

A Marxist reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein: Making the case for social and political change

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Marc James Deegan 

University of Oxford, UK

Abstract

This article offers a Marxist reading of Wittgenstein and juxtaposes his famous dictum that philosophy ‘leaves everything as it is’ with the idea of transformative action. I seek to align the later philosophy of Wittgenstein with Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach. I advance an unorthodox view interpreting Wittgenstein as an advocate for social and political reform. Wittgenstein’s philosophy encourages us to imagine alternatives and contemplate concrete possibilities for changing the world. The debate operates within the philosophy of education and draws inspiration from related inquiries in political thought and, more specifically, from Marxist connections with Wittgenstein.

Keywords

Wittgenstein, philosophical investigations §124, Marx, 11th thesis on Feuerbach, educational philosophy, theory, action

1. Introduction

Karl Marx properly criticises theorists for failing to take action. ‘The philosophers’, he maintains, ‘have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it’ (Marx and Engels 2010, 5). Ludwig Wittgenstein says that philosophy ‘leaves everything as it is’ (Wittgenstein 2001, §124). In this article, I offer a Marxist reading of Wittgenstein and seek to align his later philosophy with Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach. I advance an unorthodox view and present Wittgenstein as an advocate for social and political reform. Wittgenstein’s philosophy, I argue, encourages us to imagine alternatives and contemplate concrete possibilities for changing the world. This is significant since it

Corresponding author:

Marc James Deegan, The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, UK.

Email: marc.deegan@bodleian.ox.ac.uk

challenges conventional interpretations according to which section 124 of the *Philosophical Investigations* reverses the eleventh thesis. The debate is set within the philosophy of education and draws on connections between political thought and Wittgenstein and then, more specifically, on Marxist readings of him.

Wittgenstein is not a social engineer or a political philosopher. He does not speak directly to the struggles of workers or to the uncovering and dismantling of hidden contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege. He makes no formal links between theory and praxis in the context of social and political change. Also, he denounces philosophical theorising and certainly does not want philosophy to become the handmaiden of science. It is hardly surprising, then, that Wittgenstein and Marx can be seen to be worlds apart.

The approach I am taking is, on the contrary, presented in the same spirit as Marxist scholars who seek to find deep commonalities between Wittgenstein and Marx, show how their respective world views are mutually enriching and who believe that the ideas and methods of these two thinkers can be used to inform social and political criticism.¹ Also, I take Nigel Pleasants' cue that Wittgenstein's philosophical approach 'stimulates a critical attitude towards traditional philosophical issues and problems' that 'can be extended to reflecting upon, and questioning, aspects of social, political and moral life' (Pleasants 2002, 166).

2. Philosophy leaves everything as it is

In section 109 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein makes it plain that our considerations into the ordinary workings of language are not scientific ones and that there is no room to 'advance any kind of theory'. 'We must do away with all *explanation*', he insists, 'and description alone must take its place'. Moreover, our philosophical problems are solved, not by discovering new experience, but by 'arranging what we have always known'. Wittgenstein's infamous maxim soon follows:

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.

For it cannot give it any foundation either.

It leaves everything as it is.

It also leaves mathematics as it is, and no mathematical discovery can advance it. A 'leading problem of mathematical logic' is for us a problem of mathematics like any other. (Wittgenstein 2001, §124)²

Sections 125 to 133 buttress Wittgenstein's position that philosophy puts everything in plain view. It neither explains nor deduces anything. The aspects of things which are important are only hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity and, hence, our failure to notice what is always before one's eyes. Our aim is for conceptual clarity which we seek to achieve by demonstrating philosophical methods that, like different therapies,

proceed by giving examples which eliminate difficulties and remove philosophical problems. And the business of philosophy is not to make discoveries in the way that science does, but to offer a clear view of, for example, the state of mathematics that troubles us.

How do Wittgenstein's remarks sit within the field of educational philosophy? In particular, how do they cater for social and political critique? The starting point is to read section 124 in context (Smeyers 2017, 243) and appreciate that philosophy, or theory, does not leave everything as it is (Standish 2017, 263). Facts in the world may not change but our understanding of them changes along with their significance.³ Language evolves and concepts are continuously revised, perhaps 'by finding and inventing *intermediate cases*' (Wittgenstein 2001, §122), and new terms are introduced (such as language-games and family resemblances) but none of this takes place, Wittgenstein rightly contends, by inventing a new or ideal language or constructing a new symbolism – our language of everyday is 'completely in order, as long as we are clear about what it symbolizes' (Waismann 1979, 45–6).⁴

Paul Smeyers reminds us that Wittgenstein's attack is primarily against theorists who, for instance, use theories that resemble those found in the scientific paradigm and which make causal, and not conceptual connections, operate as hypotheses waiting to be tested by experiment or experience in general, and which involve deductions and the drawing of conclusions rather than providing descriptions by means of examples (Smeyers 2017, 243–4). Wittgenstein is very much concerned with traditional philosophical problems (many of which traverse social, political and moral life) and does not want them to fall within the realm of science.⁵ Viewing his aphorism in this light, Paul Standish properly connects it with the then community of 'scientific' philosophers including the mind-set of the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Standish 2017, 263).

Section 124 serves as a heuristic aimed at theorists – and educational philosophers no less – to think about the things we do in practice: the way we research, argue, draw conclusions, debate our theories and positions (in the senses Wittgenstein means) and publish our work. This has significant purchase given the interdisciplinary nature of research and teaching and, with it, the importance of recognising, as equally valid, different epistemologies, styles of reasoning and methods of inquiry. Indeed, our domains of knowledge, once subjected to Wittgenstein's investigations, will not remain the same (Hacker 1972, 125–126). Nevertheless, how does Wittgenstein's philosophy connect with the educational notion of transformative or emancipatory action? Here are some illustrations or clues.

Bringing Wittgenstein's language-games into the classroom allows us to change our perspective on how we use and define concepts and, in turn, reflect on their underlying premises (Edwards 2019, 676). As researchers, we come to look at the world differently and so we, too, change (Smeyers 2017, 247). As teachers, we can use works of art, for example, to trigger our students' imagination to see things in the right perspective – like when we are sitting in a theatre and watching an actor perform a mundane task, say, lighting a cigarette, 'observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves'; where 'it would be like watching a chapter of biography with our own eyes'; something 'uncanny and wonderful at the same time' (Wittgenstein 1980, 4) – and,

as Adrian Skilbeck continues, our challenge is to ‘create the conditions under which students feel willing and prepared to expose themselves to the risks involved in making claims through their art’ (Skilbeck 2017, 202–4).

