

Wittgenstein, Brecht and (the Philosophy of) Politics

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1. INTRODUCTION

In his book *Wittgenstein and the Social Sciences. Action, Ideology, and Justice*, Robert Vinten has shown that Wittgenstein was not a conservative, nor a liberal, neither a Marxist or anything of that kind. As far as I can say Wittgenstein has never been accused of being a fascist thinker, and Vinten does not defend him against that claim either. (I will come back to that later.) Of course, there are a number of reasons to attribute to Wittgenstein conservative, liberal and even Marxist views, convictions etc. But, as Vinten highlights, and many would agree, making remarks which are typical for conservatives (liberals, Marxists, ...), does not make Wittgenstein a conservative (liberal, ...). For instance, and as Robert Vinten argues (see p. 81f. of his book), the fact that Wittgenstein quotes a remark from Grillparzer that conservatives might easily agree with—a remark according to which it is easy to “move about in broad distant regions” but “hard... to grasp what is individual and near” (and the fact that Nietzsche expresses similar thoughts at the beginning of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*)—does not prove that Wittgenstein was actually a conservative. That is, of course true. However, I think that Vinten’s argument against the claim that Wittgenstein was a conservative is not radical enough. Indeed, there may be a need for a more radical theory than the ones in circulation, even a theory as radical as the one Vinten envisages. Sure, if there are theories which incorporate prejudices, for instance by not acknowledging certain groups of people the way other groups are acknowledged, then something like a “critical theory” may very well be needed, “critical” with regard to the state of the art or, perhaps better, the *Herrschende Meinung*. (There may be all kinds of such “non-critical theories”, some of them as simple as pharmaceutical theories primarily or even exclusively looking at white adult males. Of course, not everything is as “innocent” as this bias may be.) There can also be no doubt that in order to arrive at such a “critical theory” (or, as may be a better name, a “sober theory”) a lot can be learned from Wittgenstein. As perhaps the case of psychology shows most clearly—but one may as well point at Heinrich Hertz’s remarks on physics—there may also be all kinds of conceptual confusions, and perhaps others too, embodied in scientific theories.

Yet, for Wittgenstein, the problem might just be the theory, however radical. In that sense, to be more radical might mean to have no theory at all, but something else. In the best of all worlds which we might arrive at, this “something else” might actually help us in a way even the best, most radical theory might not allow us to achieve—if, in such a world

help will still be needed (on this, see below). Anyway, it is exactly for the reason that Wittgenstein was neither a conservative, nor a liberal or an adherent to any other comparable political creed that Wittgenstein was actually able to approvingly quote a conservative passage from Grillparzer, or any other conservative for that matter. For if there would not be anything right in all of these different views (conservative, liberal, Marxist, and so on), none of them would actually be a view. There has to be something plausible and attractive in each and any of these views in order for them to be views in the sense in which this word is used here. (The way I use that word here, it is not to be understood in such a way that only full-blown philosophies fall under the respective concept, though these actually do fall under it.) Furthermore, it was just because Wittgenstein was not adhering to any of these views that he was able to quote approvingly in an unconditional way. For, say, a liberal might of course also feel that this or that remark which typically counts as conservative also brings forward or expresses their view, but the liberal's approval must be conditional in the sense that he claims to know better what that remark is actually saying (than the conservative or even the author of the remark). To put the same thought the other way round: for a philosopher, if we might call him that, like Wittgenstein, all these expressions of creeds are material to be philosophically investigated, and none of these expressions has a higher status than any other as expressing the truth directly. They are all material.

There is something else to be mentioned here, and this is something everyone might agree with: the very fact that Wittgenstein made remarks like the one just hinted at indicates that he was indeed quite interested in political affairs. In addition to himself making, or quoting, such remarks there is enough further evidence to prove that point, be it the fact that he broke off relations with a pupil for quite some time due to the fact that this person made a quite stupid remark on politics, as well as the fact that Wittgenstein once wrote a letter to the editor of an English newspaper complaining about someone making propaganda in Britain, and beyond, which closely resembled that of Goebbels. However, Wittgenstein was not only interested in politics, but also at least to some extent knowledgeable. For, after all, he became friends again with his pupil—this way acknowledging that the stupid remark made by his friend was a remark countless people make—and he did not actually send the letter to the editor—this way acknowledging that such a letter would not change a bit in the political arena, not even the way the newspaper would “work” in the future.

