another, and which is therefore presupposed in the language they use; language is woven into that pattern of human activity and character, and meaning is conferred on its expressions by the shared outlook and nature of its users.”<sup>11</sup> Language is a central part of our human form of life: “Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing” (PI, §25). Even if we tried to imagine how words are used in certain activities and what part these activities play in the lives of their speakers, we would not get very far without also imagining the utmost general form of life lived by the speakers.

The immediate problem that arises here is the anthropocentric relativism that the idea of ‘form of life’ seems to suggest. While the theory of language in the *Tractatus* could not account for most of human language use, it had no problem in anchoring truth objectively in the proper denotation of objects by names and the proper mirroring of facts by propositions. However, in the *Investigations*, the concept of ‘form of life’ seems to suggest that since language is the product of agreement among the members of a community of language speakers, the truth value of propositions must also emerge from the agreement of speakers. Wittgenstein’s answer is direct but not immediately illuminating. He says, “So are you 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* they use. That is not an agreement in opinions but in form of life,” (PI, §241). What he means to say here is that truth and falsity are qualities of the content of speech, but not of the form that the speech takes. While I may not know whether what you have said is true or false, I understand that you are making a claim and what claim it is that you are making because we agree on the general linguistic forms in which ideas are expressed and claims are made. The agreement in our form of life is the agreement of basic behaviour and judgments – agreement in the meaningfulness of making claims, but not agreement in the truth or falsity of particular claims.

The above means that we cannot take charges of historical and cultural relativism too far either. Wittgenstein does say that, “When language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change,”<sup>12</sup> which implies that different historical or cultural modes of life will have different concepts that cannot be perfectly translated. He also says that, “We do not understand Chinese gestures any more than Chinese sentences.”<sup>13</sup> However, our differences here are not differences in our agreement on the truth or falsity of the content of speech, but differences in our agreement in historical and cultural modes of life. But even this does not preclude us from understanding different historical and cultural modes of life from ours. Simply in order for us to recognise past peoples and other cultures as sharing our basic form of life (that is, to recognise them as *people*), we must already have found enough common ground to make that judgement. This common ground may not be grounded in shared historical and cultural modes of life, but in the shared basic human species form of life.

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<sup>10</sup> Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993 [1972]), pg. 132.

<sup>11</sup> Grayling, A. C.. *Wittgenstein: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pg. 97.

<sup>12</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty* (12th ed.), edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1972), no. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), no. 219.

This commonality is so basic that it transcends historical and cultural modes and even when Wittgenstein says, “So if a lion could indeed talk, we could not understand him,” (PI, part II pg. 223) we cannot interpret this to the extreme. There will be much that we cannot understand about lions because we do not share their specific species form of life, but there will still be something we can understand of lions, in so far as we share some basic behaviours or activities with them. We cannot understand their hypothetical speech as humans qua humans, but perhaps we can understand something of them as humans qua mammals. Mating, hunting and playing are as much part of our natural history as it is theirs.

Still, many observers will not be assuaged by this line of explanation because a conventional basis for our epistemic criteria seems incredibly uncertain and arbitrary. But it is not as if we can, at any given time, opt out of those conventions, for the consistency of our common way of being in the world also depends on the consistency of the features of that world. For example, “[w]hat we call ‘measuring’ is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement,” (PI, §242). For an action to count as ‘measuring’ the object of measurement cannot suddenly, “grow or shrink for no obvious reason,” (PI, §142) because then there would be no distinction between correct and incorrect measurement. Of course the conventional measuring units we have are arbitrary – that we need to have a standard metre stored somewhere in Paris is evidence enough – but the concept of measuring itself is not arbitrary because the hard features of the actual world allows a certain consistency of results.

The upshot here is that social sciences and the humanities need neither be relativistic nor irrational. That we share a particular human form of life that is grounded in a shared linguistic faculty, “ensures possibility in any encounter of a shared set of facts and epistemic criteria.”<sup>14</sup> And while the social nature of human life is constructed (that is, it is conventional), it is not constructed *ex nihilo* in each and every place, culture or time. It is constructed out of the facticity of our common way of being in the world and the consistency of the features of that world. While scholars of the human sciences should avoid speaking outside of the language game they study, the distance that time and space creates between them and their subjects does not preclude the possibility of their understanding their subjects.

The defence against the charge of relativity above does however rely upon Wittgenstein meaning for the idea of the human form of life to be the ultimate explanation or justification for the linguistic activities and practices we have as human beings. It is the most basic substrate upon which we build different historical and cultural modes of life, and that which makes intermodal understanding possible. To train in the practices of human language games also means learning the general worldview, assumptions and behaviour of humans from which those language games get their meanings – those things without which the language games would be unintelligible. But this also means that what justifies all our different language games is the shared form of life underlying them and no more fundamental justifications can be given. Our basic form of life is the limit of explanation for all investigations into human life. “If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do,”” (PI, §217).

If the idea of ‘form of life’ is supposed to form the most basic level of explanation or justification of human practices and activities, then it shouldn’t surprise us that political theorists who use Wittgenstein’s ideas often take ‘form of life’ as informing the foundations of their social ontology. The concept is taken to be essential to the study of human activity because it forms the bottom-most foundation of our social and political concepts. The concepts we have reflect the

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<sup>14</sup> Bevir, Mark. “Taking Holism Seriously: A Reply to Critics”, in *Philosophical Books*, vol. 42 (2001), pg.15.

linguistic conventions we have which in turn reflect the conventions of practice that we have. Conventions of practice have no other foundation than the regularities of human action that are our form of life. Of course, Wittgenstein's work is on the philosophy of language, but since his is at base an anthropological theory of language, many theorists see this as unavoidably presenting a social ontology. In order to get us to see that the meanings of words are grounded in their actual usage, Wittgenstein had to show us how the language that we use not only facilitates but is constitutive of our human form of life, thereby many theorists see this as unavoidably providing us with a theory of the deep structure of human action and human interrelations.

## Family Resemblance

Having surveyed the concepts of 'language games' and 'form of life', it might strike the reader as a failure that Wittgenstein had neglected to delineate these terms clearly and precisely. As touched upon above however, neither 'language game' nor 'form of life' was meant to give an essentialist definition to the reader. But this does not render the terms useless as their vagueness only reflects the inherent vagueness of language. The Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* rejects the idea that language has a simple, crystallised essence in favour of respecting the countless multiplicity of linguistic activities and practices. He says that, "...these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, - but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship or these relationships, that we call them all 'language'," (PI, §65).

But this inherent vagueness is shared by many other concepts as well and Wittgenstein's wish is to wean the reader from the general philosophical practice of whittling down concepts to their core essences. By analysing the similarities and differences among what we normally call games – card games, ball games, etc. – Wittgenstein shows us that concepts which may be thought of as being connected through common essential features of its actual uses, may in fact be connected by a series of overlapping similarities where no one feature is common to all. "Don't say: "There *must* be something common, or they would not be called 'games'" – but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that... Look for example at board games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ballgames much that is common is retained, but much is lost. – Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with naughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear," (PI, §66).

Wittgenstein calls this uncertain pattern of criss-crossing similarities 'family resemblances', "...for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And... 'games' form a family," (PI, §67). Hence a 'family resemblance' concept is one whose different actual uses only share a vague sense of similarity to one another, like the faces of different members of a particular family. A concept like 'authority' for example, is used in many different

modes of life. It is informed by beliefs surrounding parental authority, political authority, military authority and literary authority and these different uses of the concept are all part of the concept in its entirety. Thus, if someone were to ask us what authority is, we would not be able to give a simple precise singular proposition as a description. There might be one characteristic that dominates and overlaps with most of uses of the concept, but no one characteristic will be common to all. We would then have to rely on giving a succession of examples and depend on our enquirer to figure out in which language game those examples find their home. And following our discussion of language games above, we can only legitimately confirm her understanding if she is then able to use the concept consistently and appropriately in future exchanges. This inability to give a precise answer however, is not ignorance. “We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn,” (PI, §69). Unlike concepts with singular essences, we cannot know in advance how someone is going to use a family resemblance concept in a particular utterance. The boundaries of the concept are drawn only when the speaker uses it and the boundaries can shift in future uses.

The concept of ‘family resemblance’ not only suggests that many concepts lack clear boundaries of meaning but also that the traditional philosophical craving for crystallised essences in order to construct generalities is not always well-founded. By explaining concepts as embedded in the contexts of their use, Wittgenstein prevents us from reifying concepts, but this does not render them useless as social scientific tools. Concepts can be determinate in so far as they function acceptably well within some context of practice, that is, determinate enough for immediate and practical purposes. “We can draw a boundary – for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept usable? Not at all! (Except for that special purpose.)” (PI, §69). Asking for more precision is a misguided demand to make precise what is inherently vague. “No matter how many distinctions we draw, no matter how many of our theories we make explicit, these distinctions and theories – and so the concept of concern to us – always will gain meaning only when situated within a wider web of beliefs. The crucial point here is that analysis can never lead to a pure concept with given content.”<sup>15</sup>

Since concepts are only as precise as the language games they are embedded in demand of them, as a general matter, political theorists have used the concept of ‘family resemblance’ as a reminder against the essentialist notions of political and social concepts. Two related consequences arise for political theorists: Firstly, trying to identify strict definitions of our political concepts may be a misguided venture, especially if we are trying to distil their essences from uses across historical periods or cultures. Secondly, trying to formulate a general comprehensive theory to solve a general political problem may be out of order, for political problems that look similar across historical periods or cultures, say authoritarianism for example, may have nothing specific common to all those instances. Just like Wittgenstein in his treatment of language in the *Investigations*, the concept of family resemblances teaches political theorists to curb their tendency to generalise in order to give more attention to the particular case.

## **Perspicuous Representation**

One common thread that has pervaded the concepts we have surveyed so far is Wittgenstein’s general attempt to wean us from the conventional ways in which we view language and in which we philosophise. He argued specifically against the Augustinian ‘picture’ of language learning as well as the traditional philosophical craving for conceptual essences and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pg. 8.

the generalizations built upon them not only because he found them to be erroneous or misguided but because these ‘pictures’ are so entrenched in the discipline that we find it difficult to question or look past them. But as we will see in the next section, part of Wittgenstein’s basic understanding of the role of philosophy is the struggle to release us from the grip of such enthrallment and to do this by a ‘perspicuous representation’ of the language we use to philosophise. “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions’,” (PI, §122).

By ‘picture’, Wittgenstein meant something like, ‘a model of reality’, where the emphasis is on ‘model’ because a ‘picture’ is not the thing in itself but a “form of representation” or more prosaically, “the way we look at things”, (PI, §122). For example, “[w]e form *the picture* of the earth as a ball floating free in space and not altering essentially in a hundred years,” and, “...this picture now helps us in judgment of various situations.”<sup>16</sup> In this instance, “[t]he picture of the earth as a ball is a *good* picture, it proves itself everywhere, it is also a simple picture – in short, we work with it without doubting it.”<sup>17</sup> But this tendency to work with a ‘picture’ without doubting it can lead us to confusions and dead ends, because a bad ‘picture’ is more than a mere mistake in choosing the best paradigm because we also tend to be enthralled or captivated by ‘pictures’, good or bad, especially when it involves a picture we inherited and not one we had to formulate for ourselves.

We find it difficult to think outside a particular ‘picture’ because we mistake it for being all that there is in the matter – that is, we mistake the model for the reality, the representation for the represented. As such, the possibility of another model is foreclosed because we tend to forget or overlook the fact that we have no direct apprehension of things, but must understand them from certain representations or viewpoints. We think we ‘see’ when what we are really doing is ‘seeing something as’. “A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and seemed to repeat it to us inexorably,” (PI, §115). Wittgenstein exemplified this rather strikingly with his discussion on a picture puzzle that seemed to represent two different objects, (PI, pg. 194). One may see the drawing in this puzzle as a rabbit facing the right or a duck facing the left. The drawing has both ‘pictures’ in it simultaneously and there is no contradiction in one person saying she sees a rabbit and another saying she sees a duck. They see what they see, but the drawing indeed has two *aspectival* objects and someone who currently sees the drawing as a rabbit cannot simultaneously see the drawing as a duck, and vice versa. In fact, since one can only see one aspect at a time, one may never come to be aware that there is another aspect to the drawing, but until one has seen both of them in turn, one will only understand part of the truth of what the drawing is.

Not all ‘pictures’ are so benign of course, but a bad ‘picture’ is not necessarily one that is completely untrue. In fact some bad ‘pictures’ are especially captivating because they capture some part of the truth or are a product of certain cognitive biases (e.g. reductionism) that make them seem natural. The Augustinian ‘picture’ of language learning exemplifies both cases and was sufficiently important to dispel that Wittgenstein began the *Investigations* with it. In that case, the ‘picture’ of language learning as ostensive definition inexorably led us to reduce the meaning of language to a denotative link between names and objects. It did so because it paints a natural and coherent picture of how many of us learn to improve our vocabulary in our first

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<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, no. 146.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 147.

language or how we pick up a second one, both of which are very common occurrences. But by concentrating on this exemplar, we generalise the case and blind ourselves to the other aspects of language that do not fit into this ‘picture’ – we forget, for example, that pointing and uttering may also fit into the practice of commanding or requesting. “The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something because it is always before one’s eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry does not strike a man at all. Unless *that* fact has at some time struck him. – And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful,” (PI, §129).

What is important to note here is the sense of constraint that is part of this captivity. Wittgenstein is attempting to help the reader realise that enthrallment by a ‘picture’ impinges on our ability to conduct ourselves as autonomous and thinking agents. When a captivating ‘picture’ becomes part of the background of our practices of thought and action, it becomes foundational for our language games and the truth or falsity of this picture is no longer up for grabs. “Why do I not satisfy myself that I have two feet when I want to get up from a chair? There is no why. I simply don’t. This is how I act.”<sup>18</sup> Of course enthrallment to other pictures may be more harmful than the working assumption that I still have my two legs. In philosophy, a ‘picture’ of philosophical interest may only represent a particular case, but, “[w]e feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena,” (PI, §90) “as if there were something hidden in them that has to be brought to light,” (PI, §91) and that we could take to be universal or necessary. As discussed above, the search for such a generalizable essence may not always be in order, but we almost never question the possibility or wisdom of making generalizations. We are enslaved by a picture not because we consciously think it cannot be otherwise, but because the grip of such enthrallment prevents us from recognising the very possibility that it could be otherwise.

While what Wittgenstein meant by ‘picture’ meant something more like, ‘a model of reality’, political theorists have more often used the concept of perspicuous representation as applied to ‘models of *social* reality’, that is, as applied to ‘pictures’ of customary social and political behaviour where the enthrallment of such ‘pictures’ lie in their seeming socially obligatory rather than ontologically universal or necessary. Political theorists are more concerned with using ‘perspicuous representation’ as a technique in uncovering normative issues that lie hidden under sedimented linguistic social and political practices. This approach gives us the opportunity to view our conventional way of looking at moral problems as only one option among many, which is important because we tend to be enthralled by conventional ‘pictures’ of dealing with politics and in doing so our self-government qua moral agency is blocked. We limit ourselves unnecessarily because we cannot even begin to imagine that our political beliefs and practices cannot be otherwise. It may be that governance is situated in a dialogical intersubjectivity, but this very dialogue can trap us in our past conventions and this intersubjectivity can be ripe with possibilities for transformation, revision and reshaping. As James Tully claims, “Political philosophy as a critical activity starts from the practices and problems of political life, but it begins by questioning whether the inherited languages of description and reflection are adequate to the task.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., no. 148.

<sup>19</sup> Tully, James. “Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity”, *Political Theory*, vol. 30, no. 4 (August 2002), pg. 534.



## Philosophy as Therapy

It was discussed above how Wittgenstein's commitment to linguistic analysis as central to philosophy was common to both his earlier and later philosophy. Whether in the *Tractatus* or the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein was committed to the idea that our philosophical problems arise from linguistic confusions and so they can be dissolved by linguistic clarification. In the *Tractatus* he says, "Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. Philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions' but rather in the clarification of propositions." (TLP, no. 4.112) Whether in the *Tractatus* or the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein was committed to what Peter Winch called "the underlabourer conception of philosophy,"<sup>20</sup> where the philosopher's task was limited to the conceptual clarification of the disciplines of natural and social sciences, never having anything entirely new to contribute. "The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we've always known," (PI, §109). Further, "[o]ne might also give the name "philosophy" to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions," (PI, §126).

Despite this ostensible commitment to philosophy as a second-order discipline, Wittgenstein still tried to create a 'theory' of language in the *Tractatus*, in order to help philosophy give clear and sharp boundaries to "cloudy and indistinct thoughts", (TLP, no. 4.112). In the *Investigations* however, he came to think that this was a mistake; the linguistic confusions we have cannot be solved by constructing first order philosophical theories about language, because such a theory would be a linguistic confusion in itself. Building such a theory would be to fall into enthrallment with the traditional picture of the philosopher's task as seeking out sublimated essences even where the subject of discussion displays a radical multiplicity. In this way then, in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein's commitment to philosophy as a second-order discipline was extended to philosophical work on the medium of philosophy itself – language.

Thus, instead of constructing theories to solve philosophical problems, we should instead, "...do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say, its purpose, from the philosophical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the working of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognise those workings: *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them. ... Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language," (PI, §109). What would dissolve these philosophical problems is not a theory but a perspicuous representation of the area of confusion which will extricate us from our bewitchment. But as discussed above, enthrallment by erroneous 'pictures' is difficult to solve because their grip prevents us from recognising the very possibility that we could think otherwise. No argument can be made to wean us from this enthrallment, for no logical space is available for the argument when the very possibility of such an argument cannot be fathomed by one so enthralled. Wittgenstein therefore, wants us to conceive the philosophical task as a therapeutic endeavour. "The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness," (PI, §255). While in the *Tractatus*, the linguistic elucidations took the form of a theory, in the *Investigations*, they are a practical, constitutive part of Wittgenstein's therapeutic technique to wean us away from explanatory theories.

We should stop trying to explain and limit ourselves to description because explanation itself creates misconceptions about language. In trying to make new discoveries instead of

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<sup>20</sup> Winch, Peter. *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2008 [1958]), pp. 3-6, 10, 19.

simply re-organising our thoughts, we take a static view of language, sublimating it from the context of its everyday use. But as we have discussed above, the meaning of words lies largely in their use and taking them out of their contexts is a major source of linguistic confusion. “The confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work,” (PI, §132). “For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*,” (PI, §38). Nonetheless, it is a very bold claim that all our philosophical problems are created by our own confusions. The corollary being that all our philosophical problems will disappear when we have a thorough understanding of language. Until then, we are like flies trapped in a bottle. We are lucky then that Wittgenstein’s aim is “[t]o shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle,” (PI, §309), but ‘perspicuous representation’ is only one kind of treatment. He says:

“The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. – Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off. – Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.”

(PI, §133)

Yet, it is difficult to understand how it could be that the examples Wittgenstein gives us are immune from generalization, even implicitly. If he gives us more than one example to make a single point, how could it be that his intended lesson does not lie in what we can generalize from those examples? Does the answer not lie in what is common to those examples? Of course this would not amount to the sweeping generalizations of ambitious grand theories, but theories come in all sizes and it seems, on the face of it, impossible to learn anything that is applicable to anything else without some minimal amount of generalization. The subject matter of philosophy may be complex, but complexity alone does not amount to unanalyzable uniqueness. The latter claim needs stronger justification than what Wittgenstein saw fit to give.

Perhaps it is this difficulty to understand Wittgenstein’s ostensible anti-theoretical stance in his later work that led some political theorists to more or less ignore this issue in their adaptation of his work for political theory. Whether they are writing genealogies or deductive analytical arguments, political theorists inspired by Wittgenstein often take his later work as representing, even if minimally, some sort of theory of human discourse or social ontology—Nigel Pleasants being the notable exception in this regard<sup>21</sup>. Additionally Wittgenstein is not the sole influence in the works of these theorists. Combining Wittgenstein’s work with that of philosophers such as J.L. Austin or Michel Foucault, the compatibility of these pairings remain to be analysed. Whether either of these theoretical manoeuvres is justifiable will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

Nevertheless, since Wittgenstein’s later work was intended to avoid forming a ‘system’ and consequently since Wittgenstein had to do without the clarity and rigour we usually seek in modern works of philosophy, it must be said here that it is not too difficult to author philosophical works with a surface agreement with his work. To one extreme, as A.C. Grayling puts it, his later work “provides excellent cover for charlatanism,” because “[o]nce one has sifted his texts and has ceased to be dazzled by the brilliance of metaphor and the poetical quality, one

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<sup>21</sup> See Pleasants, Nigel. *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar*, (New York: Routledge, 1999).

finds much less argument, and very much less definiteness in the crucial conceptions, than is expected in and demanded from philosophical enquiry.” But, as Grayling himself concedes, “perhaps the value of Wittgenstein’s work lies as much in its poetry, and therefore in its suggestiveness, as in its substance.”<sup>22</sup> After all, to be influenced by someone does not necessitate perfect agreement or even perfect understanding, and political theorists can perhaps legitimately expand his work into normative political theory. How legitimately, we will see in later chapters, but in order to do that we must first release ourselves from enthrallment with Wittgenstein’s poetry and personality. We must put aside the legend for the work.

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<sup>22</sup> Grayling, *Wittgenstein*, pg. 132.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Social Thought of Hanna Pitkin

We have now arrived at the second part of this dissertation where we leave the general historical and conceptual overviews for a more in-depth discussion of our chosen contemporary political theorists. This chapter and the next will concentrate on the methodological and substantive work of Hanna Pitkin as influenced by Wittgenstein in her seminal work, *Wittgenstein and Justice*. We will begin here by examining her social thought before looking at her political thought in the chapter that follows. Here, I will attempt to show how Pitkin built her social theory by taking Peter Winch's and J. L. Austin's methodological ideas to complement and expand the fundamental ontological and epistemological precepts she draws from Wittgenstein's later philosophy. At root, Pitkin's anthropological epistemology is suspicious of positivist attempts to sort and sterilize the organic and messy parts of social life. But while she claims to take from Wittgenstein a new way of looking at politics, I argue that *Wittgenstein and Justice* is still a modernist text (in the most general terms). While Pitkin argues against a number of modernist tropes in the study of the social and political, I will attempt to make apparent how she brought the modernist tendency of theory building to Wittgenstein's anti-systematic thoughts on language.

#### Motivation

Having previously noted that Wittgenstein's later work does not seem to give away any substantive political or moral content, but had instead inspired political theorists to take an approach more mindful of linguistic practices, it would not surprise us to learn that Hanna Pitkin was conscious of both those elements. She notes in the introduction of *Wittgenstein and Justice* that Wittgenstein indeed does not offer any new theories or any empirical data regarding politics, but what he does offer is a new perspective, a new way of seeing what has always been in front of us but had gone undetected exactly because of its familiarity.<sup>1</sup> What Wittgenstein offers then is a *technique*, a new way of doing what we have always taken for granted. A new way of *seeing* that uncovers more than what we are accustomed to; a new way that has to be *learnt* and not simply adopted because those customary ways are so entrenched as to be second nature to us. But this technique alone would not be eminently applicable to political theorists if it were not largely applied to human language, whose relevance for social and political study lies as Pitkin states it, in its status as a "carrier of human culture" and as a "medium of the mind"<sup>2</sup>.

More specifically though, language is important because it is what allows for reflexivity, allowing us to have attitudes towards ourselves and not only towards the collective and the external physical world. This means that language is "as much a tool as the datum of social science,"<sup>3</sup> and this fact alone brings highly problematic methodological consequences to the study of the social and the political. The creativity and complexity of our linguistic faculty

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<sup>1</sup> Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993 [1972]), pg. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 4.

inevitably throws up linguistic problems for our endeavour to understand ourselves and the world. So for Pitkin, quite central to the work of the social scientist or political theorist is the resolution of conceptual problems where they arise and the later work of Wittgenstein brings quite revolutionary and incisive tools to overcome those problems, giving us rare insight into the usual and habitual pitfalls of our conceptual thought.

The later work of Wittgenstein is revolutionary and incisive in large part because it takes the radical view that language is “in order as it is”<sup>4</sup>. This is of course opposed to Wittgenstein’s earlier work in the *Tractatus*, where the aim was to perfect language and its logical form, in order to cleave language of all its vagueness and forge a perfect tool for philosophical use. But in order to do so, as we’ve seen in the previous chapter, the role of all that vagueness is dismissed and much of what is social or political about our discourse is eliminated. In the *Investigations*, however, much more attention is paid to the ordinary in our language with much more inspection carried out on the linguistic regularities that occur in the ordinary contexts where they are naturally found. And for Pitkin, this is useful because for her, deviations from ordinary language come from faulty assumptions or bring unintended implications and therefore give us a real clue to the origins of certain conceptual confusions in social science. At this point, however, much of Wittgenstein’s work is not specific enough to give Pitkin the precise tools in analysing individual words and statements. Here, Pitkin ties in what she considers to be complementary from the Oxford school of ordinary language philosophers like J.L. Austin and from American scientific linguists such as Paul Ziff. She takes from these scholars, ideas about and techniques in dissecting ordinary language where they may alleviate the conceptual puzzles found in social and political study.

Yet, her stated aim here is not only methodological, but to also consider what substantive implications some of the themes in Wittgenstein’s philosophy have for political and social study. For Pitkin, Wittgenstein’s technique is not, “just one more technique,” because, “method often dictates content,” and so Wittgenstein’s technique has *distinctive* substantive implications on social and political study.<sup>5</sup> Pitkin takes Wittgenstein’s later work as speaking to a new social ontology that works against “the inherited, unexamined fragments of philosophy... derive[d] from some form of positivism,”<sup>6</sup> – that are, unfortunate perhaps for her and other Wittgensteinians, as popular now as they were when she wrote *Wittgenstein and Justice*. Wittgenstein’s central substantive influence on Pitkin comes from her assumption of a post-analytic stance against positivism’s naïve scientism and easy binary assumptions regarding such things as ‘facts and values’. Unlike the influence of positivism which tells social and political scholars to seek a detached and therefore neutral point of view, Wittgenstein according to Pitkin, “provides new ways of seeing that, and investigating how, man is both an animal shaped by his environment, and a free, responsible actor. Thus, he allows us renewed access to the fundamental problems of social and political study: free will and scientific objectivity, the nature and validity of judgment, the relationship between thought and action.”<sup>7</sup> Still, she does not claim to have exhausted these implications, claiming only that she is dealing with, “suggestions for applications, not completed studies.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pg. xxv.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pg. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pg. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pg. 169.

To Pitkin, the influence of positivism in social and political studies is a bewitching picture of social reality which seemingly gives us good answers in the field, but at the same time creates tell-tale conceptual problems that betray a deeper confusion. These conceptual problems arise, according to her, because of distinctively Wittgensteinian misunderstandings caused by, “certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language,” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §90) or by taking a static view of concepts, sublimating them from the context of their everyday uses and therefore conceptualizing while, “language goes on holiday,” (PI, §38). These conceptual problems seem unresolvable because the opposing arguments do not genuinely meet, but with a Wittgensteinian analysis, the dialectical nature of these issues will become clear and Pitkin feels opposing arguments will be reconciled. Pitkin’s general strategy then, is quite expectedly a perspicuous survey of the issues based on a Wittgensteinian social ontology and privileging the ordinary in language by using the analytical methods of Austin and other ordinary language philosophers.

### **Understanding What People Say**

Perhaps the most fundamental way in which Pitkin takes Wittgenstein to offer a social ontology that is relevant to social and political study is how the idea of a language game can revolutionize our understanding of the meaning of social or political speech. In looking at language as an activity, Wittgenstein allows the social scholar to bridge the gap between speech and action. No longer are words mere facilitation of actions and are therefore logically separable, but by taking both language and action as jointly constitutive of language games, the social scholar is able to ascertain what *counts* as social and political speech and is further able to analyse what constitutive role a particular utterance has in its particular social or political practice. For in taking *language as an activity*, words are taken as tools or as signals in the context of our practices and therefore function differently in different contexts.

The idea that words are tools or signals that depend for their meaning on the particular contexts in which they are found is a Wittgensteinian idea that dovetails nicely with the work of J.L. Austin.<sup>9</sup> From here, Pitkin takes Austin’s work as a sort of extension of Wittgenstein’s social ontology, giving us further, more specific tools for analysing language where Wittgenstein’s work ends. To Austin, words often have a ‘performative’ role, the utterance of which constitutes an action as named by those words. His most famous example is the institution of promising. By uttering the words, “I promise” in the right context, (e.g. not when I’m practicing lines for a play), the utterance is sufficient to constitute me as having actually promised something. And so in a political context, the utterance of the words, “I appoint” by the right person in the right context is sufficient to appoint a person to some office. For the social scholar, this theory of performatives highlights the social or political meaning of utterances beyond that of the descriptive nature of those utterances. It allows the social scholar to see beyond what was described into what was done as a social or political act. In fact, since a speech-act can be performed even without the particular term in question – for example, saying, “You have my word,” instead of, “I promise,” can also be sufficient to having committed to promising – the line between mere descriptive statements and performative utterances are blurred. But it is this very blurriness however, that takes Pitkin back to Wittgenstein and the more general idea of language as an activity. For if speech cannot be separated from practice and the meaning of words come

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<sup>9</sup> See Austin, J.L., *How to Do Things with Words*, edited by J.O. Urmson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

from their use in activity, then, “much or perhaps all of language is performative in a looser sense, . . . what we might call *quasi-performative*,”<sup>10</sup> (italics mine). For even when we are not performing classic speech-acts where our words commit us to the action named by those words, we are always *doing* something with our utterances, from asserting standards to starting a war.

The main import of the theory of performatives and quasi-performatives for Pitkin’s social and moral theory lies in her development of the idea that utterances are actions that we use to signal our intentions, views or standards to which we stand committed and are not simply (at least not always) formal descriptions. For Pitkin, this idea is key in understanding how we attribute responsibility to the utterance of words and how we attribute responsibility to action and thereby pick out an event as an action. Both are key issues in social and political studies that, as we will see later in this chapter, create much conceptual confusion in the field. In both instances, Pitkin uses the idea of language games and the commitment we take in playing them to resolve the key conceptual confusions that seem to make reductionist social science a sterile discipline where arguments do not genuinely meet. Yet, it is not the case however, “that we never refer or describe, never make true or false assertions, never use words as labels. But these functions are not privileged or definitive.”<sup>11</sup> Taking words as mere labels as positivist social science is wont to do, excludes from social and political studies much of the signals or commitments we make in those contexts and therefore a large part of what we ordinarily pick out as proper explanations in our social and political world. Such reductionism ignores the ordinary at the peril of incomplete and lopsided explanation.

Nothing perhaps exemplifies the idea that language is an activity and that utterances commit us than Wittgenstein’s explication of the meaning of the word ‘understand’. Since ‘to understand’ takes the form of a verb in our formal grammar, we assume that it refers to (or labels) a private mental activity that surely reflects some sort of biological process going on in our brains – a process with duration. We commonly correlate understanding to the phenomenological and quite colloquial ‘Aha!’ moment that we all come to be familiar with at some point or other. But as Wittgenstein pointed out, that feeling is insufficient to support our claim of understanding, for almost of us have had that ‘feeling’ of understanding and found out later that we were indeed mistaken, (PI, §310-421). So it would be odd to claim that the ‘Aha!’ moment and understanding are related in any sufficient way. The only justification sufficient to verify my understanding is my proceeding to use that knowledge or skill correctly where relevant. The phenomenological experience is insufficient grounds to claim understanding. Wittgenstein then teaches us that to say that one understands is not to report an internal state that one perceives but to express that understanding. Pitkin develops this line of thought further by saying that, “Understanding is not merely a state or activity to be labelled, but a commitment about performance to come.”<sup>12</sup> By saying one understands, one is expressing understanding, but that again is not a description of the present rather than a giving of one’s word about the future. By expressing understanding one is asking for the confidence of others in one’s ability to execute the knowledge or skill claimed, one is committing oneself to being relied upon for that future performance. Similarly, the word ‘mean’ and some others are alike ‘understanding’ in this way. That is to say, to mean something by one’s utterance is not to pick out a mental process with duration that goes on as we utter our words. Just as the ‘Aha!’ moment sometimes but not always underlines our understanding, to mean something is sometimes but not always about the

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<sup>10</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 39.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 43.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 67.

intention behind the words. In order to mean something, it is often sufficient to take a position on something or to commit oneself to a belief or a standard. For Pitkin, words like ‘understand’ and ‘mean’ serve to confuse positivist social scholars because they take these terms as mere static labels and discount the commitment inherent in them that bridge the present with the future.

This position on ‘meaning’ foreshadows Pitkin’s weak intentionalism in identifying events as action as we will see later, but here it also signals her commitment to the inherent vagueness of language. For verbs like ‘understand’ and ‘mean’ are not only not simply labels, their signalling functions also vary. “In short, a verb like “to mean” is not simply a label for some recognizable inner process; it is a complex, composite tool put together out of a variety of heterogeneous parts – the various contexts and language games in which the word is used. These include feelings and actions and circumstances, phenomena to which the word can refer, but also phenomena which characterize the occasions for its use as a signal.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, Pitkin propounds a view of Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblances that is more sophisticated than most others’. For as she argues that when we think of various facial features of a family or of different strands of a rope as exemplifying what Wittgenstein meant by family resemblances, we might still be tempted to understand family resemblances as only picking out different physical objects or traits rather than activities or contexts.<sup>14</sup> We are tempted to think that while all the different crisscrossing similarities in family resemblance concepts do not indeed have a unifying theme, these similarities are still the same kind of thing, each of which can be easily identified in isolation. But referring to the above quote, what constitutes a concept may not only be direct characteristics of the concept themselves but characteristic of the contexts the concept finds its home in. Unlike a rope, where it is quite simple to extend the rope by adding similar strands, language is far more complex and it is far less certain what would count as an acceptable projection of a concept like ‘mean’.

Words like ‘mean’, ‘understand’ and also ‘intending’ and ‘expecting’, are all terms that are commonly used in understanding or explaining social or political speech, but their meanings must depend on context. As concepts they are multivariate, being made up of a conglomerate of different uses in different language games. This non-essentialist nature means that there is no singular theory or method of interpretation that can disregard context. Arguing for these premises, Pitkin propounds a contextualist theory of meaning. For her, context plays an essential role in determining both interpretation and acceptable projections into new meanings. “Sometimes what makes a context suitable for [a word’s] use will be a characteristic feeling we experience, sometimes certain behaviour on someone else’s part, sometimes a commitment we are willing to undertake, but always against a background of suitable surrounding circumstances.”<sup>15</sup> And suitability relies on contexts that are, “recognizable as fully natural, ordinary use.”<sup>16</sup> Following Pitkin’s example of the use of the concept of ‘all’, we can be rightfully suspicious of a person’s ability to use language if she questioned our claim that we have ‘eaten all of an apple’ or ‘smoked all of a cigarette’ on the basis that we had not eaten the apple core or smoked the cigarette filter. Her usage of the word ‘all’ transgresses the regular ways our form of life eats apples and smokes cigarettes. We would be very surprised for example, that having given someone else an order to eat an apple, that they would eat the core as well. We do not expect it either of ourselves or others. Our interlocutor would be speaking

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pg. 69.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pg. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pg. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pg. 78.



outside our customary language games; her application of the word ‘all’ makes almost no sense outside the customary context.