Jeff Stickney suggests we can take the lead from scholars in philosophical feminism, ethical philosophy and political philosophy to advance a social reading of Wittgenstein’s later work in an effort to bring about political change and achieve social justice (Stickney 2020, 8). Aligning Wittgenstein with Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach would certainly speak to this. Stickney foresees educational philosophers playing a role in delivering a decolonising education and that this will change our natural history by altering our language and forms of life (*Id.* 10). He writes:

Here I am possibly caught in a contradiction, as my use of Wittgenstein’s philosophy does not ‘leave everything as it is’, but sides more with Marx in seeking not only to describe but to change the world. (*Ibid.*)

Claudia Schumann points out that we can distinguish between the limits and the ‘possibilities of effecting change through theorizing’; and that, by advancing a positive critical analysis, we ‘open up new ways of understanding’ and are able to develop, among other things, the ‘transformative potential of feminist political practice’ (Schumann 2017, 381 and 385).

This discussion leads naturally to my unorthodox view that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is an instrument for social and political change. In educational philosophy, Maxine Greene’s pioneering work on ‘looking at things as if they could be otherwise’⁶ runs along the same Wittgensteinian tracks that head towards imagining alternatives and contemplating concrete possibilities for changing the world. Here we can utilise her thesis that by mediating with creative and imaginative works such as literature, poetry, sculpture, theatre, film, music and dance we empower our students to tear apart the ‘cotton wool of daily life’ (Greene 2018, 185) and imagine better worlds for themselves (Greene 2017, 494–5 and 500–1; and Greene 2018, 15, 163, 185–6 and 196); invite them to engage with the ‘imaginary mode of awareness’ and ‘break with the taken-for-granted, with the ordinary and the mundane’ (Greene 2018, 181); and encourage them to take transformative action to ‘repair the lacks, to move through the openings, to try to pursue real possibilities’ (*Id.* 223). Greene writes:

Imagination, after all, allows people to think of things as if they could be otherwise; it is a capacity that allows a looking through the windows of the actual towards alternative realities. (Greene 2017, 494–5)

The imaginative leap required to lead to transformative praxis is, moreover, dependent on ‘seeing things close up and large’ (Greene 1995, 16). No longer seeing things small, from a safe distance, and as mere objects – in the way we may have previously looked at ‘schooling through the lenses of a system’ (*Id.* 11), we see people and things for whom and what they truly are. And this passion for seeing the world big is the ‘doorway for

imagination’, where there is the ‘possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise’ (*Id.* 16).

Moving on the same tracks is José Medina’s work on ‘resistant imaginations’.⁷ He says we should explore the role imagination plays in our epistemic lives and especially when we are contemplating epistemic alternatives (Medina 2013, 53). We have to resist ossification, he insists, and reimagine our generic categories (man, woman, white, black, straight, gay, etc.). To remain truly alive and to cease following the path of least resistance we need the assistance of:

a *resistant imagination*—an imagination that is ready to confront relational possibilities that have been lost, ignored, or that remain to be discovered or invented. (*Id.* 299)

3. Lessons from political thought

Alice Crary presents an in-depth analysis of the significance of Wittgenstein’s philosophy for political thought (Crary 2000). Her concern with the ongoing debate between a popular interpretation on which Wittgenstein advances a view of meaning that threatens to rule out the possibility of social and political criticism and, in some instances, labels his work as deeply conservative and a more progressive reading on which Wittgenstein’s thought sheds light on our desire to instigate social and political change, even radical or revolutionary change is that both positions misinterpret Wittgenstein’s view of meaning and are not able to highlight how his philosophy informs political thought.⁸

Crary seeks to present a more plausible account of the relevance that Wittgenstein’s philosophy holds for political thought by clarifying his view of meaning. She argues that Wittgenstein’s account of meaning does not commit him to the view that meaning is fixed independently of use or that use fixes meaning (*Id.* 131). Meanings are not fixed and we have no need to assume metaphysical vantage points before we can begin to critique our social and political practices. Rather, Wittgenstein wants us to bring ‘meaning’ and ‘criticism’ back from their metaphysical to their everyday use (*Id.* 138). We can in fact submit all aspects of our lives to criticism but there may well be occasions when ‘we have no notion what (if anything) will count as the fulfilment of the words we are uttering’; in this sense there are limits on our critical endeavours (*Id.* 139–140). Nevertheless Wittgenstein, Crary concludes:

presents us with a view of the conditions of human knowledge on which there is human activity in the forms of thought and speech we use in attempting to understand the world: here getting at the facts of a situation may require us to try and see it in a different light, to use our imagination in a variety of ways, to seek new experiences which help us to refine our sensitivities and so on. Wittgenstein’s writings in this respect teach us something about the kind of challenge we confront when we turn to investigating established modes of thought and speech (such as those that bear directly on political life), sorting out their injustices and developing more rigorously just and consistent ways of thinking and speaking. (*Id.* 141)

Everything that lies in plain view is open to question.⁹ Wittgenstein encourages us to critique our social and cultural practices. Philosophy does not freeze our forms of life, our debates or our modes of criticism. Quite the opposite, it invites us, as Crary rightly says, to look at things afresh, to use our imagination and seek new challenges in the ways we confront and negotiate the world. Wittgenstein writes:

The sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and it was possible for the sickness of philosophical problems to get cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a medicine invented by an individual.

