

INTRODUCTION

This book aims at exploring the implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy for social philosophy and the social sciences. I should make clear at the outset that I will be particularly concerned with Wittgenstein's later philosophical work – his work from the 1930s until his death in 1951. When I talk about 'Wittgenstein's philosophy' I will primarily be talking about the mature philosophy of the *Philosophical Investigations*¹ and *On Certainty*² rather than his earlier work in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*,³ that he criticized in the later work. However, I will occasionally refer to his earlier work and note certain elements of continuity in Wittgenstein's work.

According to Wittgenstein (throughout his career) philosophy is a discipline that is not based on observation and experiment. It is not an empirical discipline and, more particularly, philosophy is not a science.⁴ This book defends the later Wittgenstein's take on philosophy and attempts to show its usefulness for social philosophy and social science. So, this book is not a work of social science and it will not rely on empirical data about our current or past social and political circumstances. I will not be attempting to formulate prescriptions for, say, politicians, social workers, or political activists based on evidence drawn from observations, questionnaires, medical records, interviews, or crime statistics. The aim is not to provide advice about policy or information that might help social scientists to solve particular concrete problems that concern them. Rather, this is a book that is primarily concerned, as Wittgenstein

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

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

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

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

was, with conceptual matters. The focus will be on examining conceptual matters in social philosophy and the social sciences with an eye to showing that Wittgenstein's philosophy can be helpful in overcoming confusions.

However, although this work is primarily focused on conceptual matters and is not a work in social science, I take it that it is of relevance to social science and that social scientists have something to learn from Wittgenstein. We cannot make a neat separation between the conceptual cartography engaged in by philosophers and the practices of social scientists. In order to produce good work in social science we must achieve some clarity about the concepts we are using. To say something true about social phenomena we must make sense. The kinds of confusions that Wittgenstein was so skilled in identifying in his philosophical work are confusions that are still rife among social scientists.

Of course, social philosophy is an incredibly broad area and I cannot possibly hope to get rid of all confusion in it within this book. Indeed, it is not clear that it is possible to entirely get rid of all conceptual confusions within social philosophy. New developments in society will undoubtedly lead to new frameworks for understanding society and there is always potential for confusion as new attempts at understanding are made. Furthermore, there are some areas of recent social philosophy that I barely touch upon. For example, I say relatively little about religion within the book, although Section 6.5.6. is dedicated to a critical engagement with Terry Eagleton's discussion of Marx, Wittgenstein, and religion. What I will do in this book is take a look at some of the issues in social philosophy that I take to be central – (i) issues about the nature of social sciences, whether they can be properly called scientific; (ii) the issue of reductionism, whether social sciences can be explained in terms of the (perhaps more fundamental) natural sciences; (iii) the issue of the proper form of explanation in the social sciences (if indeed there is a proper form of explanation in the social sciences); (iv) the issue of relativism, whether social scientists should contemplate some form of relativism about truth, justification, knowledge, existence, or concepts; (v) the issue of ideology – whether Wittgensteinian philosophy favours a particular ideological standpoint; (vi) the issues of freedom of the will and responsibility; and, finally, (vii) the issue of justice.

However, as mentioned above, in dealing with these issues I will not be making arguments based on observational or statistical evidence. This book is a work in philosophy rather than a scientific or empirical work. Its negative aim will be to clear away confusions about the nature of philosophy, the nature of social sciences, and to clear up some confusions that arise in contemplating particular problems within the philosophy of social science such as freedom of the will, control, responsibility, and justice. Its positive aims will

be to enrich our understanding of those areas and to show that Wittgenstein's philosophy can be very useful for philosophers of social science, as well as for social scientists.

In order to fulfil those aims I will use methods particularly suited to philosophy as conceived by Wittgenstein. In the first place I will take care in reading the work of philosophers working in social philosophy as well as the work of social scientists and attempt to diagnose cases of conceptual confusion as well as cases of failure in interpretation (e.g. in interpreting Wittgenstein's work). So, this book will to some extent be a work in exegesis and interpretative criticism. In trying to achieve my positive aims of producing clarity and understanding in social philosophy I will attempt to follow Wittgenstein's suggestion that we should construct 'surveyable representations' of regions of grammar. What that means is that I will provide explanations of the meaning of terms that are causing confusion (such as, e.g. 'reasons', 'explanations', 'consciousness', 'control', 'justice') and discuss how those terms are related to other terms (other terms that are etymologically related, other terms that belong to the same family, or terms as they are used in specifically philosophical (as opposed to ordinary) life). If those explanations are successful then the upshot should be enhanced understanding.

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

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

nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy so that we can see clearly that it does not support a particular ideological standpoint but that it can be used to clear away confusions in ideological work in political theory.

0.1 Overview of the Contents of the Chapters

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

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

My answer will be that the considerations about reductionism, reasons, and methodology tell us that the different disciplines have different subject matters, different forms of explanation (and description), and so they have very different standards by which we might judge their progress. Disciplines like psychology and philosophy *have* made some progress but the nature of progress in each of these disciplines is very different to the nature of progress in the natural sciences. I will conclude that philosophy, as Wittgenstein conceived it, is quite a different kind of discipline to either social scientific disciplines or the natural sciences but I also want to make clear that philosophy has something to say to other disciplines – that social scientists and natural scientists are susceptible to philosophical confusions that affect their endeavours. Philosophy aims at clearing up grammatical confusions. It enriches our understanding, whereas cognitive disciplines, such as the natural and social sciences, add to our stock of knowledge. But in order to add to our stock of knowledge the cognitive disciplines must achieve clarity about the concepts they are using and must achieve some clarity about how it is that we are to understand their objects (we

must try to understand the concepts and practices of those we are studying). We can point to differences between philosophy and the social and natural sciences but those differences are not so great that philosophy is just irrelevant to the cognitive disciplines. Issues of sense and understanding are clearly very important in the social sciences.

