

Response to Critics

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I'd like to thank the contributors to this symposium for taking the time to read my book and for giving it thoughtful consideration. I'm touched and humbled by the careful attention that they have given to it and the issues raised within it. It was, on the whole, a great pleasure to read these responses to *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* as well as being intellectually stimulating. The contributions to this symposium do not only engage critically with my book but also contain some fascinating reflections on the nature of the social sciences and various ways of relating Wittgenstein's thought to them. I'd particularly like to thank Richard Eldridge, the editor of the issue and the author of the introduction for gathering together such a fantastic group of commentators and for his work with them. I'd also like to thank Leslie Marsh for suggesting the symposium in the first place and *Cosmos + Taxis* for hosting the symposium.

1. RESPONSE TO ROTH

I'll begin my response to the critics of my book by looking at Paul Roth's piece 'Wittgenstein, The Radical?' Roth quotes a passage from the end of the Introduction to the book where I set out some of my central aims:

We face enormous threats from climate change, rising authoritarianism, bigotry, and war. [1] 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. [2] 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 [3] his philosophy can help radicals to get clearer in their political thought (Vinten 2020, p. 22, cited in Roth (2023)).

He then goes on to look at Chapters 7 and 8 of *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* (the Chapters on freedom of the will and justice) in search of arguments in support of these claims because, he thinks that "One can sidestep, in this regard, the various attempts that Vinten canvasses in Chapters 3-6 to politically pigeonhole Wittgenstein the person or Wittgensteinian philosophy".

He argues that my book entirely fails to demonstrate the central claims that I lay out at the beginning, based on his reading of chapters 7 and 8.

However, it strikes me as very odd that Roth thinks that chapters 3-6, half of the book, can be skipped in assessing whether the central aims of the book have been achieved. The first of those aims is to demonstrate the usefulness of Wittgenstein's philosophy in challenging liberalism and the fourth chapter concerns Wittgenstein and liberalism. In that chapter I *do* discuss attempts to politically pigeonhole Wittgenstein, as Roth suggests, but I also evaluate Richard Rorty's variety of liberalism by comparing his philosophical remarks to Wittgenstein's, pointing out that there are strong differences between the two, and suggesting that Rorty comes off the worse for it. For example, I favour Wittgenstein's approach of bringing "...words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" to Rorty's suggestion of adopting new vocabularies (Vinten 2020, p. 107), I argue, in agreement with Wittgenstein, that we cannot affirm the negation of (nonsensical) traditional philosophical theories because the negation of nonsense is nonsense, whereas Rorty wants to assert the opposite of traditional philosophical 'positions' like realism (Vinten 2020, p. 108). I agree with Wittgenstein in sharply distinguishing philosophy from the natural sciences (Ibid.) whereas Rorty assimilates science and philosophy by saying that both "help us to learn to get around the world better" and that "[t]hey do not employ distinct methods" (Rorty 2007, p. 166).

Furthermore, the central chapters of the book, Chapters 3-6, which Roth ignores, contain material that is relevant to substantiating the third claim that Roth highlights from my introduction to the book, namely the claim that Wittgenstein's philosophy can help radicals to get clearer in their political (and philosophical) thought. In the fifth and sixth chapters I discuss interpretations of Wittgenstein by three 'radicals': Alex Callinicos, Perry Anderson, and Terry Eagleton. In the course of discussing how I think they have misinterpreted Wittgenstein I also offer them a version of Wittgenstein that escapes their criticisms of him, showing that Wittgenstein's thought is not incompatible with Marxist thought in the ways that they think it is, and opening up the possibility that Wittgenstein's work might actually contain some positive lessons for them.¹ A few Wittgensteinian criticisms of claims made by Marxists are also made in these chapters, illustrating how Wittgenstein's philosophy can be of use to Marxists. For example, if Marxists were to attend to Wittgenstein's arguments against the possibility of reducing psychological states to physical ones (Wittgenstein 1958, p. 18; 2009, §§157-8, 412, 427) then they would not be so tempted to take up the stance that Trotsky did in 'Dialectical Materialism and Science', where he said that "materialist psychology has no need for a mystic force—soul—to explain phenomena in its field, but finds them reducible in the final analysis to physiological phenomena" and where he also claimed that sociology and psychology were reducible to "mechanical properties of elementary particles of matter" (Trotsky 1940). If the Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek had been reminded that "only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious" (Wittgenstein (2009, §281), i.e. that it only makes sense to ascribe psychological attributes to human beings and creatures that resemble them in their behaviour, then he might not have claimed that "our brain makes a decision around three tenths of a second before the brain's owner becomes aware of it", and tried to suggest that "freedom of choice is an illusion" on this basis.²

Moreover, I make Wittgensteinian criticisms of the liberal philosophy of Chantal Mouffe, a philosophy that has quite a lot in common with Rorty's, in Chapter 8. This is one of the chapters that Roth focuses on and yet he ignores my arguments against her liberalism and instead tries to use Mouffe as an example of my failure to establish the relevance of Wittgenstein's thought to political theorizing. Mouffe appeals to passages from Wittgenstein's later work; what has been published as *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*, in an attempt to justify her liberal pluralism. She quotes Wittgenstein's remark (1969, §204):

Giving grounds [...] justifying the evidence, comes to an end; — but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of our language game" and she says that this "allows us to grasp the conditions of emergence of a democratic consensus (Mouffe 2000, p. 70).

She then cites Wittgenstein's famous passage about games from the *Philosophical Investigations*, where he noted that 'game' cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions but instead what we find is "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: similarities in the large and in the small" (§66) and says that this suggests "we should acknowledge and valorise the diversity of ways in which the 'democratic game' can be played, instead of trying to reduce this diversity to a uniform model of citizenship" (Mouffe 2000, p. 73). However, having laid out Mouffe's case in that chapter, I then go into a fairly lengthy examination of passages from the *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* where he discusses differences (between language games, between concepts, between his own philosophy and Hegel's, between German and Chinese, between different cases of knowing something, between belief and knowledge, etc. etc.) and point out that Wittgenstein's philosophy does not lend support to Mouffe's claim that Wittgenstein "insists on the need to respect differences" (Vinten 2020, p. 196). Wittgenstein's work, including the passages she cites from *On Certainty* and *Philosophical Investigations*, is descriptive and angled at enhancing our understanding, rather than being prescriptive. Taking his points on board involves acknowledging that people might behave in different ways, have different evidential standards, and have different concepts, but this does not imply that we should *valorise* people behaving in different ways and having different standards. So, Wittgenstein's work does not go very far in *justifying* the kind of democratic pluralist vision that Mouffe promotes.

In that chapter, then, I present a case that Mouffe has misunderstood Wittgenstein and argue that Wittgenstein's remarks do not support her particular form of liberalism. In doing so I have demonstrated the relevance of a certain understanding of Wittgenstein to political theorising. It may well be that it is relevant in such a way that it involves destroying houses of cards rather than in providing the grounds for a determinate new political theory but it is relevant nonetheless. As Richard Raatzsch notes in his contribution to this volume, Wittgenstein's philosophy gives us reason to reject "some of the most influential political philosophies of our days", including that "professor from Harvard" John Rawls³ (Raatzsch 2023) but although it helps us to see what is wrong with, or confused about, many political theories it does not leave us with a distinctively Wittgensteinian political theory. As Raatzsch puts it "picking all the wrong ideas out of the basket does not mean that the one and only true idea will be left in that basket" (Ibid).