Suppose the use of the motor-car produces or encourages certain illnesses, and [humankind] is plagued by such illness until, from some cause or other, as the result of some development or other, it abandons the habit of driving. (Wittgenstein 1967a I, II, §4)

In her seminal work, *Wittgenstein and Social Justice*, Hannah Pitkin argues that philosophy's success lies in showing the 'deep necessities' of our conceptual system—the very concepts that 'reflect our most central forms of life' and are altered by them (Pitkin 1972, 298). These concepts are, to be sure, intimately connected with our social, political and moral lives.¹⁰ In her view, 'Wittgenstein is very close to Marx' and the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is parallel to Wittgenstein's idea that the sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in our modes of life (*Id.* 340).¹¹

The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy represents a collection of insightful essays that demonstrate the relevance of Wittgenstein's methods to political thought.¹² In addressing the question, What is political? Allan Janik suggests we assemble 'Wittgensteinian reminders of the role of the political in human experience that enable us to grasp how politics fits into human natural history' (Janik 2003, 101). Politics permeates our 'everyday concepts and conflicts'; and the 'solution to our political problems', he argues, 'comes in the way we live, not in the theories we hold' (*Ibid.*).¹³ Clearly our practices have their own political significance. Janik's analysis of the interrelation between family resemblance concepts and the activity of rule-following (which itself manifests a certain regularity in human behaviour that limits the ways in which our practices can be altered) leads him to conclude:

To change society has to entail not simply changing the ruling ideas (the substance of the rules we abide by) but changing our mode of rule-following itself. (*Id.* 115)

Critical reflection on our social and political practices can bring about change. I am presenting Wittgenstein as a reformer in just this sense. James Tully's exposition of our practices of critical reflection connects with this approach (Tully 2003). Rather than resorting to theory or to relying on a single form of critical reflection as a foundation, our pressing political issues are resolved in practice and commence by surveying our diverse language-games of reflection.¹⁴ In the course of our activities of critical reflection, what we take for granted and what we call into question and reflect on are 'provisional and subject to change and reversal over time' (*Id.* 28–29). Tully writes:

our new understanding of the non-foundational and conditional role of practices of critical reflection gives a clearer view of the diverse forms they take and the boundary-challenging ways free critical reflection both rests on and questions its own conditionality. (*Id.* 34)

Tully adopts Wittgenstein's metaphor of language as an ancient city (Wittgenstein 2001, §18) to illustrate the maze of little streets and squares of old and new houses that frequent our practices of critical reflection (Tully 2003, 41). He rightly concludes the only guarantor of our free and critical life is the wisdom to accept and work within the 'enlightening multiplicity of conceptions of critical reflection available to us'. We can use them 'to reflect critically *on*, our well-trodden ways of thought and action, rendering them less indubitably foundational, and thereby disclosing possibilities of thinking and acting differently' (*Ibid.*). In this way we are able to use critical concepts to address our social, political and moral questions.

Further, if we are able to identify with the voices represented in the internal dialogue in the *Philosophical Investigations* then, as Richard Eldridge explains, we are given a 'chance to recognize in a new way what we do and might do in judging, in politics and in other domains' (Eldridge 2003, 120–1). Wittgenstein's remark that philosophy may not interfere with the use of language but only describe it does not have to be seen to endorse political conservatism or traditionalism even in hard cases. Eldridge takes up Stanley Cavell's 'argument of the ordinary' and shows how by participating in the 'conversation of justice' we are able to move between different positions and work within a political framework of affirmative tolerance and mutual respect (*Id.* 124–128).

Eldridge and Crary's essays are consistent with my argument that Wittgenstein's philosophy encourages us to imagine other vistas and work on building avenues for changing the world. I close this section with Denis McManus' proposal to sketch a Wittgensteinian model for radical political critique (McManus 2003, 63). The key is to work through what Wittgenstein means by 'nonsense' and rehabilitate a 'conception of "nonsense" as a term of criticism for the political thinker' (*Id.* 65–66).¹⁵ His notion of 'political imagination' is intended to rescue the lives that animate our practices (and therefore the sense or meaningfulness that attaches to them); to stop them from slipping away (*Id.* 77). McManus concludes:

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 change. 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 speaking falsely or acting contrary to principle. Rather it is the descent of our talk into meaningless chatter and our action into token gesture. (*Id.* 81)

4. Looking at §124 of the *Philosophical Investigations* through a Marxist lens

Now we reach the crux of the matter and see how a Marxist reading of Wittgenstein can further support both the alignment of his later philosophy with Marx's eleventh thesis on

Feuerbach and place Wittgenstein as an advocate for changing our forms of social existence. In respect of my first task, Terrell Carver questions whether Marx's retort about what philosophers should do and what philosophy should be 'could be very close to Wittgenstein's parable of philosophers as flies in fly-bottles' or 'it could be something very different and very confused'; and the answer depends on what readers bring to these remarks and what they intend to do with them (Carver 2002, 103–104). Here I agree with K.T. Fann that Wittgenstein's philosophy is a tool that is entirely useless if you are not a fly trapped in the fly-bottle or are otherwise quite content to stay there (Fann 2002, 285).¹⁶

In my view, Wittgenstein and Marx challenge what we mean when we say we are doing philosophy. They rupture what we take for granted. Carver rightly says that both philosophers do not approve of the practice of philosophy as it is performed by their contemporaries. As an activity, Wittgenstein and Marx are 'concerned with doing *something* – such that their contemporaries would be drawn up short and their self-understandings, and understandings of the world, disturbed' (Carver 2002, 104). Indeed, a theory of revolutionary praxis may well have been in Wittgenstein's mind and life though, unlike Marx, it is not readily transparent in his works (*Id.* 107).¹⁷

Moira De Iaco takes issue with reconciling Wittgenstein's philosophy with Marx's notion of transforming the world given that, for Wittgenstein, philosophy 'must limit itself to leaving everything as it is' (De Iaco 2021, 25). 'Wittgenstein's philosophy does not have,' in her view, 'the purpose of changing society through the thought and rethinking of language. It does not look at society' (*Id.* 26).¹⁸ De Iaco accuses Wittgenstein of focusing on the 'role of praxis in the meaning processes of language' without 'considering these processes from an historical point of view' (*Ibid.*). Wittgenstein's emphasis is on reforming metaphysically-inclined philosophers hell-bent on misusing language¹⁹ rather than appreciating the wider role that 'real historical circumstances' play in determining thoughts, actions and events (*Id.* 28).²⁰

Even if De Iaco is correct in her reading of his work, can we not choose to read Wittgenstein from the point of view of an absence? If we take Nancy Fraser's cue²¹, we can extrapolate from things Wittgenstein does say to things he does not and reformulate his conception of praxis as if he had considered the historical perspective. Nevertheless, De Iaco does attempt to close this gap by suggesting we can use Wittgenstein's method for analysing linguistic usage in a manner which complements the way we use 'Marxist conceptual tools' to 'investigate the social-historical processes that affect language and real life with which language is intertwined' (*Id.* 26). Our tool-box for addressing 'concrete linguistic uses' is, in other words, strengthened by combining these complementary aspects of Marxist and Wittgensteinian philosophies (*Id.* 28–29).

