

the difficulties that attend accepting our humanity, that attend leaving everything as it is).

Accepting our humanity requires that it be freed from the illusions that haunt it, from categories that are taken to be complete, from concepts and conceptions of ourselves that serve only to confine. The aim for Wittgenstein, as for Baldwin, is to secure the possibility of liberation, not by promulgating an illusion, but by rotating “the axis of reference of our examination . . . about the fixed point of our real need” (PI § 108).³⁵

3

Wittgenstein, Fetishism, and Nonsense in Practice

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In the last hundred years, philosophy in many of its most innovative forms has declared itself, in some sense, “post-” or “anti-metaphysical.” This claim, in its many different interpretations, has seemed to pose a problem for critical reflection on how we conduct our lives. The sense is that, whether through logical positivism’s attack on the factual character of value or the deconstructive rejection of “grand narratives,” we have lost the basis upon which we might pose any radical criticism of the forms of our social existence, moral or political. Wittgenstein has typically been seen as contributing to this same erosion. Throughout his development, Wittgenstein challenged attempts to ground our practices in accounts of the metaphysical characteristics of the world or in descriptions of the activities of the mind. Consequently, those practices possess a kind of autonomy that may seem to render them immune to the kinds of assault that we, surely rightly, have praised social critics for making. In this chapter, I sketch an alternative picture of how Wittgenstein’s work might bear on our contemporary political predicament. Rather than making profound social and political critique impossible, his work suggests an illuminating and plausible view of the way in which characteristically modern critiques of our practices actually work. After describing an “anti-metaphysical” argument that figures in Wittgenstein’s work early and late, an argument that challenges the possibility of evaluating practices as intelligible or nonsensical, I will set out an alternative, but still Wittgensteinian, view of how our practices may nonetheless descend into nonsense, into noise. I will outline the general character of this way of thinking before indicating how it may accommodate some of the kind of social and political critique that we feel most illuminates our modern lives. My interpretation of this kind of critique will give a sense of its power, how difficult it is to perform, and how much is at stake—it is a struggle, one might say, not merely to talk but to have something to say.

Metaphysics, Nonsense, and Critique

Metaphysical theories about the fundamental structure of reality, of the mind, and of meaning would seem to make it possible to assess which thoughts are coherent. A popular reading of Wittgenstein's early work, for example, ascribes to him a set of metaphysical theses according to which the world is constituted by the totality of facts and facts are constituted by arrangements of objects. On this basis, it has been argued, Wittgenstein maintained the further view that an isomorphism between the objects that make up facts and the elements that make up thoughts allows thoughts to describe facts.¹ On the basis of such preestablished metaphysical notions about facts, thoughts, and their structure, one might then derive a set of principles governing which thoughts are coherent and which are not.

This interpretation of Wittgenstein's work is mistaken. A fundamental strand within his thought, early and late, maintains precisely an opposed view, claiming that one cannot assess the intelligibility of a thought by reference to the reality it represents. In identifying this "reality that it represents" one must presuppose the intelligibility, the meaningfulness, of the thought. One must presuppose its meaning if one is to differentiate the parts of reality that are relevant to that thought and its coherence from the indefinitely large regions of reality that are simply irrelevant. What we are imagining ourselves assessing by reference to its conformity to reality is actually what determines how a proposition is compared with reality: "The method of portrayal must be completely determinate before we can compare reality with the proposition at all in order to see whether it is true or false. The method of comparison must be given me before I can make the comparison" (N 23). *How* we compare propositions with reality cannot itself be evaluated by comparing it with reality, and learning how to compare propositions with reality cannot itself be a process of reading something off reality:

How is congruence or non-congruence or the like given to us?

How can I be *told how* the proposition represents? Or can this not be *said* to me at all? And if that is so can I "*know*" it? If it was supposed to be said to me, then this would have to be done by means of a proposition; but the proposition could only shew it. (N 25)

The moral of the discussion so far is liable to chime with a well-known and widespread sentiment about the bearing of Wittgenstein's work on the work of the political theorist and the social scientist, namely, that Wittgenstein strips these observers of our practice of the means by which that practice might be evaluated. Peter Winch is perhaps the best-known example of a thinker who sought to explore the implications of Wittgensteinian insights for such social and political critique. Although his critique of positivistic social science is made up of a number of strands of thought, not all of which

strike me as plausible or authentically Wittgensteinian, one strand I believe to be both and to be a variation on the above argument.

Winch challenges a particular picture of what it is to understand and assess social practices. He challenges projects that, wittingly or not, attempt such understanding and assessment by imposing "standards of rationality" (or an analogue of such) upon those practices "from without," so to speak. For example, Winch argues that Evans-Pritchard, in interpreting magical practices as inept attempts to control the natural world, retains a background commitment to a species of scientific rationality as constitutive of the rational as such.² Similarly, according to Winch, Pareto's explanations of phenomena such as Christian baptism and pagan sacrificial bloodletting involve the illicit imposition of conceptions of "integrity" and "purification" upon those phenomena, insinuating that these conceptions reveal something one could call the common "true character" of those practices. For Winch, such approaches fail to recognize a constitutive feature of the challenge that is the understanding of human action, a feature that distinguishes it from the forms of understanding that the natural sciences involve. Crucially, social practices are themselves constituted by particular pervading standards. Where the natural scientist imposes concepts from without, the social scientist must, at least as a first step, come to terms with the concepts used within the practices she wishes to understand. Such "social objects" are at least partly *constituted* by concepts rather than succumbing to the conceptual only when the social scientists come to town. The observer of human action who remains oblivious to the participants' own categories does not yet have the object of his study in sight.

A corollary of this argument is that any credible attempt to understand social practices must make some kind of sense of the standards they embody. This may seem to rule out as unintelligible the charge that a practice is or has become irrational or nonsensical. One can easily see how to present a Winchian case for thinking so. The events, processes, and "objects" in question are constituted by concepts. To know what they are is to know which concepts they embody. To make the connection with Wittgenstein's argument explicit, applauding or condemning a practice by reference to its "agreement" (or suchlike) with reality raises a problem: what constitutes the relevant portion of reality is something that one can only determine by coming to understand the practice. In other words, "reality is not what gives language sense." Rather "what is real and what is unreal shows itself *in* the sense that language has."³ When we imagine ourselves judging that a practice is irrational or nonsensical, from where can we derive *relevant* standards of coherence? We would need to know what this practice is about, which is something one cannot do while nominally bracketing out its very coherence.

