Liberal Organic Democracy:

A Politics of Active Citizenship



Richard James Elliott

Jesus College

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Abstract

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Richard James Elliott, Jesus College

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This thesis outlines a new theory of democracy – Liberal Organic Democracy – that recovers the dynamic understanding of popular self-rule developed in the work of New Liberal theorists, and reconstructs it on much firmer philosophical foundations. It reframes the New Liberal principle of democratic self-realisation within a Wittgensteinian theory of language- and concept-use. And it advances an organic model of democracy grounded in the everyday practice of following a rule.

Early chapters of the thesis endeavour to reclaim New Liberal democratic thought from its current obscurity. The first chapter offers a detailed analysis of the 'organic' model of political development that shaped New Liberal demands for constitutional reform. Thereafter, the second chapter advances a new interpretation of Hobson's democratic thought, acknowledging its theoretical limitations, while extolling the organic social ontology that grounds Hobson's model of democracy in a framework of political engagement.

Subsequent chapters reframe this organic social ontology within a comprehensive philosophy of meaning. The third chapter begins the process of theoretical reconstruction by outlining a Wittgensteinian theory of rule-following practice. The fourth chapter maps the theory onto the normative claim that 'every agent should have the opportunity to be understood'. And the fifth chapter illustrates the importance of the rule-following norm for politics, arguing that social development is defined by a holistic process of self-realisation.

The final chapters of the thesis apply this argument to political thought. The sixth chapter identifies three political characteristics that follow from the rule-following norm, and grounds meaningful democracy in a model of active citizenship. And the seventh chapter gestures towards a loose institutional framework for meaningful democratic rule. This theoretical model aims to democratise the development of political concepts: to uncover the holistic processes driving political engagement, and to demonstrate how they can be harnessed to the principle of democratic self-realisation.

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Introduction

'Paradoxical as it seems, you must do a thing before you can know it. Only by the exercise of self-control can a person or a people learn the art of government.'

J. A. Hobson, *Towards International Government* (1915)[1]

'It is always the discontinuous, the novel, the breach of the rule, that fastens itself upon us as spectators and actors in the human drama.'

J. A. Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order* (1926)[2]

'Here the fundamental fact is that we lay down rules, a technique, for playing the game, and that then, when we follow the rules, things don't turn out as we had assumed. So that we are, as it were, entangled in our own rules...The entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand: that is, to survey...It throws light on our concept of meaning something.'

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953)[3]

[1] J. A. Hobson, *Towards International Government* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915), pp. 207-8.
[2] J. A. Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 29.
[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4th edn. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), §125, p. 55.

In contemporary liberal states, few political precepts command as much theoretical authority as the principle of democracy. A common demand for popular self-government lies at the heart of the collective political imagination – acting as a coordinating principle within theoretical discourse, partisan political campaigning, and the ordinary, complacent assumptions that frame civic life.

The democratic community's ability to translate this abstract demand into a series of determinate rules or conventions depends upon a broad theoretical convergence around a shared cluster of ideas. And contemporary academic debate plays an important role in shaping this convergence; in fashioning and legitimising common democratic concepts. By drawing focus onto a few competing definitions of democracy – or onto a few essential characteristics of popular self-rule – political philosophers help to frame the theoretical boundaries of democratic politics.

But problems arise when boundaries become limitations. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, a range of conceptually and ideologically distinct theories of democracy competed for primacy within a rapidly modernising society. Diverse understandings of democratic politics – focusing on the individual, the corporation, or the community; on material or spiritual improvement; or on participation or civic education – captured the imagination of individuals across society, inspiring a plurality of distinct political perspectives. Shared democratic discourse depended upon a broad body of ideas, rooted in deliberately wide-ranging political theories. After the outbreak of war, the subsequent defeat of the totalitarian powers in Europe, and the academic turn against ideology, many of these ideas disappeared from contemporary discourse. Theoretical convergence – centred upon the moral authority of the individual –

exercised a strong influence over democratic theory, establishing tighter conceptual boundaries that persist to this day.

Consequently, many of the most interesting ways of thinking about democracy explored in the pre-war period have been bracketed off from modern debate. The democratic theories of J. A. Hobson, L. T. Hobhouse, and other New Liberal theorists play virtually no part in contemporary theoretical discourse. Yet the dynamic and expansive understanding of politics developed within their work represents a unique insight into the principles driving the modern demand for popular self-rule.