If the meaning of a social-scientifically problematic concept like ‘mean’ is non-essentialist and is made up of various cases of use in various contexts which are not truly analogous to each other, then the different meanings of the concept need not be mutually consistent. The same concept may have contradictory implications in different contexts or language games. And Pitkin believes that it is these contradictory implications which give rise to the classic conceptual problems in social and political studies, creating paradoxes that seem irresolvable. Pitkin illustrates this with an epistemological discussion analysing what it means to ‘know’, using the analytical tools discussed so far. She begins by noting the form of epistemological scepticism which claims that since knowledge must be knowledge of what is true (since we distinguish knowledge from belief or opinion), we do not really know anything as all knowledge is provisional and all truths are always open to revision. This form of scepticism takes a strictly formal view of the meaning of knowledge. Yet, if we look at how we ordinarily learn to use the word ‘know’, we apply it customarily to all sorts of notions which are inherently fallible. And Pitkin’s claim as an ordinary language philosopher is that, “[t]he ordinary, fallible occasions on which we claim to know things define what knowledge is, so they cannot, in general, fail to be knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> This is the same paradox that often has us flailing when we note for instance, that ‘strictly speaking’, nothing is really ‘permanent’ because nothing is truly eternal and yet we continue to use the term in ordinary contexts. Here, Pitkin has identified two conflicting uses of the same concept. The target of scepticism is the strictly formal one, which seems incompatible with the more ‘tolerant’ ordinary use. “Our ordinary ways of operating with that family of words just do include both of these facts, contradictory as they may seem: that we claim to know only (or mostly?) in fallible, human situations, but that we say in retrospect someone didn’t know if what he said turns out to be false.”<sup>18</sup> But as long as we treat words like ‘knowledge’ strictly as labels, we see such results as a paradox in which only one side can be correct, instead of a duality, where both are correct in their respective contexts.

It is with this deeper understanding of contradictions in our concepts that Pitkin deduces the fundamental thesis underlying most of her substantive theorizing in *Wittgenstein and Justice*: That, “[t]he apparent gap is bridged by our act of speaking, by our authority in speaking, by our commitment.”<sup>19</sup> Just as with the case of the concept of ‘understand’ above, to say, “We know,” is not a performative as saying so is not sufficient for us really knowing. But just as with that case above, when we say, “We know,” we are asking for the confidence of others, we are making a commitment to be relied upon in the future. We are giving our word that what we say is true. Of course, what we say might turn out to be false, but for ordinary, practical reasons, we give our word nonetheless. We give our word so that that piece of knowledge can be depended upon and we can move on with our lives, as it were. At base, what Pitkin is trying to argue is that there is no real gap at all that *needs* to be bridged, between different language games or between signalling and labelling functions of words. If words were always merely labels, then the concern for contradiction would be real, but if words are also often tools, then the contradictions should not be surprising. For the goal or function of one activity can be contrary to the goal or function of another without logical contradiction. The failure that sets up conceptual puzzles such as these is not the failure to identify the ‘real’ definition of a word and to stop speaking in our ordinary,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pg. 87.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pg. 87.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pg. 88.

everyday ways. Following Wittgenstein, Pitkin argues that this type of puzzlement happens when we abstract definitions or rules of grammar out of particular cases (analysing language while it is idling) and then not understand why they should be mutually inconsistent. Of course, to do this sort of abstraction, which is a sort of naïve induction, is useful in other facets of life. Pitkin simply argues that when it comes to understanding what people mean when they speak, it is a wrongheaded approach. And since it is the approach which is questionable and not the substantive claims themselves, Pitkin's strategy is to give those interested in social and political studies a synoptic view of human language and activity, a perspicuous representation. She claims that she will introduce nothing new, but will proceed simply by rearranging what we already know, thereby dissolving a puzzle that was merely a mirage.

### **Understanding What People Do**

In social and political studies, we are not only concerned with what people say but with what they do as well. Of course, we have already seen that Pitkin has followed Wittgenstein in taking language as part of human activity, but the fact remains that we do not treat all human activity equally; we do not treat all human activity as human action, as opposed to mere behaviour. At base, Pitkin's discussion on human action is animated by the claim of political theorists before her such as Peter Winch that the subject matter of social and political studies is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. If this difference in kind means that human action is irreducible to natural physical events, then they conclude that a science of the social and political is quite wrongheaded if not impossible. Once again, Pitkin's analysis revolves around positivistic explanation in social science and the objections to it, but as we shall see, though her solution is in a similar vein to her dissolution of conceptual puzzles in language as discussed above, her opposition to positivism here is not quite as severe.

To begin, Pitkin rightly notes that as it stands, there exists in the field of social science a variety of different classifications regarding action by different authors. Most often action is thought of as opposed to behaviour, sometimes it is treated as a subset of behaviour. Sometimes the category of behaviour is dispensed with altogether, and the distinction is made between 'meaningful' action and actions in general. At other times, the term action is not used at all as authors prefer to speak of causal explanations as being distinct from purposive explanations. Pitkin goes on to argue that many of these distinctions are not identical. "The real problem is not the existence of all this ambiguity and complexity; that is not the writers' fault, but lies in the nature of our language. The real problem is that these writers sometimes seem to be oblivious of the complexity, insensitive to the difficulties it creates, and therefore unaware of the uncontrolled ways in which it dominates their own investigations."<sup>20</sup> Thus, even though some of these scholars, especially Winch, invoke arguments from Wittgenstein, Pitkin believes that their reasoning is flawed and their study of Wittgenstein incomplete. They take Wittgenstein to be offering a clear solution to the problem, when Pitkin believes as she did in the discussion above, that Wittgenstein shows that contradiction is natural and is in this case if not in the last, quite unavoidable. The problem is proposing a singular solution to a problem that will not admit to one.

While the authors who oppose positivistic explanation of action vary in their influences, in general terms, they make similar arguments about action. While they all take action to be central to the subject matter of social and political studies, they argue that it cannot be studied in

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pg. 158.

a scientific manner. That is to say that human action cannot be studied in a linear and causal manner. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, Pitkin takes Peter Winch as her main opponent in her argument. For Winch, actions are qualitatively different from behaviour because action is rule-governed and therefore actions have the potential of going wrong. Using Wittgenstein's arguments about rule-following, Winch argued that making mistakes follows logically from following a rule.<sup>21</sup> Since action is purposive activity, it can succeed or fail, can be well or badly done. Physical objects as causal agents cannot succeed or fail because they are not purposive. This is because, as Winch argued, physical objects exist independently of concepts, they pre-exist concepts, but actions are intentional and therefore for actions, concepts are prior to the physical event involved. For human agents to perform actions such as commanding or obeying, they must already possess the concepts of commands and obedience. Winch gives us the example of voting, where the act of voting and the act of putting a non-symbolic mark on a piece of paper are observationally identical. What makes a particular act an act of voting are the conventions surrounding representative politics and the subject's intention of following those conventions, whose concepts she must understand. That is, the subject must understand what it means to vote and had indeed intended to vote, in order to be counted as carrying out the action of voting.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, in claiming that action is entirely incompatible with scientific explanation, Winch holds two main theses that many other interpretivist theorists of his time share: that action *must* be described in the subject's own concepts and that action concepts are logically incompatible with causal explanation. Taking this as an exemplar of such interpretivist arguments about human action, Pitkin criticises Winch even though he explicitly claims to derive his social theory from Wittgenstein's later work. Pitkin criticises his theory for being too singular while a properly Wittgensteinian answer, according to her, would be multivariate, involving the social context but also the quasi-performative quality of attributing action to people.<sup>23</sup> For Pitkin, both of Winch's main theses depend on a strong intentionalist position, but she believes that a more faithful Wittgensteinian analysis would only support a weak intentionalist stance on human action, and only much weaker versions of both theses can be defended.

Winch's first thesis depends on three supporting arguments: i) that the subject's own conception of what she is doing defines what she is doing, ii) that conventions regulating a particular language region define actions in that region and iii) that the conventions of a particular culture define actions in that culture. Pitkin argues that all of these three supporting arguments are incorrect.

For the first supporting argument, Pitkin believes that this view is too narrow and ignores the whole gamut of human language games where the various activities involve different levels of privileging the self-conception of the actor. Sometimes we attribute to an activity the action which the actor had in mind or else we would say the act was accidental or mistaken. However, at other times, when for example the actor is inebriated, neurotic or obtuse, we still sometimes attribute action to them even though we presume they did not know what they were doing at the time – we would still identify those acts as actions because we hold the actors responsible for them. Then, there are also times when we attribute action to acts which have inadvertent macro-effects, such as changing the course of history or changing social patterns. Additionally, Pitkin

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<sup>21</sup> Winch, Peter. *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1965) pg. 32.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 49.

<sup>23</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 245.

also points out that certain action concepts have the relevant judgments built into their grammar. For instance, we usually attribute intention to the act of lying, but we can deceive others unintentionally. The same is famously true of the concepts of murdering and killing. Pitkin suggests that the requirement of the actor's own concepts for identifying action forms a continuum, where in general, the more the act is like mere behaviour, the less that the actor's own concepts matter and the more abstract the act or the more tied up it is with social conventions, the more the actor's intentions matter. But even more generally, Pitkin asserts that, action concepts do not simply rely on their obvious results or internal psychic events, but have meaning only in appropriate social contexts, that is, in appropriate language games where they find their home. "Neither intentions nor observed results are a priori definitive of action."<sup>24</sup> So it is not that intentions and self-conceptions are never or always essentially relevant. Sometimes they are and sometimes they are not, which means that they are *potentially* relevant and so cannot be ignored without looking at the context, even if the self-conceptions are not used in the final assessment. To limit social and political studies only to actions which are self-conscious and deliberate would dismiss as irrelevant as large swathe of potentially relevant human activity, where the dividing line between action and mere behaviour is not even clear. Pitkin believes that Winch and others like him have not considered the plurality of possible examples in positing their strong-intentionalist theories.

Arguing against the second of Winch's supporting arguments, Pitkin takes Winch's example of the Publican and Pharisee, in which Winch claims that the question of whether both persons are praying is a question that can only be answered as a question in the religious realm of discourse.<sup>25</sup> Prior to even the self-conceptions of the subjects, Winch believes that the language region of religion sets its own conventions about what prayer is and so the determination of what action the subjects are executing must also refer to the conventions of the relevant language region. Pitkin objects by arguing that other language regions can (and routinely) address the same questions. There are no clear dividing lines between language regions and we should not assert that there are. Psychology, law, economics and anthropology all have their own answers to the question of what the Pharisee and the Publican are doing. And yet, one cannot say that the different answers are always mutually incompatible, such that we must choose only one. One might be praying and expressing a legal right at the same time. The only *a priori* wrong answer, according to Pitkin, is the one that claims to be the only alternative to the self-conception of the actors.<sup>26</sup> The conventions of any single language region are not necessarily definitive in attributing action. Again, Pitkin argues against Winch by pointing out the plurality of possible answers that Winch seems to have ignored.

As for the third of Winch's supporting arguments, Pitkin notes that it is more likely that we make incorrect judgments on action when describing the activities of very different cultures from our own, yet, she does not believe that the actor's self-conceptions, even as embedded in her own cultural practices are definitive. It is true that in cases like these, we often find ourselves depending on the subject's own self-conception, but our judgments in the form of translations to our own culture and beliefs are not always out of order. Take the example of throwing seeds on fertile ground. The subjects involved might insist that they are performing a religious ceremony yet we might want to say that they are planting seeds for future harvest. It is not entirely clear that we would be wrong or that it could not be that both sides are right. In other situations, it

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pg. 256.

<sup>25</sup> Winch, *Social Science*, pg. 87.

<sup>26</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 257.

could also be the case that there might be something wrong with either side. Taking Winch's own example about rain dances, would one say that another culture was 'making rain' or 'engaged in a magic ritual designed to make rain'?<sup>27</sup> The first characterization would commit us to believing that they can actually make rain as such, but the second would commit us to a reality that is false to the subjects' world. In this example, there seems to be no neutral ground. The social or political scholar will have to choose between privileging the subject's intentions and the objective results of their activity. So to Pitkin, much depends on the specific example being discussed. Sometimes, the other culture's activity can be translated to analogous terms in our own. Sometimes they cannot and the translated interpretation is qualitatively different. Yet what they are doing can sometimes be truthfully spoken of in either way, sometimes in both ways. Again, Pitkin argues that to limit oneself to one answer here is to ignore the multiplicity of cases we must take into account when it comes to human action.

For Pitkin, just like many mental concepts as discussed in the previous section, action concepts are also partly a product of quasi-performative functions – we do not use them exclusively in formal terms. As such, the grammar regulating their use is also filled with contradictions. Sometimes we can indeed be objective and detached about our subject matter, but often not because action concepts also often carry the quasi-performative implications of commitments and responsibilities. Hence, "[t]hey work well in context, in particular cases: but anyone attempting to articulate broad, general, abstract principles about the nature of promises, obedience, voting, and the like will encounter conceptual puzzlement and paradox. Anyone attempting to study such phenomena scientifically, through empirical observation, will be troubled by the problem of just what phenomena count as instances of promises, obedience, voting, roughly in the way that Thrasymachus and Socrates are at odds over what counts as an instance of justice."<sup>28</sup> Unlike both the positivists and theorists such as Winch, Pitkin does not assume that if a subject matter is not entirely objective like natural science, then it must therefore be entirely subjective. "Action concepts are neither purely labels nor purely performatives."<sup>29</sup>

Pitkin takes a similar approach against the more basic interpretivist thesis that action concepts are logically incompatible with causal explanation. She argues that the thesis is incorrect, but does not offer an alternative singular thesis. Instead, Pitkin shows us that the contradictory grammars surrounding action do not admit to any singular explanatory thesis, for even though we often explain actions in terms of intentions and motives, Pitkin reminds us that we also often simply explain in causal terms. She argues that this is not just the result of a careless habit of speech but a clue to a much more complex reality. Pitkin says that we speak this way because causation is sometimes relevant to actions even though she thinks that all actions do indeed have agents. In general, Pitkin believes that the problem of action's compatibility with causal explanation is simply the modern formulation of the problem of free will, the latest iteration of a millennia-old conceptual puzzle. While today, scientific causality has replaced the determinism of an omnipotent God, the puzzle of action's compatibility with causation is also a question of whether we can have freedom in a causally determined world. Despite what science says, we all have the phenomenological evidence of free will and we still also hold people responsible for at least some of their actions, so it is our practice to imply free choice.

Yet, the determinist argument has seemingly strong arguments on its side. Actions can be explained and sometimes predicted in causal terms. Even when others have the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pg. 258.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pg. 261.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pg. 262.

phenomenological feeling of free choice in executing an action, we are free to say without self-contradiction that they made that choice in a given situation that is a result of who they are at the moment, which is the sum of all their earlier choices and experiences. We often use causal explanation for contexts where either the subject's choice is minimal or our interest in their self-conception is minimal, for example, when we are looking at the social or historical significance of an action. We also use causal explanations when trying to predict and perhaps therefore to manipulate others. While interpretivists claim that the concept of prediction is incompatible with the concept of action, to Pitkin, it is obvious that we ordinarily attempt to predict action all the time. We are of course not always successful, but it is not certain that a low success rate proves logical incompatibility.

Pitkin's strategy here is not to deny that there is a puzzle, but to explain where the puzzle comes from and to consequently deny that the puzzle can be resolved by singular answers. She argues that the conflict here is not between the grammar of the concept of action and the grammar of the concept of causation but lies in the internal contradictions in the grammars of each.<sup>30</sup> And so a Wittgensteinian approach to this puzzle will uncover that problems we face when we try to generalize about concepts which have inherent contradictions. The abstracted rules or generalities will obviously be laden with contradictions themselves. So to take on the issue of prediction, the real confusion comes from generalizing from different contradictory parts of the grammar of prediction. The issue is not why predicting people is far more uncertain than predicting the movement of the planets but that why we expect the exact same end results when the two activities come from inherently different language games. They are neither entirely the same or entirely different, so no general theory of prediction can treat them as either. The grammar of the concept of prediction is made up of both types of cases even if they are not mutually consistent. The same is true of the grammar of action, which has both causal and purposive parts, even though the language games they come from are mutually inconsistent. "So the problem for social science is not that prediction and causation do not apply to actions, or that objectivity is impossible, but that these concepts apply to actions in distinctive ways, ways which give rise to conceptual difficulties when we try to generalize about them."<sup>31</sup>

The question of choice or free will then, is at least partly dependent of the position of the observer and the particular context of observation, but this does not mean that any context or position is definitive. It does mean however, that to generalize across all positions and contexts will not fully make sense. To say flatly that we do have free will, or flatly that we are always causally determined is to speak confusedly, because when we talk about action we take the concepts of free will and pre-determination from broad conceptual categories and apply them to very specific contexts or examples. We know how to go about judging in particular cases whether an action was free or not free, but we have no way of generalizing our judgment. "The criteria by which we ordinarily distinguish cannot be the ones by which *all* actions are seen as causally determined."<sup>32</sup> So, our determinist supposition makes some sense, but it doesn't make total sense. We are not aware of the full implications of our supposition of total freedom or total pre-determination.

So for Pitkin, the mutually exclusive choice between free will and pre-determination, between purposive and causal explanation is a false choice. We need to both predict and have the ability to causally influence other people in both small and large social scales. But we also need

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pg. 267.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pg. 268.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pg. 271.

to make commitments, hold each other responsible and decide what to do as individual actors. We need both the phenomenological and scientific explanations. This claim of course, goes against the general tide of social science theory which supposes, in the fashion of positivistic natural science, that particular explanations about particular actions can be generalized because in each case, there lays implicit “general explanatory principles which can be made explicit and systematic”.<sup>33</sup> That is, if you explain the particular, it can be generalized for the mass. But Pitkin argues that Wittgenstein’s work warns against this and in this matter, she takes his call for second order philosophizing very seriously. No first order theory here is possible for Pitkin as the question of free will is a conceptual matter with inherent contradictions and not an empirical one. Neither free will nor pre-determinism are empirical facts of the world. Both are concepts which are deeply embedded in our conceptual system, whose foundations are our human form of life. And this foundation has never guaranteed internal consistency. “What Wittgenstein tries to show is that not merely the possible answers to that question [of free will], but the question itself is necessarily framed in language, and that, therefore, no matter how insistently it tries to get beyond words to the reality of facts, it remains dependent on the meanings of its concepts. What the questioner wants to know is not unambiguous, even if it feels perfectly clear to him.”<sup>34</sup>

### Understanding Social Reality

While Hanna Pitkin has argued against the interpretivists for a place for objectivity in social and political studies, her readers could be excused for thinking that her idea of objectivity is not quite the same as many other commentators. For what Pitkin thinks of as objectivity, is understandably enough, not based on a modernist-positivist understanding of the world and how we experience it – such as that that can be found in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Following Wittgenstein’s later work in the *Investigations*, Pitkin expresses post-analytic views that take a skeptical attitude towards positivist ontology and epistemology. We have already seen how she refuses to take sides in the causal-purposive explanatory dichotomy and how for her, words are neither flatly labels nor flatly signals but a menagerie of different compositions thereof. Following Wittgenstein’s later work, language for her does not have a one-to-one denotative link with the world, but is made up of many different kinds of uses – a variety that resists generalization. So naturally, “if many words are wholly or partly signals rather than labels, if their grammar is often internally inconsistent in its implications, then the matter of “what they refer to” becomes seriously problematical.”<sup>35</sup> If the meaning of words and the determination of action is contextual and dependent on the language games they find their home in, then Pitkin cannot depend on a modernist-positivist understanding of objectivity that grounds our language and actions (and therefore also our social reality) in simple correlations with the physical world. Her understanding of objectivity in social and political studies has to be one where there is interdependence between words and the world. And this, as we will see, will lead her to argue for revision in how social and political studies operationalize concepts for use in its commentary.

At base, Hanna Pitkin’s general ontology follows from her Wittgensteinian epistemology that claims that there is no such thing as a pure experience of the world where prior conceptual categories play no part in our cognition. In other words, our experiences are never fully objective in the modernist-positivist sense, but are always value-laden. She forwards a simple example

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pg. 269.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pg. 273.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pg. 99.

from Paul Ziff's ordinary language analysis about corpses and cadavers.<sup>36</sup> In the example, Ziff argues that corpses and cadavers are two different concepts even though they refer to the same physical object. They are different because they are used in different contexts. But this, argues Pitkin, makes them two different *things*. For even though the words refer to the same unchanging context-less physical object, there is really no neutral third way to talk about the object because there is no way for us to genuinely strip context from our human language. "If such terms were merely labels, obviously they would all refer to the same thing; since they are not, what they refer to in the world is problematical."<sup>37</sup> To elaborate further, Pitkin brings in the work of ethnographers such as Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, whose works she believes, give much empirical support to Wittgenstein's post-analytic views. By comparing our experience as English speakers to speakers of other 'exotic' languages, it does very much seem that, "what a people considers as part of "the world" depends very much on that people's language."<sup>38</sup> The differences in different languages seem very much dependent on the conventions that they have, and the different conventions that different people have, frame the world in different ways. And further, there is no such thing as a 'frameless' world.

Nevertheless, while our experiences are always value-laden, we should neither take Pitkin nor Wittgenstein as relativists. Pitkin's claim to objectivity in social studies is based on the dissolution of the objective-subjective dichotomy and not a reinforcement of it. To Pitkin, recognition that experiences and language are value-laden is only half the issue, for she does believe in an independent external world, where knowledge of human convention and language games alone are insufficient in knowing the world. The slogan, "to know how to use the word 'anger' is to know what anger is" alone will not do. For even though supposing that one can only learn what a word means by experiencing what it denotes is to stay enthralled by the 'picture' theory of language, to say that we can learn the complete meaning of a word which refers to phenomena we have not yet experienced is to ignore the ordinary ways in which experiential knowledge often adds to our understanding. "Our conceptual system depends both on what we have learned to say and on what we have experienced; and both these dimensions expand as we learn and grow, though differently for different words and not in any strict one-to-one correlation."<sup>39</sup>

The point of the introduction of the empirical research by Sapir and Whorf is not to be understood in thoroughly relativistic terms as it also supports, according to Pitkin, much of what Wittgenstein says about how we learn about language and the world at the same time. She argues, "Despite the illuminating parallels, Wittgenstein propounds no doctrine of linguistic determinism like that of Whorf, but attempts to hold a dialectical balance between the mutual influences of language and the world." Like Wittgenstein, Pitkin attempts to hold that dialectical balance in her work and although she argues for the 'objectivity' of the social sciences, she admits that her social ontology does not allow for a, "singular, consistent answer,"<sup>40</sup> for social sciences' epistemological questions. For her, as it is for Wittgenstein, "the world is necessarily both objective and subjective, both independent of language and structured by language."<sup>41</sup> Thus, for Pitkin, the objects of our world are not to be divided neatly between the objective and

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<sup>36</sup> See Ziff, Paul. *Semantic Analysis*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), pg. 211.

<sup>37</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 100.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 102.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 111.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 114.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 113.



subjective parts of the traditional dichotomy, but they form a long continuum. While things like stepsisters, trumps or mistakes are not there in the world like elephants are, and are therefore not as amenable to an empirical investigation as opposed to a conceptual one, they are not thoroughly created by language use. So while, “the determining and limiting role of concepts on what is perceived as reality, will generally be most intensive with respect to human, social, cultural, and political things,”<sup>42</sup> the conceptual analysis we use will not be thoroughly subjective and relativistic because even if minimally, our words depend on the world.

Even though the meaning of our concepts is not determined by denotative links to objects but rather by the language games they belong to, “our playing those language games rather than others is the result neither of accident nor of arbitrary free choice. It is the result of what the world in which we live is like, and what we are like, what we naturally feel and do.”<sup>43</sup> The grammar of our language comes from what Wittgenstein calls our ‘form of life’, for language games are part of our natural history as a species on this planet. As Pitkin observes, “human life as we live and observe it is not just a random, continuous flow, but displays recurrent patterns, regularities, characteristic ways of doing and being, of feeling and acting, of speaking and interacting.”<sup>44</sup> Still, while our form of life is the bottommost foundation of our language games and cannot itself be justified but merely accepted, our form of life is no guarantee that our concepts will never change. And this returns us to Pitkin’s post-analytic views, for this epistemological dependence on our form of life also means that there is no strict dividing line between synthetic and analytic propositions. As Pitkin argues, there is no general dividing line between what we mean by the word ‘chair’ and all the other things we know about chairs.<sup>45</sup> No proposition is intrinsically a definition and when a sufficient number of propositions about ‘chair’ change, that is, if enough facts about our form of life change, the entire concept must change too or the language games it usually figures in would lose their point.

With this post-analytical epistemology having heavy bearing on Pitkin’s ontology, it does not come as a surprise that one of the most basic underpinnings of her social ontology is a denial of the fact-value dichotomy. This picture of how things populate the world is so pervasive today that it is assumed in almost all academies around the world, which is why this line of argument is one of Pitkin’s most notable substantive contributions to the social sciences. After all, university students learn early in their academic careers that Hume proved that ‘is’ does not imply ‘should’. Following her Wittgensteinian arguments about objectivity and subjectivity above, Pitkin does not argue that facts and values are the same thing or that there are no such things as facts or values, but only that the distinction is “not an accurate or useful way to dichotomize either our utterances or the world.” The fact-value dichotomy is as valid and as useful as the dichotomy between “herrings and fruit.”<sup>46</sup> They are obviously different things, but so different that they are not really compatible enough to form any sort of useful dimension in social studies. If one tried, one could shoehorn everything to fit into the dichotomy, but as Pitkin argues, it would not be enlightening.

Pitkin, takes as her main opponent in this matter, Charles L. Stevenson<sup>47</sup>, who divides values from facts by noting that value judgments have an extra component containing an

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pg. 115.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pg. 122.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pg. 132.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pg. 135.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pg. 219.

<sup>47</sup> See Stevenson, Charles L.. *Ethics and Language*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

imperative mode. That is, by saying something is ‘good’, we are not only commenting on its virtues, but also imputing our approval and desire that others do the same. Yet, as we saw above, Pitkin’s ontology does not permit a clean separation between the objective and subjective and all our concepts are to some extent value-laden. Words such as ‘good’ are part of our language and are regulated by the language games they are part of, just like any other. And just like any other words, value terms are at the same time created by and given to us, so that they are no more subjective than other words in the sense that their meanings is not really up for any individual to decide. “The truth is...that no word is by nature “expressive” or “evaluative” or “factual” or “objective””<sup>48</sup> Following Wittgenstein, words indeed have no nature apart from how they are used in particular language games. Of course some words are more often used in language games that are tied to emotions, self-expression and values, but firstly, this does not imbue special status to those words and secondly, other kinds of words can be used in this way as well. “Thus to study esthetic judgment, one must concentrate “not on the words ‘good’ or ‘beautiful’...but on the occasions on which they are said.”<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, the positivist social scholar may argue that the fact-value dichotomy does not classify individual words or concepts per se, but propositions, where those which are based on how the world is, are factual, while those that based on how the speaker is, are value-laden and subjective. Pitkin would reply however, that, “[a]n individual’s values are one thing; the conceptual system of his language, complete with its implications for judgment and commitment, is quite another.”<sup>50</sup> Pitkin, uses an example from G.E.M. Anscombe<sup>51</sup> that tells the story of how if one has received groceries and have not paid for them, one owes the grocer money and has an obligation to pay. To Anscombe, the obligation of debt is a fact, stemming from the meanings of the words ‘bought’, ‘not paid’ and ‘owe’. For Pitkin, it is the commitment inherent in the act of speaking those words, that is, inherent in their signaling functions, which brings about the obligation. And while scholars like John Searle would call them ‘institutional facts’<sup>52</sup> that only exist in the realm of human institutions and conventions, Pitkin finds it difficult to deny that they are facts, or to classify them as values, for following Wittgenstein, she is wary of the desire to separate the labeling and signaling functions of words. This example goes some way in explaining how the Humean inability to derive ought from is, is a conceptual puzzle that is ultimately a false problem, for if words and concepts cannot be classified into a strict dichotomy like ‘facts and values’, for we cannot legitimately separate their labelling and signalling functions, then there is really no gap for our puzzled minds to fill. If there is no dichotomy, then no derivation is required in the first place. Nevertheless, that does not mean we cannot question conventional obligations or institutions, but when we do, we are questioning the concept and the institution as a whole, not merely the ‘value’ component. We are asking not whether the concept of owing carries imperative implications but whether we must have the institution of debt.

Of course, the positivist social scholar may reply that arguments from language and what people indeed say and do does not tell us about the cold hard reality of the case. The point of the fact-value dichotomy is to divide those things that have hard, often external, evidence to back them, and those things where the speaker is not entitled to claim the truth of in a categorical manner. Institutional facts have no foundation outside in the real world. Pitkin’s reply continues

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<sup>48</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 223.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 224.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 225.

<sup>51</sup> See Anscombe, G.E.M. “On Brute Facts”, in *Analysis*, 18 (January 1958), pp. 69-72.

<sup>52</sup> See Searle, John. “How to Derive ‘Ought’ from ‘Is’”, in *Philosophical Review*, LXXIII (January 1964), pp. 43-58.

her Wittgensteinian epistemology in giving a levelling treatment to all types of human discourse. She argues that standards of objectivity and rationality work differently in different realms of discourse and because of this, “[t]he fact that we speak differently about art than about physical events is not proof that esthetic discourse is less objective than scientific discourse.”<sup>53</sup> When we say ethics or aesthetics are subjective and arbitrary, we are incorrectly and inappropriately comparing them to science. We must look and see how these things actually work in each realm. Pitkin argues, much in the way of Thomas Kuhn and Peter Winch, that science is idealised and is not what we commonly think it is. “Even in science and mathematics there are assumptions and conventions guaranteed only by our commitment to them, the way we use them.”<sup>54</sup> There is no universal agreement even in science and deviant positions are not impossible. But just as in any other type of discourse, when science gets the wrong answer to a question, we do not lose faith that there are right answers in this realm of discourse. These commitments are part of what we call ‘science’. Following Wittgenstein, Pitkin argues that what makes a proof a proof is the language game that we play with it. A proof does not merely show that something is the truth but demonstrates in a perspicuous way, *how* it is the truth. The language game does not dictate that majority rules per se, but that anyone who dissents from the proof is judged to be incompetent in the field.

So, whether it is in science, or any one of the ‘value theory’ discourses, when we speak in a categorical manner, we do not do so with access to transcendent, superhuman standards or judges. We have no access to those. Even science and math are not based on absolute unchallengeable standards. All language regions are ultimately based on the fallibility of men who have to write all the rules and come up with all the answers themselves. When we speak in a categorical manner, we are instead announcing, “what attitude we are prepared to take towards those who disagree with us, what kind of support we would be able to muster for our assertion if challenged, how we regard that assertion and intend to use it, how it is to be used and considered by others.”<sup>55</sup> If we cannot support our position, we pay a price and the price is different in each language region, but the difference lies in the different ways we operate in different language regions, not in the difference in access to transcendental evidence or authority. Pitkin concludes that the differences among language regions are plural and not dichotomous. The differences between mathematics and science and between ethics and esthetics are also large and interesting. “Lumping all of these different realms of discourse into two great classes really obscures instead of clarifying.”<sup>56</sup>

Given this post-analytic epistemology, Pitkin’s objection to naïve scientism in social and political studies goes deep. While she does not, unlike certain social scholars, object altogether to studying people, some of the time, the way we study physical phenomena, she does however still object to positivism’s influence in stripping social studies of its concepts, values or human commitments. In the thrall of the traditional fact-value dichotomy, positivist social scientists tend to believe that they can gain precision and exactitude in their field by confining their work to ‘value-free’ subject matter. Pitkin’s idea of social studies, however, is a holistic one that includes causes and reasons, events and concepts, despite the vagueness or contradictions inherent in such a view. Anything else risks an incomplete view of social reality. To her, a hypothetical, concept-free observer of people will not see, “promises or decisions or power or interests or organization

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<sup>53</sup> Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, pg. 236.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pg. 237.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pg. 239.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pg. 240.

or war or worship; for none of these phenomena strike the naked, concept-free eye.”<sup>57</sup> He will not see anything that is shaped by the quasi-performative quality of language games, and therefore perceive nothing more than a mere caricature of social reality.

Yet, despite the positivist slant of much of contemporary social science, Pitkin notes that positivistic social science has not in fact tried to strip itself of all concepts, but has instead tried to, “fiddle with the concepts we already have in such a way as to make them scientifically usable,”<sup>58</sup> that is, to ‘operationalize’ social scientific concepts. Positivists have tried to do this by attempting to strip the value component of concepts by ‘sticking to the facts’, as it were, or where they feel they cannot, by inventing new, technical concepts wholesale. These attempts do not impress Pitkin, who feels that they are not only imprecise, but at base, misguided. Close, to her, is not close enough, for these ‘scientific’, ‘realistic’ and ‘factual’ terms often turn out to be as grammatically complex as the ‘value terms’ the positivists were trying to avoid. Also, if the new operational term is not grammatically related to the original ‘value term’, then any analysis using the new term will not give us any satisfactory information about the original one. The positivists assume incorrectly that their ‘value-free’, ‘scientific’ terms function only as labels; they ignore at their own peril, the signaling functions for standards and commitments that many of their operationalized terms inadvertently still carry. Of course, Pitkin is not the first to notice something like this and a number of other social scholars have made similar objections without using the work of either Wittgenstein or Austin. Nevertheless, Pitkin believes that such anti-positivist objections are incomplete and imprecise without the language of labels and signals or the denotative and the quasi-performative that Wittgenstein and Austin can provide.

Pitkin’s Wittgensteinian and Austinian approach is exemplified in her analysis of two key social scientific terms: ‘power’ and ‘legitimacy’. In both cases, she analyses by looking at how the word is used and not what it is a label for. Firstly, for ‘power’, she notes that it is a capacity or a potential and so the positivist social scientific tradition of studying power in its exercise limits us to the study of only its effects. For Pitkin, power must also be assessed independent of its actual manifestation. She continues by arguing that the ordinary usage of ‘power’ also tells us that, contrary to traditional social science, it is not a relational concept. What this means is that contrary to traditional social science which regards power as only the power one has over another, ordinary discourse also uses the term ‘power’ with regards to its consequences; power is not only power ‘over’ but also power ‘to’. Nevertheless, Pitkin saves her main criticism for the common practice in social science of not distinguishing power from related but not identical concepts like, ‘influence’, ‘control’ or ‘authority’. Many social scientists regard this practice as legitimate because the differences among these terms are sufficiently small, but clearly Pitkin regards this as intellectually lazy and unwise. It would be unwise even if the terms are purely used as labels, but since they also have signaling functions, this practice of conflating them can have disastrous and unpredictable effects. “The trouble clearly is that terms like ‘power’ and ‘influence’ are not labels for mutually exclusive categories of phenomena, like ‘gorillas’ and ‘elephants’.”<sup>59</sup> The grammars of wide terms like these are internally complex, owing to the fact that they are played in many different language games. This, just like the example of the concept of causation discussed above, allows for contradictory implications and inferences. With composite natures, these concepts do not have perfectly delineated boundaries and overlap with

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pg. 274.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pg. 274.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pg. 279.

each other in places, which is easier to see when we stop asking what and start asking how or when they are used.

Secondly, for the concept of 'legitimacy', she begins by taking Max Weber as her main opponent as a positivist social scientist. Weber's work on social science concepts like 'legitimacy' and 'bureaucracy' is seminal in the field, which in part accounts for the spread of positivist thinking in social science. Weber sought to clarify social scientific terms by formulating operational redefinitions which he thought would be culturally neutral to the social scientist, whom he envisioned as a disinterested, detached observer. He argued that if a social scientific term has positive and normative meanings, the proper social scientist must use the former and cast out the latter from her research. Consequently, he defined 'legitimacy' as, "the prestige of being considered exemplary or binding,"<sup>60</sup> in that, "the legitimacy of a system of authority may be treated sociologically only as the probability that to a relevant degree the appropriate attitudes [towards the system] will exist, and the corresponding practical conduct ensue."<sup>61</sup> Clearly, Pitkin argues, this attempt at redefinition reduces the concept to just its labeling function, taking the commitment to standards away from the responsibility of the speaker, in this case the responsibility of the social scientist. Pitkin says this, because, as a quasi-performative, the concept of legitimacy is not simply an expression of taste or preference or opinion, but an invocation of standards, much like the concept of justice is, as we will see in the following chapter. But Weber's definition strips away those standards for both the subjects and the observer. His definition treats legitimacy phenomenologically with regard to the subjects, whose internal deliberations are irrelevant just as long as they behave as if the system is legitimate. Then, on the other hand, his definition is positivistic towards the social scientist, whose judgment of what legitimacy entails is treated as entirely irrelevant. Weber's definition then, is not looking for anything but acquiescence; all judgment is stripped, both the observer's and the subjects'.