According to my own reading of Wittgenstein, his philosophy can be understood as an effort to show why we lose nothing when we recognize the

incoherence of the confused test of meaningfulness imagined above. Wittgenstein faces a difficult task, not least because the notion of such a test supports and is supported by a powerful vision of our intellectual predicament that itself expresses a craving to found the basic terms in which we live our lives, to justify our own lives and interests. This confusion extends its influence throughout large regions of philosophy, and political philosophy is no exception. A charge that I am tempted to level against Winch is that he left his Wittgensteinian work unfinished. He demonstrated that a certain vision of the critique of our practices made no sense, but then did relatively little to show why this only swept away “houses of cards” (PI § 118). In particular, what can one make of central critical terms of social and political reflection such as “ideology” and “false consciousness” if “reality is not what gives language sense” anyway? Mustn’t such a claim dislodge the point that provides us with leverage to expose these often real failures of thought and practice?

Such reasoning has led to the depiction of both Winch and Wittgenstein as perversely conservative, Winch as refusing to recognize the manifest debunking power of reflection on, among other things, our political practices. Winch insisted that his view had no such implication, and I think that he is right. My motivation here is instead something like Scott Gordon’s worry that Winch gives us little concrete sense of what such debunking reflections would look like were they to take to heart Wittgenstein’s insights.¹ In response, I will offer here a rather speculative sketch of a form of recognizably *political* thought that would meet Winch’s strictures but retain a debunking bite. It has its origins in reflection on some of the later Wittgenstein’s thoughts on rule-following, is consistent with the argument presented above against a delimitation of the “natural laws of sense,” but also rehabilitates what one could call a conception of “nonsense” as a term of criticism for the political thinker. It will have the attractive feature of presenting a credible basis for the reading of some significant social and political theory of the past and will give a new twist to Winch’s proposal that philosophy and the social “sciences” are more closely related than might be supposed. The form of thought I will describe takes as its target not inconsistency or contradiction but superficiality: utterances that have become empty and acts that have become token. Such “performances” do not break the rules that govern them, but this is because they have lost the content that would have made such a clash possible and significant.

Reality Shaking Off the Conceptual

In the next two sections, I will set out a possibility that Wittgenstein could recognize as real and that one might, with justification, label “reality shak-

ing off the conceptual.” One of Wittgenstein’s reminders for us is that the use of concepts, as systems of description, depends upon there being a minimal degree of regularity in the results achieved when using those concepts, those systems. We use concepts in those situations where our applications are generally in agreement with each other and this reliability is multidimensional. Judgments made of a particular object may hold between different people, different times, different lighting conditions, etc. (the relevant circumstances depending on which concepts one is using). If so, judgments made by others at different times in different circumstances allow us to anticipate, for example, judgments that we will ourselves make when confronted with the objects of which these other judgments have been made.

This need for a background of agreement has a number of notable aspects. A certain degree and pattern of agreement in judgment is necessary if two people are to be talking about the same topic. Without such consistency, we see the other as, at best, talking about something else. Correspondingly, particular objects are thought of in different ways according to whether people who ordinarily agree in a certain type of judgment can consistently agree when making those judgments about those objects. Our fundamental understanding of different types of object depends upon which objects sustain such regularity with which concepts. For example, those we treat as “having a color” are those with which we find a certain regularity in our color judgments. If the fact that a flower is blue had no implications for how it appeared in other situations, what force would there be in insisting that blue is its color? In what sense does something that constantly changes color *have* a color? To what extent can we say that there is such a thing as *its* color? If the color of a chameleon really did change to match its *every* environment, what would one say “its color” was?²⁵ It “has” a color to the same degree as a piece of colorless glass “changes its color” as it passes in front of differently colored objects. Such a use of the idea of “an object’s color,” its application here to glass, seems pointless.

It seems then that it is only sensible to talk of something as having a color if this carries a suitably broad set of implications. Hence, the fact that we use a particular concept in relation to a particular object already tells us something, namely, that the kind of background identified is *already* in place. In talking about “the color of *x*’s,” we are looking upon these *x*’s as things that display a certain regularity in “behavior,” a regularity that makes the concept (“owned” color) and the judgments that it informs useful here (one could even say “usable” here—a point to which I will return). With the breakup of the generally reliable background of implications surrounding a statement such as “this object is blue,” it becomes increasingly difficult for an utterance of this sentence to say anything, to be consequential. Consequently, we are faced with the need to reassess radically what we think we

are judging, whether it makes sense to talk of these objects as “having a color,” for example.

Now these reflections may seem to suggest a certain hermetic sealing around our life with colored objects, such that, for example, we label divergence over judgments as due to “color variation” or to the fact these objects don’t “have a color.” Whatever happens seems to be catered for, in that whatever happens can be assigned a description within the language of color. Nothing can happen that will rupture the covering that that language lays over reality. We may have the feeling now that our use of color terms is somehow casuistic, our commitment to their applicability unshakable by anything the world throws at us, like an item of faith or a refusal to take the world seriously. But this indicates that we are dealing with descriptions, not judgments of fact, just as the earlier Wittgensteinian argument suggests.

Also it isn’t quite true to say that *anything* can happen and leave our talk of color in good repute. Let us imagine an increasing level of disagreement in color judgments. Color fluctuation becomes epidemic and even our own mastery of the colors is being called into doubt by our neighbors, whom we now see as largely color-blind. But now what are our color terms used for? In one sense, they continue to “work.” But in another they don’t. Orders like “Five red apples, please” are now pointless. Or one might say that such orders would be as successful as would be, in our present condition, that we should meet “at the restaurant with the nicest food” or “in the shop that sells the best records.” But as a result, we cannot use these terms to do what we currently do with color terms. *Cannot or do not?* Let us bear this in mind, when we now ask: Has the use of color terms become nonsensical? Answering either yes or no seems wrong. Nature did not reject our color terms, so to speak. The “logic of color terms” was not violated. But we no longer behave in the same ways, are no longer bothered about the same things. The language of color has fallen silent. One might be tempted to offer an explanation here that asserts that this language has fallen silent because, in terms of our earlier purposes, the use of these terms is now pointless—they are now *unusable*. But unusable for what? The activities in which those terms played a role have also waned. We no longer argue, for example, over the color to paint a room or over the use of pigment in a picture. Concepts articulate our desires as much as our beliefs, and desires articulated in terms of color have sunk into insignificance. Their satisfaction “makes no difference,” one might say. Hence, rather than being “unusable,” it seems more appropriate to say that color terms simply aren’t used. A whole world—populated by people with particular desires and objects of a certain sort in certain kinds of conditions—waned. To adapt a well-known line from *On Certainty*, light *fades* gradually over the whole (OC § 141).