In the second chapter I examine various questions about relativism. I ask whether it is a serious objection to Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy that he subscribed to some form of relativism. I use Maria Baghramian's taxonomy of the different forms of relativism to look at various forms of relativism and assess them.⁶ I argue that ontological relativism, alethic relativism, and some forms of cognitive relativism are implausible, and also that they cannot be attributed to Wittgenstein. A more plausible form of relativism is conceptual relativism and it is reasonable to describe Wittgenstein as a conceptual relativist. This chapter responds to some of his critics, who claim that Wittgenstein's philosophy implies implausible forms of relativism. My conclusion is that Wittgenstein *is* a kind of relativist but that the fact that he is a kind of relativist does not undermine his philosophical views.

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

The chapters on social sciences and relativism form the first part of the book where I am trying to get clear about Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy

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

⁷ P. Winch, 'Certainty and Authority', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, vol. 28, 1990, pp. 223–37.

and its relationships to other disciplines. In the second part of the book I look at political ideologies and ask whether Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks imply that he was committed to a particular ideological stance.

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

In Chapter 4 I turn to liberalism. The question of whether Wittgenstein was a liberal philosopher has received less attention than the question of whether he was a conservative philosopher but, as Robert Greenleaf Brice has recently argued, there are hints of liberalism in some of his remarks,¹⁰ and some philosophers, like Richard Eldridge, have argued that a kind of liberalism follows from Wittgenstein's later philosophy.¹¹ Richard Rorty has also drawn liberal conclusions from a philosophical viewpoint which draws on Wittgenstein's work and Alice Cray has suggested that the lessons learned

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

⁹ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*.

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

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

from her own interpretation of Wittgenstein are ‘reflected in forms of social life that embody the ideals of liberal democracy’.¹² In the fourth chapter I argue both that Wittgenstein was *not* a liberal and that his philosophy does not imply a liberal viewpoint. The authors discussed in the chapter do not demonstrate that any broad ideological conclusions follow from Wittgenstein’s philosophical remarks.

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

The sixth chapter focuses on the work of another Marxist, the cultural theorist Terry Eagleton. The influence of Wittgenstein’s work on Eagleton’s oeuvre is clearer than in the case of Anderson and Callinicos. He wrote the script for a film about Wittgenstein’s life and work,¹³ wrote a novel which included Wittgenstein as a character,¹⁴ and his work in literary theory and cultural theory more generally is clearly indebted to Wittgenstein to at least some extent. His recent book *Materialism* combined insights from Marx and Wittgenstein (as well as the work of other philosophers, such as Nietzsche).¹⁵ In the chapter about Eagleton I look at his article ‘Wittgenstein’s Friends’ and argue that his account of Wittgenstein there is flawed. His criticisms of Wittgenstein do not hit their target. I then go on to look at his more recent book about materialism and suggest that Eagleton also misrepresents Wittgenstein’s work there.

¹² A. Crary, ‘Wittgenstein’s Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought’, in Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds), *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 141.

¹³ K. Butler, T. Eagleton, and D. Jarman, *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script, the Derek Jarman Film*, London: BFI, 1993.

¹⁴ T. Eagleton, *Saints and Scholars*, London: Futura, 1987.

¹⁵ T. Eagleton, *Materialism*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017.

The final two chapters form the third part of the book and they look at applications of Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks to particular problems that have arisen in the work of political philosophers: the problem of freedom of the will (including problems about self-control and responsibility) and problems concerning justice.

In the seventh chapter I argue that Wittgenstein's grammatical remarks about psychological concepts as well as his remarks about philosophical methodology can help to dissolve conceptual problems that are clearly relevant to political philosophy. My focus in that chapter will be on Patricia Churchland and Christopher Suhler's paper 'Control: Conscious and Otherwise',¹⁶ where they formulate what they think of as a neurobiological account of control. They do so in an attempt to tackle problems about the extent to which we ought to hold people responsible in cases where they are not conscious of the way in which circumstances affect their choices. Some philosophers and cognitive scientists have argued that empirical research shows that circumstances have such a large impact on people's choices that we ought to say that a person's control over what they do in many cases is very limited. Given the lack of control we ought not to hold people responsible for their actions to the extent that we do. This is known as the 'Frail Control' hypothesis and Churchland and Suhler think that their account of control undermines it.

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

The eighth and final chapter is focused on the question of justice. In the first half of the chapter I look at ways in which we might get clearer about the concept 'justice' and I use insights gleaned from Hanna Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice*¹⁷ in doing that. In the second half of the chapter I look at whether

¹⁶ P. S. Churchland and C. L. Suhler, 'Control: Conscious and Otherwise', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, vol. 13, no. 8, 2009.

¹⁷ H. Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks imply that we should adopt a particular conception of justice and I argue that although his remarks do not imply that we should accept a particular conception of justice his remarks do nonetheless imply that we should reject certain conceptions of justice for making unwarranted assumptions or for having confused conceptions of practical rationality.

Within Chapter 8 I also look at some remarks that Wittgenstein made in *On Certainty*¹⁸ and I suggest that Wittgenstein has things to teach us about the form that political disagreements might take. Political disagreements may well not just involve conflicts of opinion; they might also involve disagreements in evidential standards, disagreements about concepts, or perhaps even a difference in worldview. I conclude that although Wittgenstein acknowledges that disagreement, contestation, or rebellion have a role to play throughout our normative practices, this does not imply that his philosophical remarks are suggestive of a particular form that society should take. In particular I do not think that Wittgenstein's remarks provide support for the kind of pluralistic democracy favoured by Chantal Mouffe and José Medina. However, I think that the tools Wittgenstein provided us with can be used to help us to understand oppression and injustice and suggest ways in which that might be done.

0.2 How Is This Book Different to Other Books about Wittgenstein and Social Science?

There are already several book-length discussions of Wittgenstein's relation to social and political theory. In this part of the introduction I would like to make clear where my own work differs from other book-length treatments of these questions. One obvious difference between the work in this book and earlier treatments of the topic, such as Hanna Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice*, John W. Danford's *Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, and Susan Easton's *Humanist Marxism and Wittgensteinian Social Philosophy*, is that much of the work discussed here has been written in the past two decades. For example, in the first chapter, about social science, I discuss recent work from Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Read, Wes Sharrock,¹⁹ and John Dupré.²⁰ In the second chapter I discuss recent work on relativism from Maria Baghramian²¹ and Hans-Johann

¹⁸ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*.