This practice of operationally redefining social scientific terms in accordance with positivist notions is now widespread in the discipline in large part because of the influence of the seminal work of Max Weber, who is traditionally taken as one of sociology's founding fathers. But this attempt at neutrality is also an attempt to move social studies away from the commitment of standards inherent in the use of some concepts; to move social studies away from the substantive aspects of concepts and towards their formal meanings. To Pitkin, this misguided attempt will only generate confusion and is ultimately foolish because one cannot fully abandon the quasi-performative aspect of language. Thus, using such redefinitions will not produce consistent answers to social scientific questions that are free of inherent ambiguities and contradictions. This, suggests Pitkin, makes complex concepts like 'power' unusable as the subject of positivistic social scientific laws or universal grand hypotheses that Weber among others, had envisioned for social science.

## **Critique and Conclusion**

We have seen in this chapter, how Hanna Pitkin's social thought is heavily indebted to certain themes in the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. At base, Pitkin shares his post-analytic epistemology that treats in a holistic and leveling manner the entire range of human

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<sup>60</sup> Weber, Max. *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, translated by A. R. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, edited by Talcott Parsons (London: William Hodge, 1947), pg. 114, quoted in Pitkin, pp. 281-282.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 299, quoted in Pitkin, pg. 281.

discourse in all language regions as well as all human activity and modes of living. Following Wittgenstein, Pitkin believes that all that we do and say as human beings finds its explanatory roots in our species form of life on this earth and neither she nor Wittgenstein believes that we have special access to transcendent standards or authority. Thus, at root, Pitkin's is an anthropological epistemology, which is derived from a social ontology that is suspicious of modernist-positivist attempts to sort and sterilize the organic and messy. Everything is in order as it is, and coupling Wittgenstein with the methods of Oxonian ordinary language philosophy, Pitkin attempts to show how in detail, taking the inherent contradictions and inconsistencies in our language games into account is quite necessary for a complete social ontology. To dispense with any part in order to resolve those inconsistencies is misguided practice that will result in an incomplete picture of our social reality and therefore lead to artificial and unnecessary conceptual puzzles.

The above is what allows Pitkin to argue for objectivity in the social sciences at the same time as she recognizes the indispensable role of concepts, reasons, attitudes and commitments in social science. This, however, raises the question of whether Pitkin's social thought constitutes a first order theory or merely constitutes a perspicuous representation of social science's subject matter. While Pitkin does give us a synoptic view of the subject matter at hand, she also makes explicit prescriptions not only for the methodology of social science, but for what properly constitutes its ontology as well. While accepting vagueness and contradictions, Pitkin does make coherent supporting arguments for this accepting attitude that follows from her Wittgensteinian epistemological foundations. While her arguments are not foundationalist in the traditional manner, the anthropological basis for her arguments helps create a coherent whole that looks as complete a first-order comprehensive theory as most. And while, she claims to only take from Wittgenstein his technique for a new way of seeing, what she sees is a new social ontology that follows from his philosophical themes. Thus, while she argues against many modernist tropes in the study of the social and political, she does seem to bring a modernist tendency of theory building to Wittgenstein's anthropological theory of language.

Whether the substantive implications of Wittgenstein's technique and philosophical themes as Hanna Pitkin sees them indeed constitute a theory, is a matter that will be given deeper treatment in a later chapter. For now, it suffices to note her tribute to C. Wright Mills' plea for "the sociological imagination", the ability to understand social phenomena at more than one level of analysis at a time."<sup>62</sup> It is the ability for example, to understand, how action is neither confined to observable behavior nor phenomenological experience or the ability to see how facts can be value-laden as well. Pitkin wants us, "to be both hedgehogs and foxes simultaneously,"<sup>63</sup> in order, not to be "rigidly doctrinaire"<sup>64</sup> and do full justice to the full complexity of the discipline of social science. And so perhaps her seeming attempt to combine a modernist, substantive approach with an ostensibly anti-theoretical technique requires us to have the 'philosophical imagination' to see how her work bootstraps its way out of a potentially nihilist philosophy.

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<sup>62</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 285.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 286.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 285.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Political Thought of Hanna Pitkin

We saw in the last chapter how, in her *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Hanna Pitkin provided a social studies methodology that was so radically holistic that it accepted contradictions that she argued were inherent in our lives as situated rational beings. This position followed from the postanalytic epistemology that she took from Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, while working on the methodological implications of Wittgenstein's later work on social studies, she also delineated their substantive implications, arguing that, "method often dictates content."<sup>1</sup> Into Wittgenstein's postanalytic epistemology she reads a postanalytic social ontology, based again on the situated rationality of our form of life. And as we will discuss in this chapter, she goes on to use that social ontology and social science methodology to make substantive claims about politics and the discipline of political theory. In doing so, she follows a long line of political theorists from J.S. Mill (utilitarian consequentialism) to John Rawls (Kantian deontology) in taking substantive political implications from a pre-existing philosophy. Yet, Wittgenstein's later philosophy, even if methodologically normative, had anti-theoretical tendencies. This raises two related questions: does Pitkin's work constitute a modernist theory based on a postmodernist philosophy (in so far as the later philosophy of Wittgenstein is anti-positivist and anti-formalist) and is this a philosophically legitimate approach? The second of these two questions will be dealt more centrally in the last chapter of this dissertation. Here, we will attempt to answer the first, because while Pitkin argues against a conservative reading of Wittgenstein, it is unclear whether a left republican reading of Wittgenstein is any more correct given his anti-theoretical tendencies and the fact that he made no substantive comments on politics.

#### Motivation

Using Wittgenstein's understanding of the deep structure of human social relations, Pitkin is centrally concerned with uncovering moral issues that lie hidden under sedimented social and linguistic practices – the idiomatic dirt that gets swept under the carpet. In this situation, "those in power and prestige in a society often have an interest in keeping things as they are...and they are in a position to make it to other people's interest to do so as well. Large groups of people, even whole societies, can thus come to avert their eyes from familiar but uncomfortable realities: dislocations, inconsistencies, injustice. Even victims, up to their necks in the dirt may not see it for what it is."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, for Pitkin, the political relevance and importance of Wittgenstein's later philosophy comes from its resemblance to psychoanalysis, "in that both are methods of indirection, designed to liberate their practitioners from constraints that are in some sense self-imposed,"<sup>3</sup> This will give us the opportunity to view our conventional ways of looking at political problems as only one option among many, which is important because we tend to be enthralled by conventional 'pictures' of political organization. The correct

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<sup>1</sup> Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993 [1972]), pg. xxv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. ix.

application of this indirection will, “culminate not in reconciliation to some inescapable feature of our human condition that we had yearned to flee, but rather in the political alteration of offensive social conditions that we had yearned to ignore.”<sup>4</sup> Pitkin’s approach then, echoes Stanley Cavell’s ‘conversation of justice’ which affirms the heterogeneity of human society and, “reveals spaces for political dissent from any society that does not allow for the intelligibility of all its members.”<sup>5</sup> This conversation is of course reflected in language and with Wittgenstein’s philosophy suitably directed at language Pitkin feels she can recover, “the lost realities of the past and the suppressed “dirt” of the present,”<sup>6</sup> that lay buried in our linguistic practices. For Pitkin, Wittgenstein’s method shows her how, “perfectly ordinary people,” can, “reinterpret their own tacit knowledge critically,” and how political theorists like her can join in the, “emancipatory effort”.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly then, Pitkin feels that her left republican views finds much methodological and ontological support in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy and in taking substantive political implications from a pre-existing philosophy, Pitkin is in good company; she follows a long line of political theorists from J.S. Mill (utilitarian consequentialism) to John Rawls (Kantian deontology). However, Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, even if it exemplified new investigative methods, had anti-theoretical tendencies substantively speaking. And while Pitkin admits that her studies of Wittgenstein’s political implications are nowhere near complete, she still *consistently* finds left civic republican implications from Wittgenstein’s work. *Wittgenstein and Justice*, while expressly meant only to suggest further studies, presents us with a coherent politically normative vision despite it investigating a wide range of subjects. Thus, Pitkin’s work is an unusual combination of a modernist theory-building project based on a postmodernist philosophy (in so far as the later philosophy of Wittgenstein is anti-positivist and anti-formalist). Her project is not only to give a survey of the various ways Wittgenstein’s work has value for the methods of social and political sciences, but also 1) to refute politically conservative readings of Wittgenstein and 2) to counteract the influence of positivism in the social and political sciences that results in the, “vague but persistent feeling about social science and social scientists: that they are somehow destructive or cynical, that they are somehow cowardly or reluctant to make commitments and judgments, that they are somehow intrinsically conservative and supportive of the status quo.”<sup>8</sup>

In the textual analysis to follow, we will see that although most of the direct revelations above about her leftist leanings were only published in the preface to the paperback edition, in the main text itself, Pitkin clearly couples Wittgenstein’s philosophy with left civic republican assumptions and principles. By giving us a political reading of Wittgenstein that is consonant with such Arendtian values, Pitkin sought to refute conservative readings of Wittgenstein. And, as I have shown in Chapter 3, by delineating a social scientific methodology based on Wittgenstein’s postanalytic epistemology that can give due regard to the role of moral standards in social activity, Pitkin sought to counter the conservative influence of positivism in the social sciences. This work was inspired, in large part, by the totalitarianism Pitkin witnessed spreading across the world after World War II. Evidently, her project is an anti-conservative one.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg. x.

<sup>5</sup> Heyes, Cressida J. “Introduction”, in *The Politics of Grammar: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, edited by Cressida J. Heyes, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), pg. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. xviii.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pg. xviii.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pg. 285.



The textual analysis of *Wittgenstein and Justice* to follow will allow us to identify in what manner Wittgenstein's ideas have affected Pitkin's political thought and also to identify her secondary influences and the sources of her moral commitments. Nonetheless, while Pitkin argues against a conservative reading of Wittgenstein, it is unclear whether a leftist Arendtian reading of Wittgenstein is any more correct given his anti-theoretical tendencies and the fact Pitkin leans heavily on secondary authors for her political commitments. I will consequently argue that while Wittgenstein's later philosophy does indeed have interesting implications for thinking about politics, accepting and embracing a Wittgensteinian investigative method and social ontology need not exclusively entail left civic republican views such as Pitkin's. I will do this by showing how the same method and ontology may also form coherent support for a less liberal and more multiculturalist communitarian view. I offer this alternative reading not as *the* correct political reading of later Wittgenstein, but as evidence that there is probably no *one* correct set of political values that is strictly implied by Wittgenstein's later philosophy. So while Pitkin is free to build a theory from inspiration gathered from many sources, I argue that one cannot give undue credit to any single source and therefore one cannot hold to Pitkin's suggestion that "method often dictates content"<sup>9</sup> too strongly.

## Understanding Justice

It is of course difficult to impose a linear order on the analysis of a work of which the author herself has proclaimed each substantive topic to be, "quite self-contained," and, "stemming in different directions."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless we begin our textual analysis with Pitkin's discussion on the concept of justice because it provides a foundational statement on her ideas of the standards inherent in the meaning of some concepts and subsequently, the commitment inherent in using those concepts. We have of course seen some part of these ideas in the previous chapter, but here, Pitkin's ideas about standards and commitment are more directly related to political ideals and will provide a good basis for our discussing the rest of her political thought.

Pitkin begins by introducing the familiar dialogue in Plato's *Republic* between Socrates and Thrasymachus. In it, Thrasymachus contradicts Socrates' traditional definition of the concept of justice by suggesting that justice is the interest of the stronger, that is to say, whatever it is that is called 'just' is simply that which serves the interests of the powerful in society. Socrates' simplified definition on the other hand, vague and circular as it may seem, is that justice is every person doing what is appropriate to her as an individual member of a collective. Pitkin is correct to point out that this dialogue is an iconic one in the history of political theory and has many times been taken as an exemplar of the fundamental problem of incommensurable arguments in moral and political discourse. "[T]hey disagree *so* fundamentally that they do not really *disagree* at all. Rather, they seem to be addressing and answering different questions, and their arguments never really meet."<sup>11</sup> While Socrates seems to be trying to tell us what the word 'justice' means, Thrasymachus seems to be "making a kind of sociological observation about things which people call "just" or "unjust"."<sup>12</sup> While Socrates seems to be trying to tell us how the word 'justice' is defined in our language, Thrasymachus seems to be challenging the traditional definition and making what we might today call a Marxist critique.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pg. xxv.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pg. 169.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pg. 170.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pg. 170.

Pitkin's motivation here is ostensibly to show how disagreements like this can genuinely meet using Wittgensteinian and ordinary language analyses, because on the face of it, this argument is reminiscent of her treatment of the concept of action. Socrates seems to represent the interpretivist approach, trying to understand people through an understanding of their own concepts and intentions, while Thrasymachus seems to represent the positivist approach which is deeply suspicious of the subjects' self-conceptions and advocates explanation by social forces which the subjects may never have been conscious of. In the case of action, we saw that Pitkin argued for an acceptance of the irresolvable differences between causal and purposive explanations, arguing for a 'peaceful co-existence'. In that case, she argued that both sides can be right at the same time, albeit for different purposes and in answering different questions. When we make purposive explanations, we are signalling commitments that we do not when we are making causal explanations. In this case, if we concern ourselves with only the labelling function of the word 'justice', then Thrasymachus and Socrates may be addressing the same question after all and are having a real disagreement about which both cannot be right. In which case, it is unlikely that people can in fact be brought up to think that fulfilling the interests of the powerful *is* exactly what is appropriate for everyone to do. Nevertheless, as Pitkin notes, this debate has survived the ages because Thrasymachus seems to have something very powerful to say. This returns us to the question of what it is exactly that Thrasymachus might be right about. If we look at the signalling function of the word, then the two men might be answering different questions, so that they may both be right.

One might be tempted to argue that the dispute here really arises out of the fact that Socrates is speaking from within traditional premises and assumptions about justice and Thrasymachus is speaking from the outside of those accepted premises. That is to say, Socrates accepts at face value, the conceptual framework in which the concept traditionally resides and Thrasymachus rejects it. One is tempted to say that Thrasymachus is standing outside his contemporaneous Greek culture and Socrates stands within. But this way of putting it can only be metaphorical, for as a situated rational being, it does not seem literally possible for Thrasymachus to actually do this. Furthermore, if you look at it this way, Socrates also seems to be standing outside his culture, judging its conventional norms against the Platonic 'Form' of justice that is eternal. Pitkin argues that it is more accurate to say that Socrates speaks from within the signalling function of the concept of justice, carrying the full weight of the commitment inherent in using that word. Thrasymachus on the other hand, suspends this commitment, confining himself to the labelling function of the word in order to speak about 'what other people call justice.' "Part of his point is that other people are not aware of the cultural hypocrisy, as he is, and that they therefore would not say what he says. Thrasymachus, then, refuses to step inside the concept of justice and take on the burden, the weight, of what is normally guaranteed or claimed in uttering it. He wants to question precisely those conventions."<sup>13</sup> Still, Pitkin argues that noting what Thrasymachus is trying to do only goes so far in understanding how the arguments of the two men can meet. For, as it stands, we might have a clearer idea of what Thrasymachus is doing, but we have not proven that they are really not speaking past each other; we have not analysed whether it is legitimate for Thrasymachus to challenge the conventions that Socrates stands behind.

That we might say that Thrasymachus is standing outside his culture to question the conventions and values of that culture might suggest some level of cultural relativity. After all, if Thrasymachus had belonged to a different culture instead of just theoretically standing outside it

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pg. 180.

and had learnt about justice through an entirely different set of speech situations and speech acts, then we might say that he has a different idea of what ‘justice’ means. But to say that is of course quite inaccurate. If we stick to the labelling function of words alone, then Thrasymachus would mean something entirely different by the word ‘justice’, since his usage refers to a different set of referents. But if we look at the quasi-performative or signalling function of words, then we would say that although he would learn it from a different set of examples, he is speaking about the same thing if the language games his culture plays with the concept are the same. The dispute then would spring from him having different *standards* for what might be called ‘just’ and it would raise the question of whether it is legitimate for him to insist on his standards instead of Socrates’. The evaluation of this dispute would then depend on the particular grammar of the concept of justice with respect to standards.

To elucidate, Pitkin compares justice to the concept of ‘green’ and the concept of ‘delicious’. While we all know what the word ‘delicious’ is supposed to mean, when we look at cultural preferences for food like fermented herring the differences in taste are quite drastic. Different cultures and even different individuals play the same language games involving the concept of ‘delicious’ in relation to very different foods. It seems that the justifications for what is delicious are relative to a very great extent. ““Delicious” suggests that taste is entirely independent of the word’s meaning, so the kind of observation Thrasymachus makes... would simply have no bearing on the kind of observation Socrates makes,”<sup>14</sup> if the concept of justice was as relative in its justifications as ‘delicious’ is. On the other hand, the concept of ‘green’ seems to be far less relative than ‘delicious’. If the children of another culture learn the meaning of ‘green’ by using examples of things that are blue in colour, then they have really learnt the meaning of ‘blue’ and what they call ‘green’ cannot be accurately translated to what we call ‘green’. There is no logical space for them to justify their usage to us. “So if we construe “justice” on the model of “green,” we will conclude that it makes no sense to suppose that the word could have the same meaning in two cultures with radically different standards of what is just.”<sup>15</sup> Pitkin here, understands the temptation to say that justice must be a concept that is somewhere in the middle of these two. For in the case of ‘delicious’, the gap between meaning and justifications is too wide to allow two different sides to engage and with respect to ‘green’ there is no gap at all to allow conflict between different justifications.

Nevertheless, Pitkin argues that justice is far too complex a concept to define along this single dimension. It would not suffice to say that it is simply somewhere in between matters of taste and matters of fact – a place where different justifications are can do battle. What needs to be explained is what makes this engagement possible. Pitkin argues that what makes it possible is that justice has three dimensions: facts, meaning and *standards*. It concerns the facts of the world from which we interpret meaning (using past examples as a guide) and so the standards of concept is at the same time created by us as it is given to us. This creates, “the possibility of judgment and justification,”<sup>16</sup> which is missing from the grammars of the concepts of ‘delicious’ and ‘green’. And this in essence, is why using the fact-value dichotomy would not be useful in our analysis. It is unreasonable for something to be definitively labelled as just or unjust as a given, but neither is something just or unjust simply because of our say so. We reason about justice; we give reasons to why something is just or unjust, but not simply any sort of reasons. If someone were to make a judgment about the justness of an act by reference to factors unrelated

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pg. 182.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pg. 181.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pg. 183.

to justice or fairness, we would not say that they have different standards of justice. We would say that they do not understand what justice is. We would say that they are not trained in the language games of making judgments about justice. Not every reason given will be accepted as a consideration for justice; not every factor has a part to play in the language games involving justice.

The rub, though, is that this central feature of the grammar of the concept of justice also allows for inconsistent application. It allows inconsistency because its half-given and half-created nature creates a tension between its ideal substance and its practical form, a tension that can only arise with concepts where meaning is linked to application by way of standards. And this, argues Pitkin, goes to the heart of the conceptual puzzle at the heart of Socrates' and Thrasymachus' dispute. For example, we may create an institution like a court of law to practice the ideal of justice, but the machinations of that institution, the complex internal politics of the institution, might cause a deviation from that ideal. Of course, the deviation may happen in the opposite direction, the institution may be created out of a set of procedures and the ideals are created by abstracting from the real cases that take place. The ideals then take centre stage and begin to displace the procedures. If ideals did not require application then perhaps there would be no inconsistency in the grammar of the concept of justice, but ideals without application are empty ideals. They would hardly be worth mentioning. But part of their worth is also that their embodiment in practice requires our commitment exactly because actions often fall short of intentions and collective action often lead to places no one individual intended. "We need, always, to hold our concepts partly aloof from the practices and institutions in which they are (supposedly) realized, in order to continue to be able to criticize, to renovate and to revise."<sup>17</sup>

Pitkin here, is taking the opportunity to remind us that such abstracted principles and manifested ideals, given to us as they are, need not be conservative, for even, "though we learn the meaning of terms like "justice" and acquire some standards of what is just in connection with existing institutions and practices, we can and do use them to criticize and change those institutions and practices."<sup>18</sup> Here, as will be repeated in other places in *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Pitkin makes the point to argue that although language games and linguistic practices are quite basic to our social reality, a fundamental conservatism should not be read into a Wittgenstein-inspired ontology. Language games are not utterly static as practices and reform and dissent are also part of the language games we play. A Wittgensteinian political analysis need not be conservative. She says further of justice, "We are always potentially able to pry the idea loose from some particular example, and reassess its applicability. That, I think, is a major function of political discourse in our lives."<sup>19</sup>

And it is this liberal line of argument that for Pitkin helps legitimise Thrasymachus' position vis-à-vis Socrates' and shows exactly what the nexus of the disagreement is. For both Socrates and Thrasymachus agree fundamentally on the substantive meaning of the concept of justice and both are able to see the deviation in its application from the ideal meaning of justice. It is just that they simply choose a different path from that fork in the road. Thrasymachus chooses to go on the deviated path, but Socrates being right about the meaning of justice does not invalidate Thrasymachus' choice. Thrasymachus implicitly accepts the labelling function of the concept. His point is that the signalling function has been corrupted and so he will not himself take on the burden of that commitment, for that commitment, he feels, no longer means anything

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pg. 190.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pg. 189.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pg. 191.

in corrupted times. “Thrasymachus’ kind of detachment and standing outside of the conventional hypocrisy can help to restore health and coherence inside. But it can do so only in combination with the Socratic definition and it’s kind of standing outside of corrupted standards.”<sup>20</sup> For Pitkin, the grammar of the concept of justice means that wherever the concept exists, so too the possibilities of taking a stand against injustice. If we do not recognize this option, injustice can otherwise go on undetected. Pitkin’s aim was to use a deep Wittgensteinian analysis to uncover the space for dissent against the corruption of politics.

## Understanding the Political

The above discussion puts us in good stead as we consider Pitkin’s views about the concept of the political, political discourse and the practice of political theory, for we saw above how Pitkin attempted to justify her liberal views about justice by introducing the idea of standards as the third component in addition to meaning and facts. Not only does the use of concepts like justice tells us what a speaker means, but in relevant circumstances it also shows what standards the speaker is committing herself to. In this section, we will see how Pitkin attempts to use the same strategy to define the concept of the political in liberal democratic terms; we will see how she invokes the political characteristics of the concept’s etymological origins in order to argue that the ideal standards for the political are liberal and democratic in nature. In her discussion of the meaning of the concept, Pitkin begins by first noting what to her, is its central ambiguity. On one hand, there is the tradition relating the political with participatory, democratic, egalitarian, public-spirited values and a suspicion of a given order. On the other hand, there is the opposing tradition that uses the concept of the political to signal hierarchical, elitist, traditional and manipulative values. To Pitkin, this dichotomy of meaning is much like the dispute surrounding the concept of justice discussed above. She argues that the ambiguity we see in the concept of the political today arises from the deviation from the ideal standards set in ancient Greece and so we live today with two sets of standards that are at odds with each other. But Pitkin’s central message is also that the deviant standard we see today is a more or less corrupted standard for politics even though its proponents in political science defend it as a neutral, empirically oriented image of real politics.

In her defence of the ideal standards of the political, Pitkin invokes the work of political theorists Sheldon Wolin and Hannah Arendt. To Wolin, the public nature of collective action is essential to the concept of the political. Terms like ‘common’, ‘general’, and ‘public’ are central to the meaning of the political as they have been equated with what is political for ages. He says, “From its very beginnings in Greece, the Western political tradition has looked upon the political order as a common order created to deal with those concerns in which all of the members of the society have some interest.”<sup>21</sup> Wolin points to the etymological origins of the word ‘political’, which comes from the Greek word ‘*polis*’ – denoting the independent city-states that were the centre of Greek civilisation. “[T]he political originally was simply what pertained to the polis.”<sup>22</sup> But we should note that not every collective was a polis. A collective must be a freely self-governing community where its citizens participate in public and common concerns in order to call itself a *polis*. This orientation towards public participation directed at the public good was echoed by Arendt, to whom the political realm was the realm of action that arose directly out of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pg. 192.

<sup>21</sup> Wolin, Sheldon. *Politics and Vision*, (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1960), pg. 9, quoted in Pitkin, pg. 209.

<sup>22</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 209.

collective decision making. To Arendt, what made a *polis* and its actions political, were relationships and institutions committed to collective action. She makes the point to delineate how for the Greeks, this political life was distinct from the private life – the former being the realm of freedom and the latter being the realm of necessity stemming from biological needs. So, even though human beings are subject to necessity as biological beings, the *polis* was the realm where we could transcend those necessities and transcend ourselves as discrete individuals. Here, the political is not about governance and power, but about the freedom to action that frees us from more parochial concerns. From all this, Pitkin concludes that, “the idea of the political involved from its inception a fundamental notion of participation and equality, or participation on the basis of the essential equality of political membership, of citizenship.”<sup>23</sup> This essentially is what distinguishes political authority from the authority of the head of household and in arguing that the political must involve essentially equal men respecting each other’s ends Pitkin takes a very Kantian lesson from the etymological origins of the concept of the political.

Pitkin contrasts the above view of the political with the work of empirical realists such as Robert Dahl and David Easton for whom the study of politics is a study in dominance and power. Politics, for this group, is essentially nothing more than the means by which conflicting private interests come to agreement and avoid descending into anarchy. Participation in politics then is not directed at the public good, but one’s own private interests. People participate in politics only to get what they desire, invoking the public good only as an empty rhetorical device. Politics is therefore defined by Dahl as, “any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, power, rule or authority.”<sup>24</sup> The decisions from this process are binding for all, but are often the product of the few. “Proponents of such power-oriented or interest-oriented views of politics will point out that nothing visible is modern political life remotely resembles the seemingly idealized picture ascribed to the Greeks by commentators like Wolin and Arendt.”<sup>25</sup>

It would be no surprise then that commentators like Wolin and Arendt have long complained that the political in modern times is but a former shadow of itself, and indeed has been replaced by the social. Pitkin explains, “Where the political deals with public, shared, common concerns, in which the whole is not merely a summation of separate parts, society is a realm of the unplanned, spontaneous, laissez-faire interaction of separate individuals who remain separate, each pursuing his own private goals and producing, unintentionally, results which affect others.”<sup>26</sup> While the former deals in deliberate, proactive and purposive action negotiated with reasons, the latter trades in unthinking, reactive and automatic responses; where politics is the realm of action, society is the realm of behaviour. Of course, the empirical realists here can ask what is it exactly that has changed about the political – its meaning and substance or its practice and form? The answer surely is not the latter as the Greeks themselves did not live up to their own ideals. A brief scan of Greek history would bear out the discrepancy between their political thought and their political actions. If the answer is the former, then the question arises why we should take the Greek conception to be the only true one. Why should it be that the concept of the political has remained static over two millennia?

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pg. 210.

<sup>24</sup> Dahl, Robert. *Modern Political Analysis*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pg. 6, quoted in Pitkin, pg. 212.

<sup>25</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 212.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pg. 212.

Pitkin's reply is that the ideal standards of the political delineated by Wolin and Arendt are, "not really the Greek conception of politics, but our own."<sup>27</sup> She argues that while the example of the Greeks is illustrative, it is used only as a didactic device to remind ourselves of the standards that we ourselves hold but have somehow left behind. Like Socrates, Wolin and Arendt are trying to tell us what a concept means and what standards come with that meaning, even though those standards are less and less lived by in modern times. But even though they are less lived by, modern practice does not change the fact that those standards exist. Pitkin argues that the ideal of proactive collective action towards the public good is indeed the ideal of our substantive conception of politics even today. Our political institutions may at times make decisions that reflect private interests or execute actions without proper deliberation, but just argued above, this deviation from the substantive meaning of what it means to be call an institution 'political' should not be held as the proper standard. And so, just like it was between Socrates and Thrasymachus, the citizen finding herself faced with realities that deviate from the ideal can apparently choose, as Socrates does, to keep the substantive meaning of the word 'political' and withhold the term from existing corrupt institutions and practices or she can choose, as Thrasymachus does, to adapt the term to existing conditions. Wolin and Arendt, argues Pitkin, were trying to be the gadfly, as it were, forcing us to think about the discrepancies between our ideals and the way we find ourselves living today, while the empiricists like Dahl and Easton are attempting to scientifically describe current conditions as they and indeed we, see them. "But an accurate amount of how things are is often an essential requisite for change. And Arendt and Wolin too, are trying to give an accurate account of how things are."<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, Pitkin argues that the dispute here is slightly different from the dispute over the concept of justice, for after all, she has previously warned that the grammar of each individual concept is quite unique and here language 'plays new tricks'. "[I]f we construe the dispute this way, suggesting a choice between the two positions, we may still miss how central this very dispute is to the nature of the political itself. For the rival definitions are both very much bound to the grammar of the word, and both illuminate it."<sup>29</sup> This divergence seems to point at a central ambiguity or duality at the heart of the concept of the political – a divergence that happens in the writings of the Greeks themselves. But Pitkin argues that this central duality is not to be seen as an essential irresolvable *logical* ambiguity, but rather as the consequent of the essentially agonistic *practice* of politics. "Perhaps what characterizes political life is precisely the problem of continually creating unity, a public, in a context of diversity, rival claims, unequal power, and conflicting interests."<sup>30</sup> In the absence of conflict, an issue of public interest does not enter the political realm and no political deliberation needs to be made, but if it does after all enter political deliberation, the conflict must be resolved in a way that continues to preserve the collectivity. Both the initial problem and the resolution are essential parts of our conception of the political. Political discourse is not just manipulative propaganda or the moral concern for others. It exists to address the diversity of interests in society in terms which relate the plural masses to their shared public interest. This plurality of perspectives is central to politics, forming part of the meaning of politics, because the shape and content of public interest is itself a topic of contention.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pg. 213.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pg. 214.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pg. 214.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pg. 215.

This, for Pitkin, as we will discuss in more depth later, is what distinguishes moral and political discourse. For Pitkin, moral discourse is personal discourse, intimate dialogue. It does not require finding equilibrium among the plurality of perspectives. But as members of the polity, we trade in the comfort of individuality and the intimacy of personal relations for the transcendence of public justice. In a polity, we learn to see beyond our own selfish needs and in an Aristotelian manner, fulfil our potential as *zoa politikon*. The household can teach you to be aware of the needs of others, but for Pitkin, this is qualitatively different from the being aware of the common good because at this scale things can no longer be personal. One requires social imagination at a different level of abstraction to relate one's interests with the interests of the public, which itself is not a static phenomenon, but a continual negotiation.

## Understanding Membership

What the above discussion highlights for Pitkin is the problem of political membership. For as we've discussed, Pitkin argues that central to the meaning of the political is how the individual finds a balanced relationship with the collective, a balance which nonetheless is in dynamic equilibrium, always in flux and always allowing for creative change; always allowing for present circumstances to at least be questioned if not changed. While that argument was relatively more abstract, in this section we will see how that position is argued for from Pitkin's Wittgensteinian social ontology. Pitkin takes this second route as well in order to argue that her ontological holism means that individual freedom is indeed compatible with political authority, and also that the political obligation of the citizen does not need to lead to conservative principles.

Pitkin begins by comparing political membership with linguistic membership, that is, membership to a particular group speaking a particular natural language. This comparison, as we will see later on, has deep implications on the shape of Pitkin's arguments about the characteristics of political discourse. But here, she begins by noting Wittgenstein's misleading emphasis on the individual's experience of language. It is misleading because, as discussed in the previous chapter, Wittgenstein's theory of language games means that language has a dual perspective: language is both made by and given to us. Still, of course, the emphasis is on the individual because we are born into our languages and unless you are Shakespeare, you're individual contribution to your language will be minimal to say the least. Yet, despite this, language is a 'living thing' and it changes in systematic and patterned ways. The infinitesimal ways in which individuals can change language do accumulate appreciably over long periods of time. While language is largely imposed from the outside, individually we use language to conceptualise and understand our social world in new ways. Culture enters from the outside and becomes part of us, but we also give something of ourselves to our culture. All this suggests that the boundary between the individual and society is a fluid and porous one. The two halves of the individual-society dichotomy of traditional methodological individualism are really different aspects of a single reality. "Society is not just "outside" the individual, confronting him, but inside him as well, part of who he is."<sup>31</sup> As such, Pitkin argues that this dual aspect also brings a dual aspect to our social membership: linguistic membership makes us all equals on that plane, but individual language use distinguishes us as discrete individuals. Language both binds and separates us. This further suggests that society is as real an entity as the individual, or at least, no more abstract than the individual. As Pitkin argues, the individual is not equivalent to the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pg. 195.



individual's physical body and the grammar of the concept of the individual is as abstract as the grammar of the concept of society.

Nevertheless, while Wittgenstein emphasised the individual and rarely spoke of the mass of society, Pitkin's emphasises the relationship the individual has with her polity. She uses the comparison between political membership and linguistic membership to show how individual freedom is compatible with membership. No matter how much of language and culture is given to one, over time, changes in language reflect the widespread changes in the way individuals speak. We cannot as individuals elect to change language in a deliberate manner, of course, change only happens when a sufficient number of people adopt an innovation, but all changes in language come from the natural and free use of language by individuals. And even though individual innovations may happen at random, the widespread changes to language are systematic and patterned. Pitkin surmises that this reflects the uniformity in the motivational driving forces behind individual actions.

Pitkin also suggests that this dual perspective might also be where social contract theorists have gone wrong. She argues that social contract theory makes the wrong assumption that human beings have the kind of individual autonomy that is free from dependence on any type of social ties. This radical autonomy creates a tempting picture of human individuality, but it becomes consequently difficult to create any sort of organic obligation from this point of isolation. Social contract theorists are then forced to conjure up some sort of contractual agreement that arises from individual self-interest. And to avoid the air of artificiality, they argue that this contract precedes social ties and conventions and is written into the very law of nature. But, "[s]elf-interest just does not seem to get translated into obligation to the public interest,"<sup>32</sup> and the issue of free-rider problems are a major stumbling block for methodological individualist theories. Following her social ontology described above, Pitkin argues that we are born as human animals, but we grow and learn to become human persons only by internalizing the norms and standards of society. Our commitment and orientation towards the common good are learnt and not chosen, and hence we do not make contracts, implicit or otherwise, but we *grow* into socially obligated beings. Even our self-interest is very much a social product, and so artificial links with other members of society do not need to be conjured up. They have always existed. The same goes with our linguistic membership. Language is given to us when we are born and we grow and learn to speak our mother tongues, but the obligation to speak in that way is not derived by contract. "[W]e obey them [the rules of grammar] because they have become part of our selves. They are not obstacles to freedom, but our very means of free self-expression."<sup>33</sup> As children, the rules of grammar and language games come to us from the outside, but once internalised, they become the very basis of our identities, from which point innovation can always be negotiated, but this freedom is never as radical as social contract theorists want us to believe.

