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Wittgenstein's *On certainty* and rational argumentation

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss the question of the possibility of rational argumentation between two parties who fundamentally disagree. Wittgenstein's fictitious example of George Edward Moore encountering a king who thinks that the earth came into existence with his birth serves as an example of such a disagreement, but the paper sheds light on differences in moral views rather than epistemic ones. It seems that the second (and third) Wittgenstein rules out the possibility of any rational debate between people who do not share basic beliefs regarding, for instance, the criteria of decency. Contrary to this view, I argue that the so-called "hinge epistemology" developed in *On certainty* makes room for extra-systemic argumentation as it differentiates hinge propositions — basic certainties that regulate our standard ways of reasoning — from criteria of meaning. One result of this distinction is that we are actually able to understand what the rejection of our hinge propositions would mean and hence we can have doubts about them. The basis for such doubts can be tensions raised by our emotional and behavioural reactions, something Wittgenstein calls "primitive".

KEYWORDS

Ludwig Wittgenstein; *On certainty*; hinge propositions; moral arguments

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We live in a fragmented social reality. After the fall of the Iron Curtain that had been a symbol of divided humankind for nearly half a century, some hoped for a more united world governed according to the rules of liberal democracy. Francis Fukuyama's *The end of history and the last man*, published in 1992, epitomised that hope. From a contemporary perspective, this hope seems an upshot of our naïveté and intellectual laziness. True, in a sense the present-day world is one: it resembles a living organism linked by a vascular system of international trade and capital flow, while its ailments — pollution, climate change, the extinction of species, viral diseases, exploitation, and social inequality — are global. However, humankind seems no less divided than during the Cold War, though presently the deepest divisions run within nations. For instance, someone who happens to be a liberal or a socialist in today's Poland would likely find the pro-government media literally as alien, untruthful, and unbearable as she would have found Polish communist party propaganda thirty-five years earlier; on the other hand, a Pole who considers himself a right-wing conservative and a devout Catholic would likely find liberal and leftist media content similarly alien to him. This situation is, I believe, not unfamiliar to the citizens of the UK, the US, Turkey, India, and many other countries in almost every corner of the earth.

A number of thinkers and commentators have pointed out the perils of our present-day situation when we face a couple of severe global dangers at once, and public opinion is highly polarised not only on what the best possible responses to those dangers are but also on their actual severity or even existence. One might ask: what is the task of philosophical reflection in this predicament? Answers may vary due to the diversity of philosophical ideas on the role of philosophy itself. For a thinker who is attached to Ludwig Wittgenstein's view, philosophy is a relentless endeavour to make things clear. As we read in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 4.112, "[p]hilosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions', but rather in the clarification of propositions".[1] We can also read in the *Philosophical investigations*, §127: "The work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections for a particular purpose". According to Wittgenstein, what a philosopher should not do is to put forward some theses or explanations or become involved — as a philosopher — in a political movement, for she "is not a citizen of any community of ideas" (Wittgenstein, 1970: §455).

Nevertheless, a philosopher is always a citizen of some society (or at least an exponent of humankind) and usually wishes for society (or humankind) to

[1] As the article refers to some of Wittgenstein's works, the following convention is used: 'TLP' stands for *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Wittgenstein, 1965), 'PI' stands for the *Philosophical investigations* (Wittgenstein, 2009), 'OC' stands for *On certainty* (Wittgenstein, 1972), 'PPF' stands for the *Philosophy of psychology — A fragment* (included in: Wittgenstein, 2009). The numbers of remarks or theses are used instead of pages.

thrive. As she senses her duty to the people, what kind of "goods" may she bring to them?[2] One possible reply can be: by freeing them from certain misleading images of how they change each other's minds. In this paper, I consider the question of whether it is possible to have a rational conversation with a person whose worldview is radically different from our own. I shall attempt to show that, contrary to how some tend to read him, Wittgenstein's thought can give us an adequate answer to this question.

THE KING AND MOORE: FROM EPISTEMOLOGY TO MORALITY

The very last notes that Wittgenstein wrote before his death, which were published as *On certainty*, were inspired by George Edward Moore's so-called proof of an external world. Moore famously presented a common-sense argument against scepticism and idealism which involved raising both his hands and saying: "Here is my left hand" and "Here is my right hand". Thus, he concluded that he knew about the existence of at least two external objects, and since the metaphysical premises of idealism and scepticism were less plausible than his common-sense claims, the former should be rejected. Furthermore, Moore presented a number of common-sense certainties that have subsequently often been called "Moorean facts". One such fact is that the earth had existed long before our birth.