Mathematical Measures

Let us switch to a more complicated example, the application of arithmetic. Note, first of all, that it makes sense to talk about discovering a particular number of stones because this has a bearing on how many one can expect there to be in ten seconds time or when seen from another angle, or when counted by other people we see as competent counters. We find that when we set two stones down next to another two stones and then count the whole group we get the figure four. And so do the vast majority of other people who attempt this same exercise. This same pattern of stability is not found, however, in the case of, for example, the shadows that a group of objects throws. People may differ in how they break up the shadow and the shadows may be constantly changing. Since our “results” are so frail, so lacking in the robust implications that our enumeration of stones may boast, there is very little point in counting shadows. Similarly, imagine counting the clouds in an overcast sky or the ripples on the surface of a lake. We could, no doubt, come up with *some* figures but the results derived would be idiosyncratic and unreliable, to say the least. If our assessment of the number of stones before us varied in the same way, we could not use our findings in anything like the way we presently do. To the suggestion that one counts the stones one might reply not “Why?” but “Why bother?”

Such cases do not, of course, draw a limit to the application of arithmetic. In the face of apparent resistance to arithmetic, isn’t it always possible to apply it? Isn’t it simply up to us to find out how it should be done? I don’t want to deny this, but let us note how it *is* done. When we pour one amount of water into a tank that already contains another amount of water, we do not get two amounts of water. But the level of the water increases. Let us suppose that each “amount” is the contents of a particular cup filled to the brim. Let us further suppose that there are gradations on the side of the tank, equally spaced all the way from the top to the bottom and that the cross-section of the tank is uniform from top to bottom. Under these circumstances, we can predict the number of gradations covered by remembering how many times we poured in full cups of water. If one cupful raises the level one gradation, pouring in another cupful will raise the level another gradation. On this basis, we can answer some interesting questions. For example, we can tell whether the cup was always full to the brim by seeing how many gradations the total amount covers.⁶

With the introduction of the “technology” of tanks with uniform cross-sections and equally spaced gradations, and the practice of using a particular container so as always to add what we call a “standard unit” volume of water, we are now treating water in a way that allows us to apply arithmetical rules to it meaningfully. We have found a way of treating this domain in a way analogous to that in which we treat other “countables,” and phenom-

ena that appeared to resist arithmetically informed description have ultimately succumbed.⁷

One might perhaps argue that, proceeding in this way, every domain will succumb to arithmetic, that such “construction” or “interpretation” may always be possible, such a “technology” always available. I do not wish to deny this. What I want to flag is the fact that such stage-setting measures are *necessary* and a sense in which such “arithmetized” phenomena may, all the same, “resist arithmetically informed description.” As anticipated earlier, these phenomena may sustain enumerations and additions, but enumerations and additions that are empty, somehow *trivial*.

Consider *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. What makes this a list of three ideas? The fact that we have three separate words encourages the thought that, yes, we can count this domain too, the domain of ideas. But can we count and add ideas, or just words? Do we, after all, really have *compelling* criteria for when ideas are distinguishable? How many ideas are there in *Leviathan*, for example? Are there more or fewer in *Das Kapital*? The message of the previous section was that one could certainly *construct* or *force* opinions about such matters, sometimes very easily. For example, if asked the number of ideas in *Leviathan*, it would certainly seem wrong to say zero. But the arithmetical “interpretation” of such a domain seems simply too ad hoc for there to be any substance in the figures generated. If I say there are thirty ideas in *Leviathan* and you say thirty-one, neither of us being convicted of error, would that mean that one of us was mistaken? What, for example, would the relevant criteria of “error” be here?

A minimum requirement for arithmetic really getting a foothold would seem to be that we already have an established background of judgments about what makes these things separate things, about when we would say “the same one” has disappeared and reappeared or when one has been destroyed and “another” created, and so on. In our present case, such criteria seem not to exist. The problems that we face when trying to analyze a text are precisely those that will prevent us from establishing a “unit of measure,” through the use of which one might start counting and adding.

Compare the utilitarian dream of adding together volumes of happiness. One very plausible interpretation of the failings of that approach proposes that, in order to apply its proposed calculus, we need to have established what “equivalent amounts” of happiness are and how much weighting such amounts should be given, and that, to have established that, we need to have solved many of just the kind of evaluative puzzles that utilitarianism promised to solve. To take a crude example, is it true that watching football generates twice as much happiness as watching opera, but that the latter is to be weighted as twice as worthwhile as the former? Obviously such questions and the issues that they provoke have generated a large literature. I wish merely to raise the possibility that the difficulty encountered here, un-

derstood within that literature as that of working out a plausible and applicable interpretation of utilitarianism, may be another case of “reality resisting a mode of description”—here, quantitative measures. Two units of happiness plus two units of happiness may give four units of happiness. But what is a unit of happiness? Two distinct ideas plus two other distinct ideas may give four distinct ideas. But what is a distinct idea?

Consider a familiar diagnosis of the perceived failures of behaviorist approaches in the human sciences. In one sense, behaviorism succeeded in describing human conduct using variables that could be handled mathematically. The sense in which it failed was that the variables it used captured aspects of conduct in which no one was interested. What we could measure quantitatively repeatedly turned out to be nothing more than weakly associated with what we wanted to measure. Quantification was achieved but only with measures of negligible “validity.” Again there is a large and divided literature to be acknowledged, but my point is that the human sciences may offer us further examples of areas with a subject matter that can be described mathematically but only at the price of triviality. One generates figures, but figures that are useless, meaningless. And note here that these methods were used for a *long* time!

What do such cases tell us? I would suggest that they should prompt us to think about what we take “the applicability of a descriptive framework” to be. If arithmetic being applicable just meant “numbers can be stuck on,” then, yes, arithmetic is universally applicable. But are those numbers *useful*? Can we do anything sensible with them? If that is what “applicability” requires, then just how widely applicable *is* arithmetic?