Of the many social contract theorists, Pitkin seems to think that Rousseau comes closest to her own view, but once again, Pitkin argues against conservative principles from such Wittgenstein-compatible anthropological social ontologies. Rousseau gains her attention because while Rousseau uses the language of contractual obligations, his ontological basis is far more 'communitarian' (to risk anachronism) than the individualism of others like Hobbes or Locke. For Rousseau, human beings are born free as natural human animals, but social life transforms us, changes our habits and desires and consequently our behaviour. Just like Pitkin, Rousseau

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pg. 198.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pg. 199.

argued that social behaviour is learnt and individuals who are true members of the polity identify their interests with the interest of greater society. Hence no real contract is really necessary in Rousseau's theory if this identification pre-exists. And just like Pitkin, for Rousseau, politics is not built on a *tabula rasa*, where unattached individuals come together from a position of radical autonomy. Nevertheless, Pitkin rejects Rousseau's conservatism which culminates in his dictum that in the final count, some citizens will have to be 'forced to be free'. And she rejects that such conservatism is the natural consequent of a Wittgensteinian social ontology. To Pitkin, "[a] theorist like Rousseau accordingly leads us to confuse political life with cultural education; and that is why his political vision, so clearly aimed at perfect freedom, comes in the end to resemble perfect tyranny."<sup>34</sup>

Pitkin's rejection of Rousseau stems from the limited way in which she believes linguistic membership and political membership are analogous. While the analogy is useful, it cannot be taken too far because the similarities between the two types of membership do not exhaust the critical characteristics of political membership. For one, Pitkin argues that politics is public and collective while language use is individual and cumulative. Secondly, linguistic membership has no central role for conflict, power and interest while political membership does. And thirdly, linguistic rules are not enforced, while political laws carry official sanctions. For Pitkin, language is not a matter of obedience or enforcement, but politics is. Politics is deliberative and pro-active, but also imposing. Political decisions are enforced and usually executed by a political institution. Pitkin here, clearly views natural languages as part of the social and not the political, which she continues to define in the Arendtian-Kantian manner as discussed above. Linguistic membership, to her, is clearly not a realm of free action but a predominant realm of determined behaviour. And so, if we take the analogy between linguistic and political membership too far, Pitkin worries that we will incorrectly view politics as a non-coercive and passive activity. Language for her is a realm where the norms are internalized but change happens organically; linguistic change does not arise out of deliberate conflict among free actors. Politics, on the other hand, is a realm of explicit norms due to its public and deliberate nature and its conflicts are consequently also public and deliberate. For Pitkin, "[t]o interpret political life entirely on the model of language, culture patterns, morality, or education is to obscure this crucial difference, and thereby to endanger both politics itself and political freedom."<sup>35</sup> This is because, if we assume that political norms are implicit and fully internalized without question, there will be the tendency for any conflict to be swept under the carpet or for people to be 'forced to be free'. To obscure this difference is to fall into the same trap Rousseau did and create a very specific rather than general theory of political membership and obligation.

## Understanding Discourse

Another way in which Pitkin argues for her liberal reading of the social ontology she finds in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is to look at what Wittgenstein called 'language regions' (PI §90). While Wittgenstein only used this term once and it is not explicitly clear what he meant, Pitkin surmises that language regions are those large areas of discourse that we customarily divide our species life by, much like how we divide books in libraries by topics denoted by the Dewey Decimal System. A language region is therefore a larger conceptual category than a language game and is ostensibly constituted by language games. Though, much

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pg. 203.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pg. 203.

like actual books that defy easy classification, language regions are not given to clear and distinct boundaries. Just as there are among language games, there may be significant overlaps among language regions.

In this case, Pitkin sees much overlap between political and moral discourse. In both cases, the subject of main interest is human action and in both cases, the objective is not to remain detached and above the fray. In fact both types of discourse are part of and utilised in their respectively named practices. In both cases you expect a level of unpredictability and the possibility that things can wrong which would subsequently require remedial measures. And in both cases, you get the same problem of naming the relevant actions without accidentally invoking a standard that is inherent in the meaning of that name. (eg. Calling an act ‘murder’ instead of the ‘killing’ of) Nevertheless, just like the last section, Pitkin’s argument relies on the *differences* she argues that exist between the political and the merely social

Pitkin’s idea of moral discourse is heavily inspired by Hanna Arendt and Stanley Cavell, and draws especially heavily from the latter’s unpublished doctoral thesis, *The Claim to Rationality*. This lends Pitkin’s writings a distinct emphasis on ordinary language. For Pitkin, moral discourse begins with the ordinary ways in which we talk about moral matters and so the content of morality itself, the principles we abstract from behaviour and argue about, is not central to her as it depends on ordinary speech for its concepts. Ordinary moral speech logically precedes scholarly study of ethics and is concerned directly with purposive human action. And as we noted in the previous chapter, purposive human action has the potential to go wrong and this for Cavell and Pitkin is the main locus of moral discourse. “It has to do with the assessment and repair of human relationships when these have been strained or damaged by the unforeseen results of some action.”<sup>36</sup> Of course ordinary speech does not exhaust all the ways we talk about morality, but Pitkin feels that it is an instructive way to illuminate morality’s link with human action and its unpredictability, for it is human action’s unpredictability which led us to develop coping mechanisms in our speech. Following Arendt, Pitkin identifies two such modes of ordinary moral speech: the prospective and the retrospective. The prospective seeks to assuage distrust or pessimism in committing the speaker to future fulfillment of intentions and the retrospective seeks to mend with pleas, explanations and justifications, that which is already broken.

Apart from her emphasis on the ordinary, what is also distinctive about Pitkin’s discussion is her emphasis on the personal in moral discourse. Although one can discuss morality publicly, to Pitkin, “the center of gravity of moral discourse”<sup>37</sup> is primarily found in personal conversations between the two parties involved in a morally relevant incident. Moral discourse is therefore personal, though not merely subjective or private; it is interpersonal but not really general or public. It happens when someone is moved to speak and usually that begins with that person or another being accused of some wrongdoing. This is where pleas or justifications start and the adjudication can begin. For normal moral discourse is usually adjudicative and not innovative, involving the application of pre-existing moral principles and not the creative innovation of new principles. Obviously, new moralities are created in special times but by taking moral discourse primarily in the manner above, Pitkin paints a very conventional picture of moral speech and interaction. Nevertheless, moral discourse is not the only way to see ourselves past conflict. Politics and violence are also ways of solving conflict, sometimes used because of the lack of finality in much of moral discourse.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pg. 149.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pg. 150.

Following our discussion of Pitkin's epistemic relativity in the previous chapter, she argues here that the lack of finality or conclusiveness in moral discourse does not reveal morality's irrationality, but shows us instead what sort of rationality is distinctive to such discourse. Moral discourse is aimed at the relevant parties coming to an agreement, but the failure to reach an agreement does not render moral discourse meaningless or pointless. "The point of moral argument is not agreement on a conclusion, but successful clarification of two people's positions vis-à-vis each other. Its function is to make the positions of the various protagonists clear – to themselves and to the others."<sup>38</sup> Following our discussion in the previous chapter on the inherent ambiguity in picking out human action as action, sometimes, it is not clear to us as moral agents what exactly we have done. The self is opaque in this regard and our taking a moral position requires some level of self-discovery and self-knowledge. "In sum, the pattern of moral discussion is different from that of a discussion on empirical fact, because what is at stake in it is not factual knowledge of the physical world but self-knowledge and the knowledge of actions..."<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, while we are free to take up whatever moral stand we see fit, the rationality of moral discourse does not allow for arbitrariness. Just as we have seen with regards to the concept of justice, not any justification or standards are morally acceptable standards. Some justifications are acceptable while others are seen as irrelevant at best and callous at worse. There are different levels of due care attached to different circumstances surrounding our actions, but in each case, we expect them to be met in our moral discourse. The cost of failure to meet these standards is for one to be treated as incompetent at moral matters at best or as intentionally immoral at worst. The rationality of moral discourse conditions the attitude either side is prepared to take towards the other when the other fails to meet the standards inherent in such discourse. Thus, to Pitkin, moral discourse is essentially Kantian in nature and requires mutual identification as rational beings with private ends. "I can *refuse to accept* a 'ground for doubt' without impugning it as false, and without supplying a new basis, and yet not automatically be dismissed as irrational or morally incompetent. What I *cannot* do, and yet maintain my position as morally competent, is to deny the relevance of your doubts..."<sup>40</sup>

The conventional picture of moral discourse above is contrasted with Pitkin's construal of political discourse. For Pitkin, politics is a public and collective activity, which makes political discourse public discourse. Comparatively, moral discourse is most often personal dialogue among a small group of people who were affected by the offending action. The content of political discourse is the common issues meant for public deliberation and therefore, compared to moral discourse, political discourse is much larger in scope and involves the entire mass of the polity. The intimacy of private speech must give way to a more neutral and impersonal tone. It is essential for the legitimacy of political discourse for everything to be discussed in the open. We can speak publicly about morality, "[b]ut public sermons are not what moral discourse is for, what it is primarily about; and personal relationships are not the point of political discourse. There is no such thing as private politics, intimate politics."<sup>41</sup>

Also, Pitkin suggests that while moral discourse is primarily retroactive, helping to solve problems from the past, the role of political discourse is primarily concerned with future action. Of course, morality can be about the future and politics about the past, but the central concern is

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pg. 153.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pg. 156.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pg. 156.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pg. 204.

more often the converse. Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of morality is to restore health to broken relationships, and the central role for politics is to decide on future collective action and so the point of both types of discourse is to come to some sort of agreement. Still, Pitkin believes that in neither does an epistemic elite exist. For moral discourse, it is a discourse in which everyone is free to participate and since it is primarily based on truthful revelation of the self, it would be unlikely that the elite can be expert in what is truly in another's heart. For politics, an epistemic elite would be required to set the standards of argument and evidence, but since in politics the shape of methods and institutions for resolving disputes are up for dispute themselves, Pitkin feels it unlikely that we can say whether there are or there no political experts without implying a particular political system.

Pitkin finds this last point – the radical contestability of politics – to be quite unique to politics. In science for example, disputes about the fundamental nature of science and its methods are not themselves scientific disputes – these disputes are conceptual and inward-looking while scientific disputes are empirical and outward-looking. This contestability is also the basis for the main difference between moral and political discourses. As we saw above, moral discourse is primarily about revealing one's moral stand based on the conventions of moral justification and it is therefore adjudicative, but political discourse is primarily about future collective action and is therefore more legislative than adjudicative. Obviously there are traditional values and ideas in play in politics, but they are not excluded from contestation themselves. Unlike for morality and science, contestation is the root of political discourse. Nevertheless, as we have seen so far in this chapter, Pitkin is no nihilist and it would be uncharacteristic of her to accept any notion that politics was at heart about contestation without standards – where the only currency was expediency or efficiency and the natural tools for these were “rhetoric, propaganda, and manipulation.”<sup>42</sup> Without the goal of the common good, all of these are, “but a perversion of political discourse.”<sup>43</sup>

Still, even if for both moral and political discourses the point is to come to some agreement, the rationality of political discourse is not personal revelation as it is for moral discourse. Without hope of agreement, political discourse would lose its point too, but just as with moral discourse, failure to come to agreement does not mean the complete failure of politics. While political discourse is explicitly about questions of action and the details of what and how, Pitkin argues that the rationality of political discourse revolves around the identification of just who the collective is that is asking the question. Just as moral discourse reveals the individual, political discourse reveals the collective. Following Arendt's ideas about the concept of the political, Pitkin claims that, “The counsels of conscience are initially unpolitical because they are always expressed in purely individual, subjective form. But someone in a position of isolated dissent, who can speak only for himself, is not yet in a position – logically, grammatically, not yet in a position – to speak politically.”<sup>44</sup> And so, just by identifying the relevant individuals as a collective, as a ‘we’, a claim is made about their identity as a polity – about who they are to make a such a decision for action and who will they be if that action is taken. Obviously, that decision will not be made by a total consensus and total agreement is a rare thing in large collectives, but, Pitkin argues that the point of political

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pg. 207.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pg. 207.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pg. 208.

discourse is not the “eradication of dissent,” but that, “at the end of political deliberation, the polis will be affirmed by its membership, despite continuing dissent.”<sup>45</sup>

## Political Theory

In the above sections, we have discussed Pitkin’s views on the concept and practice of politics. In this section, we will discuss her views on what implications the later philosophy of Wittgenstein has on the shape of political theory as a discipline. We have already seen how Wittgenstein’s most basic lesson for the social scholar is for her to have better sensitivity to language as a medium of personal and social expression. But this lesson he shares with other philosophers of language. What is distinctive about Wittgenstein’s influence is the social ontology scholars have read into his later philosophy and the methodological holism and postanalytic epistemology this ontology seems to entail. For Pitkin, when this unique Wittgensteinian perspective is applied to past works of political theory, we get a renewed understanding of the inherent relativity of past cultures and past language games, which leads to a deeper appreciation of the pitfalls in translating past texts. And when applied to contemporary theory, this perspective gives us a better understanding of the plurality of concepts used by theorists and how the inconsistencies among these often get in the way of our full understanding of what they mean. Nevertheless, Pitkin’s acceptance of some relativity is not an invitation to nihilism. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Pitkin is careful to argue that a Wittgenstein-inspired postanalytic ontology or epistemology does not destroy all traces of objectivity from social studies. When two political views disagree, “a simultaneous contemplation of what is right in each view might produce a new synthesis, or at least a perspicuous overview of why we are torn between the two positions.”<sup>46</sup> For Pitkin, this methodological holism has never been more important for the discipline of political theory than in our postmodern times.

To Pitkin, the modern condition is characterized by “a story of increasing knowledge and objectivity, increasing detached, scientific, rational awareness both of the world and each other; but all of this accompanied by, even purchased at the price of, a steadily decreasing sense of security, of stable foundations.”<sup>47</sup> The power that was supposed to accompany these great strides in human knowledge was instead replaced by a nervous sense of dislocation and insecurity. So instead of enhancing our capacity to act, we have become increasingly hapless, paralyzed by analysis without end and alienated from ourselves and each other. If we do not attempt to address this condition, Pitkin sees two consequences. The first is the increasing likelihood of seeing and consequently treating other human beings as mere objects, as mere furniture that populate our world, to be used and abused without any guilt. This slowly degrades our ability to have moral attitudes towards others at all and makes it more likely for our governing policies to embody technical manipulation and social engineering. With a distinctively Kantian concern, Pitkin sees the peril of looking at governance as a merely technical realm where problems are to be solved scientifically. The second consequence relates to how we see and treat ourselves. Pitkin argues that just as we need to see others as independent moral beings, we need to experience ourselves as fully moral beings as well – able to commit to judgment and standards and to act where that commitment calls for action. Pitkin sees the positivist and technical approach of science in the modern era as resulting in the reduction of opinions and commitments to mere social products

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pg. 208.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pg. 314.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pg. 316.

without the underpinning of individual commitment and personal integrity. No wonder then, we increasingly find it difficult to trust our own judgment and moral positions.

Out of this despair came the postmodern philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology, which Pitkin argues have much in common with Wittgenstein's later philosophy, at least in shared perspectives if not in doctrine. "All three philosophical movements start from the assumptions of the modern predicament, from a profound distrust of all religions, ideologies, metaphysics, and would-be absolute standards."<sup>48</sup> If God is dead and Man is at the centre of everything, then everything is suspect, including traditional philosophy with its inherited doctrines and generalizations. All three movements recall us from the wanton universalizing of tradition philosophy in favour of a new found respect for the particular and the concrete. Phenomenology places new emphasis on the knowledge given to our experience, existentialism recalls us from our positivistic attempts at abstracted and inauthentic neutrality and Wittgenstein writes about both of these in his own way, emphasizing attention on the temptations of certain habitual ways of thinking and being. For Pitkin, Wittgenstein replaces the positivistic objectivity of science which deals in formal perfections not with a relativistic vertigo, but with the stability of the 'rough ground' of our concepts, where things are admittedly not perfect and boundaries are blur. But this imperfection at the very least minimizes the propagation of further mismatches between perception and reality, further detachment from our situated rationalities and further detachment from the other as subject.

As such, Pitkin expects that a Wittgensteinian political theory would be a very different kind of animal than what has gone on so far in the discipline. "It would presumably share his suspicion of broad, systematic generalization, his therapeutic stress on the particular case, on the investigating and speaking self, and on the acceptance of plurality and contradiction."<sup>49</sup> Pitkin recognizes, however, that this description does not sound much like a theory at all, and she accepts that Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical leanings might mean that there could be no such thing as a Wittgensteinian political theory – at least not in the comprehensive manner we have hitherto understood theories to be. A Wittgensteinian political theory would look as different from traditional political theory as Wittgenstein's philosophy looks from traditional philosophy. Pitkin thinks that a Wittgenstein-inspired political theory would stress the act of philosophizing rather than conclusions that might form a coherent system of thought. This way of philosophizing ostensibly dovetails nicely with Pitkin's liberal vision which calls for a variety of political perspectives that would guard against, "the older vision of a single, dominating politico-theoretical system."<sup>50</sup> Her social epistemology after all emphasises the acceptance of contradictions between causal and purposive explanations and her social ontology accepts the fundamental plurality and mutual inconsistencies of individual private interests.

The above also means that the political realm resists attempts at grand theorizing even though attempts at such have been pervasive in the history of the discipline. The result, in her opinion, has always been to distort what is truly political in human society. "[T]here seems to be something in the enterprise of theorizing itself that makes the resulting system seem totalitarian and in that sense nonpolitical."<sup>51</sup> In order to theorize, the political theorist stands outside the polity, and under the guise of a detached, neutral point of view, impose a political order from the outside. Pitkin feels that perhaps this is the natural outcome when we try to look at politics in the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pg. 317.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pg. 325.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pg. 326.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pg. 326.

largest and longest scales in space and time. Much like how people on the street look like mere ants from vantage point of the top of a skyscraper, it is difficult not to reduce people to mere objects from the abstracted neutral viewpoint of the theorist. She suggests then, that a Wittgensteinian political theory would not be an expert theory, created by a political sage to be distributed to the masses, but one to be communicated from one citizen to another. The two individuals may not be equal with respect to intellectual prowess, but the key here is the equality of membership to the polity. Of course, her vision of a Wittgensteinian political theory still lacks the overall coherence that is usually needed for a coherent comprehensive program of action, but it is Pitkin's contention that our modern condition has already made such comprehensive programs impossible.

Putting the issues surrounding Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical leanings aside, Pitkin argues that a Wittgensteinian political theory can provide a way out of the two fundamental consequences of the modern condition as described above. For Pitkin, when we lose the ability to see ourselves as full moral beings and to see others as full subjects with their own cares, then political action becomes impossible, as the linguistic medium of such exchanges ceases to be free and responsible and becomes not much more than manipulation and propaganda. Deception and control makes all of us withdraw into our own corners and genuine deliberation is hampered by cynicism and paranoia. True collective action cannot take place under such conditions. What a Wittgensteinian approach gives us is a renewed confidence in speech. With the modern condition instilling powerlessness and subsequent distrust in us, a Wittgensteinian approach can restore responsibility and commitment to our speech and actions. It takes us from the abstract and the general that seem to no longer have any firm basis in the truth of the world, to the particular and concrete, which happens against the background of actual practices and standards. Vagueness and ambiguity exists, but they do not entail that everything is therefore up for grabs. God is dead and much of our world is conventional and socially constructed, but it is not created *ex nihilo*, conjured up from nothingness and inherently without meaning. "Wittgenstein allows us to see how, when it comes to choosing (an action, a position, a standard, but also a book, a friend, an example) we already are somebody; we never have to start from scratch, because we never can start from scratch. Values, and order, and meaning are indeed created by men, by men's choices. But that does not mean that they are created in their entirety by each man at each point in time; it does not mean that they are created in just any way at all, arbitrarily."<sup>52</sup>

Thus, for Pitkin, while a Wittgensteinian political theory would be post-analytic and somewhat anti-theoretical it would certainly not be anti-foundationalist. A Wittgensteinian political theory, as envisioned by Pitkin, would be based on the anthropological social ontology she finds in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. "Wittgenstein teaches us that, by the time we are old enough for the [modernist] problem to arise, we already have values and standards and meanings and a conception of the world, just as we already have a language in which they are largely embodied. In this sense, we really are part of an ongoing human community, whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not."<sup>53</sup> While we might feel lost without the firm foundations of a supernatural being underwriting our reality, that has always been an illusion of security and we have always anyway depended on the foundations of our own human conventions. Regardless of how we feel about it, the foundations in the form of our form of life have always been the only thing that we had. It is our human form of life that bridges thought and action, meanings and standards, our minds and the world. Our postmodernist fear is hard to shake because it arises

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pg. 334.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pg. 334.



from knowing that we cannot in the end replace that epistemological security blanket of absolutes with another illusion; the time has passed for us to buy into yet another illusion.

Thus, as an antidote to the modern condition which Pitkin argued leads to inauthenticity and dishonesty, she clearly finds in Wittgenstein's later work a liberating philosophy; a philosophy that liberates us from the mental cages of our own creation. It liberates us from our craving for absolute certainty and clean conceptual categories – cravings that ultimately cause our own alienation from ourselves and others. She finds liberation despite acknowledging Wittgenstein's call for purely descriptive philosophy and the acceptance of our form of life as a given, as the unchanging bedrock for all explanations of human life. For once again, despite other commentators finding in this part of Wittgenstein's work a conservative quietism, Pitkin sees spaces for freedom. Pitkin suggests that true freedom can only be founded on true self-knowledge. By knowing what cannot change, the identity of what can becomes clearer, and we can investigate the culturally contingent by using a Wittgensteinian analysis, a, "deep anthropological acquaintance," with different cultures and a, "deep historical acquaintance," of different times.<sup>54</sup> Of course this freedom is far less radical than that offered by existentialism, but, "[h]ere freedom lies not in plurality or in changed patterns of life, but in acceptance of the inevitable, or our real selves and our situation."<sup>55</sup> We cannot hope to escape our human condition in its totality, we are not free to reinvent ourselves in whichever way we fancy, but accepting our form of life as given does not mean accepting everything about the way we live now.

## Critique and Conclusion

As I have asserted in Chapter 3, Pitkin's social theory in *Wittgenstein and Justice* was built by taking Peter Winch's and J. L. Austin's methodological work to complement and expand the fundamental ontological and epistemological precepts she draws from Wittgenstein's later philosophy. In comparison, in this paper we saw how she built her political theory by using Wittgenstein's ontology to flesh out and justify the fundamental political values she draws from Kant and Arendt. As such, it is not surprising that Wittgenstein's influence is more direct in the former than it is the latter. After all, Arendt and Kant are relatively further removed from Wittgenstein's philosophical ethos than Winch and Austin. From Kant, Pitkin inherits his deontological commitment to respect other human beings as subjects with their own cares and ends – human beings whose manipulation is unjust oppression. And from Arendt, she inherits a deontological commitment for political openness, honesty and a commitment for the democratically and deliberatively defined public good.

Applying Wittgensteinian ontology and methodology to the above political values, Pitkin arrives at a left civic republican and anti-conservative vision of the political realm. However, while she is quite right in insisting that Wittgenstein was not a conservative, she makes no direct argument as to why her reading might be the only correct one. While Pitkin's main aim was to use a Wittgensteinian perspective to uncover spaces for dissent, to use Wittgenstein's work as a spade to crack open the sedimented modes of our political life and uncover the injustices that lie beneath, those injustices are not so defined by anything Wittgenstein wrote, but by the political values she finds in Arendt and Kant. Understandably finding no moral commitments from Wittgenstein, Pitkin must bring them in from elsewhere. And so, even if method does often dictate content as Pitkin claims, it is not really in this case, that Wittgenstein's method dictates

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pg. 338.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pg. 338.

liberal Arendtian content. Nevertheless, perhaps one might argue that if positivism is intrinsically conservative as Pitkin charges and Wittgenstein is anti-positivist, then Wittgenstein is intrinsically liberal or left-leaning. But this is a false dichotomy. It is also possible that although anti-positivist, Wittgenstein's work is intrinsically apolitical and thus can be easily read as either conservative or liberal or anything in between without apparent internal contradiction in whichever way, but also not without adding particular normative commitments from the outside.

Subsequently, as much as Pitkin explicitly attempted to delineate the concept of the political without implying any particular political system, it seems that she did not succeed. She of course attempted to justify her construal of the concept by tracing its etymological roots back to the Greek '*polis*' and delineating the value commitments inherent in the politics of the *polis*. And she dealt with the dissenting question of why we should accept the two millennia old Greek conception of the political as the true one by saying that the ideal standards of politics delineated by Wolin and Arendt are, "not really the Greek conception of politics, but our own."<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, while an argument with an etymological-historical emphasis is ostensibly inspired by the ordinary language methodology of Austin, that emphasis is not necessarily fully consonant with Wittgenstein's ontology. Wittgenstein's emphasis was on the language games that people 'play' (in the present tense) and while conservative readers have read a conservative quietism in that, it was Pitkin who pointed out that Wittgenstein allowed for language games to have a dynamic and evolving character to them. So, while Austin's assertion is true – that most concepts have some residue of past meanings – by Pitkin's own anti-conservative argument, she overemphasizes this link to the past. Using a concept today without the commitments the concept used to embody may not necessarily be the result of moral decay. It might simply be part of the natural evolution of the concept as it is adjusted to fit contemporary society. After all, few people live in a city-state today, even fewer own the slaves necessary for individual participation and many live in increasingly multicultural and multilingual societies. And thus, while the impersonal and alienated modes of interaction in modern post-industrialised societies are to be lamented, it is unclear why the normative force of that lament should be argued through a cultural inheritance that not everybody shares and one that implies a socio-structural background that no longer applies. By Pitkin's own argument about sedimented understandings and practices, it is possible for a concept to grow and change and become less about commitment to a single set of ideals not because of corruption but because adhering to those ideals is no longer adequate in dealing with a diversity of values and standards in contemporary society and because whatever standards of justice that applied to the Greek *polis* may require authentic and legitimate revision. After all, Pitkin argued that part of the grammar of politics is that different values have legitimacy in the conversation of politics. The modern usage of the concept of the political looks like corruption from one point of view, but from another, it might be liberating and inclusive. This discussion of course, is another iteration of liberalism's problem with accounting for and dealing with pluralism. However, in our case, if modern societies are not free to adapt the concepts of 'politics' or the 'political' to their own language games, signalling their own present commitments, then Pitkin is vulnerable to her own anti-conservative arguments.

Further, if we insist that the concept of the political is given meaning by historically Greek commitments, then the governing activities of non-Western or non-English-speaking or non-deliberative-democratic societies cannot be validly translated as 'politics' or described as 'political'. By Pitkin's own line of reasoning, only what happens in Western deliberative democracies can be called 'politics' or 'political'. But by the lights of Pitkin's own ordinary

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pg. 213.

language philosophy methodology – that we should investigate the meanings of words by generally discounting deviant sounding locutions – one would say that that sounds odd. Here we have arrived at something similar to Aristotle’s puzzle as discussed by Pitkin<sup>57</sup>. By defining a citizen by the participation she gives to her society’s governance, Aristotle came to the odd conclusion that people are only citizens in a democracy and the corollary is that in a monarchy, only the monarch is a citizen. But of course if we define a concept with deliberative democratic principles, then we should scarcely expect it to apply to non-deliberative-democratic contexts. When we do invent such definitions we get the odd grammatical result that if politics is to be defined by freedom and the public good, then tyranny is not subsequently a political problem; that is, it is not a problem about politics. It becomes a problem that arises from not having politics, a problem that appears in the absence of politics – to be solved by *acquiring* politics.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, this goes against contemporary ordinary usage of the concept and Pitkin attempted to perfect the ordinary. From this perspective, the methods of Wittgenstein and Oxford ordinary language philosophy come into tension with each other and Pitkin chooses the latter over the former.

Pitkin’s definition of the political along Arendtian lines also makes the political conceptually distinct and separate from the social and therein lies her objection to Rousseau, who, according to this definition, invalidly tied cultural education to political life. Where the political is the realm of rational free collective action, the social is the realm of determined and caused behaviour. However, to argue this is to severely underplay the importance of the social context (of cultural and linguistic membership) for the individual to understand her own agency. Pitkin herself argued that we have no need of social contracts when we *grow* into obligated and connected individuals, that is, we grow as moral and political agents in our *social* context. Of course if we interpret political life entirely on the model of social life we might risk *some* amount of political freedom, but to argue that this would make political norms implicit and fully internalized *without question* is firstly already to envision a particular and not a general social compact and secondly to make no distinction between non-liberal and illiberal cultures. This, of course, is an example of Western commentary’s tendency to conceptually categorise communal societies with those that are oppressive, but clearly, being non-liberal does not entail being illiberal. Again, this reflects liberalism’s problem with accounting for pluralism. It is not so much that Rousseau is not incorrect in creating a specific rather than a general theory of political membership; rather, it is that Pitkin is guilty of this herself.

Pitkin’s distinction between the political and the social is also a subject about which Wittgenstein was silent. Pitkin based this distinction not on Wittgensteinian ontology but on Arendtian values and thereby, ultimately on Aristotelian teleology – where a human being can only fulfil her potential as a human being by participating in the political realm and expanding her social imagination to the largest of scales and acting on judgement and responsibility. In contrast, the social realm is the biological realm of blind reactive response where she remains an instinctive animal. But this utilisation of a teleological vision is in tension with Pitkin’s other commitments on two points. The first is her explicit avowal of Wittgenstein’s call for philosophy to leave things as they are. At the very least, this means that the burden of proof that any set of normative values are indeed compatible with Wittgenstein’s philosophy falls on her, but she offered no direct argument as to why an Aristotelian teleology does indeed follow from a Wittgensteinian ontology from our species form of life. The second point of tension is with

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pg. 215.

<sup>58</sup> See Ibid., pg. 326.

Pitkin's stand with regards to moralising and political theory, where she regards comprehensive, abstract theorizing as manipulative of the individual citizen whose wishes and opinions were not consulted. Yet in *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Pitkin introduces a teleological vision from the outside, telling readers what their best selves are like by abstracting from a particular vision of politics. Of course, Pitkin admits that stripping all moralising from political theory might be impossible, but she has given us no indication as to why her own efforts at moralising are justified.

Pitkin's distinction between the political and the social also parallels her distinction between political and moral discourses, because as opposed to politics' public nature, morality to her is a private realm of personal intercourse. To Pitkin, only the *polis* can teach men about justice – a lesson learnt from a life shared publicly and impersonally with others in society at large. According to her, the household can teach you unselfishness, but it cannot teach you justice. But Pitkin's analysis is based on concentrating on what for her are the differences in what these discourses are 'mainly' for, at the expense of studying carefully how much variation these differences can have in different cultures where moral discourse can serve a different main purpose. As such, Pitkin's idea of moral discourse is as particular as her idea of political discourse, and similar problems arise from taking it as universal. While she argues that moral discourse can be public but that is not what it is mainly for, that vision of moral discourse mostly fits societies with an individual ethos where there is no moral authority and where morality is never externally enforced. In more communal societies, the line between morality and politics (the line between private and public) is blurred and the moral failing of an individual affects more than a handful of people around her. In these societies, the immoral act of one person, especially (but not necessarily) of a public figure, can raise the question of membership for the entire society. Pitkin was mistaken in conflating the intimate and the private. There could be such a thing as 'intimate politics' in a society for whom the identity of the one is bound very tightly with the identity of the whole. Rousseau may have gone too far in using the words 'forced to be free', but he was essentially speaking about the same reaffirmation of political membership as Pitkin was.

Thus, while in Chapter 3 I have argued that Pitkin's social theory was post-modern in its holism and acceptance of ambiguities and contradictions, Pitkin's political theory is quite modernist in the sense that it is systematic in building its normative vision and looks very much like the beginnings of a coherent comprehensive political theory. Oddly though, Pitkin's political theory seems to go against her own suggestion that a Wittgensteinian political theory would be accepting of plurality and suspicious of broad, systematic generalisation. However, if we are to take *Wittgenstein and Justice* as something other than a Wittgensteinian political theory, that alternative would be inconsistent with her assertion that method often dictates content. This ambiguity stems from the fact that in forming her anti-conservative project, Pitkin extrapolated from the Western political experience and perspective to the exclusion of the multiplicity of political experiences and perspectives around the world. But Wittgenstein tried to tell us who we are, not who we should be. And so perhaps a Wittgensteinian political theory can at best only tell us who we can and cannot be. Our choice among alternative ways of being political has to be guided by moral or teleological commitments which have to be acquired from elsewhere and Pitkin underplays the contribution of her secondary influences. Wittgenstein's work is useful for social and political studies, but we must not give him more credit than he is due. Accepting and embracing a Wittgensteinian investigative method and social ontology need not exclusively entail liberal views such as Pitkin's left civic republicanism.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Social Thought of James Tully

In this and the following chapter, we turn our attention to the writings of James Tully, concentrating mainly on the works compiled in his two volume collection, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*. We begin here with a study of his sociological and methodological thought before looking at his more directly political thought in the next chapter. Unlike Hanna Pitkin, Tully's work under examination here is more piecemeal, taking the form of individual articles that have been woven together into a collection. Yet, like Pitkin, Tully presents a new way of doing political theory - as the title of his collection suggests - which is also similarly inspired in part by the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, as we shall see in this and following chapters, Tully's interpretation and more so his use of Wittgenstein's concepts and ethos, varies significantly from Pitkin. In fact, after narrating and examining Tully's social ontology and social scientific methodology, this chapter will argue that Tully fails to be accurate when he tries to equate the Foucauldian method of genealogy with the Wittgensteinian method of 'perspicuous representation'. This is because the goal of such genealogies is to transcend Foucault's concept of 'limits' while 'perspicuous representation' aids in breaking the spell of Wittgenstein's idea of 'pictures', but 'limits' and 'pictures' are not equal concepts. And further, Tully errs when he conflates 'pictures' themselves with Wittgenstein's idea of a 'form of life'. Similarly, the two are not equal concepts. Still, we will see how in some other ways, Wittgenstein's ideas are indeed complementary to Tully's critical methods.

#### Motivation

Tully's central motivation is to immerse himself in the civic task of struggling against oppression, in direct engagement with the citizens who live every day under such conditions. To him, "[t]he role of public philosophy is to address public affairs,"<sup>1</sup> but such an address can no longer, in these modern times, come from 'on high'. For reasons we will discuss in depth, the political theorist today, can no longer preach a comprehensive political theory, to be applied universally and without reciprocal adjustments. For Tully, this means a political theory that is a dialogical practice aimed at the establishment of,

pedagogical relationships of reciprocal elucidation between academic research and the civic activities of fellow citizens. The specific role of this public philosophy is to throw a critical light on the fields of practices in which civic struggles take place and the practices of civic freedom available to change them. It does this by means of historical and critical studies of the field and the given theoretical forms of representation of it. Reciprocally, this critical ethos learns from citizens and the successes and failures of their civic activities how to improve the historical and critical studies and begin again.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tully, James. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume I, Democracy and Civic Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

Nevertheless, what is new about Tully's approach is not entirely so. While the history of political thought is full of theorists who have put themselves above the mass of the citizenry and this presents the mainstream tradition of the discipline, its history is also populated by public philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Bertrand Russell and Noam Chomsky. Like Tully, these authors sought to bring political and social issues into public view for public discussion and like him, they thought of themselves as citizens who worked on the same problems as their fellow citizens. Still, what Tully brings is a self-consciously explicit post-foundationalist and holist understanding of that role and a new proposal for what relevant methods that can centrally (but not foundationally) come into play. To wit, he does not assume that there are causal processes that inadvertently determine the course of social and political history and does not therefore believe it is his special role to elucidate that story as a revelation. He does not argue that there are universal ethical principles that tell citizens how to act regardless of context and does not therefore believe it is his special role to elucidate what immutable normative principles govern collective life. And finally, Tully does not assume that there are institutions and background norms that act as necessary preconditions that must be satisfied in order to enable truly democratic activity and he does not, therefore, believe it mandatory for political scholars to study those institutions and norms.

This abandonment of these traditional disciplinary assumptions shapes Tully's political thought because it represents his core social ontology and social science methodology. He takes those background conditions to be constitutive of social and political relationships and as evolving along with those relationships. Tully rejects the traditional ontological assumption that they come into human collective life and determine its course from the outside – as something that happens to us rather than what we do. For Tully, “[i]t is this revolutionary discovery that brings political philosophy ‘down’ into the world of the *demos* and renders it a situated public philosophy in conversation with fellow citizens.”<sup>3</sup> And while politically this means that we can more easily constitute ourselves as free beings because these background conditions are no longer to be thought of as impenetrable limits that confront us, it also means that, methodologically, one of the central functions of the social scholar is to uncover the actually mutable and contingent conditions whose guise of necessity mislead and enthrall us in our view of social reality. And in order to do that, the social scholar need not limit herself to the fiction of pure description in the social sciences, for the fall of the above foundationalist assumptions also means that the social scholar is free to attempt radical redescription of social practices and beliefs and uncover the mutable and contingent in background conditions.