Robert Vinten is right, in my view, to suggest that the underlying tensions between Wittgenstein and Marx dissolve once we appreciate the different ways in which both thinkers approach the nature of philosophy (Vinten 2013, 10).²² 'Wittgenstein's elucidatory philosophy', he argues, 'does not obviously conflict with Marx's emancipatory philosophy' if we accept that Wittgenstein engages in different tasks from those performed by Marxists (*Id.* 13).²³ There is no barrier, Vinten concludes, to combining both philosophical approaches in our practical endeavours (*Id.* 22).²⁴ They are, to be sure, mutually enriching.

The question concerning the extent of the tension between the claims that philosophy leaves everything as it is and that philosophers ought to change the world, not merely interpret it is raised directly by Rupert Read. He is right to claim that ‘Unless language can take care of itself, there can be no taking care of it’; and, in this respect, philosophy ‘leaves language as it is’ (Read 2002, 256). Read finds points of convergence between Wittgenstein and Marx²⁵ and answers:

Marx’s approach, like Wittgenstein’s, has to be seen as essentially practical, getting one primarily not to think something one doesn’t think, but to do something one doesn’t want to do. And, more generally, that resources are available to us—within Marx, within our lives and experiences, our societies, within ‘common sense’—both to avoid ‘idea-ism’ and to embrace a vision and practice of changing the world (including importantly, as Wittgenstein would emphasise, oneself). Of course, to say this still does not in the slightest imply that it will be *easy* to do. (*Id.* 272)

Read seeks to fill the lacuna by suggesting that Marx could have endorsed section 124 of the *Philosophical Investigations* and much of Wittgenstein’s philosophy and methods and that Wittgenstein, in turn, could have endorsed Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach and that he, Wittgenstein, was ‘not against changing things (even by means of philosophy)’ (*Id.* 274).²⁶ He concludes that there is a ‘fit’ between Wittgenstein and Marx and ‘the point may indeed very much be still *to change the world*’ (*Id.* 275). Wittgenstein’s philosophy may appear more ‘individualist’ than Marx’s, Reid writes, but Wittgenstein does not want us to work upon ourselves ‘in a narrow and introspective way’; rather he hopes that the darkness of our time ‘might be altered by people taking up his work and using it to think (and act) with’ (*Id.* 277).

Despite the popular image of Wittgenstein as a ‘deeply apolitical thinker’, a closer inspection of the ‘biographical and broader historical context of his life and thought,’ Dimitris Gakis remarks, ‘reveals a number of interesting connections to Marx(ism)’ (Gakis 2021, 8)—some of which we have discussed. He reiterates our finding that they share a critical attitude that approaches philosophy as a ‘matter of praxis and method’ as distinct from a ‘mystifying, metaphysical tradition’ couched in ‘doctrine or dogma’ (*Id.* 11). It is here, Gakis continues, that their outlooks ‘converge on the potentially transformational and emancipatory character of philosophy’ (*Id.* 11–12). To this he adds their connections between philosophical and everyday human activity (and how theoretical problems are dissolved in practical life) and then argues that Marx’s eleventh thesis and Wittgenstein’s aphorism that philosophy leaves everything as it is (‘with the “everything” ranging over the use of language’) may be taken to be in fact complementary and not opposed (*Id.* 12–13). Gakis concludes that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is of ‘critical importance from a political point of view’ (*Id.* 15).

One contact point that Marco Gigante pursues between Wittgenstein and Marx is the ‘attribution to philosophical thought, understood as *praxis*, of the power to transform the real’, the power to transform social relations (Gigante 2021, 42). He discusses Marx’s eleventh thesis and Wittgenstein’s remarks on the role of philosophy as therapy²⁷ and its task to leave everything as it is (*Id.* 48–49). Gigante couples Wittgenstein’s account of

language with the transformative power of philosophy advanced by Marx (*Id.* 49–50). ‘Both philosophers,’ he says, ‘show the instruments for carving out a different role for [philosophy’s] exercise and therefore for the use of its own demystifying power’ (*Id.* 50). This task does not involve new interpretations of the world, Gigante continues, but the ‘description of the logics of social life’ that are always before one’s eyes and the understanding that enables us to ‘identify and remove the conditions that alone can transform them or give rise to other forms of life’. He concludes:

Marx and Wittgenstein aim at making philosophy an instrument of criticism, a tool by which men and women can more and more effectively recognize the contingent character of the ideological constructions they are surrounded by; that is, in doing so, the philosophical discourse becomes a practice of transformation, a way to change the process of description and interpretation of the world itself. (*Ibid.*)²⁸

We have already started to touch upon the emancipatory or transformative power of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. Moving onto my second task, and drawing on further insights from Marxist thinking, I now wish to investigate the possibilities that Wittgenstein’s philosophy holds for reforming our social existence. The first thing to note is that a philosopher should not find him or herself trapped within any particular community of ideas. We all hold certain beliefs and values. And, not surprisingly, we are members of different human communities but, as philosophers, we need to keep our critical distance and try and see them for what they are.²⁹ ‘The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas’, Wittgenstein insists, and this is precisely ‘what makes him into a philosopher’ (Wittgenstein 1967b, §455).

T.P. Uschanov says that this remark is ‘the core of Wittgenstein’s attitude towards the mixing of philosophy and politics’ (Uschanov 2002, 38). As philosophers, we should not treat the ideas of one ideology more favourably than those of another; rather, we should be content to support our preferred political party’s ideas ‘from without’ (*Ibid.*). Uschanov also cites Cavell’s related point that ‘when philosophers *do* change things, there’s nothing about their being philosophers that specially enables them to do this’ (*Id.* 39). Philosophy leaving everything as it is does not mean that philosophers are estopped from trying to change their society. Individuals and movements are free to work on changing things only that philosophy by itself, theory to be precise, will not get them there.³⁰

The ‘obvious point,’ Pleasants explains, is that ‘to say *philosophy* leaves things as they are neither entails nor implies that they *should* be left as they are’; and, in line with Marx’s eleventh thesis, the ‘natural implication is, then, that if one really wants to change things, doing philosophy is not the way to go about it’ (Pleasants 2002, 169). He says we can bring Wittgenstein’s Socratic presentation of the reminders about things ‘we have always known’ but have since forgotten or misplaced³¹ to bear on the problems that trouble us without resorting to any special philosophical insight or explanatory theory (*Id.* 164). The quest for universal critical standards remains ‘chimerical’ (*Id.* 174–175). Description that promotes changing how people see their reality is what is needed, not explanation that unearths its ‘hidden essence’ (*Id.* 177).