In a series of polemical interventions in early twentieth century debates, the New Liberals advanced a vision of politics centred on *democratic self-realisation*. By actively engaging in the process of political rule, each individual could play a role in re-shaping the principles and institutions that defined their social, intellectual, and moral development. Democracy was thereby transformed from a structural model of government into a dynamic process of communal self-determination. Returning to this understanding allows the contemporary political theorist to conceptualise an evolving demand for self-government within an ingenious, responsive, and loosely-bounded theoretical structure.

However, the New Liberals' preoccupation with polemical impact prevented them from expanding their underlying understanding into a philosophically coherent doctrine. Thus, a simple reversion to New Liberal theory would be weakened by the presence of theoretical problems and inconsistencies.

This thesis moves beyond a basic re-statement of New Liberal ideas – towards a comprehensive project of theoretical reconstruction. By reclaiming the core New Liberal concept of democratic self-realisation, and elaborating upon the conceptual and

linguistic processes that underlie its theoretical force, this project generates a framework for a new philosophy of democratic politics. *Liberal Organic Democracy* advances an expansive understanding of popular self-rule, inspired by New Liberal ideology, but attuned to contemporary forms of democratic (re)definition.

Liberal Organic Democracy – A New Theory of Democratic Politics

Liberal Organic Democracy presents a potent alternative to existing theories of democratic rule. It unites New Liberal democratic theory with the more established and comprehensive analysis of meaningful behaviour developed in Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy. The resulting fusion of ideas generates a stronger, more realistic foundation for translating the norms of human behaviour into the sphere of popular self-government.

New Liberal writings trace a dynamic theoretical understanding of politics, centred on the constantly evolving *activity* of democratic self-rule. Liberal Organic Democracy builds upon this understanding, establishing it as the core principle of a popular and responsive form of democracy rooted in the practice of following (and modifying) a rule.

Echoing New Liberal theory, this new philosophy of politics advances a liberal form of democracy that is grounded in a holistic – rather than an atomistic – vision of the political community. It is defined by the aspiration to include all members of the community in collective self-government. It emphasises the role of individual citizens in the reform and redefinition of public life. And it safeguards the prerogatives of each citizen, while suggesting that individual political choices are only meaningful within a wider, holistic social environment.

This new theoretical understanding therefore reconciles the reality of human interaction and political change with a commitment to popular self-rule – realised through inclusive political action, initiative, and reform, rather than through a supposedly universal democratic ideal.

The Intellectual Origins of Liberal Organic Democracy

Liberal Organic Democracy reflects an original synthesis of ideas from two very different theoretical sources – (i) New Liberal social reform ideology and (ii) the philosophy of following a rule (as explored in the later writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein).

Historically, these were two distinct intellectual traditions that barely overlapped. The New Liberals were a circle of left-liberal intellectuals and political activists that rose to prominence within British political and philosophical discourse in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Most notable among these theorists were J. A. Hobson, L. T. Hobhouse, D. G. Ritchie, and G. Wallas. They were influenced by the writings of a broad range of philosophers and commentators, from to John Ruskin to John Stuart Mill, and from G. W. F. Hegel to T. H. Green. The New Liberals advanced democratic and social welfare reform as their primary objectives, and exercised a real influence over the leadership of the British Liberal Party – which reached its zenith under the Liberal government of Herbert Asquith from 1908 to 1914. Thereafter, the impact of New Liberal ideas on government policy declined rapidly in response to the outbreak of the First World War, the collapse of the British Liberal Party, and the emergence of competing ideologies. However, a number of New Liberal theorists continued to write and publish during the interwar period, producing profound but little-known work on a

range of subjects. Hobson's deeply original theoretical writings on democracy, dating from the 1920s and 30s, are most notable in this regard.

Wittgenstein rose to prominence following the publication of the philosophical work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in German in 1921; but he only began to formulate his distinct, mature ideas from the mid-1930s onwards, within the academic context of Cambridge University. Wittgenstein's later work embodies a resolute rejection of his earlier ideas. It focuses on the relationship between language and meaning, and the importance of matching conventional activity to specific circumstances in order to generate meaningful human behaviour (which can be formulated as *rules* that others can recognise). These ideas were worked into a final form in the years 1945-46 as the *Philosophical Investigations*; however they were not published during Wittgenstein's lifetime and were only available for the first time in English translation in 1953.