### **Privileging Practice**

While Tully believes that the three traditional disciplinary assumptions above no longer hold, that still leaves behind countless ways of studying politics and society whose validity cannot be foreclosed upon. He admits that there is, “no universal criteria for adjudicating among them.”<sup>4</sup> Still, he takes from this lack of definite answers and the open-endedness of social and political dialogue the central importance of practice or activity. “Dialogue partners gain insight into what ruling, being ruled and contesting rule is through the exchange of questions and answers over different ways of studying politics and over different criteria for their assessment

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pg. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg. 15.

relative to how they illuminate different aspects of the complex worlds of politics.”<sup>5</sup> It is this central importance of practice and activity which in part draws him towards what he calls , “public philosophy as a critical activity”<sup>6</sup> for critical activity is a form of philosophical reflection that starts from and privileges practice and consequently allows one to reflect on those practices which are oppressive and consequently call them into question. It allows one to see social and political problems as real practical problems of contestation and negotiation which are aimed at real and practical solutions to those problems.

To Tully, apart from this focus on the actual practices of government, critical activity has three other characteristics which make it central to public philosophy. Firstly, in line with his post-foundationalist beliefs, critical activity is consonant with a philosophy that stays clear of building grand, comprehensive theories, because critical activity is not aimed at building final theories of justice, equality or democracy that close the book on further discussion. “Rather, it is to disclose the historically contingent conditions of possibility of this historically singular set of practices of governance and of the range of characteristic problems and solutions to which it gives rise...”<sup>7</sup> Neither is critical theory aimed at the compilation of close, detailed descriptions for historical-ethnographical curiosity. Rather, critical activity seeks to change the way we understand ourselves as individuals or groups who struggle against those practices of government and their characteristic problems. The central aim of critical activity then is neither merely descriptive nor merely interpretive. Secondly, in order to achieve the above, critical activity focuses on two empirically-minded methods. The first are critical surveys of practices and languages that set the context of the practical social and political problems and their proposed solutions. This is to uncover the forms of subjectivity that form the constitutive conditions for those problems, and to reveal them as just that - subjective in nature. The second are historical or genealogical surveys that place those languages and practices in their larger context in order to see how forms of subjectivity are shaped by historically specific trends in thought and action. This allows us to better, “develop the perspectival ability”<sup>8</sup> to see alternative ways of possible arrangements in our collective life. Thirdly, critical activity is practical not only in the sense that it calls collective arrangements into question as above but also because this approach is aimed at creating a dialogical partnership with citizens on the ground who live within these questioned practices. “It is an interlocutory intervention on the side of the oppressed.”<sup>9</sup> This dialogical practice is meant to be on going and reciprocal and the public philosopher’s task is never done. Negotiation will bring response, response will bring another round of critical activity and the cycle continues.

Tully’s idea of a public philosophy as a critical activity therefore stands as a type of permanent dialogue that is public in nature and which surveys collective social-political practices in view of improving collective life. It finds its natural rivals in the scholastic tradition of natural law and the deontology of Immanuel Kant, but Tully prefers to view these agonistic relationships as dialogues as well, never assuming that critical activity has the final word and taking whatever he finds useful from those traditions. Thus, Tully takes from the tradition of public philosophy more of its philosophical ethos than any kind of central theory or doctrine.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pg. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pg. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pg. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pg. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pg. 17.

## The Enlightenment and Foucault

Tully's method can be neatly juxtaposed with the traditions of the Enlightenment. Comparable to some of the best traditions of Enlightenment thought, Tully takes public philosophy as starting from the actual problems that come from actual social and political practice. However, a central part of his vision of critical activity is the putting to question the very practices and languages of reflection that we have inherited from the Enlightenment. For instance, since the advent of the Enlightenment, political studies have traditionally used the Enlightenment's basic vocabulary of the 'nation-state', 'political parties' and 'social movements', and philosophical reflection on our collective life have taken these modern practices of freedom as a given. This left philosophical reflection with the distilled, taken for granted task of simply enunciating the justness of such collective arrangements. The modern subjectivity of being taken as free and equal citizens under ideal conditions of law and constitution that reflected popular sovereignty came to be cemented as the starting point of all critical reflection on society. However, placing himself firmly in the critical activities of our contemporary period, Tully takes his cue from social-democratic, ecological and feminist theorists as well as scholars of empire, globalisation, cosmopolitanism, international justice, multiculturalism, multinationalism, indigenous rights, and post-colonialism. Like many of them, Tully believes that, "we cannot uncritically accept as our starting point the default languages and practices of politics and their rival traditions of interpretation and problem-solving inherited from the first Enlightenment, as if they were unquestionably comprehensive, universal and legitimate, and requiring only internal clarification, analysis, theory building and reform."<sup>10</sup> And so, in order to avoid the Enlightenment's folly of thinking that one can, and perhaps has, solved everything once and for all, Tully proceeds by taking a dialogical relation to social and political problems, thus carrying on in the Enlightenment's critical *attitude* but not with its doctrines.

Tully's method of taking inspiration from the Enlightenment's ethos but not its doctrines is heavily influenced by Michel Foucault's specific critical analyses. Just as Foucault once noted that during World War II philosophers of various stripes were found to have supported Nazi doctrines, Tully argues that one can always appeal to one's philosophical conceptions regardless of how weak the connection one's actual political opinions has to them. Having the most profound or the cleverest political theories does not save one from making poor political choices and rationalising them after the fact; even the most comprehensive political doctrines can be perverted to any end whatsoever. In fact, the more abstract the theory, the easier it is to make a particular opinion cohere to it and therefore the poorer its critical effectiveness. Theories that take the viewpoint of the universalist tradition for instance, are often derived from the juridical tradition of the Enlightenment and attempt to abstract and universalise from specific juridical practices of governance. These traditions – and to Tully, especially the natural law tradition – are ineffective because they tend to misrepresent other, non-juristic forms of knowledge and practices of governance in which many, especially non-Western subjects are constituted and are governed by. "The lesson to be drawn from this experience is, as we have seen, to make critical philosophy less abstract by tying it as closely as possible to specific struggles."<sup>11</sup>

Enlightenment scholars of the universalist tradition, including Kantians like Jürgen Habermas who continue that tradition, attempt to speak for the whole of society about what is true and just for it. This theorising is often based on a foundationalist epistemology inspired by

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pg. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pg. 101.



natural law or by Kant. However, the critical scholar attempts to make her critique specific by focusing on individual practical systems and the relations of power and morality within them. The latter type of scholar has become more common since the end of World War II and the blossoming of social movements such as the anti-nuclear, green, feminist, civil rights and anti-globalisation movements. These specific critical intellectuals did not aim at building comprehensive theories but to make specific criticisms of the excesses of specific practices of governance. This contemporary tradition of critique traces its roots from early modern humanist critiques which, “provided the background to Kant’s Enlightenment attitude in ‘What is Enlightenment?’ and thus initiated the tradition in which Foucault places his own work. The universal-juridical tradition furnished the background to Kant’s formal critique of the limits of knowledge and so constitutes the basis of the tradition in which Habermas works.”<sup>12</sup>

Theorists of the universalist tradition like Habermas, however, in aiming to formulate universal principles, accuse critical theorists of performative contradiction in rejecting the validity of all rules and principles. In response, critical theorists such as Foucault and Tully reject the notion that they are universal sceptics. Foucault, for example, does not deny that there may be necessary rules common to all ‘games of truth’, but, to study what is singular and historically contingent about a communicative practice, “does not mean that it is deprived of all universal form, but instead that the putting into play these universal forms is itself historical.”<sup>13</sup> So, while dialogical exchange about practices of governance does perhaps require certain principles such as the obligations to tell the truth and to exchange reasons, these ‘games of truth’, as Foucault calls them, vary culturally and historically. Tully, on the other hand, puts it more bluntly and argues that the attempt to deduce universal principles has been given sufficient time and effort, but since we have failed, we must accept that we do not possess the necessary knowledge to exclude all other ‘games of truth’. The possibility of discovering new principles is not foreclosed and new knowledge may result in the changing of principles we have now. All hitherto ‘games of truth’ must therefore be treated only as provisional. Thus, the Enlightenment ethos that Tully draws from Foucault, and which Foucault drew from Kant, is only a specific form of scepticism and not the universal scepticism they are accused of by universalist theorists.

While eschewing universal forms, Tully argues that this Enlightenment ethos is still compatible with a wide variety of cultural and historical forms of communication and rationality, as well as a wide variety of scholarly, formal theories of rationality from Plato to Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, neither Foucault nor Tully would accept conventional rules of communication or rationality that foreclose on the radical redescription of concepts and practices. To them, the ability to redescribe is the locus of change, because conventional criteria of the application of words and phrases may have unintended, (or perhaps sometimes indeed intended) consequences of restricting thought. Redescription is a valid tool for challenging those habits of mind that attempt to determine our shared customary vocabulary and consequently sediment our customary forms of judgments. Foucault’s historical studies aim at showing that such purported universal forms are actually contingent and if they are contingent, then it is possible to think and act differently without performative contradiction. By not accepting the Kantian identification of reason with the dominant Western juridical forms of rationality, Foucault and consequently Tully are able to avoid contradiction and legitimately aim the critical eye back onto those forms of rationality. And therefore, testing these forms of rationality is not irrational, but a form of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pg. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, Michel. “Preface to the History of Sexuality Volume II”, in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pg. 335, quoted in Tully, vol. 1, pg.107.

immanent critique that tests one rule against another and hence enables the critical theorist to do what Habermas failed to do: “break the circle of presentism surrounding the decentred subject and open it to critical enquiry.”<sup>14</sup>

From the above, we can already see that James Tully borrows heavily from the methodological underpinnings of Foucault’s work, and his writings therefore is not a new form of analysis or technique, but is broadly speaking, a continuation of the critical ethos of the Enlightenment tradition. Tully follows Foucault because, Foucault’s, “philosophy aims to free us from habitual forms of thought and action in the present, enabling us to experiment with thinking and acting differently,”<sup>15</sup> thereby fulfilling the critical task Tully sets for himself. These habitual forms of thought and action present themselves as limits to our subjectivity and encourage us to see our current form of subjectivity as universal and given – closing our minds to the multiplicity of possible ways we can form ourselves as human subjects. These habitual forms of thought and action limit us because they are taken for granted as forming the implicit background conditions in which our subjective form finds its home. All further thought and action are contextually based on these background conditions which therefore conversely form the horizon or limits to those thoughts and actions. Unable to transcend that horizon with customary forms of thinking and doing, we mistakenly take those limits to be universal, necessary or obligatory and therefore legitimate. In their sedimented form, customary forms of subjectivity lie unchallenged. However, habit and custom are no necessities, and Tully follows the poststructuralist Foucault in the ontological commitment that there is no a priori form of the human subject. Any form of the human subject, even the autonomous form, must therefore be analysed through the specific processes of subjectivisation to isolate it from all the different possibilities. In this, Tully believes himself to be in agreement with many twentieth century philosophers such as Judith Butler, Richard Rorty and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Tully argues that the role for philosophy today, as it was for both Foucault and Wittgenstein, is, “the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently.”<sup>16</sup>

It follows from this Foucauldian influence, that Tully would privilege historical methods in his writings. Along Foucauldian lines, historical studies uncover contingent limits in two ways. Firstly, it uncovers what is taken for granted in ourselves as the form of subjectivity at question and secondly it uncovers what is given to us from the outside as universal, necessary and obligatory. In both instances, what is thought of as hard limits are revealed to be contingent and arbitrary. In this way, historical studies are key in changing the ways we look at ourselves and the world in which we find ourselves. It does this by reproblematising the form of subjectivity at hand according to three aspects: i) as practical systems, ii) along three axes of subjectivisation and iii) from the viewpoint of the generality of problematisation.

A form of subjectivity can firstly be reproblematised in the context of the practical systems under which it learns to act, that is, the context in which it inherits and acquires its practical abilities to do the things it does. Tully takes these systems to be akin to Wittgenstein’s idea of language games. In this analysis, Tully looks at both the forms of rationality that organise activity as well as the inherent freedom subjects have under these systems. As such, Tully sees these systems as both given and created by the subjects, and thus these systems do not wholly determine subjects behind their backs. Subjects are always free to attempt to modify these

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<sup>14</sup> Tully, *Public Philosophy: Vol. 1*, pg. 109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Vol. II, The Use of Pleasure*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pg. 9, quoted in Tully, pg. 77.

practical systems as they go along, and Tully sees this as a principle that is consonant with Wittgenstein's idea of a language game.

A form of subjectivity can also be secondly reproblematised as a form of rationality or 'strategic game of freedom' along three axes: knowledge, power and ethics. Along the axis of knowledge, a form of subjectivity is analysed as a form of knowledge according to which we recognise ourselves and are recognised by others as human subjects. This places a subject as both a subject of knowledge and as a participant in a game of truth, where all subjects problematise their own identity and the identity of others, thereby avoiding being conceived in a structuralist paradigm in which the subjects are wholly determined by others. Along the axis of power, a form of subjectivity is analysed as relations of power in which subjects condition and are conditioned by others in view of conducting themselves in accordance with or in challenging a specific form of governance. Along the axis of ethics, analysis of a form of subjectivity takes the form of an analysis of the ways we constitute ourselves as subjects in accord with or in challenging a specific ethical ideal of a subject. The object of this second type of reproblematisation is aimed at delineating the complex relationships among these three axes in the hope of revealing those characteristics of our subjectivity which are in fact contingent limits on our way of being.

Finally, a form of subjectivity can also be thirdly reproblematised as a general form, as opposed to a 'universal' form. This follows from the notion that a form of subjectivity is historically contingent and not an a priori truth. Thus, it is a historical form of problematisation rather than a context-free one and the limit imposed on subjects is of a limit for subjects experienced from the inside. It is a characteristic way for subjects to bring to their deliberate attention the way an aspect of how they are constituted is governed. Even though, "a subject does not invent the arts of self-fashioning he or she employs,"<sup>17</sup> and they are, "proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group,"<sup>18</sup> forms of subjectivity are not imposed on passive subjects, but on free subjects who take a deliberate part of developing their own form of subjectivity. This assumption of freedom is key to how the critical historical method of Foucault enables us to think and act differently, for only with this condition of freedom are limits to our forms of subjectivity can be shown to be contingent and arbitrary. Again, this methodology rivals that of the universalist Kantian tradition where the aim is to discover the universal form of the subject by making explicit, through universal programs of communicative practice and universal forms of logic, the implicit universal values of existing systems of governance.

## **Working With Wittgenstein**

From the above discussion on James Tully's preference for the traditional ethos of the Enlightenment and the form it found in the post-structuralist works of Michel Foucault, one could be forgiven for thinking that Tully holds this form of critical reflection to be foundational for all our critical reflection on social and political organisation. Yet of course, this could hardly be so when this form of critical reflection is decidedly non-transcendental and post-foundationalist. This form of critical reflection actually works against the traditional assumption in political and social theory that, "our way of political life is free and rational only if it is founded on some form of critical reflection on the background conditions of possibility of human

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<sup>17</sup> Tully, *Public Philosophy: Vol. 1*, pg. 78.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Final Foucault*, edited by James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), pg. 11, quoted in Tully, pg. 78.

action that transcend the situated world of everyday activities of citizens and public philosophers.”<sup>19</sup> Tully’s idea of a public philosophy as critical activity eschews this essentialist assumption in favour of the, “motley of free, critical and reasonable ways of being *in* the world.”<sup>20</sup> While the proposers of foundational forms of critical reflection claim to free us from convention, the irony is that their own proposals have become conventional. This irony stems from the common act of evaluating other forms of critical reflection through one’s own and consequently coming to the unsurprising conclusion that one’s own form of critical reflection is better, comprehensive and perhaps therefore, foundational. This phenomenon Tully calls a “captivating and Faustian convention”.<sup>21</sup> Tully’s proposed form of critical activity is therefore, based largely on Foucault’s method because Foucault did not claim his method to be foundational and it was one that allowed itself to be at question, allowing its critical eye to be turned back unto itself without contradiction. Unlike other supposedly foundational forms of critical reflection that claimed to free us from conventional pictures of social and political life but yet eventually became bewitching ‘pictures’ themselves, Foucault did not give his method special status, elevating it beyond criticism.

To justify his Foucauldian method, Tully finds epistemic and ontological justification in Wittgenstein’s later work. For this post-foundationalist and non-transcendent public philosophy, Tully finds justification from Wittgenstein’s post-foundationalist and non-transcendental epistemology. For this general but non-universal critical activity, Tully finds justification from Wittgenstein’s background philosophical commitment to situated rationality. Tully feels that he can draw this link from Wittgenstein to Foucault because through Wittgenstein, we learn that, “any practice of critical reflection is itself already founded in the popular sovereignty of our multiplicity of humdrum ways of acting with words,”<sup>22</sup> and therefore no single form of critical reflection has a privileged place. We would then be free to carry on using the arsenal of forms of critical reflection whose variety is already in place for our choosing. Also, since what Tully wants to do is to free us from this “Faustian convention”, Wittgenstein’s methods are useful because they too help, “free us from captivity in mistaken ways of thinking.”<sup>23</sup> In fact, even though Foucault’s analyses are primarily diachronic and Wittgenstein’s synchronic, Tully takes Wittgenstein’s philosophical method as taking the same critical attitude as Foucault, both fighting, “a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language,” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §109). For Tully, Wittgenstein’s post-foundationalist philosophical method also helps disclose possibilities of thinking and acting differently since its epistemology is based on convention and as we will see below, Tully takes human convention to be inherently contingent.

Under traditional modern foundationalist epistemology that traces its roots back to Descartes, certain knowledge can be built on firm epistemological precepts, and this led to the tradition of understanding political and social life by building comprehensive theories as exemplified by early modern philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes. However, Tully justifies his critical, non-universal method by basing it on Wittgenstein’s post-foundational epistemology that teaches us that understanding cannot be founded upon comprehensive theories or rules. Wittgenstein’s ‘rule-following’ argument for example, states that a sign, a rule or a concept (e.g.

<sup>19</sup> Tully, *Public Philosophy: Vol. 1*, pg. 39.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 40.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 70.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 41.

political and social concepts such as ‘sovereignty’) does not determine its own application and therefore it has no inherent universal meaning. Explaining the meaning of a sign or concept is nothing more than formulating an interpretation of a sign, but an interpretation is itself another sign and is nothing that can only be understood in only one way. Standing in need of interpretation itself, we are threatened with infinite regress. “Interpretation by themselves do not determined meaning,” (PI, §198). Thus, understanding and clarifying political concepts cannot be “the theoretical activity of abstracting from everyday use and making explicit the context-independent rules for the correct use of our concepts in every case, for the conditions of possibilities for such a meta-contextual political theory are not available.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, neither understanding nor the application of political and social concepts can be undergirded by comprehensive political and social scientific rules or theories. The various forms of argumentation are not everywhere bounded by rules and attempts at comprehensive theory-making such as Hobbes attempted, can simply never be as definitive as they purport themselves to be. “Political theories are thus seen to offer conditional perspectives on the whole broad complex of languages, relations of power, forms of subjectivity and practices of freedom to which they are addressed. None of these theories tells us the whole truth, yet each provides an aspect of the complex picture.”<sup>25</sup>

Looking at the same indeterminacy and inherent vagueness of conceptual meaning from a different perspective, Tully uses Wittgenstein’s argument to justify his claim that redescription in political and social studies cannot be foreclosed upon, for, since no set of explanations is definitive or exhaustive there is always a set of possible redescriptions of political and social concepts. “[T]he actual criteria for the application of a general political term are too various, indeterminate and hence open to unpredictable extension to be explicated in terms of an implicit or transcendental set of rules of theory, no matter how complex.”<sup>26</sup> In Wittgensteinian terms, the possible applications of a concept are related only by ‘family resemblances’ and they share no one trait, therefore no singular rule can account for them all. But while some of these redescriptions might be practically unreasonable or practically useless, having only the most tenuous connection to the customary or conventional explanation, this indefinite openness to new possibilities of redescriptions means that we cannot foreclose on the possibility that a new redescription can provoke genuine re-evaluation of those customs and conventions. The inherent vagueness of political and social concepts may mean that understanding them cannot operate along a definite calculus, but this does not mean that social and political science is irrational or arbitrary. Instead, theorising about politics and society is a form of practical reasoning and “[s]uch a skill, like all practical abilities, cannot be exhaustively described in terms of rules, for the application of the term is not everywhere bounded by rules.”<sup>27</sup> Possibilities of new conceptual understandings of political and social life always remain open to the skilled scholar.

However, the use of Wittgensteinian epistemology as justificatory grounds for his form of public philosophy means that Tully not only uses the Wittgensteinian concept of a ‘picture’ as a model of reality but as a model of social reality as well; and within the latter, he extends the concept to cover not only political and social concepts but to also include political and social practices and relations of power. For, what Tully’s critical method is aimed to do is to enable readers to appreciate the relative merits and limitations of not only different explanations of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pg. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pg. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pg. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pg. 27.

political and social concepts, but of practices of governance and relations of power as well. When you raise political and social problems and discuss solutions, there are always some uses of concepts that are not questioned and some relations of power which are not challenged in practice – those that seem ‘universal, necessary or obligatory’, to use the Foucauldian phrase Tully adopts. To Tully, these are as ‘bewitching’ as any conventional epistemological understandings which Wittgenstein denoted by the term ‘picture’. “[U]ncontested relations of power that govern ways of acting function as the enabling and constraining conditions of possibility of the practice as a whole, its forms of government and contestation.”<sup>28</sup> Those that go unquestioned function as the basis, warrants or grounds of social and political discussion, just as epistemological ‘pictures’ form the grounds on which we base our interaction with the physical world. Thus, Tully takes Wittgenstein’s quote from *On Certainty* that, “All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system,” (*On Certainty*, §105), as encompassing hypotheses on political and social practices as well as merely basic epistemological ones. With such a broad interpretation of Wittgensteinian epistemology, he can take not only conventional concepts but customary collective practices as well, as the background conditions of our collective life and so take both as enabling or constraining the form of problematisation of our collective subjectivity. In this way, Tully is able to ground more comprehensively not only a Foucauldian methodology, but a large swathe of public philosophy, steeped in the traditional ethos of the Enlightenment, in Wittgensteinian epistemology.

From this grounding in Wittgensteinian epistemology, Tully not only argues that no system of political or social analysis and explanation can be foundational, but implicitly takes a radically post-foundationalist stance in his own methodology. Since systems of rules are always up for bona fide review and possible change, each rule is only provisional and can be tested by other rules. Following Wittgenstein, the ‘hardness’ of each rule is only provisionally rooted in the inherited agreement we have in the language in which all testing of hypotheses and proposals of solutions take place; the logical ‘hardness’ of each rule is conventional and Wittgenstein calls this conventional agreement ‘an agreement in forms of life’. However, Tully here takes a different turn than other Wittgenstein-inspired philosophers who work in the tradition of Peter Winch. Theorists such as Hanna Pitkin and Mark Bevir take the idea of ‘forms of life’ as the ultimate explanation or justification for the linguistic activities and practices we have as human beings and as the founding level or substrate upon which we build different historical and cultural modes of life, and that which makes intermodal understanding possible, but James Tully does not make much distinction between ‘forms of life’ and Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘pictures’. For instance, Hanna Pitkin takes the concept of ‘forms of life’ as picking out the facticity of our being in the world and therefore representing the most permanent and unchangeable aspects of our collective lives - those aspects which the political theorist would be foolish to attempt to change. In this, Pitkin is taking the concept of ‘forms of life’ as suggesting a unitary, singular ‘form of life’ that represents the basic, foundational way that we live as human beings – our ‘species-life’. James Tully, on the other hand, makes limited use of the concept of ‘forms of life’, using it only to epistemologically explain why we have agreed upon conventional ‘pictures’ of physical and social realities and what these ‘pictures’ are ultimately rooted in. Unlike Winch and his followers, Tully does not use the concept of ‘forms of life’ to demonstrate the intersubjective ‘hardness’ of conventions, but oppositely to demonstrate their contingent nature which in turn forms the basis for his brand of critical activity. Tully does not use the concept of ‘forms of life’

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pg. 32.

to suggest anything like a basic human nature, but to suggest a radical plasticity to human life that would support his rather anti-theoretical stand.

While Winch and his followers are not foundationalist theorists in the strict Cartesian sense, their practical and anthropological social theories are in a manner, relatively more foundationalist than Tully and his critical method. Winch and his followers, while taking methodological holism seriously and criticising linear causal explanatory theories, nevertheless take our species-life as the brute fact from which all social and political explanations ultimately must spring. They are, despite their various differences, at base, commonly interested in what claim to truth social and political studies can have. Comparatively, by entertaining the idea that everything about human beings is possibly up for grabs, Tully takes Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical streak more seriously than these other theorists. For Tully, not only is no single way in which the human subject thinks or acts universal, but none are foundationally regulative either. Tully's work avoids the deepest methodological and epistemological questions because his project is aimed at describing how human life can always be questioned, not how it can always be explained. To Tully, his, "is not a critique from the vantage point of a transcendental standard or procedure of judgment, for as we have seen, such standards are internally related to the language games they purport to transcend. Rather, it is a non-transcendental yet transcending critique of the horizons of our practices and forms of thought by means of reciprocal comparison and contrast with other possible ways of being in the world."<sup>29</sup> But since his project is critical, he has no need for an ontological theory that could possibly help explain every human practice and where those explanations end, only one which could explain how every human practice has been different and could be different from the way it is now. The dominant answer to the question of how we should live in the *polis* has, since Plato, been to build foundationalist comprehensive theories that usually centre on the problem of justice. These consequently tend to lead to foundationalist comprehensive theories about how to build good constitutional systems. And although Wittgenstein-inspired theorists in the Winchian tradition do not attempt comprehensive theories on the problem of justice, they are still interested in delineating general methodological programs for general application in social and political studies. Tully's method, however, is part of the 'subaltern school' which is not only sceptical of definitive practices and solutions to problems or governance, but is sceptical of definitive descriptions of the human subject. Tully's project is simply uninterested in a deeper epistemology.

### **An Intersubjective Ontology**

Tully's critical project, while less interested in general epistemological questions, is based on a holist social ontology that takes a very broad view of the concept of 'government'. While he takes some inspiration from Hannah Arendt, as we will discuss below, he does not make the same teleological delineation between the social and the political. Neither does he, in the manner of other Wittgenstein-inspired theorists, make that distinction by an analysis of the differences between language regions or modes of life that separate the social from the political. Since his focus is human subjectivity, that is, the characteristics of the human subject as an entity subject to collective life with others, he takes a broad definition of 'government' from the broad use of the term in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, where 'governance' was used to refer to subjection under any kind of organisation. "[A]ny form of human organisation is a practice of governance, involving relationships of intersubjective recognition, power, modes of interaction and strategies

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pg. 35.

of freedom, whether it is an educational institution, bureaucracy, firm, ministry, regulatory regime or government in the formal sense.”<sup>30</sup> Tully is interested in human subjectivisation as long as the individual is subject to external governance and so he makes no distinction between what is traditionally thought of as separate spheres of the social and the political, or alternatively, the private and the public spheres.

This holist ontological base is, of course, contrary to the rival Kantian and natural law traditions of the Enlightenment, with which Tully likes to contrast his approach. These traditions are continuations of the Platonic tradition of building foundationalist, comprehensive theories revolving around fundamental questions of justice and they took the answers to lie in the construction of good constitutional systems. This engendered a narrowing of the concept of ‘government’ and ‘governmentality’ since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in the contemporary conflation of ‘government’ with the ‘state’, where government is only the sphere of the formal practices of representative government in constitutional nation-states. “Political philosophy came to be restricted to reflection on the just arrangement of this narrow set of governing practices and their problems as if they were sovereign, that is, the foundation from which all others were governed and ordered through a constitutional system of laws (and the remainder could be taken over by other disciplines).”<sup>31</sup> Tully rejects this view in favour of a social ontology that includes the whole slew of subjectivisation processes which condition the human subject in collective life, whether primarily taking place in the public or private realm.

Tully makes no distinction between the social and the political as separate realms as teleological-minded theorists might, but instead ties them together as a common realm of governmentality that is undergirded by dialogical activity. Whether in the public or private sphere, “[a] form of government includes the language games in which both governors and governed are led to recognise each other as partners in the practice, communicate, coordinate their activities, raise problems and propose solutions, and renegotiate their form of government, including languages of administration and normative legitimation.”<sup>32</sup> This view makes use of Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘language games’ to provide an intersubjective social ontology that can justify inclusion of both the governors and the governed in the study of governmentality. What is important to Tully is not a broad understanding of justice based on a teleological ontology, but a social reality that is born out of practice and activity and that which inherently allows spaces for negotiating freedom in the complex web of relations of power. Questions of justice are eschewed in favour of more fundamental questions of freedom. In these complex webs of relations of power, “individuals or groups govern the conduct of other individuals or groups, directly or indirectly, by myriad inequalities, privileges, technologies and strategies, and who are themselves subject to government by others.”<sup>33</sup> This means that none are passive objects of subjugation but each participates in dialogical and indeed, multilogical relations where each is at the same time, governor and the governed.

Participation in these relations of power is intersubjective and negotiated, gradually helping form the practical identities of the participants, that is, the customary and traditional ways of acting and thinking that historically develop out of these reciprocal practical relationships. This intersubjectivity means that relations of force are excluded from Tully’s consideration. In relations of force, human beings are passive objects of coercion and violence,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pg. 155.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pg. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.



having no recourse to their own abilities to think or act. Relations of force are monological and are, therefore, not considered relations of power, because relations of power are relations of governance, and the concept of governance requires a minimal level of freedom for an agent to formulate a response. Practices of governance are therefore also practices of subjectivisation, but while governance conditions subjectivity, this is not to be mistaken for a relation of determination. Relations of power and governance, being negotiated and intersubjective, open up a range of possible subjectivities. “Because an intersubjective relation of power or governance is always exercised over an agent who is recognised and treated as a partner who is free, from the perspective of the governed the exercise of power always opens up a diverse field of potential ways of thinking and acting in response.”<sup>34</sup>

Tully divides the range of possible ways of response into three general types. Firstly, individuals and groups, even in comporting themselves in ways that accord with the rules of practice, will still naturally follow those rules in a variety of ways that are still compatible with those rules, for as we saw above, rules cannot determine their own application. Even in trying to follow the rules in generally obedient ways, the practices will evolve into divergent ways *en passant*. Tully calls this “‘acting otherwise’ within rules of the game.”<sup>35</sup> Secondly, subjects are free to raise a rule of practice as a problem and to enter negotiation regarding the modification or even termination of this rule. This constitutes a challenge to the customary relation of power or governance and to the legitimacy of that rule. As discussed above, no rule can be claimed to be transcendental or strictly foundational that it cannot be subject to review and possible revision. Thirdly, if the first two ways of response are defeated by the relevant governors or are unsuccessful for other reasons, the possibility of open resistance by escape or wilful confrontation remains. If the processes of reforming a rule are unavailable in a system, the governed still have the option of resisting the system as a whole. Thus, these three general types of response or practices of freedom, categorise the ways in which even the most uneven and sedimented relationship between governors and the governed are open to change. In Tully’s intersubjective and dialogical ontological view, relations of governance are relations of mutual subjection or agonistic relations. Practices of freedom are viewed pragmatically as ways of acting or thinking in shared language games where problems of governance are approached as an intersubjective engagement that have the power to unsettle even the most fundamental rules of practice and enter them into disputation.

In forming this agonistic view of human collective life, Tully takes inspiration most directly from Hannah Arendt who viewed political study as primarily a study of political activity (as opposed to a study of political institutions or political thought). To Arendt, political activity was the essence of life in the *polis*, and its interactive nature imbued it with a game-like quality.<sup>36</sup> For her, political activity is an agonistic interaction based on plural views of the common good that would, by the same token, form the identity of the citizen. But more fundamentally, political activity was in itself freedom. “Political freedom is not a matter of the will or the intellect, nor of background constitutions, laws and rights, but a form of activity with others in public that is liberated from the ‘automatic processes’ to which humans are subject and ‘within and against which’ free citizens ‘assert’ themselves.”<sup>37</sup> For Arendt, political activity

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pg. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pg. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Arendt, Hannah. “What is Freedom?”, in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pg. 146.

<sup>37</sup> Tully, *Public Philosophy: Vol. 1*, pg. 136.

manifests freedom, because political action, and political action alone, can bring out something new and unpredictable; it has a unique spontaneous quality that frees us from our mechanical animal behaviours and consequently frees us from the realm of physical necessity. In this, it is important to note that for Arendt, true freedom can only be achieved in the public, political realm.

Tully takes this Arendtian approach of viewing activity as primary, to be more or less congruent with Wittgenstein's attitude towards language games. For both Arendt and Wittgenstein, not only are human activities game-like but the emphasis should be on activity and practice as the primary object of study. "What is needed is neither a theory of the game in question (which is another game with signs) nor an explanation of an underlying structure that determines the play, but a perspicuous representation of the physiognomy of the game itself: what the players do and how they do it (just as Arendt does in her characterisation of free political activity)."<sup>38</sup> The imperative is no longer to penetrate phenomena in hope of uncovering its hidden essence, but to survey the surface of things and to find meaning and significance in how things appear to be. Tully sees this congruence in seeing activity as prior to theory as part of the larger disciplinary turn away from institutions and towards practice in twentieth century social studies. Nevertheless, in taking Wittgenstein in this manner, Tully once again takes the concept of language games as basic, seeing no explanatory foundation in a singular form of the concept of 'form of life'. While previously, the concept of agreement in language games was used by Tully to show the inherent plasticity in customary human activity, here, the concept of language game is used to underline the intersubjectivity of game-like collective human interaction and of the basic freedom and consequently, the agonism that arises from it.

While social scholars in the Kantian tradition have, in the contemporary era, sought to look beyond metaphysics in favour of clarifying practice, their approach is still a continuation of the Platonic tradition of comprehensive explanatory theories; they are still attempting to distil the essence of practice in order to perfect a universal form of it. On the other hand, what Tully finds in both Arendt's and Wittgenstein's approach to practice is the "the freedom of speaking and acting differently in the course of the game and so modifying the rules or even transforming the game itself."<sup>39</sup> To Tully, this quality, "exceeds the grasp of theory and explanation,"<sup>40</sup> and calls for a critical approach. For example, Arendt sees political activity as a fundamentally unbounded realm where new players and new ways of playing are never precluded and so the political realm is, "never closed by a frontier. It is never 'rule governed' in the normative or causal sense required by theory or explanation."<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, as alluded to above, Tully's approach makes no similar distinction between the social and political realms or, alternatively, between the private and public realms. For Arendt, only our private, non-political lives are rule-governed and so by that same token, unfree. The sphere of free action is only available to us in the realm of public, political activity, where free play is unbounded by rules. However, Tully does not see politics as a realm unbounded by rules, different from the others. Rather, like Wittgenstein, Tully sees all collective human activity as game-like and rule-governed, but the elemental freedom Arendt sees arising from totally free play is not precluded. Like Wittgenstein, Tully argues that this freedom to create something new can arise from the full multiplicity of human interaction, even from the most common and banal of our language games. For Wittgenstein and Tully,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pg. 137.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pg. 139.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pg. 139.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pg. 139.

firstly, even though language games are rule-governed, they are not everywhere bounded by rules and secondly the rules themselves are not immovable constraints which are beyond testing and negotiation. It is from these that Tully concludes that the inherent instability of the agonistic freedom of subjects of governance resists the formation of comprehensive theories that describe universal normative rules. Tully's agonistic social ontology requires the study of specific language games or relations of governance as basic phenomena. The Wittgenstein-inspired fear here, is the error of abstracting universal rules from inherently particular phenomena that always have the potential to change. That would be to misunderstand the importance of elevating practice as the primary subject of study.