This paper is not the place to discuss all the aspects of Wittgenstein's subtle criticism of Moore's position. However, it focuses on the use Wittgenstein makes of the example of earth's existence. Let us take a look at *On certainty*, §§91–92:

> 91. If Moore says he knows the earth existed *etc.*, most of us will grant him that it has existed all that time, and also believe him when he says he is convinced of it. [...]
> 92. However, we can ask: May someone have telling grounds for believing that the earth has only existed for a short time, say since his own birth? — Suppose he had always been told that, — would he have any good reason to doubt it? Men have believed that they could make rain; why should not a king be brought up in the belief that the world began with him? And if Moore and this king were to meet and discuss, could Moore really prove his belief to be the right one? I do not say that Moore could not convert the king to his view, but it would be a conversion of a special kind; the king would be brought to look at the world in a different way.

What is suggested here is that the body of our common-sense certainties — like the certainty that the earth had existed before our birth — is a social

[2] Wittgenstein himself was often concerned with the question of the benefit his work may bring to the community and the public demand for his "goods" (Monk, 1991: 304).

construct.[3] This construct is inevitable for our effective communication; as Wittgenstein notes in the *Philosophical investigations* §242: "It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language". As we have been raised in a community of language-users, we have learned to take some claims for granted; that is, to have learned not to question them. It seems that the very existence of a community of language-users depends on not questioning common-sense claims. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons why philosophy at times triggers negative social reactions like anger, mockery, or disregard; philosophers follow Socrates and ask forbidden questions.[4]

When Wittgenstein refers to common-sense claims in *On certainty*, he uses the metaphor of a hinge (OC §§341–43); thus, his interpreters call them "hinge propositions" (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004). Their logical role is radically different from that of normal empirical judgements, despite the fact that the former also come from our experience and so have the form of the latter. Hinge propositions must stay put if we want to make any move in our language game of investigating, reasoning, doubting, fact-checking, *etc*. Some scholars read these remarks as an outline of a "hinge epistemology" and speak of "the third Wittgenstein" (Moyal-Sharrock, 2013; Coliva, 2015; Pritchard, 2016; for a critical view, see *e.g.* Schönbaumsfeld, 2016). According to them, during the last few years of his philosophical activity that gave birth to the second part of the *Philosophical investigations* (nowadays treated as a separate work and published under the title *Philosophy of psychology — A fragment*), the *Last writings on the philosophy of psychology*, and *On certainty*, the author developed a view that is distinct from what he had written earlier in the 1930s and what had been dubbed his "later" or "second" philosophy.

Since our primary interest is thematic rather than exegetic, we shall not dwell upon ongoing interpretative disputes here, although this does not mean that we can avoid taking any stance regarding the status of hinge propositions. Contrary to what is suggested by some scholars,[5] we shall above all consider hinges as primarily propositional. Firstly, in *On certainty* Wittgenstein clearly assumes that they may lose their exceptional status and become normal empirical claims (cf. *e.g.* OC §96). Moreover, as has been carefully examined by

[3] This, however, is not tantamount to saying that the fact that the earth existed long before my birth is somehow relative.

[4] The premise of this whole line of thought is that it is substantially possible to put those claims in question. Thus, their exceptional status is not semantic but epistemic, and we do not talk here about what Wittgenstein elsewhere calls "propositions of logic" (TLP 6.1–6.13) or "grammatical propositions" (PI §§251, 295, 458) that lack intelligible negation (Glock, 2016: 289f.). This point shall be soon developed in the main text.

[5] The examples include Danielle Moyal-Sharrock (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004: 34) and Avrum Stroll (Stroll, 1994: 138–159).

Hans-Johann Glock (Glock, 2016), negations of hinge propositions are meaningful. Secondly, as Wilfried Sellars has stressed in *Empiricism and the philosophy of mind* (Sellars, 1956), a non-propositional content would not be efficient in justifying propositional claims.[6]

Let us return to the example of the king who thinks that the earth is not older than he is himself. This example clearly indicates that there can be more than one system of hinge propositions. Moreover, it assumes a functioning community that maintains two such systems: one for the common people and another for their king. It is irrelevant whether the example is real or not, as it is used to demonstrate and highlight some features of real-life situations.