There is no indication that a direct line of influence existed between these two schools of thought. Wittgenstein's rule-following philosophy was not originally developed to support any political theory or ideology. Indeed, Janik has demonstrated that Wittgenstein deliberately avoided direct political applications of his philosophy.[4] Though a few New Liberal texts incorporated a discussion of the social importance of language, Wittgenstein's later work would not have been available to New Liberal theorists during

[4] Allan Janik, 'Notes on the Natural History of Politics' in *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, ed. Cressida J. Heyes (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 100-1. Theorists have often portrayed Wittgenstein as resolutely anti-political, but Uschanov suggests there are reasons to question this view. Wittgenstein appears to have followed Austrian politics during the interwar years; and though he remained sceptical of contemporary democratic politics, he favoured Attlee's Labour Party in the 1945 General Election. While it may be difficult to reach a judgement about Wittgenstein's private political views, we can be sure that he was primarily concerned with his work, rather than its political implications. T. P. Uschanov, 'Ernest Gellner's criticisms of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy', in *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, Morality and Politics*, eds. Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 38.

their lifetimes.[5] No clear historical link unites these two distinct intellectual elements. Therefore, the amalgamation of both traditions within a formidable democratic theory can only be understood as a matter of philosophical agreement and conceptual synthesis.

Nevertheless, the fusion of concepts from both traditions within a project of theoretical reconstruction generates a cogent vision of popular rule. Liberal Organic Democracy (in the tradition of Hegel and the New Liberal theorists) describes political society as an evolving holistic structure with a formative political history. Thus, the theory accepts the existence of imperfect, idiosyncratic democratic states while proposing evolutionary reform to enhance powers of citizenship and individual liberties. These reforms are conceived as a healthy component of any modern democracy, because they reflect a pattern of human behaviour – expounded by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* – which is fundamental in individual and collective action: the observation of a rule; and through the application of a rule in an unfamiliar context, the modification of a rule.[6]

Wittgensteinian rule-following theory provides the philosophical foundation for a responsive and holistic vision of democracy, driven by the dynamic interaction of citizens. It allows the theorist to reconstruct New Liberal insights within a comprehensive theoretical framework.

[5] See, for example, J. A. Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1926), p. 16; and Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 19.
[6] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§197-201, pp. 86-7; §499, pp. 146-7.

Theoretical Correspondence and the Project of Conceptual Synthesis

The integration of ideas from these two theoretical sources is founded upon an underlying correspondence between New Liberal assumptions and rule-following principles. By consciously reconstructing and extending points of agreement, it is possible to develop a justification for the combination of both elements within a new political philosophy.

There are two major points of congruence between New Liberal and Wittgensteinian ideas. First, both strands of thought reject the conflation of the actual with the ideal. Hobhouse stressed the need to delineate a clear distinction between the actual and the ideal when setting the agenda of politics, and other New Liberals were quick to follow his lead.[7] Wittgenstein repeatedly demonstrates in *Philosophical Investigations* that confusion leads us to seek the ideal meanings of concepts: to conflate essential meaning with one specific meaning, rather than accepting the multiple meanings found in conventional usage.[8] Thus, both schools of thought reject a misapprehension of the ideal that is common among more systematic organic philosophies. As a consequence, both strands of philosophy allow the political theorist to re-ground theoretical discussion of democratic politics in the everyday interaction of individual citizens.

Second, there is a deeper correspondence between both theoretical frameworks arising out of a shared understanding of social subjectivity grounded in *language* and *practice*. And this correspondence is important, because it justifies the use of rule-following theory in order to reconstruct and extend New Liberal insights. Both strands of thought acknowledge that language and social conventions play a formative role in orienting the individual within the political community. Indeed, a partly-intuitive recognition of the

[7] L. T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism* (1918) (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 23.
[8] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §101, p. 50.

significance of language helps to explain the New Liberal determination to counter reactionary influence, and to generate a truly democratic form of propaganda (as a trigger for democratic growth and political change).[9] But, even in the most discursive New Liberal writings, this recognition is never sufficiently examined or theoretically developed. By contrast, a philosophical analysis of the importance of language and practice (centred on the same issues of meaning, social identification, and change) is elaborated at length in Wittgensteinian rule-following theory. Therefore, by turning to Wittgensteinian thought, the political theorist is able to reconstruct an opaque and inconsistent New Liberal vision of social subjectivity – to ground New Liberal political insights in a comprehensive theory of language and meaning.