While Tully takes inspiration from Arendt's theory of political games, he considers the work of Michel Foucault to be closer to his Wittgensteinian social ontology, for Foucault as well did not make a strict distinction between the social and political realms. For Foucault, the agonism of collective human practices opens up possibilities of creating something new and like Arendt, he called this creative activity freedom. But unlike Arendt, he believed this to be possible in any form of collective human activity, even rule-governed ones. Just like Wittgenstein, he extends this agonistic game-like quality to any form of human activity or language game. Foucault, therefore, neither restricts his studies to the public, political sphere, nor to formal rules and structures of institutions. Furthermore, unlike Arendt and more like Wittgenstein, Foucault takes special note of the contingent nature of human customs and rules, and finds freedom in practices both within and against existing rules. Tully argues that, "Foucault's unique contribution to this orientation in the twentieth century is to link together the following three elements: the practice of freedom, the modification of the rules governing the relationships among players in the course of a game and agonistic activity."<sup>42</sup> Even if one is hesitant to attribute to Wittgenstein an occupation with freedom per se, Tully argues that Wittgenstein's arguments about rules, signs and concepts shares with Foucault what Tully calls, "an element of 'non-consensuality'"<sup>43</sup>. Tully takes from Wittgenstein an anthropological social ontology that uncovers the changeability of all social foundations, in order to justify Foucault's critical method centring on our innate ability to think and act differently in social circumstances.

## Critique and Conclusion

We have seen above, how the writings of James Tully is primarily inspired by the post-structuralist works of Michel Foucault and the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. From Foucault, Tully inherits a critical methodology that is steeped in the ethos of the Enlightenment tradition of public philosophy. This, Tully takes to be a post-foundationalist tradition rivalling the comprehensive-theory-building of the neo-Kantian and natural law approaches that emerged from the doctrinal traditions of the Enlightenment. From Wittgenstein, Tully inherits an epistemology and social ontology that is based on human practices and the public and conventional nature of our collective life. This, Tully takes to be post-analytic in its interweaving of concepts and actions into an intersubjective and holist approach to the social sciences and to be post-foundationalist taking the irreducible multiplicity of social practices to be basic social phenomena. More important, however, is the way Tully takes the works of these two philosophers to be congruent and complementary. Tully takes Wittgenstein's epistemology and social ontology as justification for the critical methodology he takes from Foucault. From

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pg. 143.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pg. 144.

Wittgenstein's concept of language games, Tully takes justification for his critical method of studying social practices as intersubjective games and as primary social phenomena. From Wittgenstein's rule-following arguments, Tully takes justification for the post-foundationalist and non-universal nature of his critical method. From Wittgenstein's concepts of 'pictures' and 'perspicuous representation', Tully justifies the genealogical form of his critical method that utilises practical reasoning to wean the reader from sedimented forms of social practices and judgments.

In reading the work of later Wittgenstein as congruent with the methodology of Foucault, however, Tully reads Wittgenstein in a significantly different manner than Peter Winch and the social scientific tradition his approach has engendered. For the Winchians, Wittgenstein's anthropological philosophy of language not only presents a social ontology that helps frame the interpretation of social phenomena but it also provides us with a theory of the most basic structure of human action and human interrelations that can act as the bottommost explanations of social phenomena. Winchians see Wittgenstein's concept of 'form of life' as a collection of brute facts about our species-life that forms the basic substrate of all the varieties historical and cultural modes of human life. While this is not foundationalist in the strict sense that Winchians do not attempt to distil human nature into a singular essence, they are still concerned with providing an answer to the question of where social explanations must end. Tully, on the other hand, is not interested in such a project and does not provide the reader with a deep epistemological theory. He sought only an epistemology that is consistent with the critical ethos within which he places his own work, thus giving sufficient and coherent justification for his Foucauldian critical methods. Instead of arguing that social studies *must* be done in such and such a way, Tully simply attempts to show that social study *can* be done in the manner that he has chosen – while maximising the avoidance of foreclosure on other methods. And in avoiding any suggestion that his methods are universally foundational, he stays true to the critical philosophical commitment he inherited from Foucault. Moreover, in avoiding the formulation of a more complete picture of the epistemological underpinnings of social phenomena, one can argue that Tully's work is truer to the anti-theoretical streak in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Tully's work is consequently more piecemeal than those of the followers of Winch have tended to be.

Yet, while Tully's reading of Wittgenstein's later work seems very much congruent with Foucault's later work, there are several problems with his reading. One problem is that Tully seems to conflate the concept of 'form of life' with the concept of 'pictures'. As discussed above, Tully does not take the former as a unitary concept in delineating our common way of being as a species, but rather as delineating the plurality of incommensurable ways in which we agree in our language, behaviour and judgments. But while this reading might cohere better with an anti-theoretical stance on human social ontology, he also seems to take these various 'forms of life' as picking out the very same things as the concept of 'pictures' does, the point being that both 'pictures' and 'forms of life' are conventional and consequently amenable to change. However, several issues arise. Firstly, the concept of 'pictures' is not as basic as the concept of 'forms of life'. Whether you take the latter concept to be a kind of unity or as strictly picking out a plurality, what is clear is that Wittgenstein meant for the concept to pick out the most basic characteristics of our human being in the world whose agreement forms the underpinnings of our language use as a species. It is simply a brute fact of our species form of life that we have such and such pictures and not others. "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (PI, §25). But Tully takes the

concept of ‘pictures’ as also representing agreements in certain practices or judgements that are culturally or historically specific, and those cannot be as general as the forms of life mentioned in section 25. While ‘pictures’ are often inherited and are conventional in the way that they are *traditional*, what Wittgenstein seems to pick out in section 25 is the *instinctual* nature of ‘forms of life’. Secondly, since the consistency of our common way of being in the world also depends on the consistency of the features of that world, it is unlikely that ‘forms of life’ are as changeable as ‘pictures’. While both concepts might be conventional, ‘forms of life’ are based on more basic features of our species life as well as the harder features of our natural world. Thus, while we might be able to change certain ‘pictures’ that bewitch us and turn us away from the true nature of things, ‘forms of life’ pick out the more fundamental frames of reference within which we act and think, and without which we could no longer be intelligible to other members of our species. While both concepts are conventional, the conventions of our ‘forms of life’ are not those which we can change or deny without not only opting out of our cultural or historical modes of life, but without opting out of our collective human form of life as well.

Another problem with Tully’s reading of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is what follows the conflation of ‘pictures’ and ‘form of life’. As argued previously in Chapter 2, the post-foundationalist basis of our ‘form of life’ and subsequently of our basic epistemic criteria, threatens social studies with relativism and arbitrariness, but while the social nature of human life is constructed (that is, it is conventional), it is not constructed *ex nihilo* in each and every place, culture or time. It is constructed out of the facticity of our common way of being in the world and the consistency of the features of that world. This means that our shared basic ‘form of life’, “ensures possibility in any encounter of a shared set of facts and epistemic criteria,”<sup>44</sup> and thus social studies need be neither relativistic nor arbitrary. Different historical and cultural modes of life can find common ground in order to rationally understand each other even in the most minimal way. However, conflating the concept of ‘pictures’ (which can be historically or culturally specific) and ‘form of life’ (which cannot), undermines this rational intersubjectivity. It would be the same as conflating different modes of life (e.g. social, political, religious... etc.) with our more basic species-level ‘form of life’ and thus arriving at the same radical cultural relativism that troubled Peter Winch in his *The Idea of a Social Science*, but which his followers like Hanna Pitkin and Mark Bevir had later avoided. Of course methodologically, this sits well enough with Tully’s Foucauldian critical method which investigates specific sites of unfreedom rather than making universal judgments on the justness of societies, thus freeing him from the need to justify use of universal normative values. However, as a reading of Wittgenstein’s later work, this radical relativity makes it difficult to explain the sense of commonality that Wittgenstein writes about in describing the characteristic behaviours of *all* language speakers and how we are all conditioned by those basic commonalities.

A third problem with Tully’s reading is his interpretation of the concept of ‘pictures’ itself. While Wittgenstein used the term ‘picture’ to mean something like a ‘model of reality’, political theorists of the Foucauldian persuasion like Tully have used the concept of ‘pictures’ to include ‘models of *social* reality’. They do this by substituting the Foucauldian concept of a ‘limit’ for the concept of ‘picture’, thereby transplanting it into a Wittgensteinian epistemology. They justify this by remarking on the similar sense of constraint and captivity that both concepts have on human cognition – how a ‘picture’ or a ‘limit’ becomes part of the background conditions of how we think and act and thus how its own truth-value is thereby precluded from being a candidate for doubt. Foucault-inspired theorists then see ‘pictures’ as not only

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<sup>44</sup> Bevir, Mark. “Taking Holism Seriously: A Reply to Critics”, in *Philosophical Books*, vol. 42 (2001), pg. 15.

ontologically universal or necessary but as socially obligatory as well, often using the slogan that ‘pictures’ or ‘limits’ are taken as “universal, necessary or obligatory.”<sup>45</sup> From here, they can neatly justify their Foucault-inspired genealogical method, by drawing on similarities between it and Wittgenstein’s method of ‘perspicuous representation’, thus combining genealogical methods with a Wittgensteinian social ontology based on language games and the meaningfulness of practice. However, while this conflation of two admittedly quite similar concepts seems innocent enough, we cannot overlook one important dissimilarity. While both ‘pictures’ and ‘limits’ are similar in that they impinge on our ability to conduct ourselves as autonomous and thinking agents, they do so in different ways: When it comes to ‘pictures’, they impinge on our self-government as autonomous *epistemic* agents, but when it comes to ‘limits’, what is blocked is our self-government as autonomous *moral* agents. There is of course an important role for genealogies and the way they help us uncover sedimented relations of unfreedom that have been traditionally normalised, and one might argue along post-analytic lines that there is only a difference in degree rather than in kind between objective and subjective observations, but the danger here, is slipping into the first conflation we discussed above, between form of life and modes of life. For, some of the ‘pictures’ that Wittgenstein writes about are based on our basic form of life and are hard features of our species-life whether they truly represent the reality that they are supposed to represent or not, but a Foucauldian ‘limit’ is always up for revision which subsequently uncovers more freedom. Conflating the two could lead us again to imbue more plasticity into human collective life than Wittgenstein was ready to suggest. Therefore, Tully’s attempt at justifying Foucault’s methods by Wittgensteinian epistemology is based on an inaccurate reading of Wittgenstein.

Tully’s take on public philosophy is a new update on an old idea. In working in the tradition of the ethos of the Enlightenment, as opposed to its doctrines, Tully’s critical methodology is based on the well-trodden path of engaging in specific problems in specific contexts, in aid of specific communities or peoples. What is new is Tully’s explicit explication of why this practice is epistemologically and ontologically sound given that it works against mainstream comprehensive and universal theory-building approaches to political theory and consequently why any such emancipatory efforts by public philosophers must shun utopianism in favour of provisional solutions. What separates Tully from Hanna Pitkin, though, is a more thoroughgoing anti-theoretical and post-foundationalist stand which cashes out in lesser interest in constructing a complete epistemological theory. Tully is primarily interested in justifying his genealogical and critical methodology but no further. Nevertheless, while there is much alike in Foucault’s and Wittgenstein’s work, Tully’s justificatory efforts are based on a problematic reading of Wittgenstein’s concepts that will most probably require some modification before it can succeed.

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<sup>45</sup> Tully, *Public Philosophy: Vol. 1*, pg. 75. Also see, Owen, David. “Genealogy as Perspicuous Representation”, in *The Politics of Grammar: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, edited by Cressida J. Heyes, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pg. 83.

## CHAPTER 6

### The Political Thought of James Tully

We saw in the previous chapter how, in his two volume collection, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, James Tully provided a Wittgensteinian post-foundationalist and post-analytic social ontology and methodology to justify his similarly post-foundationalist and post-analytic critical and genealogical methods inherited from Michel Foucault. This Wittgensteinian social ontology, that treats speech and actions as an intersubjective whole and treats the multiplicity of social practices as irreducible basic social phenomena, provides Tully with epistemological justification for methods that seek to uncover the background social conditions that we mistakenly take as universal, necessary and obligatory. Additionally, from both Wittgenstein and Foucault, Tully inherited a philosophical commitment against comprehensive and universalist theory-building, which as a consequence, committed him against claiming a foundational role for his methodology and foreclosing on the validity of others. And as argued in the last chapter, this makes Tully more thoroughgoing than Pitkin (and other followers of Peter Winch) in his anti-theoretical and post-foundationalist commitments.

In this chapter we will go on to see how Tully's commitments and methods subsequently cash out in defeasible critical surveys of practices and languages that set the context of practical social and political problems and their proposed solutions, and defeasible genealogical surveys that place those languages and practices in their larger context, so that we can have a perspicuous representation of how forms of subjectivity are shaped by historically specific and therefore contingent human conventions. Examples of the specific applications of his brand of public philosophy are ecological ethics, globalisation, imperialism, and the rights of indigenous peoples. Yet, since I argue in the previous chapter that his justification of Foucauldian methods by Wittgensteinian social ontology is based on an inaccurate reading of Wittgenstein, the question remains on whether this inaccuracy might create insurmountable philosophical problems for Tully. After a survey of Tully's general political principles and how they cash out in real case studies, this chapter will argue that while Tully's actual studies fit under the rubric of interrogating Foucauldian 'limits', they do so without doing too much violence to Wittgenstein's concept of 'pictures', as feared in the previous chapter. While Tully was inaccurate in conflating 'limits' with 'pictures', his studies have not, in my view, suggested change to anything which might be part of the facticity of our being in the world - those 'pictures' which, as Hanna Pitkin says, the political theorist would be foolish to attempt to change.<sup>1</sup>

#### Motivation

As varied as Tully's critical and genealogical case studies are, the bulk of Tully's work in *Public Philosophy in a New Key* builds on his earlier monograph, *Strange Multiplicity*.<sup>2</sup> As the title implies, Tully's main political project is to suggest that the socio-political compact in

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<sup>1</sup> Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993 [1972]), pg. 338.

<sup>2</sup> Tully, James. *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

contemporary constitutional democratic (largely Western) societies requires revision. To Tully, the constitutional forms inherited from the Enlightenment's doctrinal traditions are no longer sufficient when dealing with contemporary problems. In fact, as we shall see further below, these forms have become part of the problem, sedimenting relations of power that cement subaltern groups into positions of unfreedom. To Tully, this situation engenders two needs.<sup>3</sup> The first is the need to see that the various cultural and national identities are overlapping, interacting and negotiated over time. Following Wittgenstein, he calls these identities 'aspectival' to bring out their inherent subjectivity. They can only be characterised intersubjectively, and depend for their content on how agents see themselves and others in multilogical games of recognition. The second need is to realise that these identities are worthy of respect and often require recognition in the public sphere. To Tully, this is primarily aimed at making their sense of belonging to a society or country more secure. Nevertheless, since their identities are continually changing, any form of recognition must be subject to periodic, democratic revision.

Hence, as briefly introduced in the previous chapter, Tully's main political motivation is to aid the cause of civic freedom – the kind of freedom that Arendt characterises agonistic political activity as manifesting and the kind of freedom that is the consequence of the mutability of Wittgensteinian language games. It is, “not only the freedom to participate in accord with one's cultural and national identities when they are publicly recognised... but also to participate in the on-going contests over how these are to be acknowledged, recognised and accommodated.”<sup>4</sup> This civic freedom is what is principally at stake when subaltern groups are taken or presented as having static, unchanging identities, thus justifying the permanence of their unfreedom. But, of course, the second need makes it clear that Tully is also motivated by the aim of engendering a sense of belonging, though as we shall see below, he argues that in a society of free citizens and free peoples, their sense of belonging is subsequently secured by the on-going practices of civic freedom that fulfils the first need anyway. Nevertheless, a sense of belonging is important for itself because of Tully's Arendtian commitment to wellbeing of the political community that makes up the nation.

As such, the freedom of citizens in constitutional democratic societies is therefore twofold. It is not only the freedom of individual citizens, but the freedom of peoples as well. 'Free citizens' are free because they individually participate in their own governance. By contrast, in bureaucracies and markets, power is exercised over you without your say. You are then, in that context, a subject and not a citizen. Nevertheless, to be a free citizen is also to be a member of a 'free people'. Such citizens are members of 'free peoples' that live under the rule of law and constitutions that they impose unto themselves. That is to say, a 'free people' is free in so far as it governs itself as a distinct society. Each individual within this jurisdiction is subject to the law, yet each individual has to have a say in deciding the content and form of the laws. But what makes them a people, rather than a reducible collection of individuals is the creation of a group identity stemming directly from the collective act of self-governance. To be a free citizen is an individual achievement, but to be a free people is a collective achievement. Thus, while Tully is partly motivated by liberal ideals of the freedom of individuals, he does not treat groups as reducible to the sum of its members. As a republican democrat, Tully, does not see identity as arising from individual rights and duties as liberals do, but from the collective act of self-

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<sup>3</sup> Tully, James. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume I, Democracy and Civic Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 160.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 160.



governance. “Citizenship, therefore, is an identity that we come to acquire by being ‘free citizens’, by engagement in the institutions of self-rule of a free people.”<sup>5</sup>

This position is a significant departure from the liberal democratic view where group identity as a people arises from the normative principles, procedures or outcomes of the democratic process. And it is, of course, significantly different from the nationalist view where group identity arises from shared background social conditions like culture, history or language. To Tully, since the democratic process is marked by agonism, by genuine differences, the principles, procedures and outcomes of that process cannot fully account for the creation of a secure group identity of a free people because the content of those things are exactly what is being contested in a freely democratic society. “They are not only the conditions of free political dialogue and negotiation but also what those negotiations are about.”<sup>6</sup> If this group identity is defined by a particular set of democratic qualities, then the conditions of citizenship will be constrained, and the members of a free people will cease to be free individual citizens. Following Arendt, Tully further argues that these principles, procedures and outcomes are the background conditions of citizenship and not the activity of citizenship itself. These conditions derive from the principle of the rule of law, which defines individuals as free citizens, but ‘a free people’ must also be defined by self-rule.

The crux for Tully’s political motivation falls ultimately on the question of what distinguishes citizens from subjects. The former enjoy civic freedom and the latter live lives in unfree and illegitimate societies. Any identity that arises from this illegitimate polity will confront subjects as something alien and imposed. For Tully, this leads to subjects turning to subordinate sites of identity to express themselves in democratic discussion. Whether in turning to their particular gender, class or ethnic group, their identity as a people will fracture according to these smaller groups, leading to political instability in the polity, which by now can only be held together “by force, fraud and the management of interests rather than the bonds of solidarity created by free citizenship.”<sup>7</sup> To Tully then, liberal individualist principles are insufficient guides to securing the longevity of the whole polity. He is interested in not only addressing the overcoming of unfreedom but in securing its future. And in good post-foundationalist form, he subsequently argues that it cannot be secured by any conditions that we set today, but only by our political commitment to change them as and when the need arises.

## **Identity Politics**

Given the democratic republican ethos that motivates Tully and that his critical and genealogical methods are inherited from Foucault, it would be unsurprising to learn that Tully’s studies are significantly concerned with what contemporary scholars call ‘identity politics’. In the cause of civic freedom, Tully finds that constraints in diverse societies often come in the form of the prevailing forms of public recognition. Of course these prevailing forms are historically and culturally specific, but they share general commonalities sufficient for Tully to provide us with a critical survey. For starters, these forms of recognition constrain because they misrecognise or fail to recognise differences in language, culture, gender and others in the identities of some of their people. Consequently, these differences are often posed as a problem to be solved by strategies of assimilation into the dominant identity, often posing as a liberal (and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pg. 162.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pg. 164.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pg. 165.

therefore supposedly neutral or universal) identity or as a shared national identity. To Tully, the victims of these prevailing forms of recognition have tended to be “the freedom of expression of individuals, immigrants and refugees, women, gays and lesbians, linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious minorities, nations within and across existing nation-states, Indigenous peoples, and Islamic and other non-European cultures and religions against Western imperialism and Eurocentrism.”<sup>8</sup>

To Tully, these sites of unfreedom are current and live issues demanding practical participation from the contemporary public philosopher, to whom they do not pose questions about universal normative values, but specific questions about civic freedom. But, while he understands that these problems are all very different from each other, are not always exclusively concerned with identity, and are often the result of a long history of unfreedom that predate the concept of ‘identity politics’, these sites of unfreedom do share certain defeasible generalities that make them different from earlier problems of civic unfreedom. Tully is able to group them together under the contemporary title of ‘identity politics’ because of three things they have in common. Firstly, the subaltern groups involved exhibit internal diversity through the intersectionality of overlapping identities. For example, feminists may find their identity-related demands intersected by demands arising out of the national, cultural or religious differences among women. Despite false claims by some that subaltern groups are homogenous wholes, identity is never quite identical to itself; “it always contains an irreducible element of alterity. Identity is multiplex or aspectual.”<sup>9</sup> Secondly, this diversity implies that issues of priority, of the form and agent of articulation, and of the form of public recognition, should always be open to question, negotiation and even reinterpretation by anyone who shares in a particular identity. Any fixed identity under the condition of diversity will be an imposition rather than a well-supported form, constraining rather than empowering, oppressive rather than liberating. This means that identities must be allowed to remain mutable while subject to on-going negotiations. Thirdly, these negotiated identities are hence also practical identities rather than merely theoretical ones. As groups, we take on identities that support our ideas of a good collective life and our need for self-worth and they affect how we comport ourselves in society in relation to other groups.

These three features of identity politics reflect Tully’s post-analytical understanding of the concept of a group identity. Like the meanings of concepts, the contents of identities are constructed in dialogical and multilogical relationships with others. Similarly, identities are also relational and intersubjective. And thus, just like concepts, identities are partly self-created and partly given. We can also compare how for Wittgensteinians, the meaning of a concept is its use, with the practical nature of identities that are formed through actual practical interactions in society. Nevertheless, it must be said that identities are unlike most other concepts because we take them to be constitutive of our ideas of ourselves. They have an intimate political salience that is different from that of universal normative concepts such as justice. For many other concepts, what we tend to seek is a consensus on meaning to aid mutual understanding, even if, as Pitkin argues, our standards for them might change through time and space. However, for practical identities, the aim is mutual understanding despite of diversity. Thus, practical identities are marked by a need for mutual recognition and respect, because unlike other general concepts, the self-understandings of those who share an identity are given (though not exclusive) priority

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pg. 166.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pg. 168.

over the projected identity understood by others who do not. Therefore, the negotiation and agonistic contestation over identities are qualitatively different from that over other concepts.

Thus, because the identities of subaltern groups are practical and intimate in nature, “the demeaning and disrespect of their identities through sexism, heterosexism, racism, nationalist, linguistic and culturalist chauvinism, the pseudo-scientific ranking of cultures, languages and politics in stages of development with Europe and the United States at the apex, and the imposition of dominant cultures through processes that destroy identities and assimilate or marginalise individuals and groups are not only unjust.”<sup>10</sup> It is because identities are constitutive of a group’s practical understanding of itself that the above practices of subjugation also undermine the self-respect of these groups and thus their ability to resist these practices. The same is not true of universal normative values that are shared by everyone. Thus, focus on such universal normative values often results in ignoring or misattributing problems like alienation, substance abuse, unemployment and high suicide rates. While touting a particular policy as universally just one can easily overlook the fact that it has different effects on members of subaltern identities.

Nevertheless, while too much focus on universal values and principles can blind one to aspects of identity that require attention, this is not to say that struggles for proper public recognition by subaltern groups are necessarily opposed to the principles of modern democracy like equality and due process. A common liberal objection is that what is being demanded by these groups compromise the neutrality of liberal government. Nationalists, on the other hand, argue that these demands impinge on national identity by treating various groups differently. In either case, liberals and nationalists demand a difference-blind articulation and application of democratic principles. Tully, nonetheless, points out the fact that a difference-blind principle is not always good compromise in practice. For example, it is reasonable that public life is centrally conducted in the language of one particular group with other languages used in specific localities. While this is not difference-blind, it does not necessarily create an issue of civic freedom. “The suggestion is rather to interpret and apply these principles in a *difference-aware* manner: one which is not impartial to any particular identity at the expense of others but is based on mutual respect for the diversity of identities of the sovereign citizens of the association, so there is a genuine ‘parity of participation’.”<sup>11</sup>

This compromise on neutrality is also at odds with the liberal understanding of equality. Usually, equality in democratic societies is viewed as a product of neutrality or impartiality in governance. But while this neutrality is rightfully valued for promoting some amount of equality, it has limited applicability in issues about identity. A difference-aware principle does not call for equal recognition and accommodation for all claimants. That would not always be practicable or even possible. “It means that demands for recognition should be accorded equal *consideration* in order to determine if they are worthy of respect, and those that should be, given *due* recognition and accommodation.”<sup>12</sup> To Tully, what is essential in securing civic freedom is not a guaranteed outcome but the assurance that demands for recognition will be given their due attention and deliberation. Even if the outcome does not meet the demand, Tully argues that the guarantee of consideration itself is important in building a sense of belonging to a society of free citizens.

The question still remains, however, of who decides which demands for recognition should be met and by what procedures. Following Tully’s post-foundationalist suspicion of given

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pg. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pg. 171.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pg. 172.

truths and comprehensive theorising, it is unsurprising that he argues that the decision cannot be left to theorists. The decision cannot be arrived at by pure logic and argument. It has to be determined by all the participants in a society's governance, that is to say, by citizens themselves. Tully provides us with four reasons why. Firstly, the historical reassertion of the democratic principle of individual sovereignty in the latter half of the twentieth century is a reaction to the increasing diversity reflected in the increasing number of private and public associations. With more organised groups disputing the existing forms of public recognition, democratic practices such as negotiation and referendums become more greatly need. Secondly, to understand how an identity is an unjust imposition, the people must experience it for themselves. The first-person perspective is required in order to empathise with demands for mutual recognition. This also implies that the issue cannot be delegated to armchair theorists or political agents and representatives. Mediation by an elite class is likely to result in a poorer appreciation of why subaltern identities are worthy of respect and/or accommodation. Thirdly, in order to prevent particular demands of public recognition from impinging on other identities, everyone in society should be in the conversation and free to suggest alternative solutions that will avoid subsequently impinging on the identities of third groups. "The democratic negotiations of identity politics, accordingly, are not the dyadic dialogues of traditional theories of recognition, but, in Rawls' phrase, 'multilogues'."<sup>13</sup> And lastly, popular-based negotiations provide better stability and a more secure sense of belonging. A struggle for public recognition implies that something in the general scheme of social co-operation is not functioning well enough. Wide-based negotiations assure everyone in society that whatever decision is made in the end is well-supported by the people. Even if certain individuals and groups do not agree with the decision, they could still identify with it as co-participants in democratic decision-making.

Still, since we noted above that Tully's motivations are not purely liberal democratic, we should not be surprised to learn that Tully does not commit fully to the majoritarian principle of democratic decision-making. To Tully, while multilogical exchange and negotiations among ordinary citizens are necessary because of the four reasons above, the majoritarian principle is not necessary to making the final decision of how to proceed with a demand for recognition. Majoritarian decision-making is, in this type of case, unfair for the minority group. Tully argues that in cases of identity politics, the prejudicial attitudes towards subaltern groups are often deeply embedded in the practices and beliefs of the dominant identity or identities. The positions of these dominant groups are, "supported by sedimented structures of political and economic domination."<sup>14</sup> This, to Tully, means that the whole game is rigged even before the demands for recognition are made. Given these actual prejudicial background conditions, majoritarian decision-making is undermined and unlikely to achieve justice. People can see their own prejudices given debate, "but in the real time and context of politics the force of argument needs to be supplemented by the force of law in cases where the majority has a political or economic interest in upholding the biased form of recognition in dispute."<sup>15</sup>

What Tully means by 'force of law' is the protection of human rights by domestic and international law in representative governments or courts. This means that, to him, legal institutions pick up where the legitimacy of majoritarian principles ends. While democratic negotiations are a central part of Tully's political thought, the insidiousness of dominant forms of identity, means that in some cases, they are simply to be overruled. "Democratic discussions

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pg. 176.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pg. 177.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pg. 177.

need to be placed in the broader reflective equilibrium of the institutions of the rule of law”<sup>16</sup> This reflective equilibrium means that Tully is willing to let institutions overrule majority will as long as any decision is mutable and open to future reconsideration and challenges. The losing side must be left with the hope of winning their case in future or their sense of belonging to the polity as a whole will start to fracture.

Thus, we have a fuller picture of how James Tully’s political thought is motivated by democratic republican commitments to the freedom of the group as well as that of the individual – democratic republican commitments that recognise the worth of group identities. We have also seen how Tully believes that struggles for recognition in identity politics sometimes requires the curtailment of liberal or nationalist views of the democratic process. As we will see below, these commitments help inform Tully’s critical and genealogical surveys of specific sites of unfreedom. The aspectual quality of identities and the languages associated with them make it very difficult to uncover the actual sites relevant to the above generalities. But through Tully’s methods, these can be laid out to bear in genealogies that allow for a clear synoptic view.

## **Indigenous Peoples**

In this section and beyond, we will survey how Tully’s methodological and basic political beliefs cash themselves out in his critical and genealogical studies of specific sites of unfreedom. Here, we begin with Tully’s studies of the struggles for recognition by the indigenous peoples of his homeland, Canada. But, it is worth reminding ourselves first that Tully’s studies such as these are meant to be defeasible and partial (as opposed to comprehensive) sketches of very large and complex sites of unfreedom. He also does not spend too much effort on delineating and justifying fundamental universal normative values like justice or even freedom, reserving analysis to whether the relationships between peoples actually respect the freedom of peoples to rule themselves and how that could be achieved if not so.

Tully begins by noting that when Europeans first began to settle in the Americas, they encountered a pre-existing population of aboriginal peoples that had their own native forms of traditional social and political co-operation. In fact, aboriginal histories were older and their populations larger and more diverse than their European counterparts. Nevertheless, despite the presence of these aboriginal peoples and their right to rule to themselves, the next few centuries saw “the consolidation of the control of the United States and Canada over two-thirds of the continent and the effective assertion of exclusive jurisdiction by the middle of the nineteenth century”<sup>17</sup>. Of this process of internal colonisation, he identifies four major dimensions. Firstly and most infamously, Europeans decimated the aboriginal population through policies of military violence and deliberate spreading of diseases exotic to the local isolated population. The aboriginal population was reduced, “by roughly 90 per cent by the turn of the twentieth century (from 10 million to 0.5 million in Canada and the USA)”<sup>18</sup>. Secondly, the Europeans replaced the aboriginal forms of governance with French, British and then Canadian and American governments. What they could not wipe out in Canada, they either tried to assimilate into the dominant society either directly or indirectly through non-landed ‘band councils’, which still answered to a higher authority in Canadian government. Thirdly, European immigrants began to physically displace the aboriginal population by isolating them in small land reserves. By

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pg. 177.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pg. 260.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pg. 260.

asserting the exclusive jurisdiction of the Canadian and American governments, their lands were seized and their people resettled. Fourthly, where aboriginal struggles of resistance have been somewhat effective, the Canadian and American governments supplemented their structure of domination with unequal treaties.

However, while these treaties have, to a small extent, created conditions of co-operation between peoples, the above-mentioned four dimensions have had deleterious long-term effects. Not only have their populations been decimated, but those who are left, and the generations that follow, have had to live miserable lives of dependency on the Canadian and American states in overcrowded reservations. While before they were free peoples and self-sufficient in their ways, the process of internal colonisation has left them with a host of socio-economic problems: “inter-generational welfare dependency, substandard housing, diet, education and health facilities, high levels of unemployment, low life-expectancy and high rates of death at birth,” not to mention, “[t]he predictable high levels of substance abuse, incarceration and suicide for native people living on or off reserves that follow from these conditions [that] undermine their wellbeing and self-esteem”<sup>19</sup>. It is due to this deep condition of unfreedom that we call this relationship one of ‘internal colonisation’. Of course, the relevant historical techniques of governance have had a wide variety of forms, but their common effect has been to subjugate aboriginal peoples under the dominant structures of transplanted European society.

Tully’s focus in this particular sketch, however, are the discursive forms of techniques of government that have seen Western political theory, broadly defined, used as a tool to impose Western domination. Again, while there are myriad forms of Western political thought in the modern era, there are two general characteristics that have made them easily available as a repressive tool. Firstly, the language of Western political thought is, “woven into the everyday political, legal and social practices of these societies,” and secondly, it is, “a language of interpretation and critical reflection on the practices of these societies (in the institutions of law and policy as well as academia).”<sup>20</sup> These characteristics meant that since the language of Western political thought was constitutive of the Western way of living collectively, it was forced upon the aboriginal peoples of North America and it is neither the language in which aboriginal peoples reflect nor in which they understand themselves. It is imposed upon them as something alien.

Tully argues that the aboriginal peoples have their own language for political speech and thought and their own indigenous political theories that reflect their own understanding of collective life. And just like other Wittgensteinian contextualists since Peter Winch, Tully admits that the two languages are not completely closed off from each other such that they are totally incommensurable. This opens up possibilities for useful engagement despite cultural differences. However, what Tully wants to point out here is the huge disparity in discursive influence and power between the two languages. The language of Western political theory is dominant, while the political language of aboriginal peoples are often ignored or taken to be irrelevant. This is, in part, what makes this particular relationship, a case study in identity politics. After colonies such as Canada freed themselves from the yoke of European empires, the modern societies developed therein continued the process of internally colonising aboriginal peoples. So while Western political theory has, in its history, been use as a discursive technique to undermine the legitimacy of oppressive European regimes, it has also played a part in the legitimation of North American governments in their internal colonisation of aboriginal peoples as well as the assimilation of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pg. 261.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pg. 258.

aboriginal identities into the dominant European settler identity. Tully notes that, “[a]lmost every major European political and legal theorist presented a justification of imperialism.”<sup>21</sup> The arguments for colonisation were turned inwards to justify and legitimise the domination of now independent governments towards the native inhabitants of their land. The ideology of the superiority of European peoples continued to persist in the European-dominated immigrant societies. Aboriginal peoples were still inferior and this ideology served as justification in removing them from their lands, which was wasted on them.

Still, even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, at the height of this Eurocentric ideology, the issue of the internally colonised peoples remained a practical problem as they continued practising their arts of resistance. The Canadian government felt it necessary to sign a number of extinguishment treaties with a small number of aboriginal peoples who were, “portrayed in the dominant discourse as too primitive to have any rights or to require their consent to take their lands and subject them to colonial rule.”<sup>22</sup> From the viewpoint of the aboriginal peoples, however, these were treated as no different from earlier treaties that established peaceful co-existence with the immigrant society. As foolish as it might sound today, the aboriginal signatories took these treaties as international treaties between free and equal nations who aspire to share the same land peacefully. “Incredibly, the [Canadian] officials asserted that scrawled Xs by a few native people on written documents constituted agreements to cede and extinguish forever whatever rights they might have to tracts of land larger than the European continent.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite these treaties, the plight of the aboriginal peoples remained low on the national political agenda of Canada of the time. Nevertheless, Tully believes that this does not mean that the practices of resistance by aboriginal peoples have disappeared, it only signals the fact that the European-dominated formerly-colonial government is thought of as exercising legitimate and exclusive authority over what was called ‘Great Turtle Island’. This legitimacy has become part of the irrefutable background conditions on which these immigrant societies operate. That there were pre-existing sovereign peoples who were and are still being internally colonised was an inconvenient fact that was conveniently left out of public political discourse. Nevertheless, since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the issue of the plight of aboriginal peoples have reappeared in the national agenda in the guise of legal challenges. “In a series of decisions from *R. v. Sparrow* (1990) to *Delgamuukw v. B.C.* (1997), the Supreme Court has defined the rights of Aboriginal peoples as those Aboriginal rights that are recognised and affirmed in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.17.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite this apparently positive turn in the fortunes of Canada’s indigenous peoples, Tully takes issue with the arguments set forth by the Canadian Supreme Court. To Tully, while the court believed itself to have rendered judgments in the interest of aboriginal peoples, their decision, made under the discursive traditions of Western political and legal theory, actually deepens the conditions of internal colonisation. Tully decomposes the decision by the Canadian Supreme court into the following four main arguments: Firstly, the decision recognises the rights of aboriginal peoples under the Canadian constitution by incorporating them into the Canadian polity. This protects their rights under Canadian laws and the constitution, but at once makes also them fully subject to those laws. Secondly, aboriginal peoples are recognised as having distinct

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pg. 267.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pg. 268.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pg. 268.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pg. 269.

rights because of the distinctiveness of aboriginal peoples as one (corporate) member of the multinational Canadian polity. Thirdly, any aboriginal title would be a sui generis proprietary right. It does not arise out of the standards of justice but out of pre-existing constitutional protections. It would be an exclusive right to the land, but it would be held communally and still be alienable to the Crown. Fourthly, any aboriginal title that is consequently proven still has to be reconciled with the sovereignty of the Crown.