Now, as we know from many other subjects, Wittgenstein was almost physically unable to not look at anything he cared about, or at something which attracted his attention, from a philosophical point of view—or, to be perhaps more correct, from what might be called “that heir of a philosophical point of view given birth to by Wittgenstein”. So, adding this to the points made above results in a good reason to look for something like a Wittgensteinian political philosophy or, if you prefer, political “philosophy”. (If one takes as a paradigmatic case of a political philosophy what has been the most discussed “theory” of the last half century, coming from a professor in Harvard, then, I suppose, it would be an insult to Wittgenstein to attribute to him even only the seed of such a political philosophy. It seems to me that if Wittgenstein had known this “theory”, his comments on it might easily have been as harsh as those Marx made on Mill. The fact that for many contemporaries this rather speaks against Wittgenstein and Marx would make things even worse for both of them, though also something to be considered—see the remark about Wittgenstein again welcoming his once abandoned pupil.)

In addition to that, and more of an argument in favour of the idea of there being a “hidden political philosophy” in Wittgenstein waiting to be excavated is the fact that the intellectual activity we call “political philosophy” usually entails, leads to, or depends on views on subjects Wittgenstein did actually write about. And yet, as much as Wittgenstein did, for some time, influence Western philosophizing on action, intention, reasoning, emotion, language and other topics, as little did this influence show up in political philosophizing of that time. (Wittgenstein's remarks on rules and rule-following may be an example for some kind of influence.) This, then, seems to be another reason to look for or try to develop a Wittgensteinian political philosophy or something similar to that.

There can, of course, be no doubt that at least some of Wittgenstein's remarks give at least argumentative hints at what might be problematic in the current *Herrschende Meinung(en)* in political philosophy.¹ For instance, the very idea that philosophy is in the business of providing *Grundlegungen* (Groundworks) is attacked by Wittgenstein with different arguments, most of which are of considerable force. This, if it carries over to the domain of the political, obviously goes against the grain of at least some of the most influential political philosophies of our days. The fact, then, that there is no agreement about how a Wittgensteinian political philosophy could look like an indication of something deeper: there can be no such thing (if one really wants to be true to Wittgenstein). If philosophy is indeed not concerned with providing Groundworks, if this very idea is itself a source of philosophical confusion, then there can be no Wittgensteinian political philosophy, since whatever Wittgenstein does say, it cannot function as a premise; it is not a foundation upon which one can build a political philosophy. We may have a perfectly clear picture of what an action, an intention or a rule is, and yet have no idea of what politics should look like beyond those ideas we already have before we start engaging in philosophizing about politics. At best, clarity regarding actions, intentions and rules might help us to see what is wrong with our initial ideas. But picking all the wrong ideas out of the basket does not mean that the one and only true idea will be left in that basket. If the slogan is "Don't think, but look!", as section 66 of the *Philosophical Investigations* has it, then one just has to look. One cannot predict what one will see when looking at politics, and whatever one might see, it will not allow one to deduce the next thing to be seen. And in that sense, Wittgenstein might not even show us what is wrong with this or that idea in political philosophy. Why, after all, should what is true of actions, intentions and rules (as far as they matter with regard to those things Wittgenstein considered when writing about actions, intentions and rules) also be true regarding the things Wittgenstein did not consider? As this "radically destructive" reading of Wittgenstein goes, he is instead concerned with showing us how confusions arise in relation to statements which others claim to be true or false. Now, by having shown how these confusions arise, they are already gone or, as the point is sometimes put, the problem is dissolved, rather than solved. This, in turn, means that there never really was a problem in the first place. Indeed, if we are really supposed to stop thinking and start looking, this very slogan itself is something one should rather not make. For why should we believe that something which turns out to be useful in one area will also be useful in another area? And now it looks as if, given that one wants to be true to Wittgenstein, there is nothing one can learn from him which goes beyond what he did say; and he did not say anything about political philosophy.

And yet, it would be quite unjust to deny that in most of the interpretations and investigations according to which Wittgenstein actually was some kind of conservative, liberal etc. there is something valuable to be found. This is particularly true of those interpretations which do not restrict themselves to explicit political remarks Wittgenstein made. (Vinten's book is a case in point here.) However, what I want to do in the following pages is neither to criticise nor to defend any one of the more or less established readings and developments of Wittgenstein's remarks. Neither will I try to sketch a new version of a Wittgensteinian political philosophy. Instead, I simply want to outline some of the things I think one can learn, or perhaps better learn again, from that Viennese Cambridge Philosopher. In doing so, justice shall be done to the Master, whether by way of avoiding many references and quotations, or by way of following some methodological hints Wittgenstein gave ... as shall happen already in the next part.

1 For more see Lorna Finlayson's book *The political is political. Conformity and the Illusion of Dissent in Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Rowman & Littlefield: 2015. The fact that Finlayson's book is not as influential as one might expect it to be given its argumentative strength, almost proves the point she wants to make in that book. See also: Raymond Geuss: *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Princeton UP 2008.