One could make the same point by suggesting that our attention needs to be focused less on whether “arithmetically compliant” results can be obtained and more on the price that we pay in order to obtain them. How much construction, technology, and triviality must we import? In an effort to understand the power of arithmetic, the simple question of “whether arithmetic can be applied” invites us to embrace a confused appreciation of “applicability” that places artificial, etiolated cases of application alongside our actual applications of arithmetic. By ignoring the “mere” circumstances, including the “mere” “practical” implications of these cases of application, we misunderstand the sense in which arithmetic “finds” application.

My perspective gives a mundane fact—that we “ordinarily” apply arithmetic only where arithmetic can be applied *significantly*—a philosophical importance beyond that of an observation about the “pragmatics” of applied arithmetic. Indeed, a proper appreciation of this fact might reveal a certain confusion in the effort to distinguish “pragmatic considerations” from something one might call the “bare applicability” of arithmetic, the “usefulness” of arithmetic from its “usableness.”

Two understandings of “sensible” merge here. One could say that one *cannot* count ideas, or that one *will not* count ideas.⁸ The former suggests something akin to a contradiction, the latter a mere lack of practical utility. But are we yet clear about what it means to ask whether something has a number or not, as opposed to whether or not its number is a valuable thing to know? Clouds, ideas, and so forth can indeed “be counted” but only through the construction of a highly artificial framework. The framework imposed produces a set of figures but ones in which no one really believes. Similarly, with domains such as ideas, one might say that we can *apply* arithmetic here but the figures generated have no *application*. One might say of the figures that they are not “useful” or even “usable.” But, ultimately, we simply say that they aren’t *used*. We don’t really understand what it would be to use those figures. Arithmetic “reveals” to us certain patterns in the empirical, within which we see that adding two stones to two stones gives four stones, two liters of water added to two liters of water gives four liters of water and, in some sense perhaps, that two ideas “added” to two other ideas “gives” four ideas, and so on. But are the patterns uncovered *independently* significant? Or are these merely the patterns of a projected arithmetic, echoes of the mode of description that one is, for some reason, insisting on using? Consider this proposal of Nietzsche’s:

The invention of the laws of numbers was made on the basis of the error, dominant even from the earliest times, that there are identical things (but in fact nothing is identical with anything else); at least that there are things (but there is no “thing”). . . . To a world which is *not* our idea the laws of numbers are wholly inapplicable.⁹

My earlier discussion suggests that Nietzsche is half right here. A certain kind of background is necessary for the application of mathematics and, in a sense, this must be *invented* (through, say, the technology of measuring tanks, etc.). But some applications of mathematics are powerful while others are merely applications of mathematics. To echo a sentiment of Nietzsche’s broader philosophy, an application of mathematics might uncover a new range of truths for us, but the question remains whether these truths (and hence this application) have value.¹⁰

Political Critique and Pythagorean Fetishism

To see what this might have to tell us about “political critique,” let us note an important source of the illusion that mathematical measures reveal the character of reality as such. That source is our tendency in some cases to treat enumerable differences as, in themselves, what matters. The tendency

manifests itself in various forms of what one could call “Pythagorean fetishism.” Examples might include certain brands of bureaucratic/technocratic fetishization of the mathematically measurable, our earlier example of forms of methodological fetishism in the human sciences, and, I will suggest, some of the phenomena that Marx identifies in his reflections on money and commodity fetishism. In all of these cases, a certain descriptive (here mathematical) model is introduced in order to try to track factors that are not obviously capturable in those terms—“health,” “knowledge,” “meaning,” “value,” and so on. Such approaches always have *some kind* of basis, in that there will be *some kind* of association between the factors that we do actually measure and the factor we wish to measure. For this approach to be anything other than patent nonsense, the quantifiable measure must respond in some way to the important events in the “life” of the non-quantified factor that it is meant to track. There must be some impression that the figures are rooted in non-arithmetically important events. But how successfully they track the non-arithmetical factors to be measured must be monitored and cannot itself be mathematically established, unless by other measures whose validity we are (somehow!) confident of. Failure to monitor that validity can lead to emptiness, illusion, distortion, or misunderstanding. We may come to fixate on how many orders a person issues as opposed to how authoritarian she happens to be, how many patients we get through the hospital system as opposed to how much healthier they are as a result, and how much money we have rather than what we can do with it.

And the epicycles of human thought do not stop there. If enough people come to think in the “fetishized” ways specified, then they may take on a certain kind of truth. One’s status may indeed depend more on how much money one has rather than on what that money allows one to do. (Or rather, how much money one has becomes, in itself, an important determinant of what one can do, irrespective of how that money might be spent.)

Such examples indicate how certain modes of talk (and thought) can lose their import, become meaningless chatter, and that to recognize that this is so requires us to reflect on the broader context within which that talk arises. Modes of expression can become fetishized in the sense that we retain a commitment to their use despite the fact that their use no longer has the import that it is supposed to have. Exposing such situations is one of the tasks, I would suggest, that some of the most important sociological and political thinkers have undertaken. To take the most obvious example, consider Marx’s reflections on money, the “universal equivalent.” To rationalize this institution one might be tempted to claim that there is something called “value” that really is present in coats, boots, and linen and that is tracked by price. The implausibility of such a metaphysics would be comic but for the fact that, if Marx is to be believed, much of our life is spent in its grip. Many crucial decisions in our personal, public, and professional lives

are made on the basis of questions of price. We may work longer hours for more pay on the basis of a "calculation" of how much those hours are worth to us. Or the hospital in which we work may be closed because it costs too much money to run, a decision made on the basis of "value for money." There clearly are situations in which the tool of money helps us. But equally well, the tool can take on a life of its own, use-value being marginalized and a means by which it can be represented taking center stage.

We do, as a matter of fact, have to make decisions that require us to compare the "worth" of "commodities," the *forms* of worth of which are not at all obviously commensurable. But do we *articulate* this question of competing worths when we reformulate the issue in terms of price? Or do we simply *replace* one question with another? It may be undeniable that a choice has to be made and a desire to make the decision sensibly or rationally may drive us to seek a "method" for making that decision. But is the "method" we choose in deciding to compare prices a sensible or rational one to use. After all, tossing a coin is a decision procedure! That a method such as pricing allows us to make a decision does not demonstrate its worth unless all we care about is having *some* decision. In this way, pricing may not resolve but instead simply replace important evaluative questions, moral and political questions about how we wish our society to be. Then, like Wilde's "cynic," we will "know the price of everything and the value of nothing."