Pleasants demonstrates how Wittgenstein's remarks – relating to changing the way we look at things³², the considerable effort of will rather than intellect required to make such changes³³ and his appeal that we 'look and see. . . don't think, but look'³⁴ – form an essential part of his philosophy as a therapeutic process and which is capable of producing a change in attitude; and that we can extend and apply Wittgenstein's 'way of seeing' to new problems provided they are of 'personal interest and significance' (*Id.* 165). This approach, he says, connects with Marx's maxim on changing the world; and 'stimulates a critical attitude towards traditional philosophical issues and problems' that is key to challenging 'aspects of social, political and moral life' (*Id.* 166).³⁵

The point of a 'radical social critique' – one which strikes at the heart of our social and political foundations – is, Pleasants continues, 'somehow to get the participants themselves to see and share one's critical view' (*Id.* 175). He writes:

The task of the social critic is not a *theoretical* one; rather, the desideratum is to change the way people *see* their relations with their fellow creatures and their environment. And with that change of seeing comes change in *acting*. (*Ibid.*)

Doğan Göcmen and Doğan Baris Kilinc discuss what Wittgenstein and Marx understand by criticising the world and what their intentions are in doing so. Marx is intent on changing the world and Wittgenstein wants to resolve philosophical problems by addressing language problems occurring in the real world (Göcmen and Kilinc 2021, 53).³⁶ The praxis of language, they suggest, should be taken in a wide sense in respect of both philosophers (*Id.* 64). They conclude:

In the *Tractatus* [Wittgenstein] presents how the proposition, language, and thought were gained from the world and now in the *Investigations* he suggests that they return to the world in the actions of socially embedded individuals to change the world. The aim of changing the world is to establish an ethical life, not beyond good and evil, but beyond 'punishment and reward'. This is also the principle Marx seems to employ as the basis of his theory of socialism. (*Ibid.*)

Antonia Soulez conceives of Wittgenstein's 'praxis of the use of language' as an activity in a social or institutional sense that nevertheless has indirect political implications (Soulez 2021, 171–4). And while Wittgenstein does not aim for social transformation through, for example, a 'politically active programme', she does ask how we may relate his idea of the transformation of oneself to taking action in the world (*Id.* 173).³⁷ How does self-improvement lead to emancipatory action? Soulez says we can read Wittgenstein's approach 'as critical even in a social sense, even though it is not overtly political' (*Id.* 176). This must be right.³⁸ Employing Aldo Gargani's reading of Wittgenstein, moreover, we should dispense with the traditional philosopher's task of 'applying models to reality'; accept that reality is 'irregular and uneven' and that it 'cannot be dealt with using exact tools'; and that we must adjust one's tools to meet 'contingent, uneven realities' (*Id.* 177). Of Wittgenstein, she writes:

he certainly provided us with the epistemological tools useful for building a political conception of constructive models that could shed light on praxis as a politically linguistic activity through the reversal of the very-relation of model to real. (*Id.* 178)

The last step in my unorthodox advancement of Wittgenstein as an advocate for transformational change and the use of his philosophy to open up new horizons is afforded by Marco Brusotti. He reads the later Wittgenstein as a philosopher who takes up a ‘contemplative’ stance that is non-causal and at odds with science (Brusotti 2021, 185–6). But what does ‘contemplative’ mean here? Exploring Wittgenstein’s conversation with Rush Rhees, Brusotti suggests that ‘consideration’ and ‘comparison’ are what Wittgenstein is driving at and that Wittgenstein’s ‘contemplative philosopher’ is focused on showing other possibilities, other ways in which things might be done (*Id.* 186–187). Wittgenstein is, it seems to me at least, anticipating Greene’s notion of looking at things as if they could be otherwise.

There are and always will be ‘other and different ways of social existence’ (*Id.* 187). Further, the reason why a contemplative philosopher is ‘concerned with pointing out other possibilities’ and to make comparisons is, Brusotti says, ‘understanding’. This may well include imagining ‘circumstances and surroundings in which a familiar institution or activity may lose its point’ (*Ibid.*). Wittgenstein is, to be sure, calling the necessity of our institutions into question.³⁹ He is asking us to consider ‘alternatives, even imaginary possibilities that show the alleged necessity to be contingent’ (*Ibid.*). This insight shows how Wittgenstein’s ‘contemplative’ philosopher is able to challenge our political landscape and envision alternatives in the name of democracy and social justice. Brusotti continues:

For the philosopher, alternative possibilities are mere objects of comparison in order to better understand a familiar cultural phenomenon. Even when this phenomenon seems to be necessary and unique, the ethnological eye looks at it as something that could have been otherwise. (*Id.* 188)

5. Conclusion

I have sought to provide a Marxist reading of Wittgenstein and show how his later philosophy aligns with Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach rather than reverses it. Working within educational philosophy I presented Wittgenstein as an advocate for social and political reform and foregrounded the emancipatory or transformational power of his later philosophy. The unorthodoxy expressed by my ideas is, I believe, consistent with emerging trends in political philosophy and Marxist thinking that offer different perspectives on how we may interpret Wittgenstein’s philosophy and methods and which underscore their significance for tackling democratic and social justice issues.

I introduced Wittgenstein’s aphorism that philosophy ‘leaves everything as it is’ in the context of several related sections in the *Philosophical Investigations*. To shed light on how Wittgenstein’s remarks might cater for social and political criticism I drew on educational philosophers to offer some illustrations and clues. I took comfort in Stickney’s

suggestion that we should take the lead from scholars in other disciplines to advance a social reading of Wittgenstein's work that caters for bringing about change. I linked this with Greene's conception of 'looking at things as if they could be otherwise' and Medina's idea of 'resistant imaginations'.