2. AN OBJECT OF COMPARISON THROWING LIGHT ON WITTGENSTEIN BY WAY OF SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES

My object of comparison is Bertolt Brecht. One of his later poems is this:

Und ich dachte immer: die allereinfachsten Worte
Müssen genügen. Wenn ich sage, was ist
Muß jedem das Herz zerfleischt sein.
Daß du untergehst, wenn du dich nicht wehrst
Das wirst du doch einsehen.²

Now, not only does this poem itself consist of “die allereinfachsten Worte”, but also almost all other poems of Brecht’s do as well. (This is not a Brechtian specialty. Poets, it seems, are by nature far less tempted than philosophers to throw themselves into the arms of scientific jargon.³ Yet, Brecht is particularly simple even compared to other poets.) And as far as using only “die allereinfachsten Worte” is concerned, there can be no doubt that at least the so-called later Wittgenstein belongs very much to the same family as Brecht. (Though one may argue this as well for the “early Wittgenstein”, this is not the subject of our remarks here. And by any means, the simplicity of the *Abhandlung* is at least not as obvious as that of the *Untersuchungen*, and, therefore, then, either not really simplicity or simplicity of a very special, complicated kind.) Indeed, there seems to be even more resemblance, and to list these similarities, as well of course as the dissimilarities, is useful in understanding in which way, and to which extent, Wittgenstein was (not) a political thinker. For there can be no doubt that Brecht was a *homo politicus* through and through and, as I think, an eminent one at that. So, if Wittgenstein is by no means an obviously political thinker, but shows a clear resemblance to someone who clearly is, then looking at these resemblances, and differences, may indicate in which way and to which degree Wittgenstein was as political thinker as well, though not an eminent one.

2.1 Resignation

The beginning of Brecht’s poem—“Und ich dachte immer”—sets the poem’s tone. It is the tone of resignation. “Ich dachte immer: die allereinfachsten Worte (/) müssen genügen, but”, one almost hears Brecht continuing, “it did not turn out the way I always thought.” (Not saying this explicitly is one of the elements of being content with “die allereinfachsten Worte”. Brecht, like Wittgenstein, follows the maxim of letting the reader do what the reader can do, a maxim which it is easier to follow if the words used indeed are “die allereinfachsten”—with some exceptions perhaps, like the *Abhandlung* for instance.) Instead, Brecht continues with something that is in line with “die allereinfachsten Worte”. For given what things are like, how can your heart not be torn to shreds when you hear what things are like, in particular when you hear it said in “den allereinfachsten Worten”? Sure, one need not agree with Brecht that things are such that one’s heart is torn to shreds when recognizing how they are. One may, instead, think that the times are great, or at least about to be made great again. However, Wittgenstein would rather agree with Brecht. After all, when Wittgenstein was about to make his so-called later philosophy, in this case the *Philosophical Investigations*,

2 English version by Michael Hamburger:

And I always thought: the very simplest words
Must be enough. When I say what things are like
Everyone’s heart must be torn to shreds.
That you’ll go down if you don’t stand up for yourself
Surely you see that.

3 Seen in this light, it is no surprise that Brecht’s project of turning *Das Kommunistische Manifest* into a *Lehrgedicht*, similar to Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*, was not a success, despite the support of, for instance, Karl Korsch.

public, he did so, as he put it in the preface to this book, “with doubtful feelings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely.” It is only too easy to neglect these words, given that they were written in January 1945. But there is no doubt that Wittgenstein was far away from hailing the new post-war era. Similar to Brecht’s response to the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a sign of a coming evil brought about by science, even if only later generations might acknowledge that, also Wittgenstein thought that the world might very well not have seen the worst that ever will have happened in human history. In this regard, Brecht and Wittgenstein were optimists: it may very well get worse and worse.

Yet, there is also an interesting difference between Brecht and Wittgenstein. It is not only that Brecht always thought that “die allereinfachsten Worte müssen genügen.” He also thought, that they will suffice. Wittgenstein probably never fell victim to that illusion. In that regard, he seems to have been more thoroughly sceptical. For if things are such that “everyone’s heart must be torn to shreds” when being told how things are, why should one then expect that even “die allereinfachsten Worte” could suffice? If, as one of Brecht’s most beloved enemies had it, there is “kein richtiges Leben im falschen,” then making the “false” explicit will either not make a big difference or it will even bear itself the mark of “eines falschen Lebens”.