What are these situations? Imagine facing people whose hinge propositions are clearly different from our own and who organise their knowledge about the world using a different "common sense". We do not need to look for primitive tribes to encounter such people; we can meet them in our own societies. These may be differences in religious (or irreligious) attitudes, in systems of values, or in views on the desirable social order. Regarding the latter two points, we should stress right away that this is not about mere differences in political views, nor is this about surface-level ethical values or virtues. Something much deeper is at play here: differences that result from divergent basic anthropological intuitions.

Strangely enough, not many Wittgenstein scholars are interested in considering hinges in such contexts.[7] However, there are other available sources to help us understand this phenomenon. As we discuss radically dissimilar moral views, we can employ the concept of a "moral image of the world" as it is used by Hilary Putnam in the course of the third and fourth part of his *Many faces of realism*. Putnam writes:

> A moral image, in the sense in which I am using the term, is not a declaration that this or that is a virtue, or that this or that is what one ought to do; it is rather a picture of how our virtues and ideals hang together with one another and of what they have to do with the position we are in. It may be as vague as the notions of "sisterhood

[6] I do not imply that our hinges are detached from our practices; rather, what I mean is that to be meaningful the latter must be perceived as having a propositional structure.

[7] One exception is Rom Harré (Harré, 2010), while another (although less straightforward) is Alice Crary (Crary, 2005). The application of hinge epistemology to ethics can prove controversial: one may argue that its application concerns the difference between empirical and quasi-empirical propositions and that the body of moral claims — treated differently by Wittgenstein himself — should not be analysed in this manner. My answer is that even if there are differences between empirical and moral beliefs, we can still employ the concept of hinge propositions to both because, as there are questionable and non-questionable empirical claims, there are also disputable and non-disputable moral statements within a given system. I am inclined to agree with Hilary Putnam, as he argues that the facts–values dichotomy has too strong a grip on our thinking (Putnam, 1987: 71).

> and brotherhood" [...]. What we require in moral philosophy is, first and foremost, a moral image of the world, or rather [...] a number of complementary moral images of the world (Putnam, 1987: 51f.).

The term defined by Putnam in this quotation is of Kantian origin, but it is Kantianism passed through a pragmatist and Wittgensteinian sieve. Therefore, we can try to understand it in the light of the concept of hinges (again, our aim is not exegetic but thematic).[8] We can say, for instance, that a particular moral image is a whole, whereas hinge propositions constitute the key structural elements we abstract from that whole, just like we abstract grammar rules from the whole of a language-game (PI §§82–84; OC §95; see also Finkelstein, 2000: 66–69).[9] Moral images are not static; they evolve over time. In terms of hinges, we can say that the evolution of images is tantamount to the change of their constituent hinge propositions: some of the latter may lose their status — becoming normal (questionable) moral or empirical judgements — and be replaced by new hinge propositions, while some groups of hinge propositions within an image may be reformed with respect to their reciprocal interrelations. *On certainty*'s metaphor of a world-picture as a "river-bed of thoughts" that changes its shape presented shortly after the example of the king may serve as an illustration of this (OC §96–97).

As has been mentioned above, not all differences regarding political or moral views result from different moral images. As we all well know, it is difficult to meet a person who shares all the same moral directives and assessments, as the world is becoming more and more complicated and hence diverse. However, we can speak about moral reasoning and meaningful moral arguments. Thus, our moral images of the world are comprised of propositions which can be disputed, require reasons, and can be reasonably rejected. However, they also seem to be comprised of propositions that need to be accepted to begin standard dispute and criticism: the hinges. Their logical function is different from that of regular propositions, and we recognise them by being perplexed when faced with a question regarding arguments for or against them. The former are the fluid on the river-bed from Wittgenstein's illustration, while the latter are part of the river-bed itself.

Here are a couple of examples of hinge propositions one could give: "The moral value of animal suffering is comparable to that of human suffering"; "On a certain fundamental level, all people are equal"; "There is a sacred dimension to human nature that no one should violate"; "All people are morally responsible to a higher being". These examples need not represent a coherent moral view (and often do not). Moreover, their status as hinges is not universal: one

[8] See the previous footnote.