The eighth chapter of my book 'Wittgenstein and Justice', in addition to critically engaging with the work of Mouffe and José Medina using tools from Wittgenstein, also discusses Rupert Read's criticisms of John Rawls.⁴ Roth interprets my discussion of Read's work there as being critical of him for offering nothing distinctively Wittgensteinian. However, after I note that *some* of Read's criticisms of Rawls are not distinctively Wittgensteinian I then go on, in the following paragraphs to look at some of his arguments that *are* distinctively Wittgensteinian and I endorse those arguments myself. My reading of Read, far from being a critical one, is actually a sympathetic one and is intended to illustrate the usefulness of Wittgensteinian ideas in identifying problems with a prominent liberal philosopher. Read uses Wittgenstein to question the way in which Rawls assumes the primacy of justice and suggests that Rawls has not put the question marks deep enough down.⁵ Read notes that Rawls, and the contractarian tradition more generally, focuses on (imagined) discussion between contemporaries and so treats future generations as a special case. But given that we live in a world where ever worse climate catastrophes await us—an enormously important issue that clearly implicates future generations - it seems that contractarians are wrong to treat future generations as a secondary case. It is worth noting here that in the introduction of my book, in the passage that Roth quotes, where I set out my aims, I specifically mention climate change as one of the issues that is urgent and that liberal theories seem ill equipped to cope with. The Wittgensteinian case that Read builds against Rawls is a perfect illustration of the usefulness of Wittgensteinian ideas in critically engaging with liberal philosophy in terms of current issues.

Roth suggests that nothing at all has been done in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* to substantiate the claims that I make at the beginning of it by the time you get to the final few pages of it and yet he gives no attention at all to the Wittgensteinian arguments that I provide and discuss in opposition to prominent liberal philosophers or to the Wittgensteinian arguments I use to dissolve problems in the thought of some

Marxists. It may be that these arguments fail to convince or that they stand in need of development but Roth has nothing at all to say about that and so his judgement concerning whether I have done what I said I would do carries no weight at all. The fact that he entirely ignores the four chapters in the middle of the book seriously affects his ability to make a reasonable assessment of it.

This failure on Roth's part to engage with the central chapters also infects his evaluation of the later ones. One of the complaints that he makes is that I lean very heavily on a single remark from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in Chapter 7 (about Wittgenstein and freedom of the will). He suggests that I simply counterpose Wittgenstein's remark that "only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious" (2009, §281) to Churchland and Suhler's neurobiological model of control without providing any reason to think that Wittgenstein is correct (Churchland and Suhler 2009). Moreover, he complains that I do not do what I set out to do, which he takes to be to assess whether their conclusion is correct. However, Roth's account of what goes on in that chapter is very far from the truth. One thing that *is* true is that I only quote one passage from Wittgenstein and that this quotation comes halfway through the chapter. However, this does not imply that Wittgensteinian argument is lacking from the chapter, as Roth suggests. On the very first page of the chapter I set the stage for what I am going to do by saying that

[t]he role of Wittgensteinian philosophy in discussing these issues, I suggest, is to help us to get clear about the relevant concepts and ultimately to give us the understanding that will make the problems dissolve—to make latent nonsense patent nonsense and to show that the formulation of the problems involves some conceptual confusion.

This single sentence at the beginning of the chapter is dense with allusions to remarks by Wittgenstein. While I do not quote him directly here, anyone who has read the earlier part of the book would recognise that I allude to Wittgenstein *dissolving* problems rather than solving them (*PI*, §133).⁶ Remark §109 from the *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein says that "philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding" is cited and discussed in numerous parts of the book⁷ and in the passage above from the beginning of chapter 7 of *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* I am clear that I aim at *understanding*. I clearly allude to §464 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* when I say that my aim is "to make latent nonsense patent nonsense". This passage was cited in the chapter on liberalism (Ch. 4) and in the chapter about Eagleton (Ch. 6) and so I felt no need to repeat it verbatim in Chapter 7.

Given this framing you might expect that what is coming is going to be less about examining whether Churchland and Suhler's conclusion is correct but about examining the use of central concepts in their argument. This is, unsurprisingly, what happens. I go on to examine various things that can be meant by 'consciousness'; distinguishing being awake (intransitive consciousness) from being aware of something (transitive consciousness) and then distinguishing having a *tendency* to be aware of something from *currently* being aware of something (the distinction between *dispositional* and *occurrent* transitive consciousness), I discuss the neo-Cartesian sense of 'consciousness', our ordinary sense of 'consciousness', and what might be meant by 'consciousness' from an eliminativist perspective. I survey the various ways in which Patricia Churchland has used the term 'consciousness' in various works of hers and eventually come to the conclusion that "in making their arguments they equivocate between the ordinary concepts and neurophysiological ones" (Vinten 2020, p. 174). The reason that I don't take a strong line on whether their conclusion is correct or not is that regardless of whether the conclusion is correct or not the argument for it is not a good one.

Having examined Roth's response to what I have to say in Chapters 7 and 8 I will now briefly turn to what he has to say about my arguments in the first chapter of the book, concerning social studies and whether they are, or can be, scientific. The first point to make is that at the beginning of the chapter I make clear that I see my primary task in that chapter as being to adjudicate between two opposing Wittgenstein-inspired discussions of the social sciences and whether they are scientific: (i) Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Read, and Wes Sharrock's argument that social studies are not scientific, in their book *There is No Such Thing as*

a *Social Science* and (ii) John Dupré's defence of the idea that social studies can be scientific in his article 'Social Science: City Center or Leafy Suburb' (Dupré 2016, pp. 548-64). I do not set out to take on the entire literature on the topic, which would require a hefty book's worth of arguments, although I do present arguments against materialism, reductionism, verificationism, and the assimilation of reasons to causes.⁸ The discussion inevitably leaves out some significant discussions concerning whether social studies are scientific.

Given that I see my primary task as being to adjudicate between Hutchinson, Read, and Sharrock on the one hand and Dupré on the other I look at the reasons that Hutchinson, Read, and Sharrock supply for thinking that social studies might be called scientific, namely that they involve analytical rigour, that they involve revising claims in light of evidence, and that they learn from practices undertaken in other modes of inquiry (Hutchinson, Read and Sharrock, 2008, pp. 1-2). I agree with Hutchinson, Read, and Sharrock (and Roth) in thinking that these reasons are not sufficient for calling something a science and so I look to see whether there might be other reasons for calling social studies scientific. *One* of those reasons (which Roth dismisses by saying that "[o]ne might just chuckle if an undergraduate suggested" it) (Roth 2023, p.) is that we ordinarily talk in this way about social studies. If I had left it at that then I would agree with Roth that this is a weak argument. But of course, as is the case in every criticism Roth makes of my book, this is not all that there is to my argument. Much has been ignored. I reject certain reasons for calling social sciences scientific, namely claims that they are reducible to the natural sciences, that they have the same methods as the natural sciences, and that they involve causal explanations which are nomological like those in the natural sciences. In rejecting these reasons I am in agreement with Hutchinson, Read, Sharrock and Dupré. However, I then offer some further reasons for thinking that social studies should be deemed scientific. I note that "calling something scientific plays a role in legitimising that discipline" and that "the term 'unscientific' is used as a term of criticism" and argue that we should not imply that social studies are illegitimate courses of study (Vinten 2020, p. 45). I note that many practitioners within these disciplines regard themselves as doing something scientific despite recognising that what they do is very different from work in the natural sciences (Vinten 2020, p. 46). This is unlikely to satisfy Roth but I doubt whether Roth's search for necessary and sufficient conditions for calling a discipline scientific is a worthwhile endeavour. One of the lessons we might learn from Wittgenstein is that many expressions cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. He, of course, famously gave 'game' as an example. I take it that 'science', like 'game', is one of those cases where we "see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing". Even within the natural sciences themselves there is very great diversity in terms of how they conceptualise, explain, and analyse the natural world.

2. RESPONSE TO LITTLE

I'd like to thank Daniel Little for his contribution to this symposium. Little identifies genuine problems in my account of the philosophy of social sciences and I would like to take this opportunity to make correcting adjustments to that account. In doing so I will be offering an account of the social sciences that does not distinguish them so sharply from the natural sciences as I had suggested in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences*. However, I do not accept the alternative that Little offers in all its details and I will offer a few critical remarks on Little's alternative conception in the course of clarifying my own views.

2.1 Wittgensteinian philosophy of social science and causation

In characterising my take on the relationships between the natural and social sciences Little writes that "Vinten believes that natural-science explanations require causal hypotheses, whereas Wittgenstein's understanding of human action involves subjective reasons rather than objective causes" (Little 2023, p.) and he goes on to provide examples from post-positivist sociology of successful causal explanations within frameworks that nonetheless reject reductionism, naturalism, and lawlike generalisations in sociology.