Now, one might object that as much as Wittgenstein seriously thought about moving to the U.S.S.R., the Bavarian Brecht chose as his home after the war not the BRD, but the DDR. And if the emergence of the so-called real socialism was not a big difference, what would have been one? Well, Wittgenstein actually did not move to Kazan, and Brecht died too early to see what he was already fearing become undeniable reality: the ruling of a new bureaucracy, very close to what Wittgenstein had mentioned as one of the things which might put an end to his sympathies with the Soviet Union. But, that is just not an ideological homecoming. It is not a reintegration into a “Denkgemeinde.” Isn’t this rather a confirmation of the claim that we live in dark times? For if even an attempt as enormous as the one we are talking about did not put an end to human beings being humiliated and enslaved, how powerful must these times be? Well, it is even worse, for how powerful must these dark times be if the downfall of that attempt appears to be a salvation, and appears as such to so many people that it actually is one? And now, what does that mean for any hope for a revolution, i.e., for a change which brings it about that there is no longer any humiliation, any enslavement anymore anywhere in the world? Wittgenstein did have that hope, and he was at least very close to giving up on it. That, it seems to me, is what Brecht might have learned from Wittgenstein. If even “die allereinfachsten Worte” do not suffice, then the times must be even darker than Brecht thought. The problem must have deeper roots than even he thought.

2.2 Apple-trees

Or so it seems. For there is a dialectical twist to the foregoing considerations. If things are such that even “die allereinfachsten Worte” do not suffice, if the times are so dark that it is, “of course, ... not likely”, that philosophical thoughts like those expressed in the *Philosophical Investigations* “bring light into one brain or another”, if indeed

Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist
Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!⁴

how come that someone ends up with talking about trees, with writing poems which tore quite a number of peoples’ hearts to shreds, with handing over to us the *Untersuchungen*?

4 An die Nachgeborenen, English translation made by Mr. Google: “Talking about trees is almost a crime / Since it includes silence about so many misdeeds!”

In order to find an answer to that question, it might help to remind oneself of a famous answer Luther gave to what seems to be an utterly useless question. The question was what Luther would do today if he knew that the world would end tomorrow. Luther's infamous answer: "I'd plant an apple tree (and I'd beat with rods those asking such stupid questions)." The point of Luther's remark is not that his, or even our, trust in God will turn out to be justified by the fact that the world will actually not end tomorrow such that we will see Luther's apple tree flourish (and those beaten with rods could show that they had learned their lesson). Instead, the point is that there is a role to be played in one's considerations for likely outcomes of one's actions, and there is also a role to be played for something independent of any such outcome whatsoever. There is something of the form "This is who/how I am, period", or "I can't help it".⁵ No doubt, who I am, or how I am in that more serious sense needed here, will essentially be connected with me being, or not being, a believer. But that is neither to say that only believers can answer the "stupid question" the way Luther did, nor does it mean, as already indicated, that being a believer means not making decisions on what to do on the basis of beliefs about the likely outcomes of one's actions. Yet, being a believer, at least in the way in which Luther was, already indicates a stance one has towards the world. It is the stance of being active, of creating something, of hoping whatever the circumstances. In other words, Luther couldn't help but plant apple trees, symbolically understood. So did Brecht and Wittgenstein. They couldn't help it either; they had to philosophize and to write poems, plays and so on, literally understood. And of course, in both cases, these activities had not only been directed at the respective authors themselves. This may be more obvious with regard to writing poems and plays. But how much of the really great philosophy has really been published independent of the will of the philosopher? And why should writing a poem, or a play, not be a way to get clear about something, to make one's tortured mind stop asking unjustified questions, as Heinrich Hertz once put it?

But then, one might want to object that without any hope of bringing about some effect(s) in others writing poems or philosophizing would just be pointless. So, we are back at the end of the preceding section. Well, not really. For, one, why should that which is true of Luther, Brecht and Wittgenstein not also be true of many other people? If it is, then there is logical space for there being an audience. However, second, this does not mean that the times are not dark. It may as well mean that poetry, philosophy etc. are expressions of those times, rather than being providers of reasons for acting in this rather than that way. And has it not been said often enough that dark times are actually good for poetry, philosophy and similar activities? Is it not just darkness which brings about the need for enlightenment? (If the owl of Minerva does indeed, as Hegel has it, start its flight a dusk, then, by definition, philosophy is at its best in at least mild darkness.)

3. BEING RADICAL

In his criticism of Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* Marx writes that being radical means getting to the root of things, and: the "Wurzel für den Menschen ist aber der Mensch selbst." For some time at least, Marx thought that this primarily means to scientifically understand the economic sphere of human life. Humans are bodily creatures, that is, they have to eat, drink, sleep, stay warm and so on. What they need will, more or less, have to be produced. To be crude, production is the putting into action of human capabilities in order to change nature's forms in such a way that human needs can be satisfied, and these human capabilities may themselves be perfected. Production, as it actually takes place, is a social process. In most of its social forms different people play different roles, have different positions, different rights and duties and so on. These social forms are themselves expressions of human capabilities, in this case capabilities directed at oneself and other human beings, not directed at nature. To be more correct: directed at other parts of na-

5 Richard Eldridge has reminded me of the fact that Wittgenstein admired Ludwig Uhland's *Graf Eberhards Weissdorn*. In this poem, Graf Eberhard is described as one who, though he is, of course, getting older and changes in that sense, throughout his (adult) life sticks to who he is, in this case, a lover of Weissdorn or a crusader.