[9] Again, it should be stressed that hinge propositions are not rules of grammar, and moral images are not external to our language; this is no more than an analogy.

can imagine some people whose systems let them argue for or against some of these propositions. There can also be other people for whom these are anthropological-moral hinge propositions now but were previously disputable (or will be disputable in the future) and vice versa.

RATIONALITY AND VIOLENCE

Considering what we have discussed so far, we can say that there are two kinds of disputes concerning moral images of the world. The first are intra-systemic, and we have just called them the standard ones two paragraphs earlier: the two parties recognise the same hinge propositions, but for some reasons do not agree on detailed issues, like specific practical prescriptions, legal solutions, support for individual political groups or candidates, *etc*. For instance, they share roughly the same criteria regarding the decency of somebody or something, but they differ on who or what exactly meets those criteria. There can be various causes for such differences in opinion: for example, we can have different assessments of the ramifications of certain actions, or we can differ on our assumptions of what we do not know for sure. These are the waters of our river-bed of moral thoughts. We should also keep in mind that no real system of judgements and reasons is perfectly coherent. Some people do not bother with the problem of coherence, while others treat it as a mandatory requirement (notice that the proposition "One should be coherent in their moral judgements and actions" can also be a good example of a hinge proposition).

The second kind of dispute about moral images of the world is inter-systemic. Such disputes are rooted in the differences between the two systems of common sense. Here, the parties have a different understanding of basic concepts like decency. Such disagreements can be seen as analogous to Wittgenstein's fictitious dispute between Moore and the king.

What can be done in a situation of inter-systemic rift? We cannot reference what our usual common sense tells us is obvious, for it is not shared by our opponent. Thus, our standard strategies of argumentation do not work, and any attempt to use them only makes us aware of the extent of our disagreement. Have we got any tools at hand other than sheer violence and manipulation, which can also be a form of violence?[10] I believe that the answer is affirmative and that reading Wittgenstein can provide a solution.

[10] In his essay, Putnam also tries to tackle the problem as he writes about the evaluation of our moral images. He is aware that as a pragmatist he cannot reference any pre-existing standards when he recognises the superiority of a given moral image over another. "Standards and practices, pragmatists have always insisted, must be developed together and constantly revised by a procedure of delicate mutual adjustment. The standards by which we judge and

This opinion is at odds with the generally accepted interpretation. Scholars tend to share Elizabeth Anscombe's belief that throughout his whole philosophical activity Wittgenstein promoted the view that "there can be no such thing as 'rational grounds' for our criticizing practices and beliefs that are so different from our own" (Anscombe, 1981: 125).[11] In other words, they subscribe to what Alice Crary has called "inviolability interpretations"; that is, a reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy that rules out any grounds for extra-systemic criticism (Crary, 2000: 120). In consequence, they are inclined to think that inter-systemic interferences may only take the form of pressure, not rational argumentation.[12] The problem is that if an influence is irrational, it can only be a kind of violence.[13]

Some authors believe that violence is intrinsic to any argumentation or reasoning. We can illustrate this view with a fictitious story written by the late Polish science fiction writer and philosopher Stanislaw Lem.[14] In his short sto-

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compare our moral images are themselves creations as much as the moral images" (Putnam, 1987: 79). What he does instead, following Ruth Ann Putnam (Putnam, 1985), is to point to human needs. However, these are also human-made, as he quickly notices referring to Dewey and Goodman, and concludes that we should instead get rid of the idea of a "foundation" for ethics. This is true, but, as we shall later see in the main text, one can say a little more about the possibility of assessing moral images and thereby that of rational inter-systemic discussion.

[11] However, we should add that, contrary to other interpreters, Anscombe's opinion regarding Wittgenstein's view on the possibility of inter-systemic argumentation is nuanced (Diamond, 2013).

[12] This approach may be illustrated *e.g.* by the following quotation from Kristóf Nyíri: "Language [...] cannot be subject to criticism from the standpoint of 'pure' thinking. Languages come into being and become obsolete, and different linguistic traditions become interconnected, exerting a soft power on each other" (Nyíri, 1992: 7). It will be demonstrated later in the main text that this view rests on a certain misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's intention. However, this is not exactly the misunderstanding pointed to by Crary in her papers (Crary, 2000; Crary, 2010).