This is, of course, only one interpretation of the practice of pricing, and by no means the most obvious. Money contributes to the expression of a range of other normative commitments, some of which endow it with the significance that our Marx-inspired story claims is illusory. But also the invocation of pricing when faced with substantive moral and political issues can be presented precisely as a positive step as a means of removing such decisions from the purview of governmental or religious elites. Notionally at least, a commodity's price expresses "the people's evaluation" of its worth, the condensation into a single figure of fifty million or more judgments of how much of something else an individual would sacrifice to obtain this item. Such a story, along perhaps (as Weber and Merton have argued) with notions of entrepreneurship, ambition, frugality and honest hard work, can free the pursuit of money from an idolatrous miserliness and pricing from an arbitrariness or a fear of hard decisions.

Floating at this point where these many different tides meet is the mode of representation that is money and our judgments of an item's price. How is one to determine which of these many forces is driving our choice of price as a basis for action? The problem appears as difficult as, perhaps even the same as, that of determining who we are and what we want and value. From the perspective I have offered, the fetishism of commodities can be seen as an instance of the fetishizing of modes of expression. Such modes have life, and we can say and do something with them only under

certain conditions. But those modes of expression may nonetheless be brought into play or may remain in play when those conditions do not hold. Then we are liable to misunderstand the life that our words have and what it is that we are doing and saying when we use them. As an intentional agent, this is to misunderstand myself.

Consider another example, one close to home, which indicates how we might place the work of Weber on rationalization and bureaucratization within the framework I have sketched. Consider the effort to guarantee the delivery of good education to university students through the construction and formal review of formal structures of "quality assurance." Such an effort seeks to generate a self-conscious pursuit of educational excellence. But does it? A constellation of forces loom not dissimilar to those associated above with money. The appropriateness (necessity?) of such an approach rests upon concerns with accountability and equity. Its target is incompetence, laziness, and prejudice. It hopes to develop an environment within which such vices become visible and hence can be eradicated. It hopes to make this vision concrete through the formulation and application of measures of educational success and the formulation and application of rules of "due process" in the "delivery" of education.

But such an approach presents other aspects. In particular, we might wonder whether the procedures in question offer us real traction on the phenomenon of education or merely the impression that we have such traction. To echo the familiar refrain about tests of IQ, such measures of quality of education may, in fact, measure the rigor with which an institution approaches its paperwork and the capacity to make its students feel content. One suspects that at some point in the development of the measures in question, it was decided that, verily, education *shall* be so accounted and hence shall be so *accountable*. To adapt words attributed to Galileo: "Formalize what is formalizable, and make formalizable what is not so."¹¹

Nevertheless, there clearly are whole areas of research devoted to the development and refinement of such measures and many of those who think seriously about such measures will no doubt insist on their status as "indicators" rather than "criteria" of success. But taking such measures *as* indicative rather than as criterial is a matter not of how such measures are labeled but of how they are used, and such measures are used not only by those who think seriously about them. If they provide the basis for decisions on the financial support of an institution (or its withdrawal), then knowledge of that fact, combined with an understanding of the measures, may put pressure on staff not to focus first and foremost on the rigor and fairness with which the institution promotes education but on the scale and organization of its paperwork, and not on the students' fulfilling their potential but on their being content. Incompetent and lazy staff may be forced to change their ways but perhaps only in that they now, like the able and once well-mo-

tivated staff, may come to worry about paperwork and discontented students.

Perhaps such measures can be refined so as not to cause such destructive conflicts. Or perhaps the success that they wish to capture formally cannot be so formalized. Perhaps there remains the need for a species of judgment that cannot be replaced by "going by the book" (however extensively refined that book might be). Abilities may exist that are passed on by exposure to their practice and unstructured discussion of that practice (discussions without agendas or "aims and objectives"). There may be species of professionalism that one can grasp and assess as well or poorly practiced only by becoming oneself a good professional of that sort. This vision will be intolerable for adherents to a certain ideal of "accountability": whatever is being assessed must be "transparent" to the "man on the street" (perhaps a juror or a taxpayer, for example!). And, no doubt, some practitioners of these now "dark arts" have hidden their incompetence, and rested complacently, behind claims to "know better." But perhaps such turpitude is best spotted by diligent and able practitioners of these professions. The validity of formalized measures will rest upon how they are applied, and, for that, diligent and able practitioners of the "dark arts" would be necessary anyway.¹² Such voices may need to be heard in order to detect when particular formalized measures have simply become irrelevant or silly, by virtue of dissociation from educational objectives that have not been, and perhaps may never be, articulated in the formal terms that would render unnecessary such a species of "dark" professionalism.

The most worrying twist that the commitment to "accountability as formal measurability" could take (is taking?) would be to allow this demand to alter our conception of educational quality. Terrified by the perceived indeterminacy of what students are being taught and teachers are being paid to teach, we may instead demand that something *else* be taught. Courses would then be designed with different aims—aims that are (or can be made to look more) measurable. Then indeed the formalizing approach may "succeed," in the sense that it may be possible to enhance the teaching of these measurable skills. Are these skills the ones we wished to have taught? Quite possibly. But are they *all* we wished to have taught? I have no proof to offer here but merely wish to flag how the use of certain descriptive tools may become an end in itself, and in the process render invisible or even come to destroy the valuable "commodities" that we sought to produce with their help. That this is indeed happening is something that the final section of this chapter will argue may be beyond demonstration—because the issue in question is one regarding what constitutes an adequate description of what is happening.