Tully criticises these Supreme Court decisions because they are based on arguments that only reaffirms and perpetuates the system of internal colonisation. By recognising aboriginal peoples as Canadian subjects with rights thereof, the court undermines any recognition of rights prior to the establishment of the Canadian government. This reaffirms imperial arguments regarding *terra nullius* and the doctrine that discovery, settlement and recognition by other European powers was sufficient for the Canadian government to assert its sovereignty over now Canadian land. Conversely, this incorporation of aboriginal peoples also ignores the claim that these are free and equal peoples similar in sovereign standing to that of the settler society. They have long traditions of self-rule and long histories of occupying and living off exclusive territories. So in fact, when the court decided that aboriginal title is a proprietary right still under the sovereignty of the Crown, the Supreme Court is only reasserting Canadian title without have to prove that the Canadian government does indeed have rightful title to all aboriginal lands. The burden of proof is unjustly shifted to the Aboriginal claimants who are seen as distinctive colonies, but colonies nonetheless, subject to the sovereignty of the Crown.

Given the above historical background, the struggles for recognition by aboriginal peoples have primarily been in the form of efforts at changing the various techniques of government in order to gain some amount of self-rule. Direct physical confrontation is ineffective in this context and so the aboriginal peoples have developed alternative ‘arts of resistance’. The hope is that, “what appears to be a part of the immovable background to one generation can be called into question and become the object of struggle and modification by another, and vice versa.” While the background historical conditions of unfreedom are taken for granted, they are not inherently immutable and irresistible to confrontation either by action or by speech. Aboriginal peoples can, of course, physically struggle against the dominant political structures as a whole by forging revolution, though this is unlikely to be successful. However, since there is no sharp distinction between structures of domination and practical techniques of government, secondly, aboriginal peoples can also resist internal colonisation by, “exercising their freedom of thought and action with the aim of modifying the system in the short term and transforming it from within in the long term.”<sup>25</sup>

But although aboriginal peoples lack sufficient physical power to overthrow their oppressors, confrontation by words in refuting legitimising arguments for internal colonisation remains a powerful tool for resistance. For example, Tully identifies two common presumptions that help justify internal colonisation and the counterargument that could be used against them. The first assumption is that the settler society’s exclusive jurisdiction over the aboriginal peoples and their land is legitimate and productive. The second assumption is that this imposed rule is the only real choice they have since violent revolution is practically impossible. To Tully, these two presumptions are so deeply ingrained into the language and belief system of contemporary Canadian society that they have become ‘hinge propositions’ that constrain any discussion on aboriginal rights. Their role is to justify the monological relationship between the settler society and aboriginal peoples. Nevertheless, Tully’s Wittgensteinian ontology again tells us that this

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pg. 276.



picture of European superiority is not immutable. Even if as background conditions these norms are immune to direct challenge, they can still be put into question in practice by oblique and indirect criticism. Tully explains that this critical activity can take three forms. Firstly, activists can perform an immanent critique by testing whether the subjugation of aboriginal peoples is defensible by Western political theory's own principles and standards. This technique is powerful because it avoids any questions of cultural relativity. Secondly, activists can test the alleged argumentative validity of legitimising arguments for internal colonisation. Thirdly, activists can show that the second hinge proposition above relies on a false dichotomy. There are more than two choices available at resolving the problem.

These discursive arts of resistance are not to be underestimated. Tully argues that these discursive struggles can be very effective, especially in the long run, because they help change the dominant society from within. Members of the dominant settler society, while privileged, are also under the thrall of hinge propositions that undergird their society. In taking these fringe propositions for granted, as universal, necessary and obligatory, the members of the dominant society are, in a way, unfree themselves. These hinge propositions limit the horizons of their understanding of collective life. By opening a dialogue with aboriginal peoples, the members of the dominant society can free themselves of conventional ways of thinking that prevent them from having genuine equal relationships with other free peoples. After all, the Western tradition of political theory already contains the discursive tools sufficient for critical self-reflection.

Hence, the role of the public philosopher is not to decree universal rights and wrongs from above, but to help subaltern groups analyse and articulate their positions of unfreedom in their discursive confrontation with words. This reflects Tully's postanalytic commitment in the belief that discursive confrontation counts as a practical art of resistance among many others such as revolution and can be just as effective as physical confrontations. But because this discursive relationship is a dialogical one, the public philosopher must also help in a manner that does not aim to be the last word on the subject. While three of Tully's articles in *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, are based on his policy work for the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples from 1991 to 1995<sup>26</sup>, he treats them as defeasible sketches open to refutation and modification. This, in turn, reflects his post-foundationalist commitments against comprehensive theories. Yet, as we saw briefly in the last chapter, Tully's ethical commitments are not derived from Wittgenstein's writings, but from Michel Foucault. Tully's aim is to present perspicuous representations of the of the language games dominant groups play with their deep beliefs and hinge propositions, rather than to penetrate phenomena in hope of uncovering its hidden essence. But in finding meaning and significance in how things appear to be, what defines the uncovered sites of unfreedom as ethically wrong are the leftist values inherited from Foucault who linked unfreedom to the 'limits' that are imposed by certain inherited beliefs about social and political life.

## **Globalisation and Imperialism**

We have seen above how James Tully uses genealogical and critical methods to draw a defeasible sketch of the unfreedom of aboriginal peoples in Canada. Through that sketch, we saw how Tully himself has taken part in the discursive confrontation between the aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government. In this section, we will see how Tully applies his method to other

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<sup>26</sup> Tully, James. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume II, Imperialism and Civic Freedom*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 5.

questions of contemporary political salience: globalisation and imperialism. While of a different scale to multinational countries, Tully's studies on globalisation uncover similar problems as we saw above. Firstly, Tully identifies imposed forms of Western practices of government as a major cause of unfreedom and subjugation. Secondly, Tully once again argues against forms of Western political theory that dominate discourse and understandings of political phenomena in restrictive ways. Just as liberal and nationalist political theories tend to approach collective life in multinational societies from a highly restrictive and top-down point of view, Tully finds that the 'global governance' and cosmopolitan democratic approaches to globalisation, among others, run into similar problems. In both cases, Western political theory has a tendency to present new ways of acting democratically in terms of the old cosmopolitan vocabulary and institutions. What Tully attempts here as he attempted above, is to show relationships of difference in relation to those dominant concepts and institutions by studying the 'extensive' practices of governance and democratic freedom that surround the topic.

One difference between the issue of globalisation and multinational countries is that the previous sketch dealt mainly with the issues of confronting centralised representative governments and their institutions such as the judiciary. Here, Tully draws on Foucault's idea of governmentality more closely because the issues go relatively further beyond the confines of formal representative governments. What Tully finds relevant in the issue of globalisation are the myriad of non-state practices of government and extra-national forms of subjectivity that criss-cross and overlap to a much larger degree. The relationships here are more multilogical than dialogical and institutions governing the activities of people are more varied and often less representative than institutions of the nation-state. Tully argues that one important feature of globalisation as it is happening today is, "a new trend towards the dispersion of practices of government and democracy."<sup>27</sup> This trend has two aspects. Firstly, it consists of the decentralisation of authority and power away from the restrictive practices of the representative governments of Westphalian nation-states, which is associated with cosmopolitan democratic theory. Secondly, it consists of the dispersion of extensive practices of government within and across nation-states. These extensive practices of government are those that go beyond representative governments such as those practiced by professional bureaucracies or market actors. According to Tully, most of these practices of government are not democratic in nature, but restrict the range of actions of participants without their say in the name of free markets or bureaucratic efficiency. "They are on the face of it 'systems' rather than 'practices' in so far as the participants are more 'patients' or 'subjects' than 'agents' or 'citizens'."<sup>28</sup>

Tully is able to account for this second set of 'extensive' practices of government because, as we saw in the last chapter, he inherits his holist concept of governmentality from Foucault, to whom governance is the very general practice of delimiting the range of possible actions of others. While in the sixteenth century, the concept of 'government' was used for a wide variety of relationships that involved power and authority in the public or private sphere, the modern era saw the concept gradually shrink to mean almost exclusively the formal institutions of representative government. And as Tully argues, the modern academic disciplines of political science and political philosophy further reinforced this by narrowing their own academic foci.<sup>29</sup> As a public philosopher, Tully understands that one of his roles is to uncover these extensive practices of governmentality as central issues in the politics of globalisation that

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pg. 49.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pg. 50.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pg. 57.

would go unaccounted for in more traditional state-centred accounts such as ‘global governance’ and cosmopolitan democratic approaches. Thus, rather than simply viewing globalisation from the lens of the categories of older theories, Tully focuses on what is new. He focuses on how, “globalisation is a cluster of uneven, hierarchical and unpredictable processes of interregional networks and systems of interaction and exchange, not a singular condition or a process of global integration.” In addition, one novel feature of globalisation is the constant process of de- and re-territorialisation of social, economic and political space. So, we have seen in the past century, “a shift from the direct, territorial forms of control characteristic of the long age of European and American imperialism to new forms of non-territorial imperialism based on control of peoples and markets by indirect, infrastructural control.”<sup>30</sup> “[P]olitical power is shared, dispersed, overlapping, contested and battered by a range of forces and agencies.”<sup>31</sup> These new forms of indirect relationships of power do not fit neatly into modern political categories centred on formal states and their direct interrelations.

Nevertheless, Tully claims that it is an underestimation of the staying power of modern forms of representative government for cosmopolitan theorists to celebrate the ‘end of sovereignty’ for representative governments. Even as globalisation has unleashed a multiplication of identities and loyalties that demand policies that cater to more diverse populations, loyalty to the traditional nation-state has not diminished according to Tully.<sup>32</sup> Tully further argues that this cynical attitude towards the continued prospects of representative government is not a result of globalisation but of the “the traditional faults in the practices of modern representative government themselves,” which makes representative government inert to demands of the democratic will.<sup>33</sup> To Tully, the rhetoric of globalisation as a border-dissolving process masks the weakening effects of the actions of elites on domestic governments. He claims that cosmopolitan theorists focus too much on the principle of rule of law, at the cost of neglecting popular sovereignty. The point is not that representative governments are losing power and authority, but that ordinary citizens are getting no freer as this dispersion of power continues.

Tully claims that part of the problem is that while the languages of traditional Western political theory such as cosmopolitanism are useful in studying and criticising the global order, they are at last insufficient to fully uncover the new relationships of unfreedom that result from global changes in practices of government. These languages of Western political theory then become dominant and part of the background of our political speech and actions. They help conceal the fact that, “many of the global relationships that govern the conduct of people and peoples are imperial relationships,” that have survived the historical decolonisation of the non-Western world.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, since 9/11, there has been renewed academic and political interest in the ‘new imperialism’ or ‘empire’ studies literature, in which Tully situates his own efforts. “Roughly speaking, the ‘new imperialism’ is said to comprise the United States as the primary, but not necessarily exclusive or unilateral, imperial hegemon, working with or against an informal league of cooperating and competing sovereign, constitutional, representative states of ‘great powers’ (the G8) and transnational corporations; operating through, or in tension with, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), the World Trade Organisation

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pg. 58.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pg. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pg. 61.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pg. 60.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pg. 127.

(WTO), unequal or manipulable international or transnational legal regimes since the original General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1947); backed up by the full spectrum global dominance of the US military and its coalition of willing and unwilling allies, proxies and dependencies.”<sup>35</sup>

For Tully, traditional Western political theory overlooks three characteristics of ‘new imperialism’. Firstly, they overlook the continuity of informal imperialism. While formal imperialism ended with the withdrawal of personnel from the former colonies and the emergence of new independent states recognised by international law, that has always anyway depended for its existence on informal imperialist practices of government. “The rule of Britain over the Middle East in the early twentieth century and the informal rule of the United States over Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are classic examples of informal imperialism prior to decolonisation.”<sup>36</sup> Secondly, they overlook the historical length and breadth of informal imperialism. They tend to focus more on unilateral Western military overtures such as those under Roosevelt in the early twentieth century and under Bush in the early twenty-first. But, the multilateral approaches of Wilson, Kennedy or Clinton that seek common action with bodies like the G8, UN or the Bretton Woods institutions are no less imperial in nature when they use economic pressure, sanctions or bribes to open markets in former colonies.<sup>37</sup> Thirdly, they overlook the imperial features of the system of states and of the development and institutions of global governance. As the European powers left, the low-intensity democratic institutions they left in their stead were controlled by local elites who found it convenient to strengthen the Western-style institutions of law, politics and security in order to control the diverse populations they were left in charge of. These non-European governments also found it very difficult to resist the call from the West to open their economies to the new global capitalist order in which they will have to give up some amount of sovereign power and control over their own economic resources to Western-dominated international bodies such as those mentioned above.

Critics of ‘new imperialism’ theory overlook these imperial characteristics of globalisation because the basic theoretical languages they inherited from the doctrinal traditions of the Enlightenment are insufficient tools to uncover these characteristics. Tully claims, “Any language of disclosure of an object domain reveals certain aspects of the phenomena it brings to language at the expense of concealing other aspects. All languages are aspectival in this sense.”<sup>38</sup> Subsequently, the traditional languages of Western political theory tend to conceal imperial aspects of contemporary international governance and mistakenly present them in non-imperial terms. Just like Immanuel Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* (1795) and *Idea for a Universal History* (1784), they tend to mask imperial aspects by appealing to three sub-languages. Firstly, they appeal to the normative and juridical language of the order of constitutional Westphalian states. Secondly, they appeal to a language of social-science that is often culturally teleological with respect to the development of human civilisation. Thirdly, they appeal to the language of self-determination of peoples, but are easily satisfied by low-intensity democratic institutions. All three sub-languages help build the impression of universality, necessity and obligation.

Thus, Tully claims that while we are not trapped forever in imperial relationships, we are still ‘entangled’ (PI, §125) in those relationships in a way from which critics of new imperialism cannot provide an exit. These defenders of the languages of traditional Western political theory

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pg. 128.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pg. 132.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pg. 135.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pg. 143.

focus on the fate of traditional representative governments rather than the myriad of extensive practices of government that oppress subaltern groups under the cover of ‘necessary’, even ‘obligatory’, globalisation and the arts of resistance in response. As such, the alterity of the myriad of ways to act politically or economically for the majority of the world becomes hidden. Following Wittgenstein these languages are aspectival, showing some aspects while inadvertently concealing others. “For the most part, this ‘strange multiplicity’ is overlooked because it is recognised and categorised within inherited imperial languages as being ‘less developed’, ‘pre-modern’ or ‘particular’.”<sup>39</sup> It is up to the public philosopher to give a clear, perspicuous representation of these limits to our political horizon in order for us to change them. It would be the beginning of a global dialogue that unlike the dialogue between aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government has not started to happen yet.

## Critique and Conclusion

We have seen in the critical and genealogical studies above, how James Tully’s political thought is primarily inspired by the political writings of Michel Foucault and that of post-colonial scholars of empire. From Foucault, Tully does not only inherit his critical methodology and political ontology, but also takes from him his commitment to civic freedom and the principle of self-determination for groups and individuals. On this, Tully takes a postfoundationalist stand; he neither attempts to prove that civic freedom is the foundational political virtue, nor does he try to describe comprehensively the range of implications instituting civic freedom would have in any given society. As we have seen, he uses his Foucauldian critical methods to write genealogies and critical surveys of specific sites of civic unfreedom, which he treats as defeasible constituents of on-going dialogical or multilogical conversations. The sites he chooses, however, go beyond the range of subjects studied by Foucault. In this, he is more influenced by post-colonial scholars of empire such as Edward Said.<sup>40</sup> From these scholars he inherits a historical consciousness of the length and breadth of informal imperial practices of government, even in the post-colonial era. Combining the two, he sees the struggle against imperial practices of government as struggles over and for civic freedom in the face of prevailing forms of public recognition that are undergirded by certain hinge propositions. Following Foucault, Tully takes these prevailing forms of recognition and the supporting propositions upon which they hinge as cognitive and moral limits that appear to us as universal, necessary and obligatory.

We also saw that Tully inherits from Wittgenstein a post-analytical social ontology that makes no clear distinction between speech and actions in seeing both as constitutive of agonistic language games. This allows Tully to claim rather reasonably that discursive confrontations can have real and substantial impact on our practices of government. Deriving a sense of play or indeterminacy from the idea of Wittgensteinian language games also allows Tully to justify the optimism he has in the ability of subaltern actors to always seek to change oppressive relations of meaning and power even if minimally *en passant*; if no game is completely circumscribed by rules then there are always opportunities while taking part to comport oneself otherwise. This sense of mutability, however, goes even further in Tully’s political thought, because as we saw in the previous chapter, Tully conflates the Foucauldian idea of a ‘limit’ with Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘pictures’. The concept of ‘pictures’ lends a mutable quality to ‘limits’ because as

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pg. 164.

<sup>40</sup> See Said, Edward W.. *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Knopf, 1993).

Wittgenstein argued, while some propositions form the foundational river bed of our knowledge (of other propositions), they are not immovable in themselves. In some special circumstances, what was part of the river bed can shift and become part of the moving river. So what confronts us as universal and necessary is not always so. Additionally, Tully takes the idea of ‘seeing aspects’ from Wittgenstein to explain why these Foucauldian ‘limits’ are so difficult to put to question. Since our view of the ‘limits’ that form the foundational beliefs of societies depends on traditional languages of thinking and speaking about politics, some aspects of these limits might be concealed because all languages are aspectual much in the way of Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit example (PI Part II, §xi). The limits are woven into the very languages of discourse. What is needed then is a perspicuous representation of such languages in order for the concealed characteristics of limits to be more easily seen and subsequently modified. And since Foucauldian ‘limits’ are also Wittgensteinian ‘pictures’, the genealogical and critical form of Foucault’s methods can be justified by equating them to Wittgenstein’s idea of perspicuous representation.

Thus, similar to the political thought of Pitkin which we surveyed in chapter four, Tully’s use of Wittgenstein lies primarily in taking his works as presenting a post-foundationalist and post-analytic social ontology. Just like Pitkin, Tully inherits his ethical commitments largely from other sources and attempts to justify them by showing how they can be congruent with a Wittgensteinian ontology. In this case, Tully uses Wittgenstein’s social ontology to justify Foucault’s political ontology, where human beings are always already in agonistic relationships of power and meaning with others and freedom (and therefore justice) is always already an issue. This allows Tully to treat the multiplicity of agonistic relationships as irreducible basic social phenomena, which neatly saves him from the burden of justifying the choice of ethical values that he champions. The public philosopher arrives where unfreedom has already been put to question; the public philosopher does not theorise novel problems for himself. But as I conceded in chapter four, there is not much wrong, in itself, with taking ethical values from elsewhere and justifying them on the basis of a Wittgensteinian epistemology or social ontology. An issue with Pitkin was her attempt to build out of that ontology what looks like a comprehensive theory based on a culturally particular understanding of politics, but here, we can see that Tully avoids such trouble.

Nevertheless, in the previous chapter, I raised several fears with Tully’s reading of Wittgenstein, the most prominent of which was that the conflation of ‘limits’ and ‘pictures’ means that Tully is implying more plasticity into human collective life than Wittgenstein was ready to suggest. This was because while Foucauldian ‘limits’ are always up for revision, it is not clear that Wittgensteinian ‘pictures’ are always so as well. Since ‘pictures’ impinge on our self-government as autonomous epistemic agents but ‘limits’ impinge on our self-government as autonomous moral agents, any proposed revision of the latter is unencumbered by the hard features of the world that the former often depends upon. Another concern was that Tully’s studies would be open to radical cultural relativity because Tully does not think of the concept of form of life as the bedrock of all social scientific explanation. As argued previously, he conflates form of life with the concept of ‘pictures’ and so, there is no common substrate for Tully to rationally compare different societies based upon. Lastly, while both ‘pictures’ and ‘form of life’ are conventional, the conventions of our ‘forms of life’ are not those which we can change or deny without not only opting out of our cultural or historical modes of life, but without opting out of our collective human form of life as well. So the fear is that Tully might recommend change to those things that, to paraphrase Pitkin again, the political theorist would be foolish to attempt to change. ‘Pictures’ can be historically or culturally specific, but ‘form of life’ cannot.

After taking a survey of James Tully's actual critical and genealogical studies however, these fears did not seem to have played out. While it is indeed inaccurate to justify the sense of radical mutability that Foucauldian 'limits' might suggest on a Wittgensteinian ontology, Tully does not seem to recommend changing anything that might be considered to be part of our general human form of life, the bedrock of social scientific explanation. On the main, he has challenged the universal validity of Western constitutional democracy, the prevailing forms of public recognition that ignore differences to and among subaltern identities, the oppressive informal imperialist practices of government and the traditional languages of Western political theory that support all the above. And he has successfully shown how each of them is a historically and culturally contingent 'picture' of and for political organisation. None are proven to be universal, necessary or obligatory. And certainly, none are parts of our basic epistemic 'pictures' of the physical world. Changing and reforming them does not imply changing our basic species-life or opting out of our shared human form of life. This further means that Tully does not recommend reforms to the parts of human life that would be beyond the range of plasticity implied by Wittgenstein. And as far as the charge of radical relativity is concerned, Tully's claim that his sketches are specific, situated on the rough ground of actual politics, and are defeasible and partial allows him to take ownership of this criticism. His critical and genealogical studies offer immanent critiques or test argumentative validity in specific topics and of situated rationalities. Thus, his arguments are meant to have very limited remits. He does not need to prove that his arguments have universal validity; that is something he explicitly set out to avoid in the first place. Thus, while inaccurate about Wittgenstein's concepts, Tully cannot be said to have done great violence to them. Foucauldian 'limits' can be seen as an extension of the Wittgensteinian concept of 'pictures' even if not its equal, but the justificatory moves Tully makes will have to be modified to suit.

Apart from Tully's use of Wittgenstein's concept in justifying his political ontology, there are a couple of small but interesting issues with Tully's choice of following in the post-colonial critical tradition. Much of the critical and genealogical sketches above are inherited and modified from the work of Michel Foucault and post-colonial scholars such as Edward Said, and in this tradition, human beings already see themselves as acting within agonistic imperial relationships between hegemonic and subaltern actors that are mutually constitutive. The goal, as we have seen above, is to "criticise and expose the dominant discourses and practices in such a way as to affect not only a modification but also a possible 'transformation' of them from the inside."<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Tully argues that this response is inadequate because post-colonial scholars, including himself, have not been able to distinguish between forms of contestation that modify and those that will transform an imperial relationship. But while he sees this as a suggestion for future research rather than a criticism, it is possible that the task might be beyond the ability or scope of Tully's Wittgenstein-inspired critical methodology. For as Tully admits, since the parties and players involved are already playing agonistic games of informal imperialist government, the tactics and strategies that Tully and others have pointed out are still moves within the game; they are, "not so much an alternative to contemporary imperialism but a move within the strategic and tactical logic of informal imperialism."<sup>42</sup> The question then is really how do we start to play an entirely different game? The properties of a game seem to make the answer to this question impossible to pin down. Firstly, the difficulty in Tully's Wittgensteinian ontology is that the same element of play and indeterminacy is also open to exploitation by the

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<sup>41</sup> Tully, *Public Philosophy*, Vol. 2, pg. 161.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 161.

dominant forms of identity. As the reserve of tactics and strategies of contestation grows, so does the arsenal of practices of domination. The dominant groups and societies can exploit this sense of indeterminacy to entrench new forms of informal imperialist practices of government. After all, any iterated game allows for the possibility of an arms race in technology. Secondly, the level of indeterminacy in games of contestation among two or more forms of identity may be more complex than Tully expects. As argued by Hans Sluga, the complexity of social and political relations present a higher order of complexity than most concepts that Wittgenstein had already regarded as ‘unsurveyable’. Unlike most other types phenomena, social phenomena are based on human agents interpreting others and as well as themselves. As the requirement of self-understandings multiply across larger populations of criss-crossing relationships that persist through time and space, we get a “cascade of levels of unsurveyability,” that Sluga calls the “hyper-complex”.<sup>43</sup> The idea of hyper-complexity may mean that such large scale prediction is out of order in the social sciences and thus, we may never be able to tell what and how much is enough to overthrow the current imperialist milieu. A related third issue is the aspectual nature of this post-colonial critical tradition itself. Just like any other language of discourse, this critical tradition uncovers some things and conceals others. It is possible that the answer to our question is one of those things that this critical tradition conceals simply because it focuses too much on the indeterminacy of games. Thankfully of course, Tully does not foreclose on the validity of other critical traditions and we may yet still find a critical language that will find us a more definite answer.

We noted in the previous chapter that Tully’s take on public philosophy is a new update on an old idea. In working in the tradition of the ethos of the Enlightenment, as opposed to its doctrines, Tully’s critical methodology is based on the well-trodden path of engaging in specific problems in specific contexts, in aid of specific groups or peoples. As such, he could have engaged in this dialogical activity without having to rely on Wittgenstein. His immanent critiques can be offered without ontological or epistemological justification and still make an impact in the discursive confrontations between subaltern and hegemon. That he did indeed offer such justification and explication, however, makes it of interest to academic political theory in general and to Wittgenstein scholars specifically. But as we have seen, Tully’s attempt to justify his Foucauldian political ontology on a Wittgensteinian social ontology was not quite successful. While not doing too much violence to Wittgenstein’s concepts, Tully does attempt to modify their boundaries and as such, their ontological implications. Perhaps recasting the relationship between Foucault’s concepts and methods and Wittgenstein’s in a different way might prove more successful.

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<sup>43</sup> Sluga, Hans. *Wittgenstein*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pg. 110.



## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

That the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein in political theory is a complicated story is hopefully rather apparent after the last six chapters. It is hoped that the previous six chapters have at the very least established that there is no singular tradition of Wittgenstein-inspired political theory and no agreement on exactly how faithful to his later works this type of political theory has to be. On the one hand, it is quite common for Wittgensteinian social and political scholars to quote that famous line from the preface of the *Philosophical Investigations*: “I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, on the other hand, much of this literature dedicates space to chastising other authors on their misinterpretations and misuse of Wittgenstein’s writings.<sup>2</sup> If there is a strict “apostolic succession”<sup>3</sup> of Wittgensteinian scholars in philosophy departments, it certainly does not seem the case for political theory across relevant departments. Political theorists who have used Wittgenstein’s later philosophy in their work, have done so to different degrees, in different types of projects and arguing for mutually incompatible points.

In the first place, we should remind ourselves that even in his home department of philosophy, the matter of Wittgenstein’s influence and contribution is not without contention. If we recall, while some of his ideas and points of view are still used in contemporary philosophical debate, they are far from being the dominant view. Some, like the call for philosophy to play an exclusively therapeutic role, is rejected outright by the vast majority of professional academic philosophers and is, frankly speaking, not even practiced by most of his avowed followers. In the past decade or so, one can add to this the fact that the standard readings of Wittgenstein’s works are increasingly under attack from ‘resolute’ readers like Cora Diamond. Even in metaphysics and epistemology, there is now no singular tradition of interpreting Wittgenstein. What more then, could we expect from political theory, a discipline in which his influence is topically indirect? Before we begin discussing more thoroughly the modernist and post-modernist (in the most general terms) approaches in Wittgensteinian normative political philosophy, as exemplified by Hanna Pitkin and James Tully, let us review our findings thus far.

We have seen from Chapter 1, how the historical development of Wittgensteinian political theory was part of a larger movement in philosophy and the social sciences against the influence of forms of positivism and towards a focus on language and the situated rationality of human beings. A contemporary of Wittgenstein, R. G. Collingwood was an independent influence on social and political studies at time when they were only beginning to deal with the intentional or theory-laden characteristics of their subject matter. Collingwood’s writings brought out the methodological idealism of Wittgenstein’s later writings for political theorists looking to combat positivist empiricism. The Cambridge School historian Quentin Skinner for example, took up Collingwood’s ideas and extended them further to justify a contextualist approach to historical methods. If to understand history was to understand the human mind, then

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<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations* (3rd ed.), translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1973), pg. viii.

<sup>2</sup> See Biletzki, Anat. *(Over)Interpreting Wittgenstein*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Grayling, A. C.. *Wittgenstein: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pg. 129.

following Wittgenstein, to understand history, one must understand the conventionality of human language games. This contextualist approach is still very influential in current historiography, but later followers of Cambridge School history like Mark Bevir preferred to be more faithful to Wittgenstein's post-foundationalist and anti-theoretical leanings. While Skinner attempted to build a foundational historical method, Bevir limited his work to deducing our conceptual commitments to historical method from the implications of the concepts that we use to operate in the world. Unsurprisingly, he consequently argued that no single method can play the part of a foundational historical method.

But while situated in different subfields and therefore aimed at other types of knowledge, Wittgensteinian political theorists in the subfields of the philosophy of social science and normative political philosophy also display this historical development from modernist to post-modernist methods and projects. In the philosophy of social science, we saw how Peter Winch developed a foundational comprehensive theory of the study of the social science that was based on the irreducibly subjective rules of different and separate modes of life or what Hanna Pitkin called 'language regions'. While A. R. Louch developed Winch's basic social ontology to justify a larger set of social scientific methods, his post-foundationalism was still mild compared to Nigel Pleasants' resolutely anti-theoretical position. Pleasants, whose *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory* is possibly the most anti-theoretical statement in Wittgensteinian political theory today, argues against the attempt to build any sort of political or social theory at all. And in normative political theory, conservative and leftist political theorists did battle over Wittgenstein's political identity. But even among the leftist theorists, some followed in Hanna Pitkin's more traditional utilisation of Wittgenstein's ideas in building theories about democracy and rights, while others latterly elected to draw post-modern lessons from Wittgenstein that they believed to be consonant with methods and ideas from post-structuralist critical theory. On the one hand, we have Pitkin building the basis of complete political ontology based on a modified Winchian social ontology, while on the other hand we have James Tully, who was more interested in combating specific sites of unfreedom with critical and genealogical studies that eschew universal claims.

That so many different uses came out of Wittgenstein's later philosophy should not surprise us. Although usages of Wittgenstein's ideas and methods tend to concentrate on a handful of his conceptualisations, there are quite naturally a number of ways to interpret their usefulness for social or political studies and just as surely, a number of ways to put them together to resemble some sort of a political ontology. We saw in Chapter 2 the example of the Wittgensteinian concept of 'language games'. To Wittgenstein, linguistic practices always come embedded in conventional human ways of being or doing. He calls these conventional ways of speaking and acting language games to emphasise that they are part of an activity in the lives of human beings. Language games are literally games in that they are ritualised exchanges between people for various purposes and this why Wittgenstein believes that linguistic meaning lies for the most part in the *use* of words and sentences. In general, Wittgensteinian political theorists have turned to this concept to clarify the nature of the relationship between political speech and political action with the most common result being a post-analytic conclusion. The concept of language games helps them to ground political speech in political action or to analyse political speech *as* political action. Since political speech is constitutive of political activity, it cannot be understood exclusively in terms of linguistic meaning (i.e. dictionary meanings) but only as integrated into the political practices and activities of the speakers as political actors. Nonetheless, it is easy to come to opposite conclusions based on the same evidence by

emphasising different parts of one's political ontology. Conservative Wittgensteinians have chosen to emphasise the conventionality of language games and subsequently read a quietist conservatism in Wittgenstein's later works. Leftist theorists however, emphasise the fact that the multiplicity of language games is not something fixed and new ways of speaking come into existence while others fade away as the activities and practices of which they are constitutive change. They would also often couple the idea of language games with the idea of agonistic discursive exchanges because language games are not individualistic and are irreducibly dialogical. To these theorists, these points encourage a leftist progressivism that can be aimed at unjust conventions.

We also see divergence in usage for key concepts like 'family resemblance' and 'form of life'. Some Wittgensteinian theorists use the concepts to delineate foundational theories, while other take them as suggesting a more resolute post-foundationalism. The idea of family resemblances was a key part of Wittgenstein's post-foundationalism. The Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* rejected the idea that language has a simple, crystallised essence in favour of respecting the countless multiplicity of linguistic activities and practices. Language and many other concepts are inherently vague because there are no essential features that tie together all relevant instances and examples of them. "[T]hese phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, - but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship or these relationships, that we call them all 'language'," (*Philosophical Investigations*, §65). Generally, Wittgensteinian political theorists have used the concept of 'family resemblance' as a reminder against the essentialist notions of political and social concepts. But while modernist Wittgensteinians have used the concept of family resemblance to investigate individual concepts to interest results, they have not let it stop them from building generalised theories. We saw how it did not stop Pitkin attempting to distil the correct essentialist meaning of the concept of 'the political' and Peter Winch from trying to do the same with the concept of 'social science'. Other, more recent theorists like James Tully have avoided the traditional tendency to generalise in order to give more attention to the particular case. Nevertheless, in most cases, Wittgensteinian theorists have not only used the concept to argue against analytic essentialism, they have also implicitly used the concept to argue against conceptual perennialism through time. This diachronic use of the concept is taken as a natural and implicit implication of the concept of family resemblance.

And in the case of the concept of 'form of life', while some Wittgensteinian theorists have used it as the bedrock of their social ontology, others have avoided it. To Wittgenstein, the idea of a human form of life was formed to undergird the idea that language use is to take part in an activity and activities are tied to the form of life the subject is embedded in. In order to get us to see that the meanings of words are grounded in their actual usage, Wittgenstein had to show us how the language that we use not only facilitates but is constitutive of our human form of life. For him, the human form of life is the most basic level of explanation or justification of human practices and activities and so it was unsurprising that some Wittgensteinian theorists, especially those in the Winchian tradition, have taken this as a theory of the deep structure of human action and human interrelations, that is to say, as a social ontology. Wittgensteinian theorists, who have used Wittgenstein's ideas in combination with methods from post-modern critical theory however, tend to ignore the idea of form of life – or sometimes, ironically, like Winch, they have tended to conflate 'form of life' with the variety of modes of life (i.e. language regions). As with the example of James Tully's work, this omission is usually meant to avoid the determinist implications this concept can have even though it is not an essentialist notion.

## Pitkin and Tully's Social Thought

This dissertation also promised a detailed analysis of Hanna Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice* and James Tully's *Public Philosophy in a New Key* as a pair of contrasting approaches to utilising Wittgenstein's later work and in the previous four chapters, we have seen interesting similarities and differences. To begin with, we saw in Chapter 3 how Pitkin utilises Wittgenstein's post-analytic epistemology to give the entire range of human discourse a radically holistic treatment. Like Winch before her, Pitkin believes that all that we do and say as human beings finds its explanatory roots in our species form of life and so all social theorising must arise from that basic condition – noting that this condition is not a reductively essentialist notion. But going further than Winch, Pitkin makes it explicit that neither she nor Wittgenstein believes that we have special access to transcendent standards or authority. What we have is a form of life that is full of language games and language regions that criss-cross and overlap. This means that many concepts are not essentialist in nature, their many uses are often related only by family resemblances where no one characteristic is common to all instances. And so Pitkin is suspicious of positivist attempts at sorting and sterilizing the organic and messy way that human beings live out their lives. Everything is in order as it is, even with all the contradictions and inconsistencies. Coupling Wittgenstein with the methods of Oxonian ordinary language philosophy, Pitkin attempts to show how (with the concept of 'justice' for instance) taking the inherent contradictions and inconsistencies in our language games into account is quite necessary for a complete social science. To dispense with any part in order to resolve those inconsistencies is misguided practice that will result in an incomplete picture of our social reality and therefore lead to artificial and unnecessary conceptual puzzles.