Little is absolutely right to point out that social sciences involve causal explanations and so the distinction between reasons and causes does not trace out a dividing line between the natural and social sciences. He also has good reason to attribute to me the view that he does. Right at the beginning of the chapter I talk about 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”⁹ (Vinten 2020, p. 26). Later in the chapter I criticise Davidson’s assimilation of reasons to causes and say that “[t]he considerations about differences between causal and rule-governed behaviour suggest that human activity cannot be understood in terms of the causal generalisations favoured by natural sciences” (Vinten 2020, p. 33) and that “[e]xplanation in sociology is often not like the causal explanations of natural science” (Vinten 2020, p. 35). I agree with Little that these remarks, presented with little qualification, give a misleading picture. I should have, at the very least, noted that causal explanations play an important role in the social sciences.

The reason that I put things in the way that I did was that my focus was on opposing Davidson’s understanding of reasons, presenting reasons as a kind of efficient cause (Davidson 1963). I remain convinced, by the arguments I presented from Peter Winch and Julia Tannev in that chapter, that Davidson’s views are mistaken. I remain convinced that explanations of social activities are very often in terms of constitutive redescription; putting the behaviour we want to understand in a wider context and making reference to social norms. However, that is not to say that social sciences *only* feature this variety of explanation and nor does it mean that the natural sciences are simply made up of explanations in terms of efficient causation. What I want to emphasise here is that there is a very great variety of kinds of explanation in both the natural sciences and the social sciences.

Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences gives the impression that whereas the objects of the natural sciences are to be explained in terms of providing evidence for causal hypotheses the focus of the social sciences is on human *action* and so they look to reasons rather than causes. However, there is a venerable tradition within philosophy that particularly connects action to causation. Berkeley completely reverses the position of associating causes with natural sciences rather than the social sciences by denying that there are causes in the natural realm at all. Science, he thought, uncovers regularities, not causes. However, he says that “A proper efficient cause I can conceive none but Spirit; nor any action, strictly speaking, but where there is Will” (Berkeley 1729, p. 279). While I do not agree with Berkeley in thinking that causes are (strictly speaking) absent from the natural world I do nonetheless think that he is right to associate causation with agency. Moreover, there have been philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein who have thought that the connection between the action of human beings and causation is significant. G. H. von Wright, one of Wittgenstein’s literary executors, alongside Rush Rhees and Elizabeth Anscombe, has argued that “the *concept* of causal connection rests on the concept of [human] action” (Von Wright 1944, pp. 52f).

It is undoubtedly true that causation is an everyday feature of our lives as human beings. Quite apart from the explanations of the various kinds of sciences, causal explanations are an extremely familiar feature of our mundane lives. Why did my partner get angry with me? - Because the ice cream melted *because* the freezer was left open overnight. What caused the traffic accident? It was caused by ice on the road and it, in turn, caused a traffic jam. We might wonder about the cause of a fire in our neighbourhood: whether it was caused by, say, the heat of the sun being magnified by a broken bottle or whether it was caused by an arsonist looking to claim on insurance. Furthermore, there is very often an interaction between human causes and ‘natural’ ones. In the context of an ever-worsening climate emergency we may well note that *even if* a fire was started by an arsonist, that fires are more intense and *cause* more damage due to the weather being hotter and many places being drier—and that global heating, in turn, was caused by human activity.¹⁰ We learn, from very early on in our lives, to intervene in (act on) the world to bring about changes, i.e. to cause things to happen. Even before we speak we are handled, picked up, and moved around—we are the *patients* of others acting on us - and we, as *agents*, manipulate objects in our environment. Almost as soon as we begin to speak we ask for explanations that are delivered in causal terms and we are told by our parents to bring about changes by acting on our environment.

When we get older we start to look for more sophisticated causal explanations of things. We might ask about what is causing the currently very high rates of inflation, what caused the war in Ukraine, or what the causes of depression are. These, of course, are the sorts of questions that get asked in academic disciplines concerned with our social lives and our lives as human beings. Despite the impression that I gave in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences*, I do not want to claim that there is anything illegitimate in these kinds of questions. What I do want to note, however, is that there is a diversity of different kinds of causal explanation.

Early modern philosophy, influenced by the scientific revolution, very often thought about causation in terms of mechanisms and gave examples of efficient causation when trying to get to grips with what a cause is (I'm thinking here of examples like David Hume's billiard ball example). More recently Donald Davidson has tried to give an account of reasons for action that presents them as a kind of efficient cause, with beliefs and desires being the causes of action. However, as I argued in Vinten 2020, pp. 33-38),¹¹ reasons are not a kind of cause and accounts of the causes of war in Ukraine or rising inflation are not accounts in terms of efficient causes. As Little notes, my account of Wittgensteinian social studies involves a kind of critical hermeneutics, although I do not take that to be opposed to presenting explanations involving generalisations or causal explanations, as Little suggests.

One final thing I want to note about causation is that I do not believe that there is a sharp separation between the 'coldness' or 'objectivity' of causation (in being associated with causal explanation of the non-human world in the natural sciences) and the emotionally charged normativity of the social world, involving explanation in terms of 'subjective' reasons. As the Wittgensteinian philosopher Peter Hacker notes in his discussion of causation in *Human Nature: The Categorical Framework*, the Greek word *aition* originally meant 'guilt', 'blame', 'accusation'. That is the term that was translated to *causa* in Latin and from which the English term 'cause' comes. The term 'cause' has retained some of these connotations and associations (Ibid., p. 57). Causal responsibility is often tied up with personal liability, for example, when drunk driving causes a car crash. Moreover, as many philosophers have noted,¹² there are many conditions in play in most instances of cause and effect that we see around us. It may be that many things are necessary to bring about an effect but we tend to single out one as the cause. The way in which we pick out causes depends on our interests and our purposes, as well as on things like what we deem to be normal or what we deem to be someone's duty. We might attribute the cause of an accident to the negligence of somebody or some group whose duty it was to keep things in a safe condition. For example, we might say that the cause of somebody being injured by a falling tree branch was negligence on the part of the council whose duty it is to keep trees in a safe condition in public parks. Here you might say that there is an intermingling of efficient causation and normatively charged factors, with the injury being caused by the impact of a branch but also by the failure of a certain public body to do what it was supposed to do.

2.2 Social philosophy and the philosophy of social science

I'll move on now to look at one more of Little's criticisms of *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* and in response to it I will clarify how my take differs from his. Little worries that I have conflated social philosophy with the philosophy of the social sciences and so have said something misleading when I lay out the plan for the book in the introduction. There I say that I will "take a look at some of the issues in social philosophy that I take to be central (i) ...the nature of social sciences (ii) ...reductionism ... (iii) ...the proper form of explanation in the social sciences ... (iv) ...relativism ... (v) ...ideology... (vi) ...freedom of the will... and... (vii) ...justice" (Little 2023, p.). However, Little is eager to separate out social philosophy from philosophy of the social sciences, saying that each have a completely different domain: "Social philosophy is a branch of normative philosophy, concerning itself with topics like freedom, rights, authority, justice, and sovereignty", whereas the philosophy of social science "is concerned with ontology, epistemology, methodology, and explanation" (Little 2023, p.).

I take the two to be much more closely related than Little suggests they are. Philosophical discussions of freedom and control, which Little takes to belong to social philosophy are very often tied up with what might be called metaphysical and epistemological questions, which Little says belong to philosophy of social science. In the seventh chapter of *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences*, where I discuss freedom, responsibility, and control, I also make criticisms of eliminativist understandings of human psychology. So, the reflections on control and responsibility are tied up with reflections on the nature of the subject matter of one of the social sciences, psychology, and with philosophical questions regarding the legitimacy of the eliminativist project.