Theory and Analogy

The correspondence between New Liberal democratic thought and rule-following philosophy is encapsulated within a core theoretical principle. New Liberal theory and Wittgensteinian philosophy each incorporate a reflexive appreciation for the theoretical influence of dominant pictures or metaphors, and this enables each theory to draw on simple analogies in order to explain complex theoretical arguments. Liberal Organic Democracy combines ideas from both theories, but it employs one prominent metaphor above all others to capture its holistic theoretical foundations – the *organic* analogy of growth, evolution, and change.

[9] See J. A. Hobson, 'The Popular Mind', in *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932-1938: The Struggle for the International Mind*, eds. John M. Hobson and Colin Tyler (London: Routledge, 2011).

An Organic Theory of Democracy

Liberal Organic Democracy advances an organic understanding of democratic politics, which draws upon the evolutionary metanarrative cultivated in the speeches and writings of New Liberal theorists. It is particularly indebted to Hobson, whose expansive political imagination shaped the organic analogy into a range of holistic, evolutionary forms.[10]

Hobson's understanding was repeatedly re-formulated within a rapidly changing political context, as he sought to redefine politics in response to a new era of mass political enfranchisement. The organic analogy persisted as a central, organising concept throughout. Nevertheless, Hobson's conscious development and discussion of the organic analogy reflects a keen awareness of its metaphorical limitations.[11] This awareness is manifested in the way that the metaphor is used differently within distinct parts of his social, political, and economic thought.

Three core components define Hobson's use of the organic metanarrative: first, the depiction of the state (or political society) as a living biological entity; second, belief in the holistic (unified) character of social, political, and intellectual life; and third, a strong sense of evolution or progressive change.[12]

New Liberal social theory strongly emphasises the first aspect of this analogy as a theoretical justification for the provision of welfare throughout society.[13] But Hobson's dynamic understanding of democracy is rooted in the two other core components. His democratic theory models political society as a holistic nexus of citizens, individually and

[10] The innovative development of the organic analogy found in Hobson's writings justify the decision to draw primarily from his work when developing and reformulating this core theoretical principle in later chapters.
[11] Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 22.
[12] These core components are more comprehensively explained in Chapter Two.
[13] See J. A. Hobson, 'The Re-Statement of Democracy' in *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1909), p. 75.

equally connected to the state, but not subsumed within it. Alongside this weak state organicism, Hobson emphasises the holistic interrelation of ideas and institutions within an evolving ideational framework.[14] The organic analogy defines his understanding of the process of generating and reformulating political concepts: he notes that the meaning of political ideas changes over time, making rigid philosophical definitions and fixed institutional models inherently problematic.[15]

This dynamic theoretical perspective reconceptualises politics as a process in which political concepts evolve organically as a political society develops. Liberal Organic Democracy builds upon this idea. The revival of the organic analogy recaptures both elements of this deeply original New Liberal approach – the holistic (as opposed to atomistic) and the dynamic (as opposed to static) understanding of democratic politics.

The Organic Ontology

The use of the organic analogy to describe democratic politics tracks a deeper commitment to the idea of organic development. New Liberal democratic theory frames civic interaction within the context of an evolving social community.[16] This organic understanding animates New Liberal demands for popular self-rule, and may be characterised as a foundational social ontology – a theoretical principle that both describes and determines the nature of social existence.

The New Liberal social ontology identifies political understanding with political activity. It notes that political concepts acquire meaning through each individual's interaction

[14] J. A. Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1934), p. 83.
[15] J. A. Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic* (1938), edited and introduced by Michael Freeden (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1976), p. 86.
[16] See Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, p. 86.

with ideas and institutions. And it emphasises that popular interaction will naturally generate a dynamic political society, which cannot be constrained within a static constitutional framework or fixed theoretical model.