In the preceding paragraph, I spoke of the "perceived indeterminacy" of some traditional measures—"perceived" because the charge of indetermi-

nacy may itself merely express a commitment to certain measures,¹³ and may reflect a refusal to accept as a real assessment the view of competent professionals, on the grounds that whether someone is such a professional is itself an issue "bedeviled" by the very same "indeterminacy." Indeed I suspect that the mere fact that quantitative and other formal methods of description yield descriptions with a certain kind of determinacy sometimes gives these descriptions an added and possibly unwarranted weight. (The kind of determinacy in question is no doubt that of the natural sciences.) "Compared with other descriptions," we may think, "at least we know here what we are talking about." But this, of course, forgets, first, that once the decision has been made to apply such methods of description, all one possibly *can* get are "determinate" results and, second, that maybe one gets those results because these methods just don't track the distinctions that matter! Instead they may draw distinctions that don't matter and simply fail to respond to distinctions that do. There is art, guile, and craft to the application of descriptions, and consequently it should be no surprise that many such descriptions are applied superficially, ineptly or confusedly. The results will, nonetheless, remain "determinate," even if meaningless.¹⁴

From my perspective, the above cases may illustrate a species of fetishism, a fetishizing of a certain mode of expression, of a certain mode of thought. Unfortunately, we are capable of transplanting an idiom and its associated values and habits of thought out of contexts in which they "work." And there is no obvious reason why the new subject matter should indeed not be better understood by importing this new way of life. After all, "reality is not what gives language sense." My point rather is that the business of detecting nonsense is more difficult than metaphysicians and, perhaps, positivistically minded political theorists have wanted to believe. My examples have hopefully shown how something that one might call a "political imagination" might be necessary, an effort to imagine what difference these utterances make in the lives of the people who utter them.

The model of criticism set out here strikes me as capturing the slow, almost invisible leaching away of sense from our practices that some of the most radical species of distinctively modern social and political critique target. The form remains, but the lives that would animate these practices slip away. These practices may then become ceremonial, but not *merely* so. Instead they may express commitments on our part, such as a refusal to countenance a morality in politics beyond a "balancing of the books," or a professionalism or art in education beyond that which could be outlined or defended in a court of law or to a taxpayer who happens to know nothing about the subject being taught. But perhaps more characteristic of these questionable practices of judgment is ambiguity. For example, in the work of Weber on "rationalism," Foucault on psychiatry, and Freud and Elias on "civilization,"¹⁵ we see an Enlightenment ordering and something like a Ro-

mantic expressivism, neither of which we wish to renounce. To take one last very brief example, in the cynicism enveloping contemporary talk of “rights,” one has the sense of nonsense encroaching upon us, not by the violation of moral or political rules but through the withering away of the life within which the invocation of rights has content. The range of phenomena over which people may claim to have rights has extended from the likes of their life, property, and freedom of speech to include their body parts, their image, and their freedom to drive to work. Is debate over such issues enhanced or clarified by talk of “rights”? Or is it rendered hysterical? May such talk serve only to maintain the impression that the claims in question or the participants in the debate are being taken seriously? May such talk constitute another way of avoiding serious moral and political debate rather than a way of articulating it?¹⁶ No doubt different judgments are appropriate in different cases, and we must battle to prevent a mere language¹⁷—and the *impression* of a mode of thought that accompanies it—from disguising those differences. Our responses to political problems may retain a form we value, but it takes more than that to retain its content. Vigilance over whether that significance, that life, has indeed slipped away (leaving the words, like ghosts, behind) will be “a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (PI § 109).

What Kind of Thinking Is This?

A final, natural question to ask now is: What is the epistemology of this kind of critique? Is the emergence of mere talk something that one might *note*? In one sense, yes. Such breakthroughs are expressed through observations about our situation, about the lives in which we find ourselves mired. But in another sense, no. There is no set of criteria that one might apply to determine whether we had entered such a situation. Paralleling Winch’s critique of positivism, it is confused to think of such a predicament as one to be scientifically observed, because the predicament is one in which our powers of observation themselves have become exhausted. We do not observe contradictions in our beliefs, such as might provide opportunities for the falsification of sociological claims about our situation. For example, in our chaotic color world, the language of color neither runs out of things to say nor finds itself contradicting itself. If, for some reason, one insists on continuing to describe that world in color terms, it can still be described as one of objects changing color in front of color-blind people. Similarly, the language of capitalism can, in one sense, describe everything that can happen in our world, and a bureaucracy has a description for every element of this heterogeneous life of ours that passes before it. Our web of judgments becomes threadbare, purely decorative, but does not tear.

Similarly, the signs of “anti-mathematical revolt” to which I have pointed are, without doubt, ambiguous. It is not at all obvious that one cannot measure happiness or describe human conduct quantitatively and informatively. Inasmuch as there are some individuals who “believe in” such assessment, it also isn’t obvious that formal assessments of education do not determine which universities will teach well. But I suspect that it is characteristic of such situations to present themselves in this ambiguous manner. We are dealing with cases where a favored descriptive tool—mathematics, say—is struggling to find application. This, of course, is another way of saying that we are unsure how to describe such cases. There seem to be several different ways of reacting to them:

- Is it that we do have real or genuine measures of what we wish to measure but ones that for some reason aren’t very useful?
- Have we, in trying to measure one thing, ended up measuring something else?
- Perhaps our measures simply have not yet achieved the necessary level of refinement, and more work is needed.
- Or might we even say that what we are trying to measure is unreal and that we should instead be focusing our attention directly on what we can measure, which we had previously thought of as merely associated with, or as symptomatic of, the real underlying issue?

Compare the uncertainty that we might have over whether to say the chameleon has a color:

- One could say that it does but that it keeps changing.
- Or that it doesn’t.
- Or that it does, but one can’t do much with that fact.
- Or that it does, but we need a special technology to measure it, reaching for our slow motion camera. But does our camera show unambiguously that the chameleon does have a color? Or are we measuring something else here? After all, our procedure and our results are more akin to those involved in, say, mapping the reflected light on the surface of a pool. Just what kind of “property,” then, are we tracking here?¹⁸

When we imagine the collapse of the color world, we experience similar uncertainties. In our journey there from our present condition, we pass through situations in which we would not know what to say. Are these fluctuations in color due to the objects, to the conditions, or to us? Where one lays the blame becomes increasingly arbitrary with the disintegration of the conditions under which blame can be laid. We are envisaging circumstances in which our descriptions become not false but empty, in which our

descriptive vocabulary loses import. Our predicament is that we are using that vocabulary to describe its decline. The objectives that we may feel we are no longer achieving are articulated by the very concepts whose use we may fear has become pointless, ceremonial, as it were, expressive of one's commitment to a mode of thinking rather than an instance of that thinking. The observation of facts will not help one determine whether one's observations are fruitful or these facts salient. Yet our descent into barren action and mere chatter is what the "social situations" to be identified represent. In none of these situations can the measures involved be seen to somehow recoil from the reality to which they are applied, to expose themselves as incoherent or contradictory. The problem rather is that they only measure what they measure.