[13] There are fragments of *On certainty* that seem to support this interpretation. In §§611–612, Wittgenstein writes: "Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other fool and heretic. I said I would 'combat' the other man, — but wouldn't I give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes p e r s u a s i o n. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)" The core of my argument is that p e r s u a s i o n can also be a rational process, although I think it is likely that Wittgenstein himself would not have accepted this.

[14] Perhaps this example is a bit unusual, but I believe that using literary examples in anthropological and moral investigations makes sense, because literature has a great impact on the process of the formation of our moral images of the world. One can even say that novels and other forms of narrative have been the primary means of shaping modern moral intuitions since at least the early nineteenth century. However, I do not want to say that story-tellers are the only ones who contribute new ethical content to culture, while thinkers can only diagnose and reflect on it (though this view was quite popular among the Wittgensteinians: Phillips, 1986: 48, 95, 119). I believe that we should instead talk about mutual influences within a dense net of cultural inter-connections involving not only humanists and artists but also scientists,

ry *Journey 21* in the anthology *The star diaries*, there is a highly advanced civilisation in which theological disputes are carried out by artificial intelligence: religious and atheistic robots and computers debate the existence of God. Their electric brains function undisturbed by any feelings, so their reasoning is purely rational, devoid of rhetorical tricks. In consequence, the debates are always won by the machines with greater logical powers at their disposal. As one of the electric monks explains to the main protagonist of the story:

> at each new level of civilization the debate about God not only may, but must be carried on with new technologies — if it is to be carried on at all. For the informational weaponry has changed ON BOTH SIDES EQUALLY, the situation in the event of battle would be symmetrical and therefore identical to the situation that [was] obtained in the medieval disputes. This new evangelism may be judged immoral only insomuch that you judge immoral the old converting of pagans or the polemics of ancient theologians with atheists. [...] As you know, someone once came up with the dictum that God stands on the side of the strongest battalions. Nowadays, in keeping with the idea of technogenic crusades, He would appear on the side that had the strongest conversional equipment (Lem, 2016: 265f.).

In this fictitious world, both electric atheists and believers are busy constructing increasingly powerful conversion machines. This technological race — which is intentionally presented as resembling the Cold War arms race — is eventually won by the believers: they have created the ultimate converter that is able to make everyone believe in God, but they decide not to use it because they consider it tantamount to an act of mental nuclear blanket bombing (Lem, 2016: 267); that is, an outbreak of violence.

The assumption behind this story is that in its pure form, the mind is a kind of logical machine, and rationality is simply an application of a set of rules that are obtained absolutely. This assumption has a long tradition within European philosophy, reaching back to at least Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. The early and middle Wittgenstein also promoted ideas that seem to support it. The *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* can be interpreted as saying that any meaningful language must be grounded in the transcendental calculus of pure logic operating independently of any particular human mind. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Wittgenstein realised that there must be many different calculi but still stuck to the idea of a calculus (a certain set of strict rules of operating with symbols), or a syntax, as the paradigm of rational thinking. He gradually rejected this view throughout the 1930s and came to hold that both the identity of syntax and its rules, as well as the practice of following a rule, are subject to more open-ended consideration. True, to talk about following a rule at all one

politicians, and other public figures. That being said, the role of story-tellers is to some extent exceptional; they point our attention to the particular perspectives and situations of our neighbours.

must have a standard according to which one can assess behaviours. However, the durability of the standard may only rest on the affirmative or negative reactions of the community of users of the same language-game.

Therefore, according to the later Wittgenstein, the mind is no longer a logical machine, and rationality regains its human (or, rather, social) form.[15] In consequence, a rational argument within a system cannot be considered to be an exercise of power. Rationality is not violence. As Wittgenstein abandons the calculus paradigm, he breaks with the Leibnizian tradition of thinking of the mind as a machine and of rationality as a form of coercion, the ultimate ramification of which has been accurately depicted in Lem's short story.

Still, we are talking about intra-systemic rationality: giving reasons based on some ground, identified in *On certainty* as a system of common-sense obviousness or hinge propositions. Thus, the question returns: how can Moore convince the king that the earth has existed since before his birth? Or, to transpose the metaphor: what can I do in a situation when I meet somebody who, say, does not believe that the moral value of animal suffering is comparable to that of human suffering?[16] Sure, I can always use rhetorical tricks and emotional pressure. I can mock my opponent's view showing my contempt and indignation. However, these are all means of symbolic violence (although I do not say that one should never use them; they could be appropriate in some public situations). My question is rather: do we have any non-violent options at hand?