Turning to political thought I discussed insights from Crary, McManus and Pitkin. I agreed with Tully that the only guarantor of a free and critical life is the wisdom to engage with the diversity of the conceptions of critical reflection available to us. I expressed the view that Crary and Eldridge's ideas were consistent with my argument that Wittgenstein's philosophy encourages us to imagine alternatives and to build bridges that may lead to change.

My discussion then focused on Marxist's readings of Wittgenstein and included pertinent comments from Carver, Gigante, Göcmen and Kilinc, Pleasants, Soulez, Uschanov and Vinten. I agreed with Fann that Wittgenstein's philosophy is entirely useless if you are not a fly trapped in Wittgenstein's fly-bottle of philosophical bafflement or are quite happy just to stay there. I acknowledged De Iaco's criticism that Wittgenstein's philosophy does not have the aim of changing society because, in her view, it lacks the requisite socio-historical perspective. I argued we can take Fraser's cue and read Wittgenstein from the point of view of an absence and incorporate that perspective.

I noted Read's suggestion that Marx could well have adopted section 124 and much of Wittgenstein's philosophy and methods and that, equally, Wittgenstein could have endorsed Marx's eleventh thesis. Read concluded that there is a meaningful 'fit' between the two philosophers and that their point is to change the world. Also, consistent with the idea that Wittgenstein and Marx share a critical attitude in which philosophy is a matter of praxis and method, Gakis rightly contended that their outlooks converge on the transformational character of philosophy and concluded that Wittgenstein's dictum is complementary to Marx's eleventh thesis.

My last step was to take up Brusotti's notion of Wittgenstein as the 'contemplative' philosopher who focuses on finding other possibilities, other ways in which things might be done. I made the connection here with Greene's work and now say that the use of Medina's 'resistant imaginations' would further compliment the contemplative philosopher in his or her task of calling into question the alleged necessity of our institutions. This insight, I argued, demonstrates how Wittgenstein's 'contemplative' philosopher can take up Marx's gauntlet and not only interpret the world, but *change* it. Again, to borrow from Fraser, Wittgenstein is inviting us to cut our teeth on the struggles and wishes of our age (Fraser 1989, 113).

I close with these thoughts from Gavin Kitching:

Wittgenstein found a voice—a form of speaking and writing—that *is* appropriate, and deeply appropriate, not just for doing philosophy in a postmodern, highly individualised, bourgeois democratic society, but also a voice which is equally appropriate for doing political and ethical and religious and aesthetic debate (both with others and with oneself) in such societies. (Kitching 2002, 15–16)

ORCID iD

Marc James Deegan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8382-7924>

Notes

1. [Kitching 2002](#), 1–3; [Pleasants 2002](#), 160–161; and [Vinten 2013](#), 10–11 and 22. For a recent collection of essays that bring out affinities between Wittgenstein and Marx see [Sulpizio et al. 2021](#). The essays demonstrate different ways to address Wittgenstein and Marx(ism) from multiple perspectives starting from the critical attitude adopted by both thinkers.
2. These ideas are mirrored in section 89 of *The Big Typescript TS 213* where the case is made for philosophy providing us with an Übersicht of language, a perspicuous representation of the grammatical landscape which consists in ‘seeing connections’ and which itself is ‘lacking in perspicuity’ ([Wittgenstein 1993](#), 171–177). However, philosophy, Wittgenstein says at page 177, cannot interfere with our actual use of language, only describe it. Nor can it erect a foundation. ‘It leaves everything as it is’ including mathematics. Philosophy ‘puts everything before us’ and there is nothing to explain or deduce. Indeed, on his analysis, anything that does not ‘lie open to view is of no interest to us’.
3. Our philosophical, conceptual, investigations cannot uncover new facts about the world but, by removing our prejudices and erroneous notions and clarifying our thoughts, we will treat the world and our concepts differently ([Hacker 1972](#), 125). In this respect, then, philosophy is not leaving everything as it is. In mathematics, we distinguish between our calculations and proofs and the prose we use to describe them. And when we cleanse this prose of conceptual confusion, our methods of proof may not change but our attitude towards them will ([Glock 1996](#), 236). ‘The concept of calculation as an experiment tends to strike us as the only *realistic* one,’ Wittgenstein remarks, while everything else, our other methods of inquiry, appear to us as ‘moonshine’ ([Wittgenstein 1967a](#), II, §76). A calculation is not an experiment, in other words. Here we are pointing to different ways in which we use our words.
4. In the *Philosophical Grammar* Wittgenstein says that philosophers cannot use words in a ‘sublimated or abstract sense’ and construct a second-order account of language and meaning; we ‘must still speak the language of every day’ no matter how coarse and material it may appear ([Wittgenstein 1974a](#), [1974b](#), 121). He also assures us that ‘we cannot achieve any greater generality in philosophy than in what we say in life and in science. Here too (as in mathematics) we leave everything as it is.’
5. Wittgenstein shares Friedrich Nietzsche’s concern that turning philosophy into a science would mean throwing in the towel ([Nietzsche 1979](#), §55). We should cease being preoccupied with the ‘method of science’, Wittgenstein says, and should not naïvely ‘ask and answer questions in the way science does’ ([Wittgenstein 1969](#), 18).
6. Maxine Greene continues to offer her insight into utilising literature, poetry, sculpture, dance and other creative and imaginative works to envision new vistas, of ‘looking at things as if they could be otherwise’ (see [Greene 1995](#); [Greene 2011](#); [Greene 2017](#); and [Greene 2018](#)).
7. See [Medina 2013](#), Chapter 6.
8. [Crary 2000](#), 118. The misinterpretations are due to readings of Wittgenstein that advocate a use-theory of meaning which prohibits external criticism of our forms of life, that prevents us from bringing critical concepts to bear on our forms of social existence, moral and political—all of