ture, at non-human nature.⁶ For neither of the manifold ‘technological’ capabilities, nor any of the ‘social capabilities’ are, as it were, placed outside nature, in that sense of the word “nature” which is to be found in philosophical essays. Although Marx never was a Marxist, late Marx, and in particular late Engels, had more and more doubts about there being a strict causal relation from the economic sphere to other spheres of human life. Sure, if you try to find out why the laws regulating the use of firewood in the first half of the 19th century in some parts of Germany are the way they are, you are in a much better position if you start with answering the question of who owns what than with asking questions about what might categorically be demanded from rational creatures, and what not. Yet, that is neither to say that all laws follow that pattern, nor is it to say that everything that matters can be found in the law. Yet, neither Marx nor Engels really gave up on the idea of there being some kind of (economic) basis upon which a (political, cultural, ...) superstructure is erected. And that may very well be true. Yet, it is, as Marx and Engels of course knew and were very eager to tell everyone who wanted, or did not want, to know, not something to be established by philosophy. It is a scientific question. Yet, for many people, this idea also played a very different role. For many people, and this is one of the things which define “Marxism(s)”, this picture became a part of a *Weltanschauung*. Brecht was, from some point of time till the end of his life, clearly some kind of Marxist in the sense of adhering to this *Weltanschauung*. As the case of the laws concerning firewood shows, the reason for the attractiveness of this *Weltanschauung* is actually not that it fosters scientific progress. It is enough to really look at the world to be attracted by this *Weltanschauung*. But since it is a *Weltanschauung*, it also easily blinds us when looking at the world. It easily makes us think (in the sense of theorize), instead of making us to look at how things are.

That Brecht was “some kind of Marxist” is not only the appropriate formulation because there are many different kinds of Marxists, as there are also many kinds of conservatives, liberals, anarchists and so on, but also because he adhered to some kind of Marxism of his own. Though he was influenced by Marxists like Karl Korsch, what made him special was something different. This difference can be made visible by reminding ourselves of something said above. The preceding section ended with the idea that poetry, philosophy etc. are expressions of their times, rather than providers of reasons for acting (in that time) in this rather than that way. Now, there is no doubt that Brecht thought of his poems, plays, essays and so on also as of weapons in class struggle. And it would be a distortion to say that he never intended his weapons to have the form of “Do this, if you want to achieve that!”. (The very poem “Und ich dachte immer” is an example as far as what “ich dachte immer” goes: people were supposed to “sich wehren”.) But he did not see them, as Marx and Engels did with regard to Marx’s works, as a scientific weapon in class struggle, and the reason for that was not that Brecht wrote poems and plays, not scientific books and articles. The reason was that Brecht did not think that all that matters in human life is reasons. They do matter, no doubt, but sometimes more, sometimes less, and sometimes not at all. This is what using the word “expression” may help us to remind ourselves of. A poem urging people to stand up for themselves may be an expression of the situation people, including the poet, are in, rather than a manual to do this rather than that. A manual is a bad one if it does not help to achieve what it is supposed to help to achieve. A poetic, artistic expression of a state of humiliation may be as good as it can be whether or not it is going to change the situation. It may even not be a bad one if it does not encourage, enrage, stir up people to do something which might very well be labelled “sich wehren”. No, it may just be the best thing to be had if the situation is such that it cannot be changed in a rel-

6 According to Richard Eldridge (comment to this paper), Marx was “also a neo-Schillerian perfectionist about the development of human capabilities in forms of cultural practice. After the revolution, we will come to live expressively and creatively, in ,all-sidedness.‘. This is something that we need to learn how to do, albeit that learning this will require liberation from current capitalist structures of work, class, and social reproduction.”—Though I agree with these claims as far as early Marx is concerned, I am less in agreement with them as far as late Marx is concerned. Late Marx, as far as I remember, thought that capitalism will either be followed by communism or barbarism. That we actually do live in barbarian times is a point made over and over again by at least all kinds of artists. But, see Gernhardt below, this may itself almost be proof of them being wrong.

evant sense (see above). Or as Robert Gernhardt, protagonist of the *New Frankfurt School*⁷, has it, with deliberate and cutting irony (a generation ago, some German philosophers loved to call this a “performativer Selbstwiderspruch”):

Kann man nach zwei verlorenen Kriegen
 Nach blutigen Schlachten, schrecklichen Siegen
 Nach all dem Morden, all dem Vernichten
 Kann man nach diesen Zeiten noch dichten?
 Die Antwort kann nur folgende sein
 Dreimal NEIN!