Thus, the organic social ontology allows citizens to orient themselves within an evolving political community (within a fluid framework of meaning). It empowers citizens by demonstrating that political institutions and political concepts are reformulated through collective political action. And perhaps most importantly, the ontology establishes a normative drive towards democratic self-rule, characterised by the active political engagement of all citizens in the process of institutional reform and political redefinition. It therefore represents a basic framework for a new democratic philosophy, mediated by a clear understanding of contingent political change.

But for all of its advantages, the organic understanding of democratic rule suffers from a series of major weaknesses. It is inconsistent and incomplete. New Liberal texts do not sufficiently elaborate on the theory of language and practice underpinning the organic philosophical framework. New Liberal ideas are expressed in deeply polemical and contradictory terms. And the New Liberal social ontology lacks comprehensive theoretical grounding.

New Liberal writers never adequately address these foundational problems. They borrow inconsistently from Hegelian idealism and a range of other theoretical frameworks in order to support their political positions. They acknowledge the metaphysical limitations of many of these theoretical frameworks. Yet they fail to adequately differentiate their arguments from these problematic foundations. Though Ritchie, Hobhouse, and Wallas attempt to reground New Liberal political theory in systematic theoretical explanations, in the process they lose sight of the democratic

foundations of the organic ontology. Despite its theoretical appeal, the organic vision of democracy advanced by the New Liberals appears confused and inconsistent.

A Reconstructed Theory of Democracy

The process of theoretical reconstruction raises the possibility of reviving and improving New Liberal democratic theory. By reconfiguring the organic social ontology, and by grounding New Liberal insights in a comprehensive theory of language and meaning, it is possible to reclaim the concept of democratic self-realisation.

Wittgensteinian rule-following theory provides theoretical support for the New Liberal social ontology in a way that other theories centred on language and practical reason cannot. Habermasian theories of social subjectivity privilege the propositional, illocutionary, and linguistic aspects of language over other elements of meaning.[17] Procedural theories of deliberative democracy model political engagement within a set of ideal structures – thereby creating a systemic obstacle to the evolution of democratic meaning.[18] Conversely, Wittgensteinian rule-following theory reflects the dynamic understanding of politics that defines New Liberal democratic theory. These two traditions are not simply complementary; they are grounded in the same theoretical assumptions.

Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy suggests a theory of philosophical naturalism, which logically supports the organic social ontology without recourse to Hegelian metaphysics. It provides a coherent explanation of the conceptual and linguistic

[17] Jürgen Habermas, 'An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centred Reason', in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 312-6.
[18] These objections will be explored at greater length in Chapter 7.

processes underlying this ontology.[19] And it generates a consistent and measured theoretical understanding of democratic politics.

Liberal Organic Democracy ultimately succeeds where many New Liberal theorists failed: in establishing a new model of New Liberal democracy that is not mired in a rigid systematic framework or weighed down by metaphysical argument, but is grounded in everyday interaction.

The Marriage of New Liberalism and Rule-Following Philosophy

Three fundamental properties emerge from the New Liberal underpinnings of Liberal Organic Democracy: firstly, democratic government is the product of activity; secondly, this form of government is subject to conceptual evolution; and thirdly, democracy is inclusive but not totalitarian. Rule-following philosophy supports these properties by establishing them as fundamental components within a broader philosophy of human behaviour.

Activity and Political Meaning

The contention that democratic government and popular engagement can only find meaning through activity (or political action) is fundamental to Liberal Organic Democracy. Hobson's writings identify the intuitive sense of this claim, though he is

[19] Rubinstein has also emphasised parallels between Hegel and Wittgenstein (while acknowledging the distinct lack of causal influence). Meanwhile, Tully and Taylor have also attempted to bring Wittgenstein into similar projects of reconstructing Hegelian ideas in their theories of recognition. D. Rubinstein, *Marx and Wittgenstein: social praxis and social explanation*, second edn. (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 327; James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key. Volume I: Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition' in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

unable to explain the epistemic basis for his belief that 'Paradoxical as it seems, you must do a thing before you can know it. Only by the exercise of self-control can a person or a people learn the art of government.'[20] Wittgenstein's later work provides the philosophical explanation for this contention, and it is commitment to this theoretical outlook that drives the theory of Liberal Organic Democracy.