¹⁹ P. Hutchinson, R. Read, and W. Sharrock, *There Is No Such Thing as a Social Science*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.

²⁰ J. Dupré, 'Social Science: City Centre or Leafy Suburb', in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, May 2016.

²¹ Baghramian, *Relativism*.

Glock.²² In the third chapter I make use of Corey Robin's recent book *The Reactionary Mind*²³ in defining conservatism. It should also be clear that the topics I focus on in this book differ from those earlier writers.

Other, hugely influential, figures I should mention from the (broadly speaking, Wittgensteinian) philosophy of social sciences and philosophy of action are G. E. M. Anscombe and Peter Winch, who both published highly influential works in the late 1950s, soon after the publication of the *Philosophical Investigations*. I have discussed their work in a few places within this book but I did not want to say more about them since there is already a very large literature discussing both philosopher's work. I hope my indebtedness to their groundbreaking work is clear (as well as my disagreements with contemporary Winchians such as Hutchinson, Read, and Sharrock). I would recommend reading classic works like Anscombe's *Intention*,²⁴ Winch's 'Understanding a Primitive Society',²⁵ and his book *The Idea of a Social Science*,²⁶ as well as more recent discussions of their work such as *Value and Understanding* (a collection of essays about Winch edited by Raimond Gaita),²⁷ Hutchinson, Read, and Sharrock's *There Is No Such Thing as a Social Science* (which I discuss in the first chapter),²⁸ and Roger Teichmann's excellent recent book about Anscombe's philosophy²⁹.

Within this introduction, I will briefly look at three recent book-length discussions of Wittgenstein's relation to social and political theory here and make clear how my own work differs. The three books I will discuss are Peg O'Connor's *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*,³⁰ Christopher Robinson's

²² H. J. Glock, 'Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability', in John Preston (ed.), *Wittgenstein and Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

²³ C. Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

²⁴ G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1957].

²⁵ P. Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 4), pp. 307–24, 1964.

²⁶ P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 1990 [1958].

²⁷ R. Gaita (ed.), *Value & Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch*, London: Routledge, 1990.

²⁸ P. Hutchinson, R. Read, and W. Sharrock, *There Is No Such Thing as a Social Science*, Abingdon: Ashgate, 2008.

²⁹ R. Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

³⁰ P. O'Connor, *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life: Feminist Wittgensteinian Metaethics*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008.

Wittgenstein and Political Theory,³¹ and Michael Temelini's *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*.³²

0.2.1 *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*

Peg O'Connor's book *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life* is primarily concerned with metaethical questions, and so its focus differs from the focus of this book. However, there is some overlap between her work and the questions discussed here. For instance, she discusses methodology in social science as well as the question of relativism and the cases she discusses (Frederick Douglass's speech 'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?',³³ Hurricane Katrina³⁴) have clear relevance to politics. O'Connor makes several recommendations for conducting feminist inquiry and also cites recommendations made by Virginia Held approvingly. I agree with many of the recommendations she makes for feminist inquiry, including the recommendations that she cites from Virginia Held's *Feminist Morality*.³⁵ For example, I agree with O'Connor (and Wittgenstein) in being wary of scientism in the humanities and in the social sciences.³⁶ We should resist claims about social sciences being reducible to natural sciences and should also be careful about importing methods from the natural sciences into the social sciences, given differences in subject matter and also in the kinds of explanations appropriate to the different fields. I also agree with Held and O'Connor in not taking Wittgenstein's remarks about 'our craving for generality'³⁷ to imply that we should eliminate generalizations from explanations in fields concerned with social phenomena. As I will make clear in the first chapter I think that Wittgenstein's remarks about generalizations in *The Blue Book* concern the proper methodology of philosophy rather than the proper methodology of the humanities more generally or of social science.

³¹ C. Robinson, *Wittgenstein and Political Theory: The View from Somewhere*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

³² M. Temelini, *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

³³ F. Douglass's 'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?' is available at <https://www.thenation.com/article/what-slave-fourth-july-frederick-douglass/> (accessed 26 May 2018) and is discussed on pp. 132–36 of O'Connor's *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*.

³⁴ O'Connor, *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, pp. 158–68.

³⁵ V. Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

³⁶ O'Connor recommends that we 'create a moral epistemology that is consistent with much recent work in feminist epistemologies (resisting its reduction or assimilation to an overly scientific model)' (*Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, p. 5).

³⁷ L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, p. 18.

In fact, I think that generalizations have a very important role to play in the humanities and social sciences, alongside close analyses of particular cases.³⁸

O'Connor looks at moral realism and antirealism in the work of John Mackie, Gilbert Harman (both antirealists), and Nicholas Sturgeon (realist) and she argues that neither of these metaethical positions is satisfactory because both are committed to scientific assumptions about the role of observation, causation, and objectivity in thinking about morality.³⁹ In the first chapter of this book I discuss scientism, reductionism, reasons, and causes, and come to broadly the same conclusions as O'Connor.

The dispute over realism and antirealism also has obvious implications for what has traditionally been called 'moral epistemology' (O'Connor prefers to use the expression 'moral understandings' in order to distance herself from the tradition).⁴⁰ Realists and antirealists do not only make claims about objects, properties, and causes but also make claims about what their theory implies about the kind of knowledge we can expect to have in the area of morality.⁴¹ If scientism creeps into our conception of our subject matter then that will affect the claims that we will make about knowledge in that area. She concludes, and I agree, that we can make sense of talking about truth and knowledge in morality and she offers her own account of objectivity in the context of her 'felt contextualism'.⁴² In the first two chapters of this book I discuss the nature of philosophical inquiry, political enquiry, and scientific enquiry as well as questions about relativism and I come to similar conclusions to O'Connor.⁴³

³⁸ Held recommends that we should 'proceed not solely on a case-by-case basis (requires some level of generality)' (cited on p. 5 of Peg O'Connor's *Morality and Our Complicated Forms of Life*).