2.3 Everything is in flux

Moreover, we might question whether the tasks that Daniel Little lays out for the philosopher of social science are legitimate ones. For example, one of the tasks of philosophers of social science, according to Little, is to concern themselves with the ontology of the social world, namely questions about what exists and the nature of things in the social world. But are philosophers really in the business of telling us whether certain things exist or not? Presumably philosophers do not tell us what exists in the way that, say, naturalists and astronomers do—going out into nature and discovering what kind of creatures happen to inhabit our planet or using equipment to tell us about newly discovered planets, stars, meteors, and black holes. Philosophers of social science don't go out into the world and report that they have discovered institutions that were previously thought not to exist or that they have examined currencies with a powerful microscope and made discoveries about the properties of money. Ontology is not meant to tell us about what exists as a contingent matter of fact (the kinds of things that empirical investigations reveal) but about *de re* necessities, about what is necessarily the case or about the essences of things. However, if we take Wittgenstein's arguments seriously then there are no essences in the world. There are no *de re* necessities to examine. What seem to be essential features of *things* are shadows cast by necessary connections between concepts in *grammar*.¹³ As Wittgenstein said in the *Philosophical Investigations*, “*Essence* is expressed by grammar” (§371) and “Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)” (§373). If there is a legitimate activity here for philosophers (or for social scientists with their philosophy hats on) it is not to tell us whether certain things exist or about the essence of things but whether it *makes sense to say* that certain things exist and to tell us about the uses of certain key expressions in the philosophy of social science—what they *mean*—and about forms of description.

To illustrate this point it is useful to look at some of the examples from Daniel Little's book, *New Directions in the Philosophy of Social Science* where he presents his 'social ontology'. There he emphasises the heterogeneity, plasticity, and contingency of features of the social world by contrast with the natural world. So, for example, he says that “[m]olecules of water preserve their physical characteristics no matter what. But in contrast to natural substances such as gold or water social things can change their properties indefinitely” (Little 2016, p. 14) and in discussing social phenomena he contrasts them with the natural kinds investigated by the natural sciences and comes to the conclusion that “There are no social essences that definitions might be thought to identify...there is nothing in the world that dictates how we define fascism and classify, specify, and theorise historical examples of fascism” (Ibid., p. 27). Presumably Little's view is that, by contrast, there *are* essences to be found in nature and those dictate how we are to define the relevant terms.

Let's look a bit more closely at exactly what Little might mean by all of this. If we think about water it seems clear that water does in fact change in its properties. Some lakes freeze in the winter in the northern hemisphere, and in the summer the lake water might change from being clean to being dirty, or might evaporate in the summer heat and then be replaced by fresh water from rainfall or from an underground spring. In the seas there is continuous movement; currents shift and waves crash, and the temperature of the water regularly changes. The flow of rivers made its mark on the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus who famously used them to illustrate that everything is in flux. Even if we look at things at the molecu-

lar level it seems blatantly untrue to claim that water molecules “preserve their physical characteristics, no matter what”. Though a fairly simple process of electrolysis the hydrogen atoms can be separated from the oxygen atoms within an H₂O molecule. I take it that Little is well aware of these facts about water and the many ways in which it, and its molecules, might change. What these examples tell us is that Little must have something else in mind than the observable properties of water and the molecules that make up bodies of water. I take it that given his talk of (the lack of) essences in the social world that he wants to say that there *are* essences in the natural world. When he says that “molecules of water preserve their physical characteristics no matter what” I take him to be saying that H₂O is water’s *essence*.

What I want to challenge here is the idea that the natural world is made up of things with necessary features or essences (such as water being made up of H₂O) whereas the social world is characterised by contingency. One way of starting to undermine this picture is to think about how we have conceptualised things like water throughout history. The English word ‘water’ goes back to a long time before discoveries were made about the chemical elements. Hydrogen and oxygen were both discovered in the later part of the 18th Century¹⁴ and it wasn’t until the early nineteenth century that scientists found that water was made up of H₂O. Do we want to claim that before the early 19th century nobody knew what water is (or what ‘water’ meant)? If we want to say that nobody knew what ‘water’ meant before the nineteenth century we might wonder how it was that people were apparently able to communicate about water and how it is that the things they said about water are comprehensible to us now, whether we know about chemistry or not. We should also ask how it could be that an empirical discovery involved uncovering a *de re* necessity. Surely empirical observations and experiments could only tell us about how things happen to be in the world not about how it *must be*. Moreover, it does not seem at all clear that we *do* take water to be essentially H₂O. We usually distinguish between water that is drinkable and water that is not. But pure H₂O is unfit for human consumption. It is used to clean semiconductors in microchips because it dissolves and pulls apart other molecules and gets rid of tiny pieces of dirt on them. If you were to drink pure H₂O it would strip your mouth of valuable minerals.¹⁵ One might claim that although *pure* H₂O is undrinkable that nonetheless H₂O is a necessary constituent of water. It may well be a matter of fact that everything that we currently call water contains H₂O. But is it clear that if a transparent, drinkable substance came from our taps and quenched our thirst but which did not contain H₂O that we would have to say that it was not water? Does H₂O somehow force us to categorise things in one way or another?

My suggestion for how we are to understand this variety of different things we call water (sea water, freshwater, tap water, pure H₂O) is that we vary the concept according to our purposes. In certain ‘scientific’ contexts we might restrict the term ‘water’ to refer to just H₂O. Note, here, that this is not because we are forced by *de re* necessities to use expressions in a certain way but that we choose to *define* terms in a certain way according to our purposes. That is, it is a matter of *grammar* that water is essentially H₂O in some contexts. Nonetheless, it seems clear that in our ordinary lives we do not use the term in this way. We learn the term by learning that it is the liquid that comes out of taps and that we drink in our homes. We learn about seas, oceans, and rivers and we might also swim or paddle in those. Of course, in order to ensure that the water in our taps is drinkable scientists make studies of the chemical composition of what we are drinking but what they certainly do *not* do is ensure that only H₂O comes out of our taps. When scientific discoveries were made about H₂O molecules it is not the case that a *de re* necessity was discovered but that our concept of water was adjusted in line with the new discovery.

This kind of diversity in what we are talking about when we talk about water is found in many of the expressions that are used in talking about the natural world, including within the natural sciences. In the article by John Dupré that I discuss in the first chapter of my book, ‘Social Science: City Centre or Leafy Suburb’ he points out that expressions that are absolutely central to biology, such as ‘gene’ and ‘species’, are used in different ways within different kinds of biological studies. His argument is not just that they *were* used in one way and that now, in the light of discoveries, they are used in a different way but that *right now* these expressions are used in different ways within science without causing confusion and without the need to settle upon a single term defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. George Lakoff’s book

Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things also provides us with examples of how different kinds of criteria are in play in the categorisation of the animal world. There is no single way in which the essential features of animals are picked out. Instead, we find cladist (focusing on shared characteristics originating from a common ancestor in evolution), pheneticist (emphasizing similarity of characteristics and disregarding the evolutionary criteria of the cladist), and evolutionist (combining cladist and pheneticist criteria) criteria all in play in biology. Lakoff notes that this produces different taxonomies of the animal world using zebras as an example: “There are three species of zebra: Burchell’s zebra, the mountain zebra, and Grevey’s zebra. Burchell’s zebra and Grevey’s zebra form an evolutionary group, but the mountain zebra appears to form a genealogical unit with the true horse...Judging by the cladist’s criteria there is no true biological category that consists of all and only the zebras” (Lakoff 1987, p. 119).

In our study of the natural world, just as in our study of the social world, the ways in which we categorise or conceptualise things is shaped by our interests. Heterogeneity, plasticity, and contingency are features of the social world, as Little points out, but they are clearly also features of the natural world. Looking at the science of biology makes this very clear. The animal world is very diverse—heterogeneous—and it has changed dramatically over the course of evolution. Our ways of conceptualising that world have also changed dramatically over the years and the concepts we use vary now according to the interests of those engaging with it and studying it. There is no single correct way of doing biology or of conceptualising the animal world forced upon us by the world. Contingencies of all sorts have altered the course of evolution including changes to the climate and genetic mutations. Paraphrasing Little, we might say that there is nothing in the world that dictates how we define ‘zebra’ and classify and specify examples of them.¹⁶

Now, all of this suggests that the natural and social sciences are closer than I had proposed in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* and that, furthermore, they are closer in certain ways than Daniel Little has suggested in his response to me as well as in his other work. Both the natural and social sciences contain explanations in terms of causes, including explanations in terms of efficient causes, as well as many other kinds of explanation.¹⁷ Given that biological classification is very often shaped by our interests and that there is no privileged taxonomic scheme in biology it seems clear that it cannot be reduced to physics (Vinten 2020, p. 32; Dupré 1995, pp. 107-45.). So, much like the social sciences, natural sciences very often cannot be reduced to physics. Heterogeneity and contingency are found throughout the natural sciences much like they are in the social sciences. Neither the social sciences nor the natural sciences (nor the philosophy of social science nor the philosophy of science more generally) investigate *de re* necessities because there are no such things.