In his exploration of meaning, Wittgenstein establishes that if we 'Don't say...but *look and see*' what is happening in the process of engaging with and experiencing meaning, then we observe that understanding is always manifested in knowing 'how to go on' – to apply a rule or intended action within particular circumstances.[21] We can only appreciate a concept if we are able to operate it according to a shared or conventional use – otherwise the concept is an empty sign that has no purpose.[22] Following conventional usage, or applying an interpretation of that convention, is defined by Wittgenstein as 'following a rule'.[23] Because we are naturally compelled by the desire to engage meaningfully with language and with ideas, and thus make sense to ourselves and to others, we are consistently (and actively) following rules that we consider appropriate to particular circumstances.

These Wittgensteinian insights support the contention that political meaning is generated through action in the political sphere. In a democratic context, each citizen will engage in the process of following rules that accord with the demands of political life. Given that the prime demand of a democracy is self-government in a collective forum, each citizen will therefore have to engage with decision-making processes (such as voting) in order to genuinely comprehend their meaning.

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[20] Hobson, *Towards International Government*, pp. 207-8.
[21] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §66, p. 36; §154, p. 66.
[22] Wittgenstein, 'Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment', in *Philosophical Investigations*, §37, p. 190.
[23] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §202, p. 87.

Wittgenstein's work proposes an understanding of meaningful behaviour that finds direct political expression in the democratic ideas of Hobson and other New Liberal theorists. Within the resulting theory, understanding and engaging with politics becomes an active, performative process. This *active citizenship* forms the basis for popular self-rule; for generating and reshaping democratic institutions, and for gauging democratic legitimacy. Furthermore, it delineates the individual's sphere of basic democratic rights and duties within an organic political framework.

The contention that meaning is derived from contextually-situated activity inevitably jars with other philosophical theories. Following Wittgenstein's later philosophy of meaning, Liberal Organic Democracy denies that concepts have an essential meaning that is distinct from their ordinary usage. The thesis emphasises that political meaning is intimately related to applying rules – to engaging with, and creating, shared conventions within a specific community. Hobson's ideas hint at an active form of democracy that is particularly interesting because it rejects the notion of fixed or essential meaning while providing a means to make sense of the world – and engage in the process of creating a political environment.[24] Wittgenstein's work elucidates how this is possible by explaining how meaning is situated in the practice of enacting and redefining social conventions.

Evolution and Rule-Modification

Liberal Organic Democracy maintains that political meaning is neither fixed nor essential – it is subject to constant redefinition. New Liberal theory suggests that change or evolution in meaning is a natural result of new activity. Constant human interaction will generate a dynamic political society. In order to keep pace with the rapidly evolving reality of politics, the state must develop responsive and democratic institutions.

[24] Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, p. 85.

Wittgensteinian rule-following theory provides a solid philosophical foundation for this New Liberal contention. Evolution of political meaning (and of political institutions) is the natural result of our interactions with meaning. It is manifested in the process of following – and modifying – a rule.

Wittgenstein does not suggest that following a rule is a simple, prescriptive process. Throughout the *Philosophical Investigations* he emphasises that though we apply the rule that occurs to us automatically, this does not equate to deference to a specific authority.[25] We do not follow the party line, we merely attempt to use concepts meaningfully in a particular circumstance. However, when we apply this rule in a new context we discover that we have been led to emphasise one particular aspect of the rule over others; we have changed how we would formulate or describe the rule in future.[26] In effect, by following the rule, we have modified the rule.

Through political activity, each member of a democratic community is constantly engaging in the process of following and modifying the rules that determine their political understanding. Consequently, rule-following theory strengthens the core New Liberal evolutionary argument – that in order to remain meaningful, democratic government must be able to evolve in response to changes in political understanding.

Democratic Inclusion

Liberal Organic Democracy is characterised by the demand for a totally inclusive democratic community. The demand that no citizens should be excluded from the political process is an intrinsic part of the New Liberal social ontology. Liberal Organic Democracy extends this point, arguing that to eliminate any citizen from the process of

[25] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§219-30, pp. 92-3.
[26] *Ibid.* §175, p. 77.

political engagement within an organic state is to exclude a party that may play an important role in modifying and refining the meaning of political concepts. As a result, the state loses contact with the popular understanding of political concepts, as meaning evolves through the natural process of rule-following and rule-modification. Furthermore, the excluded party feels disassociated from the state (due to a loss of meaningful democratic activity) and loses any sense of political obligation.