³⁹ O'Connor, *Morality and Our Complicated Forms of Life*, pp. 22–23. On p. 59 she says that 'neither realism nor antirealism is tenable as a description of the world and their weaknesses trace back to a shared presupposition'.

⁴⁰ O'Connor discusses moral epistemology in chapter 6 of *Morality and Our Complicated Forms of Life* (pp. 113–36) and it is on p. 117 that she says that she favours the expression 'moral understandings'. For another account, see N. Venturinha, 'Moral Epistemology, Interpersonal Indeterminacy and Enactivism', in Jesús Padilla Gálvez (ed.), *Action, Decision-Making and Forms of Life*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016, pp. 109–20.

⁴¹ For example, A. J. Ayer claims that sentences expressing moral judgements 'are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood. They are unverifiable for the same reason as a cry of pain or a word of command is unverifiable' (*Language, Truth, and Logic*, New York: Dover, 1952, pp. 108–9), and John Mackie famously claimed that 'value statements cannot be either true or false' (*Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, New York: Penguin, 1977, p. 25).

⁴² See chapter 7 of *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, pp. 137–68.

⁴³ For my own take on J. L. Mackie's antirealism see R. Vinten, 'Mackie's Error Theory: A Wittgensteinian Critique', *Kinesis*, vol. 7, no. 13, 2015, pp. 30–47.

In addition to rejecting the dualism of realism and antirealism O'Connor also rejects the dualisms that she thinks underlie the debate – the language-world dualism and the nature-normativity dualism. A related dualism, the dualism between moral absolutism and moral relativism, is another which she thinks involves confusions. As an alternative to all of these she offers her own 'felt contextualism' which preserves claims to truth and objectivity without resorting to moral absolutist claims and she defends the view that 'we can have better or worse answers or resolutions to these [moral] conflicts'.⁴⁴

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

0.2.2 *Wittgenstein and Political Theory*

Christopher Robinson's book, *Wittgenstein and Political Theory*,⁴⁵ is largely concerned with the question of theory, as the title suggests. Robinson argues that although Wittgenstein's remarks suggest he opposed theory they are best understood as criticizing 'metatheory'⁴⁶ and opening up a space for 'a new way of theorizing political life'.⁴⁷ According to Robinson's account, *metatheory* is concerned with questions of justification and explanation (traditional epistemological concerns) whereas Wittgenstein's opposing conception of theory understood theorizing as 'an ongoing description of the components and topography of reality from various positions within'.⁴⁸ Robinson calls this *immanent theorizing*⁴⁹ and he places special emphasis on perception and on mobility (particularly walking). For example, he says that 'for theorists following Wittgenstein's path to immanent theorizing, what is valued above all else is mobility'⁵⁰ and he claims that 'there is a palpable therapeutic effect in seeing that theorizing is cast more accurately as a primitive activity involving seeing and walking'.⁵¹ Immanent theorizing, according to Robinson, involves being mobile and seeing things (reality, practices) close up and describing them⁵²

⁴⁴ O'Connor, *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, p. 146.

⁴⁵ Robinson, *Wittgenstein and Political Theory*, 2009.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 178.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

whereas epic theory (metatheory) involves distancing oneself from things and trying to achieve a ‘God’s eye view’ of them. Robinson says that ‘the further we stand from people, the less we care what happens to them’ and that ‘Wittgenstein expresses this distance as at the heart of “the darkness of our time”’.⁵³ He claims that Wittgenstein abandons ‘the pretense of a God’s eye perspective’⁵⁴ and that ‘both Wittgenstein and, more famously, Beckett, work from a street-level where no God’s-eye point of view is possible, though we may find ourselves waiting for it’.⁵⁵

Robinson claims that Wittgenstein’s ‘therapeutic turn’ ‘promises an erosion of the boundary separating philosophy from other activities’⁵⁶ and ‘therapy was conceived as a matter of returning philosophers to the pre-linguistic primordial and then guiding them through mazes of contingent, opaque but permeable and overlapping language-games to give a sense of language’s capaciousness and insurpassability [...] akin to the speech therapies a patient rendered aphasic as a result of a stroke might undergo’.⁵⁷ The outcome of Wittgensteinian therapy, according to Robinson, is that the patient remembers ‘what it is to be human’.⁵⁸

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

⁵³ Ibid., p. 17

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 37. Similarly, on p. 48 Robinson talks about ‘the demise of the pretense of a God’s-eye point of view in Wittgenstein’s world’ and on p. 160 he says that ‘Wittgenstein and, more famously, Beckett, work from a street-level where no God’s-eye point of view is possible, though we may find ourselves waiting for it’.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 171.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 49–50.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 50.

In §109 of the *Investigations*, when Wittgenstein is discussing the nature of philosophy and rejecting the idea that it is theoretical, it seems that (contra Robinson) he does not have in mind political theories which present themselves as offering a ‘view from nowhere’ (the ‘metatheory’ that Robinson opposes). What Wittgenstein does in §109 is to contrast philosophy with empirical theories which involve formulating hypotheses, putting them to the test, making observations, and gathering empirical evidence. He says that ‘there must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations’ and that philosophical problems ‘are, of course, not empirical problems’. Robinson is right that Wittgenstein’s conception of what he is doing involves description (and not explanation) but he is mistaken about what Wittgenstein says he is describing. Wittgenstein does not suggest that we should walk and see things and describe them from close-up. As we have just seen, the activity he is engaged in is not empirical at all. Wittgenstein is not suggesting that we should describe the things that we see. Philosophy’s task is not to describe empirical reality but to describe the uses of words, to describe grammar. Philosophical problems, Wittgenstein says, ‘are solved through an insight into the workings of our language’.⁵⁹ Whereas Robinson presents the Wittgensteinian position as being one where the philosopher-theorist is engaged in ‘an ongoing description of the components and topography of reality from various positions within’,⁶⁰ Wittgenstein himself distinguishes ‘the thing’ from ‘the mode of representation’.⁶¹ His concern is not with looking at objects and describing their qualities (e.g. the ball in front of me is red and squidgy). Wittgensteinian description is description of the mode of representation rather than of things. The descriptions are of ‘the workings of our language’,⁶² of norms of representation, rather than empirical descriptions of *reality*. I take this difference over the nature of the descriptions involved in Wittgenstein’s philosophy to be a significant difference between Robinson’s account and my own. Philosophy involves arranging grammatical rules, in order to achieve perspicuity about philosophical problems, not the kind of empirical descriptions we might find in science.