TWO FORMS OF RATIONAL DISPUTE

One can imagine the form of a rational talk between the exponents of different systems comprising different hinge propositions as follows: both parties try to build parallel abstract ideas of rationality that are grounded in their own systems. If they are able to create two abstract rationalities which are similar enough to each other, they will be able to carry out a rational debate. They will reach a sort of meta-level agreement, but without taking an illusory point of view from nowhere.[17] However, one can ask: what exactly can be settled by means of such a debate? Can one party convince the other? Sure, if both

[15] Wittgenstein often criticises the image of the rule-governed activity of thinking as an ideal machine. My point here is that the image — which formed in the early Enlightenment — is not only false; it is also morally wrong. In her paper *Die Kritik des A priori in Wittgensteins* Denkbewegungen (Markewitz, 2019), Sandra Markewitz presents a similar view, focusing on Wittgenstein's criticism of the concept of a priori.

[16] In this case, by "comparable" I do not mean "equal".

[17] This solution is examined in greater detail, though in a different context, in my paper *Theistic and atheistic picture-metaphors in our culture: Wittgensteinian inspirations* (Gomułka, 2017).

disputants stick to the idea of coherence, each will be able to use the incoherencies of her adversary for their own sake: she will be able to argue from within the opposing system. Thus, Moore could try to convince the king by pointing out the incoherencies in his image of the world. However, such a strategy has its limits and even dangers. Imagine that we have a moral dispute with someone who is incoherent in her views and actions. It may be the case that when we point out that incoherence, our opponent will remove it by surrendering her views or actions we actually appreciate for the sake of those we oppose (like when a person who is initially concerned with animal suffering while liking to wear furs drops that concern rather than stop wearing furs).

However, Wittgenstein's thought offers a perspective which may enable us to develop a much less abstract notion of extra-systemic rationality. Again, let us focus on the difference between the second and the third Wittgenstein. One crucial change that occurred between the composition of the first part of the *Philosophical investigations* and *On certainty* is a certain naturalisation of the concept of "form of life". The concept — taken most likely from Spengler's *Decline of the West* — occasionally appears in the *Investigations*, as well, but there it means something conventional: a culture or language (PI §19).[18] However, even then it does not follow from our deliberate decisions. As Wittgenstein noted in the 1930s, language is not the result of reasoning: it emerges as a consequence of our interactions with our surroundings and ourselves. "The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language — I want to say — is a refinement, 'in the beginning was the deed'" (Wittgenstein, 1984: 31).[19]

The third Wittgenstein makes a slightly different use of the concept of the form of life shifting the emphasis to more durable aspects of our behaviour. For example, in *On certainty* he writes that a form of life is "something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal" (OC §359). Similarly, in *Philosophy of psychology — A fragment*, he employs the concept while comparing human and canine forms of behaviour (PPF §1); he also writes: "What has to be accepted, the given, is — one might say — forms of life" (PPF §345).

The naturalisation of the concept, as Glock rightly notes (Glock, 1996: 126), is not so much biological as anthropological. Real human beings cannot be abstracted from their culture; moreover, it is impossible to circumscribe

[18] In the *Brown book* — a manuscript he dictated in 1934–1935; that is, several months before he started working on the first version of the *Philosophical investigations* — Wittgenstein notes that imagining a language means imagining a culture (Wittgenstein, 1969: 134).

[19] Some authors have underlined the role of the concept of primitive reactions in this context (Wolgast, 1994). It should be pointed out that a significant part of the concept's scarce occurrences refers to our basic moral responses, like comforting somebody who is in pain (Wittgenstein, 1993: 381).

purely biological components of human behaviour: everything we do is tainted with cultural meanings and values. Nonetheless, insofar as the earlier meaning of the notion was identified with cultural conventions, and therefore might be understood as a certain system,[20] the later understanding evokes something definitely extra-systemic, if by "systems" we mean the epistemic or moral images woven out of hinge propositions.