Remember, Brecht did not say that you cannot write a poem after Auschwitz. In some sense, the opposite is true. His question was: what does it say about our time if speaking about trees is almost a crime because it entails silence about so many misdeeds. (Similar to Gernhardt’s poem, Brecht’s *An die Nachgeborenen* is also a “living contradiction”, though not of the funny kind.) So, the order of things is almost reversed: talking about trees is what comes first, and what makes this a crime comes later, is somehow alien to talking about trees. To the extent to which this can also be said about poems about trees (houses under trees at the lake, ...) this is, then, turned into something like a proof by Robert Gernhardt. Sure, it is a proof in the sense in which Samuel Johnson proved Bishop Berkeley to be wrong by kicking a stone, or in the sense in which G.E. Moore proved Berkeley to be wrong by holding up his hand. One might object that G.E. Moore at least only started by holding up his hand, and then continued with giving an argument why this is indeed a proof of the existence of external things. But to be sure, is that really a better proof than holding up his hand? Does Moore really show something that Gernhardt does not show, and in an even more impressive and more concise form? Note that it will not help to object that, after all, Gernhardt’s poem is simply not a philosophical argument, provided we take something like Moore’s essay or even *The Critique of Pure Reason* as paradigms for such an argument. Moore’s essay and the *Critique* are indeed such paradigms, given the usual understanding of philosophy. But that usual understanding is just what is at issue here. And one thing seems to be clear about this topic: if it is the case that, as Wittgenstein once put it, philosophizing should be left to those who cannot help themselves but do it, then this also already indicates that there are some people to whom philosophizing comes naturally, very much the way in which writing poems, plays and similar stuff came naturally to Brecht. Both are, to use an expression of Marx, “Weisen der Aneignung der Welt durch den Menschen”, ways of making the world one’s own. And it is no objection that only quite a few people have that urge to write poems or to philosophize. This is true, but many people, almost everyone indeed, have something similar within their souls, an urge which can be satisfied by reading poems, or, for that matter, can be satisfied by listening to Rap and other similar activities, or: philosophical remarks, in particular if they have the form of poems, jokes and the like, but not by reading either a newspaper or a scientific paper.

7 By the way, it seems to me that this school is not only more successful, but also more philosophical than the Alte Frankfurter Schule. One reason for that, though not the only reason is that it is way funnier—and the deliberate irony of this poem is a nice example for this. (Remember that Wittgenstein did not only love certain jokes, but also thought that a philosophical book might consist of jokes only, and still be a very good philosophical book at that. See also section 111 of the *Untersuchungen*.)

4. BEING HEALTHY, OR NORMAL

It has just been said that Brecht almost reverses the order of things: talking about trees is what comes first, and what makes talking about trees a crime comes later. What makes talking about trees a crime is, as it were, alien to talking about trees, though it is not a misuse as paying a bribe may be called “a misuse of paying for a service”. The phrase “what makes talking about trees a crime comes later” should also not be understood in a temporal sense. It comes later in the way in which illness comes later than health. (Some people are born ill.) It is alien in the sense in which war is not simply a continuation of politics by different means, but a continuation of politics by, as one may call it, pathological means, by means the use of which may actually put an end to all politics—similar to a potentially deadly illness.

A situation in which talking about trees is (almost) a crime because it involves being silent about so many misdeeds is a situation in which talking about trees is no longer simply one of those activities Wittgenstein calls “Sprachspiel”. Wittgenstein introduces that notion for several reasons. One reason consists in highlighting the manifold of different forms of language, as opposed to what one might expect when studying logicians (like Frege or Russell, both of which saw themselves in the business of doing Groundwork, though they had different views of what that means). Another reason, connected with the first one, for introducing the notion of “Sprachspiel” is to emphasize the fluidity, the historicity of that manifold, again opposed to some logicians’ ideas about the essence of language as something that never changes. (Here is the Frege of the *Grundlagen*: “Wenn in dem beständigen Flusse aller Dinge nichts Festes, Ewiges beharrte, würde die Erkennbarkeit der Welt aufhören und alles in Verwirrung stürzen.“ Compare that with the beginning of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.) And still another reason is, finally, to draw one’s attention to the fact that using language is interwoven with all kinds of other activities (like, in the case of talking about trees, pointing at trees, using pictures of trees, breaking wooden sticks, mimicking the sound some trees make in the wind, making, reading and reciting poems about trees, composing music for such poems, and so on). Note that these activities are, as it were, internal to a Sprachspiel. That is, we do not just call that part of an activity “Sprachspiel” which consists of uttering sounds, provided they take place in a situation in which also particular other things happen. (It is, in other words, not a lucky coincidence that, when talking about trees, people point at trees, instead of pointing at cars or scratching their heads, both of which may, of course, happen in a situation in which someone is talking about trees.) Instead, it is this ensemble of uttering sounds, pointing at trees and so on which makes the uttering of sounds into language use, instead of just being—the uttering of sounds. (To be sure, uttering sounds may be a “Sprachspiel” of its own. Just imagine there being a Ministry of Silly Sounds comparable to *Monty Python*’s Ministry of Silly Walks. Both would be cases in which the word “Spiel” is used in a very familiar way.) What Brecht, however, has in mind, when saying that there may be circumstances such that talking about trees is almost a crime is something which is not internal to talking about trees in the way in which pointing at a tree, showing a picture, differentiating between kinds of trees, taking care of them by watering them or making sure they do not get any more water and so on are internal to that “Sprachspiel”. Yet, these circumstances are also not simply external. If they were, they could not make talking about trees being almost a crime. For when we say that something is almost a crime, we are not referring to something which comes in addition to that activity. It is the activity itself which is almost a crime—although not as such, but under these circumstances. And yet, it is almost a crime. The problem which creates this back and forth between activity and circumstances (under which the activity takes place), is the problem of what belongs to the identity of that activity, and what not, what is part of a Sprachspiel, and what not. And what we can learn from Brecht’s remark—similar, yet more carefully expressed, compared to Adorno’s (in)famous remark, to which Gernhardt ironically responds, that after Auschwitz it is barbaric to write a poem—is that there is something like a normal, standard, usual “environment” for something as basic as talking about trees (reporting what went on, playacting, joking, greeting, praying, ...). Where talking about trees amounts to committing a crime, this “environment” has been severely damaged.