3. RESPONSE TO AZIZE

I found Rafael Azize’s response to my book and his reflections on philosophy and politics extremely stimulating. I am grateful to him for writing such a wonderfully rich paper, bringing together the thought of Wittgenstein, Cavell, Moreno, de Beauvoir, Aristotle and Shkolovsky and including reflections on art, philosophy and politics. I found much to agree with in what he said although at the end of the day I do not think that the form of liberalism that he sketches is the most appealing option amongst the various possibilities that we have on offer.

Azize begins by noting that although Wittgenstein’s philosophical reflections continue to be influential that there is nonetheless widespread disagreement among philosophers about exactly what the philosopher’s work consists in, to the extent that even people working within the same department “have a hard time recognizing precisely what each other do” (Azize 2023). This, it seems to me, is obviously true and it has implications for the way in which philosophers and social scientists relate to each other’s work and interact with one another. In Daniel Little’s article for this symposium he worries that “[t]he stance that philosophers serve to ‘clear away confusions’ that other disciplines are prone to fall into is unfortunate...it makes communication between philosophy and sociology or political science much more difficult. It makes the intellectual exercise a contest between ‘confused’ empirical researchers and ‘clear-sighted’ philosophers

who can set matters right” (Little 2023). However, my stance is not that philosophers serve to ‘clear away confusions’ in practice and I do not set philosophers up in opposition to confused empirical researchers. Although I think that philosophical confusions of the sort that Wittgenstein identified are rife in sociology and political science, and say as much in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences*, I do not think that philosophers are any better off on that front. Confusion is also rife amongst philosophers and so I don’t think that it is the philosopher’s business to tell people in other disciplines that they have confusions that need to be corrected. What I in fact think is that people in many disciplines can learn something from Wittgenstein’s work and that attention to it might dissolve confusions in those disciplines—philosophy included. This perhaps suggests that rather than it being the philosopher’s job to tell social scientists what to do, it is the job of Wittgensteinian philosophers, in particular, to tell them that they are confused. But that is not my position either. The upshot of coming to recognise Wittgenstein’s value need not be conflict, or entering into a contest, but, say, to recommend that we (philosophers and people in other disciplines) read Wittgenstein, discuss his work, and try to learn some things from him.

Having located my book within the field of philosophy Azize correctly notes two aspects of Wittgenstein’s philosophy that I take to be central in it: (i) Wittgenstein’s method of grammatical description and (ii) its role in countering dogmatism in philosophy. These, he agrees, are important aspects of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. However, he goes on to suggest that this conception of Wittgenstein’s philosophy can be enriched in at least two ways. One way to enrich this conception is to examine the development of the concept of use in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, as in his later philosophy it “widens its scope in order to explore an expansion of the reach of phenomenological problems towards the lived experience of persons in culture” (Azize 2023, p.). And the second way in which to enrich our conception of Wittgenstein’s philosophy is to “describe the cooperation of the concepts of aspect and spirit” (Ibid.)

In giving a brief description of the movement of Wittgenstein’s thought between the early period of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1974 [1921]) and his later work, in the *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* Azize says that “the logical space of the *Tractatus* gradually expands towards ‘phenomenological problems’ (see *Remarks on Colors*) and ultimately (in the 1940s) towards the lived experience itself” (Ibid., p.). I agree with Azize that Wittgenstein’s conception of use developed as he distanced himself from his earlier work although I have a minor disagreement with the chronology he presents. What has been published as Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on Colour* (1977) is drawn from notebooks that Wittgenstein was writing in 1950 and 1951, very soon before he died. It is true that Wittgenstein went through what might be described as a ‘phenomenological period’ in between his earlier and later work but his work on this can be found in a manuscript that he wrote in 1929 (MS 105), where he distinguishes between the ‘first system’ (the facts of immediate experience) and the ‘second system’ (the facts of physics).¹⁸ Wittgenstein was indeed reflecting on colour (amongst other things) at this time but his *Remarks on Colour* reject the distinction he made in his earlier work between ‘physics’ and ‘immediate experience’.

Azize is quite right to emphasise the element of ‘lived experience’ in Wittgenstein’s later work. Whereas Wittgenstein’s earlier work is often quite abstract, talking about the world, states of affairs, objects, logic and language in isolation from lived experience and using examples of propositions in isolation from the flow of life, his later work very often uses examples where language use is integrated into various kinds of *activities* and the wider context within which those activities take place is also emphasised. In the very first few paragraphs of the *Philosophical Investigations* we are presented with the example of somebody going shopping and asking for items from a shopkeeper and the example of a builder and a builder’s assistant calling out words in the course of their work together (§§1-2). This new way of thinking about language means that he moves away from a focus on the form of propositions because propositions of the same form might play completely different roles in different contexts or on different occasions.¹⁹ For example, at one time it was a ‘hinge’ certainty that no one has ever been on the moon but nowadays ‘no one has been on the moon’²⁰ is treated as an empirical proposition, and a false one at that (although there are, of course, some who think that the moon landings were faked). There is also, in Wittgenstein’s later work, an emphasis on

the purpose or point of using certain expressions in the course of our lives.²¹ Grasping the meaning of an expression might involve getting clear about the purpose of using it in certain circumstances.²²

Azize himself uses a particularly complex example of the way in which Wittgenstein's later work takes wider circumstances into consideration; the example of art appreciation. To get some kind of a grip on what it means to appreciate aesthetic qualities, Wittgenstein says that we have to think about the wider context, historical and cultural, in which cases of fine discrimination between aesthetic qualities goes on. "It is not only difficult to describe what appreciation consists in", he says, "but impossible. *To describe what it consists in we would have to describe the whole environment*" (1966, I, §20). Although Wittgenstein says it is *impossible* to describe what appreciation consists in, he does not mean that it is impossible to say anything at all about appreciation or to get some sense of what it involves. Wittgenstein himself says quite a lot about this in the *Lectures*. He is clear about what does *not* count as a case of appreciation or at least about what is insufficient to say that somebody appreciates a piece of art or a musical piece. A person saying 'Ah!' or 'How marvellous!' in reaction to a poem or a piece of music is not sufficient to say that they appreciate it. *Liking* art, even if it is art that is widely agreed to be good art, is not the same thing as appreciating it. As Wittgenstein says, "[w]e use the phrase 'A man is musical' not so as to call a man musical if he says 'Ah!' when a piece of music is played, any more than we call a dog musical if it wags its tail when music is played" (1966, §17).

So, what is Wittgenstein getting at when he talks about the whole environment? Well, things we might take into consideration include things like the language someone speaks. If someone does not understand the language in which a poem is written then they cannot appreciate the poem (Ibid.). Presumably this, again, is not sufficient to say that somebody appreciates a poem, but it is necessary. Not every English speaker appreciates English poetry. They must also have some knowledge of the artform. Learning the rules of an artform and getting a feeling for them is important.²³ We do not attribute appreciation of poetry to somebody "who doesn't know metres" Wittgenstein says (Ibid., I, §17). What is called 'appreciation' in different instances varies. It need not involve familiarity with a very wide range of pieces in a particular artform. Wittgenstein notes that there are people "who have been to good schools, who can afford to travel about and see the Louvre, etc., and who know a lot about and can talk fluently about dozens of painters" and on the other hand there might be a person "who has seen very few paintings, but who looks intensely at one or two paintings which make a profound impression on him" and others who are "broad, neither deep nor wide" and yet all of these cases might be called 'appreciation' (Ibid., I, §30). There is also variation across time: "What we now call a cultured taste perhaps didn't exist in the Middle Ages. An entirely different game is played in different ages" (Ibid., I, §25).