Before closing, I want to indicate a continuity with a certain line of thought to be found in philosophy, a line of thought whose success or failure exhibits the kind of indeterminacy described (or perhaps a form of determinacy qualitatively different from that which characterizes well-executed natural science). Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and, I have suggested, Wittgenstein himself have, in their different ways, expressed doubts about a certain fetishization of truth, at the expense of whether the truths sought are those that matter. Philosophy itself has been targeted by these thinkers as a major culprit, attempting to convert problems with our lives into problems with our beliefs, and responsibilities for our actions into care about our worldview.¹⁹ From the perspective offered here, this is a reflection of the futility of trying to master the danger of nonsense with a body of the kind of doctrine that metaphysics provides. Given the account of the emergence of nonsense sketched here—nonsense as noise or emptiness—it is also unsurprising that such a critique has also brought in its trail a certain kind of cultural critique, a certain kind of political, sociological or psychological reflection (least obviously in the case of Wittgenstein, but there are signs of it nonetheless). Such criticisms of metaphysics yield critiques of "the present age" as populated by the merely "aesthetic" or by "last men" or as having progress as its "form," "rather than making progress being one of its features" (CV 7). Note also the kind of difficulty that we face in deciding whether these critiques are correct. Just as the utilitarianism of the English gentlemen that Nietzsche despised is itself perfectly *coherent* in its own terms, the steps from Kierkegaard's aesthetic to the ethical to the religious are *leaps*.

This sense of our predicament dovetails with a certain reading of the remarks in the *Tractatus* on ethics and the meaning of life. The world we face sustains a multitude of different, noncompeting descriptions yielding a multitude of different, noncompeting facts. In this sense, when one comes to wonder which description to act on and live by, the facts leave one in the lurch. As one might put the point, "ethics is transcendental." Alternatively,

one might say, that there is no problem of the meaning of life if that is understood as the problem of *discovering* which descriptions one ought to take seriously.²⁰ One is left, one might say, with a matter of *conscience*.²¹ This no doubt sounds a rather backward-looking or "irrationalist" proposal.²² But ultimately, such conscientiousness may have a rigor of its own, precisely not that of living by the book or following methodological guidelines. Indeed a craving for a methodology may itself express precisely the delusion described in this chapter, a belief in a form of words that cannot succumb to emptiness, a belief in a system of description or explanation that somehow cannot be used superficially or stupidly.²³

To conclude, I have argued that we can make sense of a species of reflection on our situation which reveals a species of nonsense in our lives and provides a Wittgensteinian model for radical political critique. The model hopefully captures the difficulty and seriousness of such thought, the rare kind of insight required, and just how much is at stake. The vice we seek to expose is not that of speaking falsely or of acting contrary to principle. Rather it is the descent of our talk into meaningless chatter and our action into token gesture.²⁴

I suggest below, Wittgenstein's aim in "reminding" us of such facts is largely critical. That is, such reminders are not contributions to any kind of hypothesis about our relation to the world, but part of a diagnosis of what goes wrong in philosophy when such hypotheses are proposed and disputed.

14. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 105.
15. Gellner, *Language and Solitude*, 77.
16. *Ibid.*, 160.
17. J. C. Nyíri, "Wittgenstein's Later Work in Relation to Conservatism," in *Wittgenstein and His Time*, ed. B. McGuiness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 58–59.
18. Gellner, *Language and Solitude*, 168.
19. I return to this remark, and its image of acceptance, in the concluding section of the chapter. I suggest there that Wittgenstein's talk of acceptance need not be understood as endorsing conservatism.
20. Ernest Gellner, "Relativism and Universals," in *Rationality and Relativism*, ed. Martin Hollis and Stephen Lukes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 188–89.
21. Part of the defense would be, of course, to reject the charges, at least in the terms they are posed. The particular way in which Gellner raises the problem of "cross-cultural validation," and so voices his demand for the justification of "our" concepts, takes for granted the kind of mutually exclusive closure of cultural-conceptual systems that I take Wittgenstein ultimately to be criticizing.
22. In coming to understand Wittgenstein as concerned to investigate, and ultimately reject, this imagery of confinement, I am deeply indebted to the work of Edward Minar, in particular his paper "Wittgenstein and the 'Contingency' of Community," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991).
23. Nyíri, "Wittgenstein's Later Work," 59, emphasis added.
24. In saying this, I do not wish to suggest that Wittgenstein's observation does not report something extremely peculiar: just what it would be like to inhabit that situation is no doubt quite difficult to think all the way through. Would the people in this situation also be rapidly coming into being and passing away? Would they have the concept of an object at all?
25. Indeed, Rush Rhees calls *Investigations* II, § xii "the most important short statement for understanding" Wittgenstein's later philosophy. See Rhees, "The Philosophy of Wittgenstein," in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 54.
26. Here I use "realistic" following Cora Diamond's characterization of Wittgenstein's later philosophy as manifesting "the realistic spirit," that is, an attitude that rejects metaphysical pictures and demands. See Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, especially the essay "Realism and the Realistic Spirit."
27. James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994). First published in *Partisan Review*, no. 16 (June 1949).
28. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was first published in 1852. One measure of its importance is the note on the back of my edition: "In the nineteenth century Uncle Tom's Cabin sold more copies than any book in the world except the Bible."
29. Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," 499.
30. *Ibid.*, 497.
31. *Ibid.*, 496.
32. *Ibid.*, 499.

33. *Ibid.*, 501.

34. Lawrie Balfour's book *The Evidence of Things Not Said: James Baldwin and the Promise of American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), likewise emphasizes the notion of acceptance in Baldwin's work, and the (ultimately unfair) accusations of conservatism it invites; see especially 115–17. With respect to Wittgenstein, my remarks in these concluding paragraphs owe a considerable debt to the writings of Stanley Cavell, especially *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989). Cavell sees Wittgenstein's imagery of acceptance as opening him to the charge of conservatism, but to level that charge is to misread that imagery: "In being asked to accept this [human form of life], or suffer it, as given for ourselves, we are not asked to accept, let us say, private property, but separateness; not a particular fact of power but the fact that I am a man, therefore of this (range or scale of) capacity for work, for understanding, for wish, for will, for teaching, for suffering. The precise range or scale is not knowable a priori, any more than the precise range or scale of a word is to be known a priori. Of course you can fix the range; so you can confine a man or a woman, and not all the way or senses of confinement are knowable a priori" (44).
35. I would like to thank Steven Affeldt, Alice Crary, Randall Havas, Cressida Heyes, Edward Minar, and David Stern for comments, criticisms, suggestions, and encouragement at various stages of this project.