Hence, what the third Wittgenstein clearly intends is an image of the two-fold human perception of reality: the lower layer is rooted in our biological behaviour and provides grounds for meaning, while the upper layer is responsible for what we hold true and is far more prone to change. Look closely at *On certainty*'s river-bed metaphor mentioned earlier. Wittgenstein says that "the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited" (OC §99). We can interpret sand as hinge propositions and hard rock as our form of life.[21]

In this light, it is possible to imagine argumentation that aims at showing that a certain epistemic or moral system is incompatible with regards to some features of a common form of life or a form of life that one is capable of understanding, and that some other system is more compatible with them. For instance, Moore could bring the king to his subjects' graveyard and show him rites related to their late ancestors' lives. Moore could argue: "See, these rites prove that the world existed long before their birth and so yours". This is a rational argument in favour of his own system, although it is not restricted to the inferential relations between propositions: it relies on the king's ability to understand the rites; that is, to imagine his performing them as meaningful, not as empty gestures. We can assume that the king is capable of grasping their meaning just as he can understand the idea of the time sequence: all in all, he is a human and a member of that society, too. However, being capable of something does not involve any necessity: he can equally well fail to grasp that meaning. Similarly, I can try to convince somebody that animal suffering is morally comparable to human suffering by showing her a real example of an animal in pain and hoping that her primitive reaction of compassion will

[20] It should be noted that the *Philosophical investigations* likewise do not actually provide grounds for identifying forms of life with epistemic (or moral) systems. Look at §241: "'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?' — What is true or false is what human beings say; and it is in their language that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life". Here, Wittgenstein clearly states that a form of life — even understood as a convention — is something much deeper than the judgements that are true to us.

[21] These considerations are in agreement with Glock's view that hinge propositions are not semantically constitutive and their negations are not nonsensical, and one should not confuse hinges with the rules of grammar. The epistemic or moral systems that hinge propositions are part of are not language-games or forms of life (Glock, 2016: 289–290).

result in a change of her hinge proposition.[22] Again, such an argument may prove unsuccessful: the opponent can become reinforced in her own worldview despite the evidence that appeals to her own intuition, by adding some *ad hoc* explanation. Moreover, she can always recognise her own primitive emotional and behavioural reaction as morally misleading and give priority to a general rule that is part of her system.[23] However, such a change is nevertheless possible because of a constant interplay between the lower and upper layers of our perception of the world.

All this presupposes that we can make extra-systemic content intelligible to ourselves. This is possible because our faculty of reason is broader than any system: it can transcend the limits determined by hinge propositions. Because we have the ability to imagine a system that is different from our own, we can make sense of experiences that contradict our hinges. However, it is much easier to think within a system; reaching beyond it requires some mental effort.

THE QUESTION OF CONSERVATISM

Some conservative political thinkers consider Wittgenstein to be their ally. Besides his evident personal adherence to authoritative systems and institutions, his sympathy towards Oswald Spengler, and his contempt for the Enlightenment idea of progress (Nyíri, 1982), they point to certain features of his later thought that allegedly speak in favour of a conservative view of culture and society. Although conservatism is a diverse movement that is difficult to define, its many variants tend to choose the traditional rather than the modern, the local rather than the universal, and what people actually do rather than

[22] This can meet the following objection: what I really do in the situation depicted here is persuasion rather than a form of rational argumentation. My hypothetical opponent could succumb to that persuasion or resist it. My response is as follows: persuasion does not exclude rational thinking, but rather involves it. In my story, both parties actually exercise the faculty of reason: while I try to put the example of animal suffering in a light that is rationally acceptable to the other party, my opponent considers whether one's reaction to that example is morally binding or not. This is not only a question of feelings or imagination; this is also a matter of rational thinking. I am opposed to the common tendency to juxtapose the faculty of reason to the faculty of imagination or feelings: in reality, they complement each other.

[23] I do not want to say that we should always follow our intuitive reactions. For instance, a judge's attitude towards a defendant could be influenced by a feeling resulting from the latter's physical attractiveness. We would prefer to call such a feeling a distortion and reject the explicit rule that a handsome person deserves a lighter sentence than an unattractive one, although some would argue for such a principle referring to our primitive reactions to beauty. On the other hand, some Nazi officers disqualified their primitive reactions of compassion to their victims as the distortions of true moral judgements. This shows that our concept of moral goodness can never be fully extra-systemic.

intellectual constructions. Conservative self-descriptions state that the movement "accords priority to the Concrete over the Abstract, Life over Reason, and Practice over Norms", and conclude that "conservatives give Being priority over Thought" (Bloor, 1983: 161).