Here, again, we can see that in the move from his earlier work to the later work there is a move away from the form of sentences towards appreciating a variety of different things which might count as appreciation in the setting of activities (of training in rules, of going to concerts, galleries, learning to play an instrument, learning to tailor a suit, etc.) and in terms of the wider culture throughout history.

Now, Azize wants to stress that this means having a richer conception of philosophy to one just focused on grammatical confusion and resistance to dogmatism in philosophy. It is difficult to disagree that there is also an aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy that involves focusing on lived experience, on concrete circumstances rather than on abstractions, on history, culture, and so on. However, I wonder whether the point is to get us to see something deeper than the grammatical muddles that might be cleared up before we get on with our lives or whether the interest in history and culture in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* is subservient to the aim of dissolving conceptual confusions. After all, his remarks about the variety of games played in different art forms, across time and in different cultures are aimed at philosophers like Moore, who Wittgenstein says is too focused on form in language and too focused on words like 'good' and 'beautiful' (Ibid., I, §5). He aims to correct these tendencies by pointing out that words like 'beautiful' are rarely used in cases of aesthetic appreciation and in some cases, like criticism of poetry, the language involved in appreciation involves terms like 'precise', 'right', and 'correct' rather than words like 'beautiful' and 'lovely'. Furthermore, a word like 'lovely' might be used to indicate the character of an artwork rather than being used as a term of praise (Ibid. I, §8-9). That is, his remarks on aesthetics are another example of trying to

dissolve conceptual confusion by providing a perspicuous representation of a region of grammar—looking at how words (and gestures and facial expressions) are involved in the appreciation of art.

Art enters into Azize's paper for this symposium as an example of how Wittgenstein's philosophy goes deeper than just grammar and opposition to philosophical dogmatism but it is also used as a way of highlighting the nature of philosophy by comparison. Art expands the possibility of human experience, it enriches our imaginative capacities, and opens up our habits of sensibility to new engagements in thought and life. Art helps us to see things in a new light by defamiliarizing objects and offering them up to us in a striking new way. Philosophy, Azize suggests, has the potential to do something similar. Wittgenstein, in remarking on the nature of philosophical investigations stressed that we fail to see what is important in philosophical problems because it is often something simple and familiar ("One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes") (2009, §129). We are tempted, both by the way our language²⁴ is and by the arguments of past philosophers, to adopt pictures which obscure our view of matters. What we need to shake us out of our confusion is a reminder of the familiar uses of the ordinary terms used in the formulation of the problem. However, simply being offered standard definitions of the terms is not enough to shift us away from a tempting philosophical picture. Wittgenstein comes up with ingenious ways of defamiliarizing what is familiar to us and showing it back to us in a new light, so that it becomes striking. The way in which Azize highlights the similarities between art and philosophy seems to me to be a useful way of thinking about the potential for philosophy to expand our imaginative and critical faculties and to develop our sensibilities.

Azize then suggests that this potential for philosophy to develop our imaginative and critical faculties is particularly useful given the times we are living in with the rise of irrationalism surrounding figures like Trump and Bolsonaro, and with neoliberalism being offered up to us as if there is no alternative. Azize says that a way of understanding the rise of irrationalism is to "track it back to the way instrumental reason dominates matters of practice, and policy debates are conducted merely in terms of efficiency for the satisfaction of wants" (2023, p.). There *is* an alternative to irrationalism and neoliberalism, Azize suggests, in a form of liberalism that allows us to be sensitive to differences with others and to discuss matters with other people in such a way that we use tact, and *touch* them rather than just try to convince them.

There is much that I find appealing in Azize's analysis. I agree with him that philosophy can play a role in resisting the rise of irrationalism and bigotry. I agree with him in worrying about the neoliberal tendencies to stress efficiency and satisfying wants and losing sight of humanity. There is a hint of Aristotle in the background, I think, in the way that Azize is thinking about human beings flourishing in their diversity. In a footnote Azize compares his thoughts about "autonomous exercises of the spirit" to "what Aristotle called realization of the rational powers of the human animal" (Ibid, p.).

However, there are traditions in political philosophy other than the liberal ones which have taken inspiration from Aristotelian ideas about human flourishing. What is more, I think we have reason for preferring those, socialist and Marxist, traditions to the liberal one that Azize favours. Liberals, as I noted in (Vinten 2020, pp. 89-90) have very often combined a professed love of liberty with arguments in opposition to democracy or even in favour of slavery. As Domenico Losurdo has detailed in 2011, major figures in the development of early liberalism combined defences of individual liberty and the rights of minorities with justifications for slavery. John Locke, the central figure in classical liberalism, had investments in the slave trade (Cranston 1959, pp. 114-15) and contributed to the legal formalisation of slavery in Carolina, writing a provision according to which "[e]very freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his Negro slaves of what opinion or religion soever" (Wooten 1993, p. 230). Many of those involved in writing the American Declaration of Independence and the federal Constitution were slave owners and Article 1 of the Constitution distinguishes between 'free Persons' and 'all other Persons', allowing states to regulate slavery as they see fit but obliging them to return fugitive slaves (Losurdo 2011, pp. 26-7). Liberalism developed as an ideology alongside the growth of capitalism and served to justify the slavery that early capitalist development relied upon.

This may well seem unfair as a criticism of Azize’s liberalism, given that he explicitly distances himself from classical liberalism and neoliberalism and proposes a version of liberalism that is tolerant and democratic. However, the problem is not so much with the form of society that Azize envisions but with the idealism of his political philosophy. If we look at ‘really existing liberalism’—at concrete instances of liberalism put into practice—we see that it was involved in justifying slavery in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.²⁵ In the twentieth century, liberal politicians, fearful of socialist rebellion against their rule in Italy, endorsed Mussolini’s fascist coup in 1922 and helped to bring fascism to power for the first time (Losurdo, 2011, p. 327).²⁶ Members of the Democratic Party in the United States have legislated to massively amplify racist mass incarceration (Ofer 2019) and have backed or initiated a series of disastrous wars that have killed hundreds of thousands of people and forced tens of millions of people from their homes (Vine et al. 2021). The history of really existing liberalism is a history of slavery, colonialism, genocide, and bigotry. As Lorna Finlayson has pointed out, “the history of liberal nations is the history of systematic acquisitive violence: from the genocide of indigenous populations, to chattel slavery, to contemporary ‘regime change’ and ‘humanitarian intervention’” (Finlayson 2015). If Azize wants to see a different kind of liberalism put into practice then he owes us an account of the means to bring about a tolerant and sensitive society in which individuals can flourish. While I agree with him that art and philosophy have a role in bringing about this ideal they do not seem to me to be sufficient in dealing with the problems of climate change, rising authoritarianism, war, bigotry, and the irrationalism that he is concerned about.

To bring about the changes that we need in order to mitigate the damage that will come from increasingly terrible climate disasters and to challenge the growth of far-right authoritarianism we will have to take on immensely powerful people. It is people with enormous wealth and power that are driving climate catastrophes and aiding the rise of the far right. Taking on those powerful people will require organisation and tactical astuteness. This is something that I think is provided by the socialist tradition but which is lacking amongst liberals. To construct a force powerful enough to take on the vested interests that are driving climate disaster, authoritarianism, and irrationalism involves uniting large numbers of the people who are threatened by those vested interests. Among the weapons that we can use are the power of art and philosophy to enrich our imaginations and sensitivities, as Azize says, however, the principal problem is not that those in power have the wrong ideas and need to be trained to be more tolerant. The problem is that we live under a system that grants massive power to a tiny minority of people with interests opposed to the majority of people. To challenge that power the principal weapon is the organised withdrawal of labour by working people, who constitute the majority of people threatened by the problems Azize identifies. Individually those working people are not powerful enough to take on the bosses of fossil fuel companies and big agriculture but collectively they can challenge it. The powerful live off the labour of working-class people and we can loosen the grip of that power by turning off the tap.

As Azize stresses, Wittgenstein’s later philosophy (2009) moves away from abstractions towards the lived experience of people: a return to the ‘rough ground’ (§107). I suggest that we follow Marx in making a similar move in political philosophy, away from philosopher’s abstractions towards a focus on concrete reality and how to change it: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (Marx 1974, p. 123).