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

⁵⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.

⁶⁰ Robinson, *Wittgenstein and Political Theory*, p. 26.

⁶¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §103.

⁶² *Ibid.*, §109.

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

Given what I have said about Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy above I think it is clear that I also disagree with Robinson's portrayal of Wittgenstein's 'therapeutic turn'. Robinson's account of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy was supposed to erode boundaries between philosophizing and other activities. However, Wittgenstein was clear throughout his career that philosophy was a different sort of activity to disciplines which seek knowledge of the world around us. In particular he always clearly distinguished philosophy from science. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* he remarks that 'philosophy is not one of the natural sciences'⁶³ and that it 'aims at the logical clarification of thoughts'.⁶⁴ In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein says that philosophers being tempted to answer questions in the way that science does 'is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness'⁶⁵ and in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says that 'our considerations must not be scientific ones'.⁶⁶ Furthermore, in what is now called *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* Wittgenstein says that 'we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history'.⁶⁷ Wittgenstein's work is distinct both from the sciences (including psychology) and from other disciplines in the humanities.⁶⁸

⁶³ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.111. In remark 4.1121 Wittgenstein also says that psychology is no closer to philosophy than any other natural science.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.112.

⁶⁵ Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, PPF xii.

⁶⁸ I should acknowledge here that there is some foundation in Wittgenstein's work for understanding his philosophy as being therapeutic and that Wittgenstein is sometimes interpreted in this light. For example, in *The Big Typescript* Wittgenstein describes his philosophical approach as analogous to psychoanalysis (433e) and in *Philosophical Investigations*, §133, Wittgenstein compares philosophical methods to therapies. However, I think too much can be made of the comparison with psychoanalysis or with therapy.

As mentioned above in my comments on Peg O'Connor's work, our conception of our subject affects what we will say about what we can know, believe, or understand about it. Our conception of our subject has epistemological implications. Given that philosophy is an investigation of grammar and that it involves 'assembling what we have long been familiar with',⁶⁹ it is not a discipline aimed at expanding our knowledge but rather it is aimed at increasing our understanding.⁷⁰

0.2.3 Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics

Michael Temelini's book *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics* is divided into two halves. In the first half of the book (the first three of six chapters) Temelini discusses interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy that stress the role of authority, training, therapy, and forms of scepticism in Wittgenstein's later work. He presents these various interpretations of Wittgenstein under the heading 'therapeutic scepticism'. In the second half of the book Temelini presents interpretations of Wittgenstein which stress making comparisons, dialogue, and understanding. He gathers these interpretations under the heading of the 'comparative dialogical' reading of Wittgenstein and he defends this kind of interpretation as being preferable to therapeutic-sceptical ones.

In the chapters on the 'therapeutic-sceptical' reading Temelini discusses the work of a great variety of thinkers who have interpreted Wittgenstein's work in a variety of ways and who have been inspired by his philosophical remarks. He discusses the work of people who have interpreted Wittgenstein as a conservative, including J. C. Nyiri and Ernest Gellner. He also examines the work of Stanley Cavell,⁷¹ as well as philosophers whose work has been influenced by Cavell, such as Hanna Pitkin,⁷² John Danford,⁷³ and, more recently, the New

Peter Hacker makes this case well in his response to Gordon Baker's late interpretation of Wittgenstein (see 'Gordon Baker's Late Interpretation of Wittgenstein', in Guy Kahane, Edward Kanterian, and Oskari Kuusela (eds), *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, §109.

⁷⁰ P. M. S. Hacker gives an excellent account of the nature of philosophy and contrasts it with other disciplines in his 'Philosophy: Contribution Not to Human Knowledge but to Human Understanding', which has been published in a collection of his essays – *Wittgenstein: Comparisons & Context*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁷¹ Such as S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Scepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1979; and S. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

⁷² I will discuss Pitkin's work in my chapter on justice. Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*.

⁷³ J. W. Danford, *Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: A Reexamination of the Foundations of Social Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Wittgensteinians.⁷⁴ Also discussed under the heading of ‘therapeutic scepticism’ are ‘Democratic/Liberal’ Wittgensteinians such as Cressida Heyes,⁷⁵ Gaile Pohlhaus, and John Wright,⁷⁶ as well as feminist Wittgensteinians, such as Peg O’Connor⁷⁷ and Alessandra Tanesini.⁷⁸ Peter Winch is also considered by Temelini to have interpreted Wittgenstein along ‘therapeutic/sceptical’ lines.⁷⁹ Temelini recognizes that these thinkers vary a great deal in terms of their interpretations of Wittgenstein and in terms of their ideological commitments. However, he thinks that all of these interpretations fail to give dialogue sufficient weight, unlike the ‘comparative dialogical’ interpretations (from Charles Taylor, Quentin Skinner, and James Tully), which he discusses in the later chapters. Temelini also thinks that the ‘therapeutic-sceptical’ interpretations lead to conservative, negative, or contingent⁸⁰ conclusions, whereas the ‘comparative dialogical’ interpretations present Wittgenstein’s work as having positive, progressive implications. Temelini favours the latter position.