But while Pitkin's holism is akin to Winch's in that as she recognizes the indispensable role of concepts, reasons, attitudes and commitments in studying social phenomena, Pitkin still argues that objectivity in the social sciences is possible and desirable, only different in nature compared to objectivity in the natural sciences. This, however, raises the question of whether Pitkin's social thought constitutes a first order theory or merely constitutes a perspicuous representation of social phenomena. While Pitkin does give us a synoptic view of the subject matter at hand, she also makes explicit prescriptions for the methodology of social science and what properly constitutes its ontology. While Pitkin avoids Winch's radical relativism in the social sciences, like his, Pitkin's project is a modernist one (in the most general sense) that seeks to build a foundational theory of social studies. While accepting that vagueness and contradictions are inherent qualities of the subject matter of social science as the result of the non-essentialist nature of basic ontological concepts like language games and form of life, Pitkin's systematic theoretical build-up from her Wittgensteinian epistemology makes *Wittgenstein and Justice* appear to be the start of a foundational comprehensive theory of social science. Thus, while she argues against many modernist tropes in the study of the social and political for which she blames positivism's influence in the field, she does seem to bring a Kantian tendency of foundational comprehensive theory building to Wittgenstein's piecemeal presentation of language. To Pitkin, the social sciences are sometimes circular and interpretive and sometimes linear and objectively self-evident, but while this was a call by her against being doctrinaire, it does very much seem like the start of a foundational theory that is aimed at delineating as accurately as possible the full complexity of the social sciences. It would not be a

traditional reductive essentialist theory, but it does seem to come from a modernist desire for comprehensive explanation of a given topic.

As a contrast, we saw in Chapter 5 how James Tully's social thought was inspired by the post-structuralist works of Michel Foucault rather than the more closely related Oxford ordinary language philosophy. From Foucault, Tully inherits a critical methodology that is steeped in the ethos of the Enlightenment tradition of public philosophy. This, Tully takes to be a post-foundationalist tradition rivalling the foundational comprehensive theory building of the Kantian and natural law approaches that emerged from the doctrinal traditions of the Enlightenment. Already, one can compare these philosophical commitments with the first-order philosophical commitments of ordinary language philosophy. As we saw in Chapter 1, Oxford ordinary language philosophers, while influenced by Wittgenstein's anthropological and linguistic emphasis, did not take his anti-theoretical advice to heart. They generally still believed in philosophy as a first-order discipline. Pitkin's secondary influences did not present her with a reason to take Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical appeals seriously. But while Tully similarly inherits from Wittgenstein an epistemology and social ontology that is based on human practices and the public and conventional nature of our collective life, he does not take these features as foundations on which to build a comprehensive theory. He does, of course, like Pitkin, take this social ontology as requiring an intersubjective and holist approach to the social sciences, but he also takes the irreducible multiplicity of social practices as rejecting the validity of general explanations. Unlike Pitkin, Tully is unconcerned with extracting objective facts about the most basic level of human social life. He is simply uninterested in explaining basic phenomena like the true nature of human action. Instead, Tully is primarily interested in taking Wittgenstein's epistemology and social ontology as justification for the critical methodology he takes from Foucault. From Wittgenstein's concept of language games, Tully takes justification for his critical method of studying social practices as intersubjective games and as primary social phenomena. From Wittgenstein's rule-following arguments, Tully takes justification for the post-foundationalist and non-universal nature of his critical method. From Wittgenstein's concepts of 'pictures' and 'perspicuous representation', Tully justifies the genealogical form of his critical method that utilises practical reasoning to wean the reader from sedimented forms of social practices and judgments. Unlike Pitkin, Tully's social scientific methods are to be applied in specific cases rather than in building an abstract theory explaining general social phenomena.

We subsequently noted in Chapter 5 that in reading the work of later Wittgenstein as congruent with the methodology of Foucault, Tully reads Wittgenstein in a significantly different manner than Peter Winch and Hanna Pitkin. For the Winchians, Wittgenstein's anthropological philosophy of language and especially his concept of a human form of life provide us with a basic social ontology. The latter is seen as a collection of brute facts about our species-life that forms the basic substrate of all the varieties of historical and cultural modes of human life. It forms the bedrock of all social theorising and thus Winch's early followers like Pitkin tend to follow his lead in building foundationalist theories. Nevertheless, this development in social theory still marks a departure from more doctrinally Kantian social theories that attempt to distil human nature into a singular essence. Winchian theories are not foundational in the essentialist sense but they are still foundational in their attempt at producing a general or universal albeit non-reductive theory. But, as we discussed above, Tully is not interested in such a Kantian project. He sought only an epistemology that is consistent with the critical ethos within which he places his own work, thus giving sufficient and coherent justification for his Foucauldian critical methods. Instead of arguing that social studies *must* be done in such and such a way, Tully

simply attempts to show that social study *can* be done in the manner that he has chosen – while maximising the avoidance of foreclosure on other methods. Tully’s project is neither essentialist nor universal. This methodological difference is part of the reason why I characterise Pitkin’s project as modernist (in the most general sense) and Tully’s project as postmodern (in the most general sense).

Leaving deeper discussion on Pitkin’s and Tully’s metaphilosophical commitments to later sections below, it is relevant here to recall that while Tully’s social thought avoids the foundationalism of Pitkin’s social thought, his reading of some of Wittgenstein’s concepts seems less accurate than hers. In Chapter 5, I raised several fears about Tully’s reading of Wittgenstein. The most prominent fear was that Tully’s conflation of ‘limits’ and ‘pictures’ meant that he is implying more plasticity to human collective life than Wittgenstein was ready to suggest. This was because while Foucauldian ‘limits’ are always up for revision, it is not clear that Wittgensteinian ‘pictures’ are always so as well. Since ‘pictures’ impinge on our self-government as autonomous epistemic agents but ‘limits’ impinge on our self-government as autonomous moral agents, any proposed revision of the latter is unencumbered by the hard features of our form of life or of the natural world that the former often depends upon. Another concern was that Tully’s studies would be open to radical cultural relativity because Tully does not think of the concept of form of life as the bedrock of all social scientific explanation. He conflates form of life with the concept of ‘pictures’ and in so doing, does not leave himself with any explanatory bedrock or common substrate within which one can compare different cultures or historical periods. This is, of course, consonant with his anti-universalist commitments, but it does not seem to square with Wittgenstein’s writings about where explanations about human life must stop. Tully’s methods avoid the threat of infinite regress in interpretation and explanation of social phenomena not by stopping at the level of the basic human form of life, but by ignoring more fundamental justifications as morally irrelevant to ethical issues that are already at question when he, the public philosopher, arrives at the scene. Lastly, while both ‘pictures’ and ‘form of life’ are conventional, the conventions of our ‘forms of life’ are not those which we can change or deny without not only opting out of our cultural or historical modes of life, but without opting out of our collective human form of life as well. So the fear is that Tully might recommend change to those things that, to paraphrase Pitkin again, the political theorist would be foolish to attempt to change. ‘Pictures’ can be historically or culturally specific, but ‘form of life’ cannot.

So, while Tully’s social thought displays a deeper commitment to post-foundationalism that is more consonant with Wittgenstein’s anti-theoretical appeals, it is based on a relatively less accurate reading of Wittgenstein’s anthropological approach to meaning and interpretation. Nevertheless, this criticism is based on the presumption that the method of reading a social ontology into Wittgenstein’s later writings is legitimate. This presumption is worth questioning as both Tully and Pitkin’s thought depend on this ontological view, but like other discussions on the general philosophical methods of Tully and Pitkin, a deeper analysis will be deferred to a later section.

### **Pitkin and Tully’s Normative Political Thought**

Pitkin’s and Tully’s Wittgenstein-influenced social thought set the ontological and epistemological bases for their respective political thought. Their social thought also displays the broad philosophical methodology that they bring to their respective political theories. Nevertheless, as we have noted previously, finding no general explicit moral commitments in

Wittgenstein's later work, both authors bring their moral commitments in from other sources. We saw for example how Pitkin built her political theory by taking a Wittgensteinian social ontology to flesh out and expand the fundamental normative political values she draws from Kant and Arendt. From Kant, Pitkin inherits his deontological commitment to respect other human beings as subjects with their own cares and ends – human beings whose manipulation is unjust oppression. And from Arendt, she inherits a deontological commitment for political openness, honesty and a commitment for the democratically and deliberatively defined public good. Understandably finding no moral commitments from Wittgenstein's writing itself, Pitkin must bring them in from elsewhere, but these secondary influences, I have argued, seemed to have been projected back unto Wittgenstein. Applying Wittgensteinian ontology and methodology to the above political values, Pitkin arrives at a liberal vision of the political realm.

However, while Pitkin is quite right in insisting that Wittgenstein was not a conservative academic thinker, she makes no direct argument as to why we should conceive of him as a liberal. While conservative interpreters have read a conservative quietism in Wittgenstein's idea of language games, leftist interpreters like Pitkin emphasise the contingency and corrigibility of many language games and the conventions that constitute them. Nevertheless, saying that change is possible and change does happen is different from promoting it and saying that change is hard to achieve is different from wanting to prevent it. Neither side has been very persuasive at presenting Wittgenstein as a political partisan since there does not seem to be any textual evidence of Wittgenstein imbuing special normative meaning to the conventionality of human activities or its mutability. Either side can read what they wish from this post-structuralist (since language is both created by and given to us) idea from Wittgenstein, but neither side has been able to prove in anything more than a highly circumstantial way that Wittgenstein conceptualized his basic ideas as having unavoidable political implications.

Tully's normative approach, however, avoids this traditional liberal-conservative debate in Wittgensteinian political theory. While we have indeed seen in the examination of his critical and genealogical studies in Chapter 6 how James Tully's political thought is primarily inspired by the political writings of Michel Foucault and that of post-colonial scholars of empire, Tully avoids painting Wittgenstein himself as political thinker. From Foucault, Tully inherits his moral commitments to civic freedom and the principle of self-determination for groups and individuals. On this, Tully takes a postfoundationalist position and does not attempt to prove that civic freedom is the foundational political virtue and that this fact follows logically from a Wittgensteinian social ontology. Using his Foucauldian critical methods to write genealogies and critical surveys of specific sites of civic unfreedom where civic freedom is already at issue and where his arguments are defeasible parts of on-going dialogical or multilogical conversations, Tully avoids the task of grounding his moral values in a universal theory. What Tully does is to show that his Foucauldian normative aims can be fulfilled by Foucauldian critical and genealogical methods and that these methods are epistemologically sound given his Wittgensteinian social ontology. Wittgenstein's own implied normative political beliefs are neither implied nor gestured at.

Unlike Foucault, Tully was centrally interested in issues surrounding imperial practices of government and the various specific sites where these practices are dominant. He sees the struggle against imperial practices of government as struggles over and for civic freedom in the face of prevailing forms of public recognition that are undergirded by certain hinge propositions. Following Foucault, Tully takes these prevailing forms of recognition and their supporting propositions as cognitive and moral limits that appear to us as universal, necessary and

obligatory. The idea that these limits are like Wittgenstein's idea of 'pictures', help to ontologically justify Tully's claim that such moral limits exist, but the moral nature of these limits are not projected back unto Wittgenstein's writings. The same is true of Tully's solution: Deriving a sense of play or indeterminacy from the idea of Wittgensteinian language games allows Tully to justify the optimism he has in the ability of subaltern actors to always seek to change oppressive relations of meaning and power even if minimally *en passant*; if no game is completely circumscribed by rules then there are always opportunities while taking part to comport oneself otherwise. A Wittgensteinian social ontology can help prove that leftist progressive change is *possible*, but unlike Pitkin, Tully does not use these ontological features to imply any inherent universal moral normativity or any political leanings (implicit or explicit) on Wittgenstein's part. Pitkin, on the other hand, stated that "method often dictates content"<sup>4</sup>, and rather than simply arguing that a Wittgensteinian social ontology could justify the practicalities of a leftist progressive project, Pitkin tried to show how Wittgenstein's social ontology implies leftist progressive conclusions.

Thus, while both Pitkin and Tully are leftist theorists for whom a Wittgensteinian social ontology is crucial for their normative political arguments, they approach this justificatory issue from different directions. As I conceded in Chapter 4, there is nothing wrong in taking moral commitments from elsewhere and attempting to justify them on a Wittgensteinian social ontology, but this comes with an important caveat: If these moral commitments are to be projected back unto Wittgenstein, then separate explicit arguments need to be made about why readers should believe that Wittgenstein had these basic normative political values. Pitkin had argued, using methods she claims she gleaned from Wittgenstein and Oxford ordinary philosophy, that the concept of 'the political' is essentially an ancient Greek conception and imbued with left democratic values that still apply universally today. However, Pitkin did not consider that this interpretation is only one of the many possible interpretations one can make from using Wittgenstein's methods and a Wittgensteinian ontology. And so, while Pitkin can, *per se*, use a Wittgensteinian ontology to justify her normative ideals, she has not sufficiently argued why hers is the one correct interpretation or alternatively, why other interpretations can be foreclosed upon. She has not sufficiently proven that a method can dictate only one type of normative political content. As an alternative, Tully, the public philosopher, arrives where unfreedom has already been put to question. A public philosopher does not theoretically derive normative political ideals from his social ontology; a public philosopher shows from his social ontology what purchase a given normative political ideal can have.

### **Pitkin and Tully's Philosophical Methods**

Having recollected Pitkin and Tully's social theories and normative political thought, much of their basic philosophical approaches are already laid open to view, but to encapsulate their differences as the differences between modernist and postmodernist approaches is neither to deny the complexities of each author's works nor the similarities that they share. Characterising Pitkin's Wittgenstein-inspired work as 'modernist', for example, does not mean that her work was not pioneering in its holist and non-essentialist approach. Pitkin, after all, argued for a reconciliation of the subjective and objective approaches to social studies based a holist understanding of the relationship between facts and values. In this way, Pitkin fought against the

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<sup>4</sup> Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993 [1972]), pg. xxv.



reductionism of positivist modernist thought at a time when its influence was bringing broad changes to political science and other social science departments. Nevertheless, Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice* is modernist in the broad sense that it presents a foundational social and political theory intent on making general explanations of social and political life. Her theory may not be foundational in the essentialist sense because of her embrace of Wittgenstein's non-essentialist concepts, but it is foundational in attempting to construct a singularly correct method to how social phenomena should be investigated. An instructive example is the way Pitkin takes Wittgenstein's later writings as presenting a social ontology from which she can derive the true meaning of 'the political' as agnostic public life. Although she takes the 'correct' meaning of 'the political' as the historical Greek meaning, she converts 'the political' into an abstraction when she universalises the import of this particular interpretation across time and cultures.

One curious implication here is that the above essentialism regarding political phenomena is not consonant with Pitkin's own holist non-essentialist social theory. This divergence represents the generally modernist influences of the time from which Pitkin could not entirely free herself. Curiously, her holist social theory did not result in a holist political theory, as instead of studying the wide variety of political meanings and practices in the world, Pitkin chose to abstract a universal moral commitment from the particularly Western tradition of understanding 'the political'. Pitkin did not seem consider that hers is only one interpretation among many possible ones. A wider survey of global political experiences would probably yield a range of bona fide conventional uses for the concept of 'politics' or 'the political'. In alternative terms, Pitkin's representation here lacks perspicuity because of its limited range. In fact, to argue that method often dictates content is to ignore a core epistemological insight from Wittgenstein. From his arguments concerning interpretation, Wittgenstein argued that rules cannot determine their own interpretation. Any interpretation can be made to accord with a rule and so Pitkin must make stronger arguments about why her Western-centric interpretation is correct. Any appeal to the community of interpreters of Wittgenstein, however, cannot succeed as there is no general consensus on what normative implications Wittgenstein's methods have for politics and its study. Wittgenstein's ideas and methods can make an exclusive set of normative ideas plausible, but it cannot be used to assert an exclusive set at the expense of foreclosing on all others. Either the basic normative drive of Pitkin's leftist values has to find final justification in other ways or Pitkin has to give up her project of defending her left republican values as universal.

In more general terms, Pitkin's approach is modernist because, as John Gunnell argues, it displays a, "tendency to attribute to politics more than a conventional status and to assume for political theory more than an institutional existence," which "involved the very type of problem that Wittgenstein called a "grammatical" confusion."<sup>5</sup> "Just as Pitkin abstracted and universalized politics, she, like Wolin, cast political theory in the form of a decontextualized "vocation" and "tradition," but this too was only a retrospective extrapolation of a generic or functional image, that is, an analytically defined tradition."<sup>6</sup> The problem with this is that it gives political theory and political theorists the kind of privileged epistemological position that Wittgenstein sought to deny with his anti-theoretical claims about philosophy. To Wittgenstein, the practice of political theory is a conventional mode of life like any other human practice and its bases of self-justification are internal to its own practice. Its practice is historically

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<sup>5</sup> Gunnell, John G.. *Political Theory and Social Science: Cutting Against the Grain*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pg. 84.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 84.

conditioned by the political theorists that have come before and no claim to epistemological privilege can be objectively supported. Practitioners of political theory cannot study socio-political phenomena as complete outsiders; in order to understand a convention or rule, one must be trained in that convention or rule. Hence, the political theorist has no privileged place above the community of rule-followers whose conventions and rules she studies.

Pitkin's own philosophical methods however does seem to disagree with what she claims a Wittgensteinian political theory would be like. Most Wittgensteinian political theorists would agree with her that the unique Wittgensteinian perspective is very useful in providing us with a renewed understanding of the inherent relativity of past cultures and past language games in service of a more accurate understanding of past texts. They would also agree with her that the Wittgensteinian perspective can provide us with a better understanding of the plurality of concepts used in political theory and how inconsistencies in language are often obstacles to full understanding. Most Wittgensteinian political theorists would also agree that Wittgenstein's perspective would counter the influence of positivism in the social sciences by emphasizing the ordinary in human activities. Further, Pitkin fully expects that a Wittgensteinian political theory would be very different from traditional political theory. "It would presumably share his suspicion of broad, systematic generalization, his therapeutic stress on the particular case, on the investigating and speaking self, and on the acceptance of plurality and contradiction."<sup>7</sup> This, Pitkin admits, does not sound much like a theory at all, and she accepts that Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical leanings might mean that there could be no such thing as a Wittgensteinian political theory. Instead, a Wittgensteinian political theory would stress the act of philosophizing rather than conclusions that might form a coherent system of thought. She suggests then, that a Wittgensteinian political theory would not be an expert theory, created by a political sage to be distributed to the masses, but one to be communicated from one citizen to another. The two individuals may not be equal with respect to intellectual prowess, but the key here is the equality of membership to the polity.

Yet, of course, while Pitkin's basic social theory in *Wittgenstein and Justice* might reasonably come close to the description above, her normative political thought in the text does not reflect this cultural relativity, conceptual plurality, anti-theoreticalism or the ordinariness of the political theorist and her discipline. Instead, it reflects an essentialist foundationalism and a position of privilege for political theory and political theorists. However, in the way that Pitkin says something like that there could be no such thing as a Wittgensteinian political theory, one could perhaps find some indirect textual evidence that *Wittgenstein and Justice* was not meant to be a work of Wittgensteinian political theory, but merely a statement of what that sort of political theory would look like. But this would mean that Pitkin fell short of her stated aim of really showing us how exactly Wittgenstein's writings would change the practice of political theory because the construction of a modernist work would make reflect philosophical commitments that are at odds with the post-foundationalist and anti-theoretical commitments inherent in the descriptions she makes of a putative Wittgensteinian political theory. Ironically, James Tully's work in the two volume collection *Public Philosophy in a New Key* seems a better fit for the type of putative postmodern Wittgensteinian political theory that Pitkin proposes.

I described James Tully's *Public Philosophy in a New Key* as a postmodernist work because of its faithfulness in opposing the Enlightenment doctrinal tradition of building comprehensive universal theories founded essentialist notions of social and political phenomena. Instead, Tully takes his methodological and substantive cues from Michel Foucault, writing in

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<sup>7</sup> Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pg. 325.

the tradition of public philosophy that carries on the Enlightenment ethos. As opposed to the doctrinal tradition of the Enlightenment which Tully associates with the comprehensive foundational theory building of the Kantian and natural law approaches, the tradition following the Enlightenment ethos rejects the default languages and political practices that those rival traditions depend upon and assume as given. Those rival traditions attempt to build theories from universalising sublimated essences and treating as uniform what is irreducibly diverse. However, “[i]f we are to develop a political philosophy that has the capacity to disclose the specific forms of oppression today, we require an Enlightenment critical ‘attitude’ rather than a doctrine, one which can test and reform dubious aspects of the dominant practices and form of problematisation of politics against a better approach to what is going on in practice.”<sup>8</sup>

Rather than starting with Wittgenstein and arguing what a Wittgensteinian ontology would determine about the shape and normative ideals of our collective political life, Tully begins with Foucault and attempts to epistemologically justify his critical and genealogical methods on Wittgenstein’s ontology and epistemology. From Wittgenstein’s concept of language games, Tully takes justification for his critical method of studying social practices as intersubjective games and as primary social phenomena. From Wittgenstein’s rule-following arguments, Tully takes justification for the post-foundationalist and non-universal nature of his critical method. From Wittgenstein’s concepts of ‘pictures’ and ‘perspicuous representation’, Tully justifies the genealogical form of his critical method that utilises practical reasoning to wean the reader from sedimented forms of social practices and judgments. These justificatory moves, however, are only an attempt to base his methods on an arguably sound epistemology and ontology. They are not meant to foreclose on other methods that could also be taken as consonant with a Wittgensteinian epistemology and ontology. Tully’s anti-comprehensive commitments prevent him from claiming that his is the only correct interpretation of the social and political implications of Wittgenstein’s writings.

One of the main ways in which Tully’s non-universalist methodology cashes out is the framing of this methodology as the vision of a civic task that a public political philosopher may choose to pursue. Tully’s central motivation is to immerse himself in the struggle against oppression, in direct engagement with the citizens who live every day under such conditions. To him, “[t]he role of public philosophy is to address public affairs,”<sup>9</sup> but such an address can no longer, in these modern times, come from ‘*on high*’. This means that for Tully, political theory is a dialogical practice aimed at the establishment of, “pedagogical relationships of reciprocal elucidation between academic research and the civic activities of fellow citizens. The specific role of this public philosophy is to throw a critical light on the fields of practices in which civic struggles take place and the practices of civic freedom available to change them.”<sup>10</sup> This also means that Tully is not vulnerable to the above criticism made by John Gunnell of Pitkin’s text. Part of Tully’s general postmodernism is this careful description of the non-privileged nature of political theory and the non-privileged position of the political theorist. While Tully proposes a Foucauldian methodology, he neither introduces it to his fellow citizens as a singularly foundational method nor does he lionise the position of the political theorist as having special access to the truth. His Foucauldian methods are only one valid methodology among many possible others. And there is no privileging one over all others because there is, “no universal

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<sup>8</sup> Tully, James. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume I, Democracy and Civic Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pg. 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

criteria for adjudicating among them.”<sup>11</sup> The political theorist is free to choose whichever method she finds useful in a particular case.

For Tully, this methodological freedom is important because he is suspicious of given truths and methods, especially those that might be based on the mistaken universality of default languages of the Enlightenment. Politics is an open-ended activity. It is an ordinary human practice and so is the discipline that studies it. Tully’s methods are subsequently dialogical. “Dialogue partners gain insight into what ruling, being ruled and contesting rule is through the exchange of questions and answers over different ways of studying politics and over different criteria for their assessment relative to how they illuminate different aspects of the complex worlds of politics.”<sup>12</sup> In this vision, political theorists are co-equal members of the political dialogue, who must concede that they do not have special access to the truth and thus cannot rightly impose any universal theories. To Tully, practicing public philosophy is a critical activity, a form of philosophical reflection that starts from and privileges practice and consequently allows one to reflect on those practices which are oppressive and consequently call them into question. It allows one to see social and political problems as real practical problems of contestation and negotiation which are aimed at real and practical solutions to those problems. This emphasis on real problems and the practicalities of dialogical relationships means that Tully avoids the construction of a comprehensive theory and thus avoids the pretence of having the last word on a practical subject. The modernist tendency to supply universal solutions to universal problems is less epistemologically consonant with Wittgenstein’s anti-theoretical appeals.

In dealing with real practical problems in politics, Tully does not assume, as many modern theorists have, that there are causal processes that inadvertently determine the course of social and political history and does not therefore believe it is his special role to elucidate that story as a revelation. This contrasts with Pitkin’s implicit Aristotelian teleology which sees human beings as fully developed only in taking active participation in the agonism of public politics. The role of the public philosopher is not to lay down a general path for all peoples, but to help fellow citizens find their way past those things that *specifically* and *currently* confront them as political problems. And because solutions to practical problems are ad hoc, the public philosopher’s role is not to claim the universality of particular values and tell fellow citizens how to act righteously in every situation. While, of course, Tully concentrates most of his works on the issue of civic freedom in the face of imperial practices of government, he arrives as a public philosopher in contexts where civic freedom has already been raised as a problem. Unlike Pitkin who attempted to derive left republican values from a Wittgensteinian ontology, Tully only uses a Wittgensteinian ontology to justify his methods, in that they help describe what purchase his fight with imperialism can have in particular sites of unfreedom. In this way, Tully avoids imbuing his Wittgensteinian ontology with inherent normative values.

However, while Tully’s *Public Philosophy in a New Key* is more consonant with Wittgenstein’s generally postmodern ethos than Pitkin’s *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Tully’s work still depends on taking Wittgenstein’s later works as presenting a social ontology in which he could ground his critical methodology and non-universal values. The first issue, as we saw in Chapter 5, is that the way in which he grounds Foucault’s methods in Wittgensteinian ontology is based on an inaccurate reading of Wittgenstein’s basic core concepts. Unlike Winch and those that follow him, Tully did not base his Wittgensteinian ontology on the concept of the basic human form of life. Rather, Tully’s ontology only delves down as far as the ontologically

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pg. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pg. 15.

agonistic nature of language games and the bewitching nature of ‘pictures’. Taking these as the most basic descriptions of human social ontology, Tully leaves himself without the explanatory bedrock which many followers of Winch like Pitkin have used to justify the objective/intersubjective comparison of different cultures and different historical times. This is consonant with Tully’s commitment against universal values, but at the same time, it takes away from the anthropological nature of Wittgenstein’s inquiry in his later works. Wittgenstein seemed to have used the concept of form of life as the final level for explanations about human beings. While it is always possible to question why human beings have such and such a practice or language game, the final explanation can only be that we are humans and this is what we do. But more important is Tully’s conflation of Wittgensteinian ‘pictures’ and Foucauldian ‘limits’. While in practice, Tully’s critical and genealogical studies have not really done much violence to the Wittgensteinian idea of ‘pictures’ the way he presents them would imply more plasticity to human life than Wittgenstein might have wished. As I argued in Chapter 6, the way that Tully justifies his Foucauldian commitments on a Wittgensteinian ontology requires some reworking and reframing. The idea that a tradition may be perceived as normatively obligatory should not be conflated with the idea that an epistemic ‘picture’ may be perceived as necessary. But again, this criticism is based on reading Wittgenstein writings about form of life and language games as part of an anthropological enquiry.

This leads us to the second issue with Tully’s use of a Wittgensteinian social ontology. While Tully’s Wittgensteinian social ontology is not as comprehensive as Pitkin’s, it still relies on a similar anthropological reading of Wittgenstein’s later work. Tully is still committed to the claim that what human speech and human action can only be understood within the wider cultural context. But, the conventionality of human practices which Tully’s engagement with Foucauldian ‘limits’ depends upon, is based on a ‘communitarian’ interpretation of Wittgenstein’s ideas about rule-following. Since following a rule entails being able to make a mistake, whether one is following a rule correctly or erroneously must be decided on account of a given standard, but establishing a standard is not something which any isolated individual could accomplish by herself. Thus, rule-following presupposes standards and standards presupposed a community of rule-followers.<sup>13</sup> The problem, not only for Tully but Pitkin as well, along with most others who followed Winch’s lead, is that this ‘communitarian’ reading of Wittgenstein’s rule-following depends on a community’s ability to verify the success or failure of an attempt at rule-following and subsequently, this has been judged as depending on “an implausibly strong verificationism”<sup>14</sup> by many philosophers and its popularity in philosophy departments has plummeted since the end of the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> If Winchian political theorists would still like to depend on a Wittgensteinian social ontology, perhaps certain caveats are in order about which interpretation of Wittgenstein they are using, as the Wittgenstein understood by philosophy departments diverges from the Wittgenstein political theorists and historians understand him to be.

That many Wittgensteinian political theorists have depended on a ‘communitarian’ reading of Wittgenstein’s basic epistemology is to be expected. Most Wittgensteinian political theorists have used his basic concepts as an ontological basis for arguments and methods aimed

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<sup>13</sup> Winch, Peter. *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1990 [1958]), pg. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Stern, David G.. *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pg. 159.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 162.

at providing an alternative to traditional methodological individualism. One benefit, as Pitkin argued, is how this has been a boon for theorists who work on the concept of the public good, who find that it never seems to equate to the simple aggregate of individual interests. Nevertheless, as far as utilising the concepts and methods of a past text is concerned, the issue of doctrinal or methodological purity depends very much on which interpretation of the text is the mainstream or perhaps the majority view. If the ‘individualist’ school of interpreting Wittgenstein, as represented by scholars such as Gordon Baker and P.M.S. Hacker were to become the fully dominant view, then political theorists who have implicitly depended on the ‘communitarian’ view will find it harder to justify how their works are Wittgensteinian. As an example, analogous to Kripke’s sceptical reading of Wittgenstein’s writings on rule-following which is commonly called the ‘Kripkenstein’ view, David Stern has already labelled the ‘communitarian’ reading “Winchenstein”<sup>16</sup>. Despite this somewhat unflattering name, however, there is value to this line of political theorising, much as there was value for epistemology in Kripke’s reading, also famously known as the ‘Kripkenstein’ view. What Wittgensteinian political theorists require is a reassessment of their final theoretical desideratum: purity or progress?

A third and related issue with works of political theory that take Wittgenstein to be presenting a social ontology is that even if they eschew foundational comprehensive theory-building and present their critical studies as defeasible sketches, their systematic study of the social and political phenomena that underline their sketches still constitute general explanation rather than pure description. That is to say, these sketches are still founded upon general insights about socio-political phenomena that could be used for more than one real world political case. Furthermore, the critical methods that postmodern Wittgensteinian political theorists like Tully use also go beyond description into calling for change in the political milieu they study. So, while Tully’s goes a long way to fulfilling Wittgenstein’s appeal against comprehensive theory-making, they do not meet his call that philosophy should be purely descriptive, that everything is in order as it is. He writes in the *Philosophical Investigations*, “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; in the end it can only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is,” (*PI*, §124). Nigel Pleasants, for instance, cannot but, “regard the idea of a Wittgensteinian *theory* (of anything) as irreparably oxymoronic.”<sup>17</sup> At base, Pleasants is in agreement with Tully in arguing that while projects like Peter Winch’s for instance, are primarily animated by a Kantian first-order conception of philosophy, Wittgenstein argued that philosophy should limit itself to a descriptive second-order role. Placing emphasis on Wittgenstein’s emphasis on philosophy as an activity, Pleasants is sceptical of claims that particular critical social theories are privileged for their exceptionally high explanatory power or critical efficacy. But Pleasants goes further in this anti-theoretical attitude than Tully is willing to. He argues that while it is correct to situate, “Winch within the tradition of hermeneutical theory, but wrong to suppose that Wittgenstein, by association with Winch, also operates within this tradition.”<sup>18</sup> To Pleasants, it is erroneous to use Wittgenstein’s later work as presenting a proto-theory of basic social phenomena as Winch had done. And while Tully avoids building a comprehensive foundational theory, he is still guilty of taking a basic ontological view from Wittgenstein. For his part, Pleasants challenges Winch’s ‘communitarian’

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pg. 157.

<sup>17</sup> Pleasants, Nigel. *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory: A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), pg. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pg. 34.

reading of Wittgenstein on rule-following. Using a generally metaphysically deflationist reading of Wittgenstein, Pleasants argues that one cannot, as Winch had done, take Wittgenstein to be offering a “‘rule-generated’ ontological picture of social life”<sup>19</sup> or indeed, any form of social ontology. This ontological deflationism, Pleasants further suggests, can only support an immanent form of critique which judges social theories against their own standards and criteria.<sup>20</sup>

But therein, John Gunnell argues, lies the “metapractical contradiction”<sup>21</sup>. While on one hand in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein calls for philosophy to play an exclusively descriptive role, he, at the same time, partook in a critical task to fight against bewitching pictures of language such as the Augustinian picture of learning a first language. On one hand, Wittgenstein rejected the Kantian craving for crystallised essences from which one could generalise, but on the other hand, he warned us against misleading analogies between different forms of expression (*PI*, §351). Wittgenstein did not himself seem to leave everything as it was. Whatever Wittgenstein claimed about the descriptive second-order role of philosophy, his writing did not completely avoid the semblance of a theory. Despite his anti-theoretical claims, Gunnell argues that Wittgenstein was, “seeking to reveal what kind of thing language is and how it operated in human life, and this entailed an account of conventional phenomena such as what he referred to when he spoke of “language-games” and “forms of life”.” Although the *Investigations* was organised in a piecemeal fashion, Wittgenstein was “presenting, or at least engaging, crucial elements of a theory of social reality.” Further, “Wittgenstein’s “investigations” exemplified a kind of phenomenology of conventionality.”<sup>22</sup>

At the crux of this problem is the issue of what it means to have or to build a theory. While there have been many convincing arguments against comprehensive theory building, there is a very wide gap between that at one end and exclusive description at the other. Short of thinking in a reductive way that privileges crystallised essences, lies a vast array of ‘speaking generally’. Human beings are quite naturally quick to systematise what they read and hear and quick to consider what relevance or usefulness an idea has for situations other than its original context. Our human form of life is littered with mini-theories like ‘clouds mean rain’. It is the way we operate in the world that we simplify our experiential data and hold numerous provisional and partial theories. Try as Wittgenstein did to write the *Philosophical Investigations* as a patchwork of remarks, it was still relatively easy for his readers to reorganise his thoughts in more linear and systematic ways. That, of course, is already always the job of anyone attempting to write a secondary work based on Wittgenstein. Of course, as Wittgenstein pointed out, this tendency often gets us into philosophical trouble and we must be vigilant, but that is not to say that all forms of theories, short or long, partial or comprehensive, are always equally out of order.

Thus, when it comes to basing a political text on a Wittgensteinian social ontology, it means to disagree with Wittgenstein about pure description and to do as he does rather than as he says. This raises some issues about describing a political text as ‘Wittgensteinian’ or as ‘Wittgenstein-inspired’ if it is based on reading Wittgenstein in ways he may not have approved. However, as long as there are rival readings of Wittgenstein’s philosophy to begin with, this is always the risk one has to take when using a work of philosophy, whether within or without its original scope. Still, even if there was a single unproblematic consensus reading of Wittgenstein,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pg. 50.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pg. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Gunnell, *Political Theory*, pg. 96.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pg. 96.

it does not mean that he was correct about everything, neither does it mean any extrapolation of his basic ideas are out of order. As William Child argues, “Where Wittgenstein’s ideas seem promising, we should see how they can be applied and developed, even if that leads in directions that he himself would not have approved. Where his arguments seem unsuccessful or his conclusions implausible, we should try to understand why he said what he did; but we need not follow him wherever he goes.”<sup>23</sup> This, of course, is to value disciplinary progress over intentional purity, but as Hans Sluga argues, “every utterance also stands apart from its author and may have uses and meanings that the author never intended. A written text, in particular, is capable of leading a fertile life apart from its author, and to tie it too closely to its author may diminish its vitality and importance.”<sup>24</sup> While it is important for historical knowledge to understand how Wittgenstein understood his own writing and the limits which his words were never intended to breach, it is not out of order to attempt to use a historical text as a launching pad to explore theoretical spaces the author neglected to go. What one must be is explicit and clear about what can and cannot be reasonably attributed to Wittgenstein. After all, he never intended to save us the trouble of thinking for ourselves.

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<sup>23</sup> Child, William. *Wittgenstein*, (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), pg. 244.

<sup>24</sup> Sluga, Hans. *Wittgenstein*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pg. 2.



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