4. RESPONSE TO RAATZSCH

Richard Raatzsch’s contribution to this symposium, ‘Wittgenstein, Brecht and (the Philosophy of) Politics’, is a wonderfully rich paper which discusses what we can learn from Wittgenstein in terms of political philosophy and philosophy more generally. He sheds light on Wittgenstein’s thought using Bertolt Brecht’s poetry as an object of comparison. Raatzsch also compares both Brecht and Wittgenstein to Luther, compares Frege to Ovid, and discusses the political philosophies of Hegel and Marx. His principal complaint against what I argue in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* is that my “argument against the claim that Wittgenstein was a conservative is not radical enough” (Raatzsch 2023).

As Raatzsch points out, both Brecht and Wittgenstein use “die allereinfachsten Worte”, the simplest words, to convey their thoughts. However, in neither case do they dictate to the reader how they should think. They do not lay everything out for the reader. Brecht and Wittgenstein are both eager to stimulate thinking in their audience; to let the audience work things out for themselves. As Wittgenstein says in the preface to 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” (p. 4e). Both Wittgenstein and Brecht were dissatisfied with the world as it was in their time. They were contemporaries and both lived through the two World Wars.²⁷ They both display a sensitivity to the wider environment in which language is used. Language is bound up with all kinds of activities and the circumstances in which sentences are uttered is often significant in understanding what is being conveyed by the sentence. In Brecht’s poem ‘To those born after’ he remarks that “A conversation about trees is almost a crime” in the dark times in which he lived “Because it entails a silence about so many misdeeds”. Wittgenstein drew our attention to the varieties of ‘language games’ we engage in (giving orders, praying, describing events, forming hypotheses etc. etc.) and emphasised that “language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (PI, §23).

I agree with Raatzsch about these commonalities between Wittgenstein and Brecht and also agree with him that there are commonalities between Wittgenstein and the wider Marxist tradition. In *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* (p. 131) I compare Marx and Wittgenstein and note that:

Both philosophers saw themselves as doing something which went beyond philosophy as it had been done previously. Both opposed modern philosophy (Descartes and post-Descartes) in the way that it separated mind from action. Wittgenstein’s discussion of language in his later work points out internal connections between language and human behaviour and Wittgenstein emphasizes that language is embedded in various practices that human beings engage in. For Marx the problem is the detachment of moral, political, and economic theory from what is going on in the world and in particular its detachment from human activity. So, both are opposed to speculative philosophy detached from discussion of human activity...

Their opposition to speculative philosophy, in both cases, also involves a certain kind of anti-intellectualism and anti-rationalism. In a recent chapter for a book about Wittgenstein and Marx (Vinten 2021) I have noted that both of these philosophers recognise that rational argument may very well not be successful. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein remarks that explanations (§34), giving grounds (§110), testing (§164), and doubts (§625) come to an end. Each of us has certainties (such as ‘I have two hands’) which cannot be doubted and cannot be tested.²⁸ These certainties, which lie “beyond being justified or unjustified” are “something animal” (OC, §359), Wittgenstein says, and he notes that “[l]anguage did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination” (OC, §475). Given that different people might have different certainties (e.g. one might believe in God and another does not) these matters cannot be settled by rational argument. *Persuasion* comes into play in some instances (Ibid., §§262, 612, 669). Marx and Engels placed a great stress on the role of the organisation of the economy and of society in producing ideology. So, they thought that changes in ideas might very well come through practical action to change the way in which the economy and society is organised, rather than through rational argument. In both cases there is an emphasis on the *practices* that human beings engage in and on the wider culture people find themselves in rather than upon the kind of abstract arguments that fill the work of many philosophers of the past.²⁹

These commonalities between Marx and Wittgenstein are deep ones that set them in opposition to the philosophical tradition leading up to Marx. In formulating a radical political philosophy that might tackle the major problems we face today—climate calamities, deceitful authoritarian politicians, war, and bigotry—it is useful to combine their insights.

5. RESPONSE TO READ

Rupert Read is a philosopher who recognises the urgent need to address the kind of political problems I mentioned above. His most recent book is about the climate catastrophes we are facing (Read 2022), and he is not someone who can be accused of simply interpreting the world and not acting to change it. He has been heavily involved in climate activism in recent years, and has been a spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion. He is also a philosopher whose philosophy is heavily influenced by Wittgenstein and by Wittgensteinians. As Read notes, he and I are in fundamental agreement about many things—about problems with attempts to reduce social sciences to natural ones, about differences in methodology between social studies and natural sciences, about reasons for rejecting Rawls’s arguments, and about disagreements with Michael Temelini over his interpretation of Winch’s philosophy. Although our approaches to understanding Wittgenstein are quite different, with mine being heavily influenced by Peter Hacker and his being heavily influenced by the later work of Gordon Baker, I am generally sympathetic to much of what Read writes.

However, we do disagree about whether social disciplines such as sociology, psychology, social anthropology, human geography, economics, and politics should be called sciences. In his article for this symposium he suggests that I have not had the courage to “quit the fake comforts of scientism” (Read 2023, p.). He argues that one of the reasons I give for calling social sciences scientific, namely that calling a discipline ‘scientific’ plays a role in legitimating the discipline in question, is a weak reason because calling a discipline ‘scientific’ could only play a role in legitimating a discipline in a scientific society. We should overcome the wish to ape science within disciplines concerned with the social sphere.

The first thing to note here is that in arguing that social studies should be called scientific in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences* I was clear that this did *not* mean that social studies should ape the natural sciences or seek to be legitimated by reference to the methodological canons of the natural sciences. The second thing that I want to say in response to Read is that perhaps he overestimates just how sharp the divide between social studies and natural sciences is. While it is true that social phenomena are not reducible to the phenomena of physics this does not mark off the social studies from studies of the natural world. As John Dupré has argued, many of the phenomena studied in the natural sciences are not reducible to physics either. We have good reason, for example, to think that biology cannot be reduced to physics (Vinten 2020 p. 32; Dupré 1995, pp. 107-45). As mentioned above, many of the central expressions used in biology (‘species’, ‘gene’, etc.) are family resemblance concepts and they no more pick out *de re* essences than expressions in the social sciences do. Another possible way of marking off social sciences would be to say that natural scientific phenomena are predictable whereas social phenomena are not. However, this does not give us a clear distinction either. Social scientists, such as economists, are at least sometimes able to give us successful predictions. They might highlight long term trends in an economy that are likely to continue. On the other hand, some regions of natural science, such as meteorology and population ecology, provide us with such complex data as to make predictions difficult and unreliable. Moreover, as Dupré (2016) argues in the paper of his that I discuss in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences*, the methods of some regions of natural science are similar to methods used in the social sciences: “Population ecology uses methods much more similar to economics than to astronomy or physiology...it is not that they are very similar, but that there is no obvious chasm between the natural and social sciences”. Although the rationality of human beings and the complexity of the activities they engage in is distinctive to them, they are nonetheless also creatures that have evolved and are causal agents, and so can be studied by the natural sciences as well as the social ones.

Read says that ‘go forth and quantify’ is a terrible maxim. But, of course, many of the social sciences use statistics, mathematical models, data from polls and surveys perfectly legitimately. We can quantify the number of people who are unemployed in a country at a given time. We can track the voting intentions of the electorate through polls. We can come to know that a certain percentage of the population voted in a certain way by counting their votes. We can look at information about government spending and see how much money is being spent on weaponry and how much is being spent on healthcare or education. We can

gather information on wages and on corporate profits. This information is enormously useful in understanding society, even if it is not the whole story.