3. WITTGENSTEIN, FETISHISM, AND NONSENSE IN PRACTICE

1. Cf. e.g., "What makes sense in language and thought is dependent on and derived from the nature of objects" (Norman Malcolm, *Nothing Is Hidden* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1986], 14); "Language enjoys certain options on the surface, but deeper down it is founded on the intrinsic nature of objects, which is not our creation but is set over against us in mysterious independence" (David Pears, *The False Prison*, vol. 1 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1987], 8); "The propositions of language must reflect the nature of things, and . . . the logico-metaphysical nature of things is objective and language-independent" (P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1996], 80).
2. Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," in *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972). See also Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958).
3. Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," 12.
4. Scott Gordon, *The History and Philosophy of Social Science* (London: Routledge, 1991), 638.
5. I use scare-quotes in referring to "its color" and to that color "changing" precisely because, in connection with such a creature, it makes no sense to talk of "its color" or of "its color changing."
6. Whether we are still dealing merely with arithmetic is obviously questionable but not an issue I will worry over here.
7. This has taken some work, an elaborate stage-setting (as Wittgenstein might put it). Through the "technology" of measuring cups, of snapshots, etc., we have reconceptualized what it is that we are applying arithmetic to—in the water case, introducing a refined sense in which we are dealing with "volumes" of water—and thereby put ourselves in a position to derive regular arithmetic results and intelligi-

ble deviance. On this “practical” or “creative” aspect of the application of mathematics, see note 10 below.

8. Recall the question of whether, in the chaotic color world, we *cannot* use our color terms or we *do not*.

9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 22.

10. My discussion also has Heideggerian echoes in its emphasis on the practical or creative aspect of the application of mathematics. (Cf., e.g., Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of the Critique of Pure Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), sec. 2, and “Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics,” in *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper Collins, 1977). The above discussion suggests a more nuanced and, I would argue, more faithful reading of Heidegger on mathematics and its technological application than that which the generally negative tenor of Heidegger’s writings on these topics encourages. My discussion suggests that mathematics and technology can indeed embody productive and illuminating “disclosures” of reality and that they cease to do so only when we forget that they are particular disclosures, presupposing a particular “projection” of reality. It is only when they “take on a life of their own,” when they are, as I put it below, fetishized, and are treated as *the* way in which reality discloses itself, that they constitute a threat to us.

11. Galileo’s dictum “Measure what is measurable, and make measurable what is not so” is quoted in H. Weyl, “Mathematics and the Laws of Nature,” in *The Armchair Science Reader*, ed. I. Gordon and S. Sorkin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959).

12. What if, one might ask, one cannot trust any member of the profession in question? What if it is systematically or institutionally “corrupt”? One possibility is that one *cannot* evaluate such a profession, on the Winchian grounds that *no one* can tell one when its practice is successful.

13. Compare Wittgenstein’s remarks on exactitude in PI §§ 69–70.

14. Above I referred to “formal measures” without defining “formal.” I suspect that, if not handled carefully, praise or criticism of “formality” (like praise of “determinacy”) could also turn out to be empty.

15. The work of Elias, with some of the work of Quentin Skinner, also suggests a certain fetishism in our understanding of our own history. In order to tell certain stories about ourselves as the outcome of a process of progression, we may need to conceal from ourselves the fact that the use of certain key concepts may span long periods of history in only a rather superficial way. The life of these terms may have been far more eventful than our story of progress requires, articulating lives and interests that, over the course of that history, have changed more profoundly than our linear story allows.

16. Again, part of the force behind the invocation of rights may be precisely to rule out debate on the positive grounds that we are dealing with something that is inviolate, my possession, and not fit for comment or evaluation by someone else.

17. As the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* would put it, a set of signs, not a set of symbols (3.326).

18. Analogous responses can be seen in reaction to behaviorism and utilitarianism. Philosophical debate happens here just because it isn’t obvious which of these responses is appropriate. But I am inclined to take this unclarity as itself philosophically important in precisely the way explained above.

19. See, for example, the discussion of Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard in James Conant, “Must We Show What We Cannot Say?” in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, ed. R. Flem-

ing and M. Payne (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1989); and James Conant, “Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense,” in *Pursuits of Reason*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993).

20. See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 6.421 and 6.521.

21. I would suggest that use of this term in the early Heidegger is not unrelated.

22. It may also not carry the individualist or introspectionist connotations that the label might conceivably suggest. Instead it is a reflection on how we live, on how what we say relates to what we do.

23. My suspicion is that we may learn more by reflecting on examples of the work of the artists, scientists, and philosophers who seem to have revealed to us these forms of folly. Examples range from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, 1984, and *Hard Times to Dilbert* (the cartoon series spoofing modern managerialism and bureaucracy in business) and *Yes Minister* (the satirical British TV series parodying governmental bureaucracy and spin-doctoring). This suggestion, along with others offered in this concluding section may sound similar to views propounded by Richard Rorty. It would require further work to determine whether that similarity runs deep.

24. For comments on earlier versions of some of the material presented here, I would like to thank John Divers, Cressida Heyes, Joanna Hilken, and David Owen, along with audiences at the conference on Peter Winch and the Idea of a Social Science held at the University of Bristol in September 2000 and the conference on Scepticism and Interpretation held at the University of Amsterdam in June 2000.

4. GENEALOGY AS PERSPICUOUS REPRESENTATION

1. Note that this is to say nothing against pictures *per se*; on the contrary, it points to the centrality of pictures to the activity of philosophy and, indeed, the activity of thought.

2. For an analysis of this issue, see Robert Fogelin, “Wittgenstein’s Critique of Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Hans Sluga and David Stern (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34–58.

3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*,” in *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, ed. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 118–55.

4. This does not mean that those things that “stand unshakably fast” now cannot shift (OC §§ 95–99); there is no fixed Background in that sense captured by Collingwood’s notion of “absolute presuppositions,” rather the background is relative to the practices in which we engage. See David Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

5. Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 116.

6. Gordon Baker, “Philosophical Investigations Section 122: Neglected Aspects,” in *Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations*, ed. Robert L. Arrington and Hans-Johann Glock (London: Routledge, 1991), 48–49.

7. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 116–17.

8. *Ibid.*; James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); see also David Owen, “Political Philosophy in a Post-Imperial Voice,” *Economy and Society* 28, no. 4 (1999).