However, Temelini is willing to grant that some of the therapeutic-sceptical interpreters of Wittgenstein do have progressive politics. His problem with these interpreters is either that they see the progressive politics as something that has to be tagged on to Wittgenstein’s politically neutral philosophy (O’Connor) or their progressive conclusions are rooted in ‘various kinds of scepticism or non-realism that are essentially taken for granted as essential to Wittgenstein’s method’⁸¹ (Cerbone, Eldridge, Janik, Zerilli, Pohlhaus, and Wright). The problem in those cases, according to Temelini, is not the progressive conclusions but in the fact that those conclusions are drawn from an interpretation of Wittgenstein as some kind of sceptic or non-realist.

⁷⁴ Crary and Read, *The New Wittgenstein*.

⁷⁵ Temelini also categorizes other contributors to Heyes’s volume *The Grammar of Politics* as democratic/liberal Wittgensteinians. Heyes, *The Grammar of Politics*.

⁷⁶ See, e.g. G. Pohlhaus and J. Wright, ‘Using Wittgenstein Critically: A Political Approach to Philosophy’, *Political Theory*, vol. 30, no. 6, 2002, pp. 800–27.

⁷⁷ See P. O’Connor, *Oppression and Responsibility: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Social Practices and Moral Theory*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, as well as her book *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, which is discussed above.

⁷⁸ See, e.g. A. Tanesini, *Wittgenstein: A Feminist Interpretation*, Cambridge: Polity, 2004.

⁷⁹ Juliette Harkin and Rupert Read argue that it is a mistake to categorize Winch in this way in their review of Temelini’s book. See J. Harkin and R. Read, ‘Book Review – Michael Temelini: Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics’, *Review of Politics*, vol. 78, no. 2, 2016, p. 331.

⁸⁰ Temelini says of therapeutic/sceptical readings that ‘the politics that necessarily derives from this is conservative, negative, or contingent’ (*Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, p. 95).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

There are several problems with Temelini's account. In the first place, although Temelini recognizes that there is some variety among the philosophers he gathers under the heading of 'therapeutic scepticism' he does have a tendency to tar them all with the same brush and misrepresent their views. I strongly suspect that the vast majority of them would have no objection to the idea that dialogue can result in mutual understanding and that it should be valued in both political theory and in the practice of politics. Indeed, Juliette Harkin and Rupert Read, in their review of Temelini's book, make this point with regard to the New Wittgensteinians: their 'approach to philosophical praxis is precisely that which Temelini seeks to elevate in his study [...] [t]he import of listening and the practicing of interpretative charity are the central commitments of the New Wittgensteinian's approach'.⁸²

Harkin and Read also complain that Temelini misrepresents Winch as a relativist and Cavell as a dogmatic sceptic,⁸³ and I agree with them in their criticisms of Temelini. I would add that Temelini also misrepresents Winch as conservative, claiming that Winch's position on forms of life is that 'we must accept authority'.⁸⁴ But this is a peculiar interpretation of Winch's discussion of authority. Winch *does* think that people might have ingrained habits of obedience such that they do not question authority but he also claims that these habits can be challenged and are in fact challenged: 'If these habits are to be *challenged*, as of course they sometimes are, a basis will still have to be found for the challenge *in* the life of the community'.⁸⁵ At no point does Winch claim that habits of obedience or the authority of the state *should* not be challenged.

What Winch does is give an account of authority which conflicts with traditional accounts in philosophy. Winch looks at remarks from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* in order to give a rich account of practical rationality in opposition to the accounts of practical rationality found in the works of philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (and also, later, John Rawls). Hobbes's account makes it difficult to see why someone would consent to be subject to another's authority⁸⁶

⁸² Harkin and Read, 'Book Review – Michael Temelini', p. 330.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

⁸⁴ Temelini, *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, p. 59.

⁸⁵ Winch, 'Certainty and Authority', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, p. 228.

⁸⁶ See pp. 224–25 of Winch's 'Certainty and Authority' where he explains Hobbes's account of practical rationality and some problems with it. Winch presents us with Hobbes's definitions of 'command' and 'counsel' and points out that 'it is striking that, in the case of command, Hobbes cuts off the "action" from any consideration of reasons by the ostensible "agent", whose own beliefs and projects are to be thought of as irrelevant. The difficulty raised by his definition is how the *will* of another person, the one who commands, can be thought of by the one commanded as *on its own* as reason for acting'.

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

Temelini also misrepresents my own views in his discussion of 'therapeutic scepticism.' In the work of mine that he cites, 'Leave Everything as It Is: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations of Wittgenstein,' I neither emphasize the notion of therapy in Wittgenstein (I do not present a therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein) and nor do I subscribe to a form of philosophical scepticism. My work is mentioned briefly in the second chapter of Temelini's book under the heading of 'strong contextualism' and Temelini argues that the thinkers discussed under that heading either think that we are 'thoroughly determined by conventions' or that we are 'at the mercy of autonomous, radically contingent, and historically variable conventions operating largely out of our control.'⁸⁷ I do not in fact believe either of these things and the passage that he quotes from my work in order to justify making his claims does not justify him in making the claim that I am a 'strong contextualist'. What I said in my paper 'Leave Everything as It Is', which Temelini cites, was that Wittgenstein and Marx were both 'sensitive to the importance of (social) context'.⁸⁸ However, it does not follow from this that I believe that 'individuals [...] are thoroughly determined by conventions' or that individuals are 'at the mercy of autonomous, radically contingent, and historically variable conventions operating largely out of our control', as Temelini suggests. So, one problem with Temelini's work is that he misrepresents the work of several of the philosophers he labels 'therapeutic sceptics', including my own work.

Another criticism that can be made of Temelini's book is that where he does interpret people correctly he does not always put a finger on a problem with their work. For example, Temelini takes it to be a problem with interpretations of Wittgenstein's work that they interpret him as not being a realist. However, if we look at Wittgenstein's later work we see that he regularly objects to realist 'theories' in philosophy, and with good reason. For example, in the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein tells us that 'the trouble with the realist is always that he does not solve but skip[s] the difficulties which his adversaries see' and he claims that realists fail to see 'troublesome feature[s] in our grammar'.⁸⁹ In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein says that '*this* is what disputes between

⁸⁷ Temelini, *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, p. 56.