This insight throws a light on Wittgenstein's talk about Sprachspiele: what he has to say about them presupposes, as it were, these normal, standard environments. With regard to this point, in one sense, he sharply disagrees from Brecht's approach, and, in another sense, just confirms it. In order for the talking about trees to almost be a crime, that normal form of talking about trees is neither a crime nor not a crime. (It is neither a crime, nor not a crime, to breathe—under the usual circumstances. That is, there may be circumstances such that breathing becomes a crime and therefore, if these circumstances change, for breathing to stop being a crime, i.e. not being a crime in that sense. In simple terms, to respond to someone saying that John is breathing by asking whether or not John should be punished for breathing has no established meaning, except as a joke, or as a philosophical remark.) And what something is can be seen by following the picture of it being a Sprachspiel: What are the rules governing it? What is its point? How is it different from other things? Which aspect of our nature, if any, finds one of its forms in it? Which of our interests are expressed in it and guide it at the same time? And so on. What you see when you adhere to that way of looking at things does not show you anything about a situation in which it is a crime (or, for that matter, no longer one). In that sense, Wittgenstein is not a political thinker in the way Brecht is.

Yet, in another sense he is a political thinker too. To see this, remember our starting point: that there is hardly any political view which has not been ascribed to Wittgenstein, except fascism.⁸ The reason for that is not primarily that Wittgenstein made some comments in which he expressed his attitude towards fascisms in such a way that there can be no doubt that he was strongly against it. After all, there are also some remarks which can be read as support of the political system of the Soviet Union, and nevertheless he has been described as a conservative. No, the difference between fascism and the rest goes deeper. The role fascism plays in philosophical debates about politics is similar to the role slavery plays in these debates. The problem is not that there are no "justifications" of slavery, the problem is that they are treated as "justifications", i.e., justifications in quotation marks. (And if one wanted to point at, say, ancient political treatises which are still discussed even though they "justify" slavery, then one should also point at the fact that the passages "justifying" slavery in these treatises are treated in a very special way, usually quite different from the way in which other passages in those treatises are treated: among other things, often they are not even mentioned in discussions of these treatises.) No, slavery is, as it were, out of question. "As it were" because one way in which this special attitude towards slavery expresses itself in philosophical minds, like that of David Wiggins, for instance, is by (him) saying that "there is nothing else to think but" that slavery is wrong.⁹ If there is nothing else to think, then the truth in question here is not of the kind of truth connected with an ordinary empirical statement. For the point of such a statement is just that there is a whole world of other things to think. So, the logical multiplicity is the same, which matters in philosophy. Something very similar is true of fascism. It's out of the question, there is nothing else to think. And that mirrors, of course, the way in which fascism is treated in political life. There is nothing else to think but that fascism is wrong, and "nothing else to think" leaves a world of different actions to execute. As Burton Dreben once said: If asked, as a liberal political philosopher, what to say to an Adolf Hitler, the answer should be: "Nothing, you shoot him!". Note, the difference between Dreben and Wiggins: it is the difference between saying that there is nothing to say and saying that there is nothing to say but ... This is a difference in logical multiplicity, and in philosophy that is almost everything that really matters. One objection however with regard to Dreben: what he says is nothing special to liberal political philosophy, but to political philosophy as such. Yet, two comments may help to further clarify the point at issue here.

8 In the fall of 2020, a German weekly journal headlined an article with the question „Why Leni Riefenstahl was not an artist but a glowing Nazi“. Even if one would like to object that this is a category mistake, which would be a fair objection, it would be equally fair to recognize the linguistic fact that the category mistake would belong to a different category than the mistake expressed in the following headline would belong to: Why Leni Riefenstahl was not an artist but a triangle.