It seems that one can easily demonstrate that Wittgenstein's later philosophy fits that description: he distrusted theorising in philosophy, put stress on the tangible, favoured organic wholes (forms of life and language-games) rather than specific rules, criticised reductionist explanations of religious beliefs, *etc.* (Bloor, 1983: 162). Therefore, the question arises: can a progressive make use of the Wittgensteinian legacy while dealing with problems that have social implications? In other words: does Wittgenstein's philosophy favour social conservatism?

I will not attempt to address such general questions here.[24] What I want to point out instead is that *On certainty*'s conception of hinge propositions — as utilised in this paper to elucidate the problem of extra-systemic argumentation — undermines what conservative readings of Wittgenstein take for granted. Conservatives believe that according to him traditions understood as systems of our common-sense certainties are immune to external rational criticism. True, the possibility of such criticism is grounded not in some higher-order Enlightenment-like rationality but in something basic, persistent, and partly biological: our forms of life. It seems that this is also what conservatism endorses, as it admits the possibility of the criticism of current forms of social institutions (Bloor, 1983: 161). However, conservatives see the ground for such a criticism in tradition itself which, in turn, cannot be criticised (Nyíri, 1982: 59). On the other hand, if we look closer at how the concept of the form of life is used in *On certainty*, we in fact see that it gives us the possibility to criticise tradition. The naturalisation of the concept let the third Wittgenstein cast light on the part of our behaviour and sensitivity that enables us to look at our own moral or epistemic system of common-sense beliefs from the outside and ask "forbidden" questions. For instance, as we experience compassion for a stranger (or an animal) in distress, our initial support for the idea that our moral obligation is limited to a certain group — a family, tribe, nation, species, *etc.* — may weaken. Compassion can be used as the grounds for a moral rational argument formulated within another moral system but understandable to us. Such an argument can take the form of a parable, like the story of the Good Samaritan told by Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospel of Luke.

What must be stressed here, however, is that a rational external criticism of our tradition cannot be understood as being carried out on some neutral

[24] Conservative interpretations of later Wittgenstein have faced criticism (Lugg, 1985; Crary 2000; Crary, 2005). More contemporary readings depict Wittgenstein as an eccentric leftist (Sen, 2003: 1244) and focus on the similarities between the Wittgensteinian and Marxist accounts (Read, 2002; Rasiński, 2018).

ground, for there is no view from nowhere. Without having an alternative system on hand, one can only be perplexed by the tension between one's hinge propositions and behavioural-emotional reactions to certain facts. However, the tension itself can result in adapting one's existing system or eventually accepting a completely new one.

CONCLUSIONS

Wittgenstein's concept of hinge propositions enables us to discuss rational extra-systemic argumentations. The author of *On certainty* clearly distinguishes between criteria that constitute meaning, hinge propositions that allow us to carry out epistemic or moral standard reasoning, and usual propositions that can be put to question throughout the course of such standard reasoning. In Wittgenstein's river metaphor, they are represented by hard rock, sand, and water, respectively. The non-standard argumentation is possible because we can in general understand negations of our hinge propositions. In other words, we can understand other systems of moral and epistemic belief. The "inviolability interpretations" rest on the false assumption that each system — a worldview, a moral image of the world — is a self-sustaining realm of meaning. This is not true on the subject-matter level, nor is it an accurate interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought. Due to our reactions, which he calls primitive and which are to a large extent innate, we can experience not only inner tensions but also doubts about our basic beliefs. This can bring us to consider alternative systems as more accurate than our own.

As presented in this paper, rationality does not depend on any calculus; that is, a system of rigid rules. We can talk about the rules of a language-game that constitute meaning and serve as the ultimate limitation to our thoughts, but the organic whole of the game logically precedes the rules we can abstract from it. Analogously, we can also talk about the rules of systems that regulate our standard epistemic and moral approaches to reality. We often use the word "rational" with regard to such systems, but this use limits its meaning. In a broader sense, rationality embraces non-standard ways of reasoning and argumentation that utilise extra-systemic intuitions.

The fact that extra-systemic rational argumentation can generally work without coercion is of paramount importance here. The inner tension it references may be explained away in a number of ways, *e.g.* as a temptation. On the other hand, the same tension can be recognised, sometimes thanks to a convincing story or tale that plays the role of an argument, as an impulse that comes from our moral intuition. After all, composing a story or telling a tale is also an exercise of reason.

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