- which Crary casts into the net of ‘inviolability interpretations’ (*Id.* 119–121). She rightly points out that when Wittgenstein says the ‘meaning of a word is its use in the language’ he is quite specific that though this applies in a ‘*large* class of cases’, use does not determine or fix meaning in all cases (Wittgenstein 2001, §43). Crary’s discussion of the champions and critics of alleged Wittgenstein’s conservatism include J.C. Nyíri, Ernest Gellner, Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish (*Id.* 121–130).
9. Wittgenstein is far from suggesting that we slavishly adhere to the status quo (Langille 1992, 237–238). On the contrary, we are always able to ask questions, to challenge what counts as legitimate. Wittgenstein ‘is not saying that we must dutifully submit ourselves to the established order,’ Andrew Lugg says, ‘but only that we start out from practices already in place’ (Lugg 1985, 468). We must have a starting point for critique, we must take something for granted, but this does not mean, Lugg continues, that Wittgenstein is excluding the possibility of asking questions about justification.
 10. Pitkin makes the valid point that while Wittgenstein is not a political theorist and does not devise a plan for social change, if we are to accept his challenge, and make the self-knowledge he is offering our own, then we are summoned ‘back to reality, to ourselves, to action, to our responsibilities’ (Pitkin 1972, 339). Knowledge for Wittgenstein, she continues, demands an ‘acknowledgement that it is not neutral with respect to action’ and, hence, we are left to devise our own courses of action. She suggests that a Wittgensteinian approach means we listen to the views of other people, other cultures, and see their perspectives. Pitkin adds that if we are to change our institutions, we do this in our actions, in our lives and not in isolation (*Id.* 340).
 11. Andrew Lugg maintains that Wittgenstein’s silence about how we can change our social and cultural practices for the better does not make him a conservative thinker. Similarly, he aligns Wittgenstein with Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach contending that what is required by both thinkers is ‘not more explanation, but rather a change in our practices so that the problems they give rise to no longer occur’ and that ‘the answers we require must be forged in practice; they cannot be generated by philosophers out of their own meagre experience’ (Lugg 1985, 472).
 12. Cressida Heyes, in her *Introduction*, discusses Wittgenstein’s attitude to politics and rightly emphasises his greater concern for the ethical integrity of the individual (Heyes 2003, 1–3). She highlights conservative and relativist views commonly associated with Wittgenstein’s later thought (*Id.* 3–6). She concludes: ‘I still think Wittgenstein would have been horrified by the idea of his work being incorporated into political projects. Too bad for him: his ideas have long since escaped his governance (if they were ever in his thrall); they have grown up, moved out, and created families of their own. Nonetheless, even if there aren’t more or less *authentic* ways of being a Wittgensteinian, there are, I would argue, *better and worse* ways. I hope that the essays collected in this book exemplify the better ways, and thus that they will indeed inspire the reader to thoughts of their own.’ (*Id.* 13)
 13. Janik’s response to those sceptics who find Wittgenstein’s aphorism that philosophy leaves everything as it is to be a ‘hopelessly unacceptable endorsement of the status quo’ is to remind them how Wittgenstein’s approach only entails that theorising fails in its ‘task of understanding the world when it also directs itself to changing it’ (Janik 2003, 104). Wittgenstein, he says, believes that no one has an answer to how we change the world for the better. Further, it is hardly surprising, Janik continues, that Wittgenstein’s remarks about rule-following and the role of philosophy and, in particular, that philosophy can only describe practices and not alter

them, are ‘construed as politically conservative as well as capriciously perverse’, but this is to read them in isolation from Wittgenstein’s central point that ‘to acquire a concept is to follow a rule’ (*Id.* 112).

14. Tully’s discussion draws attention to conventions of political thought that seek to establish one or other form of critical reflection as foundational and he critiques the justificational or validation form put forth by Jürgen Habermas and the interpretational or hermeneutical form presented by Charles Taylor. Since ‘any practice of critical reflection is itself already founded in the popular sovereignty of our multiplicity of humdrum ways of acting with words’, Tully concludes, we should reject any single form of critical reflection as a foundation (Tully 2003, 41). Indeed, ‘submission to one regime of critical reflection, as the self-certifying guarantor of our freedom, would itself mark the end of our free and critical life’ (*Ibid.*).
15. McManus discredits the test of meaningfulness as it is often expressed in the social sciences. He shows shortfalls in Peter Winch’s approach or at least suggests that Winch leaves his work on Wittgenstein ‘unfinished’ (McManus 2003, 64–66). McManus concludes that Wittgenstein’s philosophy ‘can be understood as an effort to show why we lose nothing when we recognize the incoherence of [a] confused test of meaningfulness’ (*Id.* 65–66).
16. ‘What is your aim in philosophy?’, Wittgenstein writes, ‘To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle’ (Wittgenstein 2001, §309). Wittgenstein is intent on teaching us the importance of thinking for ourselves.
17. Carver argues that Wittgenstein was ‘very interested in changing the world for ordinary people by stripping away a good deal of over-complex interpretation, especially of the philosophical (and pseudo-philosophical) kind’ (Carver 2002, 105). Wittgenstein and Marx unseated metaphysical foundations and appealed to facts about ordinary people and their daily activities – how they use language and engage in social practices. Carver concludes: ‘If “the people” are to be trusted in ruling themselves, there is then little warrant for claiming that they are only licensed to do this in relation to some “philosophical” framework propounded by the “voice from nowhere”, – an authorial – and authority-presumption that Marx and Wittgenstein seem (in this reader’s/writer’s eyes) to have wanted to subvert’ (*Id.* 108).
18. Wittgenstein’s philosophy is, De Iaco continues, ‘focused on the goal of changing the look of philosophers by converting towards everyday language use despite the metaphysical uses as well’ (De Iaco 2021, 26). She takes the view that Wittgenstein does not conceive of the possibility of social transformation through language; and that a Wittgensteinian change in the way we look at our philosophical problems does not have practical-social consequences and for this reason ‘the correction of the language that he made cannot be called a reform’ (*Id.* 27).
19. ‘What we do,’ Wittgenstein writes, ‘is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ (Wittgenstein 2001, §116).
20. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi provides an early criticism of Wittgenstein’s philosophy to the extent that it lacks a theory of history and society (Rossi-Landi 2002). Marco Gigante retorts that this lack could be explained away as a consequence of Rossi-Landi’s diagnosis as distinct from something Wittgenstein should have dealt with (Gigante 2021, 48, footnote 7).
21. Nancy Fraser provides a critique of Jürgen Habermas’ social theory in relation to the struggles and wishes of contemporary women. She examines what is critical and what is not in his theory. ‘Habermas says virtually nothing about gender in *The Theory of Communicative Action*’, she notes, and yet she is willing to read that work from the ‘standpoint of an absence’, extrapolate