One final thing I would like to note is that in the book *There is No Such Thing as a Social Science*, where Read, with Phil Hutchison and Wes Sharrock (2008), argues that social studies should not be deemed scientific, they do nonetheless say that “[i]t doesn’t even matter if the various social studies are grouped together under the heading of ‘social science’—so long as one keeps a clear view of what is thus named, and what its character is. But that is almost impossible to do, even in the best circumstances”. My take is that, while it is difficult to keep a clear view of the differences between the different disciplines, it is perfectly possible to do so. As I mentioned in *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences*, many social scientists are happy to say that they are doing something scientific while at the same time recognising differences between what they do and what people working in the natural sciences do. While Read is eager to mark off social studies as distinct from natural sciences, I think it is preferable to recognise that there is diversity of method in both the natural and the social sciences and that the lines between them are more blurry than Read suggests. When Wittgenstein, in the *Blue Book* talks about “*the method of science*” (1958, p. 18, my italics) and says that by that he means “the method of reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws” he mischaracterises science as pursuing a single method. If we recognise the diversity in natural science we may well be more inclined to see similarities between natural sciences and social ones.³⁰

NOTES

- 1 I should note that Eagleton is already quite open to the idea that Wittgenstein offers us valuable insights. Eagleton has often used Wittgenstein in his work, worked on the script for Derek Jarman’s film about Wittgenstein, and has used Wittgenstein as a character in a work of fiction (Eagleton 1987).
- 2 Because brains do not resemble human beings in their behaviour and so cannot be said to make decisions. See Žižek 2009, p. 62. I use this example in Vinten 2020, p. 126.
- 3 As Raazsch notes in a footnote, Lorna Finlayson (2015) has recently produced an excellent critique of Rawls which deserves to be more widely read.
- 4 I particularly focus on Read 2010.
- 5 See Wittgenstein’s remark “One keeps forgetting to go down to the foundations. One doesn’t put the question marks deep enough down” (1998, p. 71e).
- 6 In earlier parts of the book I make numerous references to Wittgenstein or Wittgensteinians dissolving problems (see pp. 8, 42, 47, 65, 82, 103, 113, 114, 119, 121, 125, etc. etc.) and I cite §133 of the *Investigations* where Wittgenstein says that “We don’t want to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways. For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear” on pages 16, 121, 124, and 130 (in chapter 5 of the book—one which Roth ignores).
- 7 On pp. 14-17 of the Introduction to the book I discuss my understanding of §109 and contrast it with that of Christopher Robinson’s take (2009), I then cite this passage numerous times throughout the book (pp. 40, 63, 103, 108, 119, 146, 151, etc. etc.).
- 8 I also discuss arguments from quite a range of philosophers, cultural critics, and scientists, including Otto Neurath, C. P. Snow, F. R. Leavis, Francis Crick, Semir Zeki, Paul Churchland, Stephen Hawking, Maxwell Bennett & Peter Hacker, Donald Davidson, Julia Tanney, and, of course, Ludwig Wittgenstein.
- 9 Note, however, that I do not make the distinction in terms of objectivity and subjectivity as Little suggests. I do not claim at any point that reasons are ‘subjective’ or that causes are objective by contrast with them.
- 10 This also provides a very clear example of scientific endeavours informing thought in the social and political realm. It is important in formulating strategies and policies for dealing with the climate emergency to take se-

- riously what thousands of scientists are saying about the causes of it and the likely impact that these enormous changes to our climate are going to make.
- 11 I relied quite heavily on the arguments of Winch (1990, p. 60) and Tanney (2013). Hacker (2007, pp. 226-232) presents a number of cases and arguments in opposition to the claim that reasons are causes.
 - 12 See, for example, Mill's (2002 [1843]), Book 3, Chapter 10, where he discusses how we pick out a cause from amongst a number of conditions.
 - 13 In Wittgenstein (1978) asks "...what is the characteristic mark of 'internal properties'?" and he answers that "... they persist always, unalterably, in the whole that they constitute as it were independently of any outside happenings. As the construction of a machine on paper does not break when the machine itself succumbs to external forces.—Or again, I should like to say that they are not subject to wind and weather like physical things; rather are they unassailable, like shadows" (RFM, I, §102). I suggest that Little is thinking about water in this way—as something 'not subject to wind and weather' in the way that bodies of water and water molecules are. He is thinking about 'internal properties'.
 - 14 By Henry Cavendish (hydrogen – 1766) and Carl Wilhelm Steele (oxygen – 1771).
 - 15 These facts about H₂O are taken from Izlar 2012.
 - 16 Wittgenstein, of course, observed that our grammar is not accountable to reality. Grammatical statements are not like our descriptions of the world around us. They are rules for the use of expressions in empirical statements. In his later work he said that grammar "is not accountable to any reality. It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary" (1974, p. 184) and in the remarks collected in (1967) we find "One is tempted to justify rules of grammar by sentences like 'But there really are four primary colours'. And the saying that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is directed against the possibility of this justification, which is constructed on the model of justifying a sentence by pointing to what verifies it" (§331) (see also, MS 160, 6).
 - 17 Aristotle distinguished between four kinds of 'cause', i.e. four ways of giving explanations in response to 'why?' questions in his *Physics* "We must explain the 'why' in all senses of the term, namely that from this that will necessarily result...that this must be so if that is to be so; that this was the essence of the thing; and because it is better thus' (198^b5-9). That is, we might explain why something occurs by reference to the agent or event that caused it, we might explain why something is so or why something was done by reference to its purpose, we might explain why something is so or why it occurred by reference to the material out of which it is constituted, and we might explain why something is so by reference to its nature or essence (as expressed in grammar).
 - 18 See MS 105,86, where Wittgenstein distinguishes the two systems and draws an analogy between the two systems and (i) images on a cinema screen (analogous to the first system) and (ii) images on a film strip (analogous to the second system). See also TS 209,19, where he makes clear that the distinction between the first system and the second system is the distinction between the system of immediate experience and the system of physics. What has been published as the *Philosophical Remarks* (1975) draws on material that Wittgenstein was writing in this period.
 - 19 In Wittgenstein (1966) says that "If I had to say what is the main mistake made by philosophers of the present generation, including Moore, I would say that it is that when language is looked at what is looked at is a form of words and not the use made of the form of words" (I, §5).
 - 20 This is what Wittgenstein claims in §108 of *On Certainty*.
 - 21 For example in §69 of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein points out that we do not know the boundaries of the concept 'game' (because none have been drawn) but that this is not a problem, given our purposes. The concept is perfectly usable. However, we could draw boundaries around it if it suited our purposes.
 - 22 A nice example of this is in §467 of *On Certainty* where Wittgenstein says "I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again 'I know that's a tree', pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him "This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy". The person who arrives in the garden is wondering why somebody would say 'I know that's a tree' while pointing at a nearby tree. What could they possibly want to convey by this? What is the point? The usual sorts of circumstances for making a knowledge claim are absent.

- 23 “In learning the rules [of being a tailor] you get a more and more refined judgement” (Ibid., I, §15).
- 24 In Wittgenstein (2005, pp. 423-24) he says that our language continually draws us back into asking the same (confused) questions: “So long as there is a verb ‘be’ that seems to function like ‘eat’ and ‘drink’, so long as there are the adjectives ‘identical’, ‘true’, ‘false’, ‘possible’, so long as there is talk about a flow of time and an expanse of space, etc. etc., humans will continue to bump up against the same mysterious difficulties, and stare at something that no explanation seems able to remove”.
- 25 For a detailed account of this, see the first two chapters of Losurdo 2011.
- 26 There are echoes of this in the way that Hillary Clinton has recently welcomed the election of the neo-fascist Giorgia Meloni in Italy, saying that “The election of the first woman prime minister in a country always represents a break with the past, and that is certainly a good thing” and that “every time a woman is elected to head of state or government, that is a step forward” (see Broder 2022.)
- 27 Wittgenstein lived from 1889 to 1951 and Brecht lived from 1898 to 1956.
- 28 As Wittgenstein says (OC, §125) “If a blind man were to ask me ‘Have you got two hands?’ I should not make sure by looking. If I were to have any doubt of it, then I don’t know why I should trust my eyes. For why shouldn’t I test my eyes by looking to find out whether I see my two hands? What is to be tested by what? (Who decides what stands fast?)”.
- 29 In Vinten 2021b, p. 163) I particularly focus on commonalities between Marx and Wittgenstein in terms of their treatment of religion.
- 30 I completed work on this article while working as the postdoctoral fellow in the FCT project ‘Epistemology of Religious Belief: Wittgenstein, Grammar and the Contemporary World’ (PTDC/FER-FIL/32203/2017). I would like to thank the FCT for their support during the past four years.

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