9 Expressed at the Meeting of the Aristotelian Society, held at the Senior Common Room, Birkbeck College, London on Monday 19th November, 1990 at 8.15 p.m.

One, the way in which fascism is out of question is not the way in which “The world came into existence 6 days ago” is out of question. For many, this is also out of the question, but the class(es) of propositions Wittgenstein treats in *On Certainty* is not exemplified by something like typical fascist statements. For the problem with “The world came into existence 6 days ago” is that we are simply lost. In particular, there is no understandable way which may lead one from hearing someone saying this to wanting to shoot him. But if you hear someone saying that the Jews are “Untermenschen” which (right: which, not who—when they speak) should be eliminated, and that political commissars belong to that which (see above) has not to be taken captive but to be shot at the spot. how can you not at least consider the guy to be shot (at the spot)? And even if the disagreement with someone saying some of the things Wittgenstein considers in *On Certainty* would be such that we would even go to war with them, that would be a war like that war mankind wages against evil aliens in some sci-fi movies. (Bad movies are often good for philosophy because, due to their simplemindedness, they display real differences in a pure form, i.e., a form which, in reality, they hardly ever take. In this sense, *Independence Day* is good for philosophy: the evil aliens are not only evil, they are also really ugly. So, there is basically no way of getting things wrong. And yet, these aliens are not fascists! They exemplify, if you like, an alien kind of evil, while fascists are homegrown. When Brecht says

Der Schoß ist fruchtbar noch, aus dem das kroch¹⁰,

then we should also be struck by the fact that this would make no sense with regard to those aliens, and the reason why this would make no sense is not that these evil aliens did not crawl out of us in the first place. If they were to crawl out of us the next time, instead of coming out of deep space, they would still be as alien as they are—which is something another of those movies shows us: *Aliens*.)

Two, what Wittgenstein reminds us of in *Über Gewissheit* is, among other things, how different humans can be. The difference can reach so deep that there is basically no way to understand one another beyond some simple things. But, as Hannah Arendt has put it, the truth is: Eichmann is our brother. He is one of us. (Goethe has made the point before by saying that there is no crime or misdeed for which he does not find the seed in his own breast. Note, Goethe has human crimes and misdeeds in minds. This is just his point: that they belong to humanity, are part of who, or how, we are.) So, by treating fascism as being out of the question, we treat some part of ourselves as being out of the question. (Isn't that an heir of that old practices of making something taboo and of exiling some people from the community?) So, the problem that, as it has been called above, making the “false” explicit will either not make a big difference or it will even bear itself the mark of “eines falschen Lebens” is not due to there being an Erkenntnisproblem. Instead, it is either a problem of a particular social form our nature has taken on or it is an expression of forgetting the fact that Erkenntnis is a part of our Leben.

When Marx, in his *Thesen über Feuerbach*, says that the philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, but that what matters is to change it, then he is often understood as saying that interpreting is not enough. Yet, if this were true, then why did he stop doing philosophy? For that interpreting is not enough, allows for it to still be necessary, in particular, as some have highlighted, in order to know how to change the world. So, this understanding is not as radical as it ought to be. The point Marx wants to make is that philosophy is not something which can possibly tell us how to change the world. Instead, and now in Wittgenstein's words, philosophy leaves everything as it is. For the torment the experiencing of which makes one into a philosopher is not the torment expressed in Brecht's poem or, for that matter, in Marx's complaining about philosophers. But it is also not something completely different. What Wittgenstein shares with the other two is the hope to be able to throw some light into people's minds, however dim that light might ever be. And very much like Brecht, and, I think Marx too, Wittgenstein finally came to realize that this hope might have been vain. For here is what Wittgenstein wrote down a few days before he died:

10 Brecht, *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*, Epilog, and four lines earlier: „Und handelt, statt zu reden noch und noch.“ (My translation: “And act, instead of talking on and on.”)

Komme ich nicht immer mehr und mehr dahin zu sagen, dass die Logik sich am Schluss nicht beschreiben lasse? Du musst die Praxis der Sprache ansehen, dann siehst du sie.¹¹

Well, what if the practice is such that what we call “looking at something” will not allow us to see the logic? And if we retreat to a remark to be found in Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass*:

Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten.¹²

we are already starting to move in circles.¹³

11 Published as remark 501 in *Über Gewißheit*. (See also my “Sein und Schein (bei Wittgenstein)”, in: *Wittgenstein Studies* 2022.)

12 Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass*: The Bergen Electronic Edition, Ms.115, p. 30.

13 I am grateful for Richard Eldridge’s comments of an earlier version of this paper. His comments were very helpful, not only with regard to making my English better.