- from things he does say to things he does not and ‘reconstruct how various matters of concern to feminists would appear from his perspective had those matters been thematized’ (Fraser 1989, 114).
22. Marx is interested in advancing workers’ rights and clearly wants theorists to engage in transformative action as his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach indicates (Marx and Engels 2010, 5). Wittgenstein wants to remove linguistic confusions that hamper traditional ways of philosophical thinking and to nurture critical modes of inquiry while, at the same time, expressing a personal preference for framing conceptual and aesthetic questions (Wittgenstein 1980, 79).
 23. The later Wittgenstein is, for instance, opposed to scientism and to constructing theories based on the scientific model. His critique of empiricism and the hegemony of science pervades much of his work (Vinten 2013, 13–14). Human beings, Wittgenstein retorts, have to ‘awaken to wonder’, as do peoples, and science is a way of sending them back to sleep (Wittgenstein 1980, 5).
 24. Vinten sees merit in Marxists reading Wittgenstein’s work ‘to better understand the nature of traditional philosophical problems’ and to ‘produce better Marxist/emancipatory philosophy’ (Vinten 2013, 11, footnote 6). Also, he concludes that ‘there is no particular reason why Wittgensteinians should not become involved in workers’ struggles with the aim of creating a classless society’ (*Id.* 22) – or, as I would put it, working together to create a freer and more inclusive, democratic society.
 25. Both Wittgenstein and Marx follow up on Ludwig Feuerbach’s insights by underscoring change in practice, aspect-seeing; and that what needs altering is not a belief or a doctrine but an attitude and a way of life (Read 2002, 260). Both thinkers adopt an unorthodox view of philosophy by replacing philosophical argument with a therapeutic orientation that re-grounds ‘us in the concretion of our actual lives and with (*actually, practically*) laying to rest the metaphysics that distorts those lives’ (*Id.* 271). Finally, Marx, like Wittgenstein, demands that we should not reify language but descend to our everyday lives, to our worlds as we ordinarily live and speak (*Id.* 273).
 26. Here Read is portraying Marx at ‘his non-scientific best’, wanting to change things not through explanation but ‘through description interlinked with action’ (Read 2002, 274).
 27. ‘There is not a philosophical method’, Wittgenstein writes, ‘though there are indeed methods, like different therapies’ (Wittgenstein 2001, §133).
 28. ‘In this way’, Gigante says, we can find in Wittgenstein and Marx’s ‘philosophical investigations the idea that the transformation of the individual’s existential conditions involves a philosophical reflection on language to the extent that the latter permits them to recognize the processes of the ideological bewitchment of society’ (Gigante 2021, 50).
 29. A philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas, but someone who stands outside, indeed distances him or herself from, the human communities and who can see them for what they are (Kenny 1984, 55–56). Frank Ramsay is thus a ‘bourgeois thinker’ interested only in ‘clearing up the affairs of some particular community’ (Wittgenstein, 1980, 17), accepting what his mathematical peers ordain as truth or knowledge (*Cf.* Kenny 1984, 55–56; and Monk 1991, 246–247). As Marco Brusotti puts it, a ‘genuinely philosophical reflection aims at showing that this state is not the only possible one’; and that a bourgeois thinker does not look beyond the horizon of his or her own society (Brusotti 2021, 185 and 188). Wittgenstein wants us to maintain our critical distance and be able to critique our systems of knowledge and truth as well

as our own internal frameworks, beliefs, values and biases. The tenets of established authority are, in this sense, and to borrow from Nietzsche, always open to question ‘under the police of mistrust’ (Nietzsche 2001, §344).

30. Uschanov rightly contends that philosophers can voice their political views, run for office and fight social evils but a philosophy of politics will not turn their political statements into philosophical ones (Uschanov 2002, 39).
31. Wittgenstein 2001, §109.
32. Wittgenstein, 2001, §144.
33. Wittgenstein 1980, 17.
34. Wittgenstein 2001, §66.
35. Pleasants argues that: ‘a more promising way of doing social criticism would be to provoke people into reflecting on what they do and know in the course of their everyday social life. This process might be stimulated by “reminding” them (and ourselves), through “perspicuous description”, of some of the consequences and implications of their (our) actions and how these relate to their (our) basic intuitive sense of decency and justice. This, I submit, will not be achieved through promulgation of purportedly explanatory or revelatory theory, but only by coaxing and cajoling people into seeing what they actually do, or contribute to doing, to their fellow creatures and natural environment, and then questioning the moral adequacy of this way of life’ (Pleasants 2002, 167).
36. To resolve philosophical problems then entails resolving the real causes in the world (Göçmen and Kilinc, 2021, 53). In this sense, Wittgenstein and Marx are suggesting changing the world. This may, Göçmen and Kilinc continue, ‘also bring about conclusive solutions to our language and philosophical problems’.
37. Ray Monk argues that ‘political questions’ are, for Wittgenstein, ‘secondary to questions of personal integrity’: being true to one’s self is the paramount duty (Monk 1991, 18). This is why, when questioned about improving the world, Wittgenstein retorts, ‘Just improve yourself; that is the only thing you *can* do to better the world’ (*Id.* 17–18 and 213). Monk writes: ‘Wittgenstein’s remark about philosophy – that it “leaves everything as it is” – is often quoted. But it is less often realised that, in seeking to change nothing but the way we look at things, Wittgenstein was attempting to change *everything*. His pessimism about the effectiveness of his work is related to his conviction that the way we look at things is determined, not by our philosophical beliefs, but by our culture, by the way we are brought up’ (*Id.* 533).
38. Linguistic analysis and social critical theory should not be considered as separate domains whereby politics belong only to the latter. And even though Wittgenstein’s conception of semantics is not dialectical in Theodor Adorno’s sense, Soulez continues, it can still be read as critical in a social sense (Soulez 2021, 176).
39. Brusotti says that comparing an institution with alternative possibilities calls its alleged necessity into question and that ‘thinking of alternative activities, of remote ages and cultures, is simply a tool that enables “contemplation” to find out the nature of a familiar institution, e.g. to understand “what sort of thing, what sort of activity science is”’ (Brusotti 2021, 187).

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