⁸⁸ See Vinten, R. 'Leave Everything as It Is: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations of Wittgenstein', *Critique*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2013, pp. 21–22.

⁸⁹ Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 48–49.

idealists, solipsists and realists look like. The one party attacks the normal form of expression as if they were attacking an assertion; the others defend it as if they were stating facts recognized by every reasonable human being⁹⁰ and in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein says that the realist's claim that 'there are physical objects' is 'a misfiring attempt to express what cannot be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shown.'⁹¹ Feminist Wittgensteinians, such as Peg O'Connor, are on firm ground when they interpret Wittgenstein as presenting realism as confused and she makes a good (Wittgenstein-inspired) case that the moral realism of Nicholas Sturgeon is a confused response to Gilbert Harman's (confused) antirealism.⁹²

Perhaps the problem with non-realist views in Temelini's mind is that they either leave us with an 'anything goes' relativism, or they leave us unable to make claims to truth or knowledge. However, Wittgensteinians might very well say that it is the various forms of realism that leave us in a confused position and that realism does not do what it sets out to do, that is, ground our knowledge claims. What we need to do is to return from the metaphysical position of realism to the rough ground of our ordinary lives, where we regularly say that moral claims are true and argue with each other about moral issues on the assumption that there are better or worse stances to take up and standards by which we can make judgements. O'Connor certainly claims that we do have standards,⁹³ that we can have moral knowledge,⁹⁴ and that we can have better or worse answers to conflicts.⁹⁵ Temelini does not tackle these arguments and so it seems that he is not in a good position to object to interpretations of Wittgenstein on the basis of them being non-realist.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §402.

⁹¹ L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, New York: Harper & Row, [1969] 1972, §37.

⁹² See O'Connor, *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life*, pp. 26–33.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 94.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–27.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146

⁹⁶ I think there are further problems with Temelini's book. I agree with Juliette Harkin and Rupert Read that Temelini misinterprets Wittgenstein's comments about forms of life. I also think that he misinterprets what Wittgenstein says about language games and perspicuous representations. But there is not space here to go into detail on all of this. I think that enough has been said here already to distinguish my position from Temelini's and to make it clear that my take on Wittgenstein and politics is different to his. I do also think that Temelini's book has many virtues as well as vices. I agree with him that conservative interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy are mistaken (see Chapter 3 of this book) and I think that there is something to be said for highlighting the role of dialogue in understanding and in resolving political disputes (although I also agree with Harkin and Read that too much can be made of this. They ask some rather

0.3 Wittgenstein, the Radical

Wittgenstein's way of philosophising represented a break with traditional ways of philosophising. Traditional philosophers thought of themselves as constructing metaphysical systems, or as adding to our stock of knowledge, or as doing something continuous with science. Wittgenstein presented us with a radically new way of doing philosophy.

I will argue in this book that Wittgenstein's radical philosophy could also be useful in developing the radical politics and social theory that we need around the world now. It is a mistake to view Wittgenstein's philosophy as conservative and Marxist critics of Wittgenstein are wrong to think that there are deep tensions between Wittgensteinian philosophy and radical left-wing politics. We face enormous threats from climate change, rising authoritarianism, bigotry, and war. Wittgenstein's philosophy is useful in challenging the dominant liberalism of today, which does not seem to be up to the task of rising to those challenges, and in developing a clearer, more radical alternative to it. It can help us to get clearer about the nature of disagreements, about what justice requires, and about the justifications given for various forms of society. Wittgenstein himself may not have been a radical in his politics but his philosophy can help radicals to get clearer in their political thought.

pointed questions of Temelini – ‘Are the underclass and the superrich in need mainly of respectful mutual dialogue? Is dialogue necessarily the answer for Palestinians being driven out of their land? Should Syrian revolutionaries be invited to “listen” to the voice of their “sovereign government”?’ (p. 331 of their review of Temelini's book).

Part 1

THE NATURE OF
PHILOSOPHY AND OF
SOCIAL SCIENCE

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Chapter 1

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE?

I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings. So I am not aiming at the same target as the scientists and my way of thinking is different from theirs.¹

1.1 Introduction

Action is significant in Wittgenstein's later work and Wittgenstein's work is significant in terms of the development of the philosophy of action. In the very first of the numbered remarks in his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein highlights the way a shopkeeper *acts* in delivering goods to a customer as a way of contrasting his understanding of language with the 'Augustinian' picture of language. In discussing one sense of the expression 'language game' Wittgenstein describes a language game as consisting of 'language and the activities into which it is woven'.² In other remarks Wittgenstein discusses the relationships between action and ostensive definition,³ the action of a machine (in connection with his discussion of rule following/the relationship between a rule and action in accordance with it),⁴ action and reasons,⁵ action/behaviour and language,⁶ acting and

¹ L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, p. 7.

² L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4th edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, §7.

³ *Ibid.*, see, e.g. §33, §36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, §193.

⁵ *Ibid.*, see, e.g. §211.

⁶ Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' provides a good example of his thinking about language and action but action and language are discussed throughout the *Philosophical Investigations*. See, e.g. §243, §556.

thinking,⁷ acting on orders,⁸ and action and the will.⁹

In his book *The Idea of a Social Science* Peter Winch developed Wittgenstein's ideas about action, behaviour, language, and rules into a critique of the idea that the disciplines known as the social sciences are scientific in the manner of the natural sciences. Action appears in *The Idea of a Social Science* as a way of distinguishing natural sciences, which feature causal explanations prominently, from social sciences, which focus upon human actions and feature explanations in terms of reasons and motives more conspicuously. Winch distinguishes actions from habitual behaviour and distinguishes actions in terms of motives from causal explanations. Wittgenstein was notoriously opposed to scientism, that is, the attempt to bring the methods of science to bear in areas where they are not appropriate, especially in philosophy.¹⁰ Winch, following Wittgenstein, detailed ways in which social investigations differ from investigations in the natural sciences.

Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Read, and Wes Sharrock have recently defended Winch's account of differences between natural sciences and social disciplines. In their book *There is No Such Thing as a Social Science* they come to the conclusion that calling social disciplines 'sciences' is likely to lead to confusion.¹¹ However, not all philosophers who have been influenced by Wittgenstein and Winch agree that there is no such thing as a social science. At the British Wittgenstein Society conference in 2015 (on Wittgenstein and the social sciences) John Dupré defended the idea that social studies can be scientific.¹²

⁷ Ibid., see, e.g. §330, §490.

⁸ Ibid., §459–60, §487, §493, §505, §519.

⁹ Ibid., §§611–28. In a recent collection of articles on the philosophy of action edited by Constantine Sandis and Jonathan Dancy the editors place this selection of remarks from Wittgenstein at the front of the book because 'the work of Wittgenstein has been seminal in this change [the move towards having graduate classes devoted entirely to the philosophy of action]' ('preface' to J. Dancy and C. Sandis (eds), *Philosophy of Action: An Anthology*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, p. x).

¹⁰ For example, in the Blue Book Wittgenstein says that 'philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics and leads the philosopher into complete darkness' (L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, p. 18). See also §81, §89, §109, PPF 365, and PPF 371 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

¹¹ P. Hutchinson, R. Read, and W. Sharrock (eds), *There is No Such Thing as a Social Science: In Defence of Peter Winch*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008, p. 51.

¹² A video of the talk John Dupré gave can be found here: <http://www.britishwittgensteinsociety.org/news/annual-conference/conference-videos>. The paper he delivered has since been published as 'Social Science: City Centre or Leafy Suburb' in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, May 2016.

In discussing whether the disciplines that are known as social sciences¹³ are in fact scientific there are a number of different ways in which the question might be approached. (1) One way of arguing that social sciences are scientific is to claim that social sciences are *reducible* to natural sciences. The positivists of the Vienna Circle and philosophers influenced by them (as well as many scientists) have made the claim that social sciences are reducible to natural sciences, that is, that behaviour at the level of social groups can ultimately be explained in terms of objects at another level – cells, or molecules, atoms, physical things, or even sense data. Reductionists often accompany this claim with the claim that laws at one level can be derived from laws at a lower level (e.g. that the laws of chemistry can be derived from the laws of physics). (2) One might not accept reductionism but nonetheless claim that the kind of explanations used in the social sciences are of the same sort as those used in the natural sciences. The debate about whether explanations in terms of reasons are causal explanations is relevant to this. Donald Davidson in the later part of the twentieth century famously argued that reasons are causes. (3) Another relevant issue in deciding whether the social sciences are scientific is *methodology*. Some have defended the claim that social sciences are scientific on the basis that they employ the same methodology as natural sciences.¹⁴ (4) A problem that arises in comparing natural sciences to social sciences is that there does not seem to be the same kind of *progress* in the social sciences as in the natural ones. In the natural sciences we see widespread agreement over a wide range of issues as well as advances in technology and in the sophistication and usefulness of theories. However, in the social sciences disagreement is the rule and doubts are raised about whether any progress has been made (in philosophy in particular). There is certainly no clear agreement among philosophers about, for example, the relationship between mind and body, and philosophers are still puzzled about the question of whether human beings have free will despite centuries of having discussed the question.¹⁵

¹³ Social sciences are usually thought to include economics, sociology, anthropology, human geography, politics, and sociology: disciplines which aim at knowledge of the various relationships between individuals and the societies they belong to. There is more disagreement about whether philosophy and history are to be counted among the social sciences.

¹⁴ E.g., Otto Neurath (of the Vienna Circle) claims that it is not tenable to separate cultural sciences from natural ones by saying that each employ special methods (O. Neurath, 'Physicalism: The Philosophy of the Viennese Circle', in *Philosophical Papers 1913–1946 (Vienna Circle Collection) Vol. 16*, edited and translated by Robert S. Cohen and Marie Neurath, Dordrecht: D. Reidel, p. 50).

¹⁵ There is an excellent recent book on the topic of theorizing in social sciences written from a critical Wittgensteinian perspective that I will not discuss here. Leonidas Tsilipakos's *Clarity and Confusion in Social Theory* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015) discusses

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

Before going on to discuss reductionism it is first worthwhile mentioning the related, infamous, dispute in the late 1950s and early 1960s between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis about whether there were two cultures, literary and scientific, which were mutually uncomprehending of one another. Snow suggested that there were and that in order to correct the situation there should be greater efforts to educate the young in the natural sciences and to introduce more scientific literacy into politics. He thought that this would lead to improvements in society, especially in poorer parts of the world. Snow was accused of scientism for his efforts to promote the role of science in society.¹⁶ Leavis, on the other hand, argued that there was just one culture¹⁷ (and was accused of ‘literarism’¹⁸). Leavis’s concerns about Snow’s scientism are not of the same sort as Wittgenstein’s worries about scientism mentioned above. Whereas Leavis was primarily concerned with the way in which Snow emphasized science education and technological progress at the expense of literature and social science education, which involved a kind of lacuna in terms of what makes for good, meaningful, happy lives (literature has an important role to play, according to Leavis), Wittgenstein’s worries about scientism were primarily about the confusion caused by trying to import scientific methods and concepts into the humanities and the social sciences (particularly philosophy but also psychology and other social/humanistic disciplines) and about attempts to reduce social sciences to natural ones. However, that is not to

problems with trying to import theoretical frameworks into social sciences. My review of his book appeared in R. Vinten, ‘Review of “Clarity and Confusion in Social Theory” by Leonidas Tsilipakos’, *Nordic Wittgenstein Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2015.

¹⁶ See F. R. Leavis, ‘Luddites? Or, There Is Only One Culture’, in *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (with an introduction by Stefan Collini), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 103.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 106.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.