Taken as an intellectual alloy, Liberal Organic Democracy appears to possess an even stronger political rationale than its component parts. Though the theory unites a consciously apolitical philosophy with theories designed to precipitate social and political reform, it ultimately generates a comprehensive and philosophically pertinent reassessment of our political world.

Methodology of Theoretical Reconstruction

The methodology underpinning this project of theoretical reconstruction enables the synthesis of ideas from both traditions within a distinctly theoretical framework. The thesis employs an internal methodological critique in order to reconstruct a neglected organic model of politics, and to subsequently isolate, analyse, and reconfigure specific theoretical principles, and rebuild them into a comprehensive theory of democratic self-realisation. This process will proceed through three methodological stages, moving from historical interpretation to descriptive and then to normative forms of philosophical investigation.

The historical reconstruction of New Liberal democratic theory is a necessary prelude to the development of a more coherent political philosophy. The New Liberals generated a compelling framework for democratic politics, rooted in a complex and intuitive

understanding of human behaviour. To explain, anatomise, and build upon the New Liberal democratic framework, the political theorist needs to fully grasp this intuitive understanding within the context of early twentieth century political debate.

Historians of ideas have undertaken extensive studies of New Liberal writings on social welfare provision. Freeden, Allett, and Clarke have produced particularly impressive and wide-ranging studies of the theoretical foundations of the New Liberal social reform agenda.[27] But few scholars have focused their attention on New Liberal democratic theory. As a consequence, this body of ideas remains largely unknown to intellectual historians and political theorists. Chapters 1 and 2 employ a contextualist analysis (using a modified Skinnerian methodology) to overcome the scholarly neglect of New Liberal democratic thought, and recapture this persuasive and original body of political ideas.[28] This process of historical reconstruction reveals a politically-astute but theoretically-incoherent understanding of democratic politics – which will be distilled into a comprehensive political philosophy using insights derived from Wittgensteinian rule-following theory.

From Chapter 3 onwards, the argument transitions into the Wittgensteinian method of philosophical investigation. Chapter 3 develops a descriptive account of meaningful engagement that deliberately eschews philosophical assumption in favour of detailed examination of human behaviour. This approach helps to explain the holistic evolution of ideas, but is limited by descriptive constraints. Chapter 4 seeks to overcome this limitation by challenging the descriptive characterisation of philosophical investigation – arguing that rule-following theory entails a degree of normative engagement.

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[27] Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*; John Allett, *New Liberalism: The Political Economy of J. A. Hobson* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); and Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[28] The modifications to the Skinnerian methodology will be further explained in Chapter 1.

Subsequent chapters employ an enhanced model of philosophical investigation that allows the theorist to alternate between normative and descriptive analysis.

The shift towards a distinctly theoretical methodology signals the primary objective of the thesis. But it also reflects a fundamental difference between New Liberal thought and Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy. Wittgenstein's later reflections on meaning, grammar, and the practice of following a rule redefined the academic understanding of human behaviour, and inspired an entire branch of philosophy that continues to shape theoretical discourse.

Rule-following theories are far more familiar to the academic reader than New Liberal democratic theories. However, they are also far more numerous. Rule-following theorists have developed a plurality of different interpretations of this core philosophical idea. By identifying a particularly compelling interpretation among different approaches, scrutinising and modifying its theoretical insights, and subsequently applying them to the problem of democratic self-realisation, this project turns Wittgensteinian rule-following theory to the complex task of theoretical reconstruction.

The Wittgensteinian Foundations of Liberal Organic Democracy

There is no academic consensus about how to interpret rule-following philosophy, or how to translate Wittgensteinian insights into the sphere of normative political theory.

Disagreement over rule-following theory continues to drive debate within a broad range of theoretical disciplines. Philosophers and social and political theorists have all been inspired by Wittgenstein's work. Yet there has been limited overlap across disciplinary lines, compounding disagreement among scholars about how to define the principle of

following a rule. Liberal Organic Democracy draws from the work of theorists in a plurality of debates, in order to establish a theoretically-coherent understanding of rule-following philosophy.

Philosophers of language have clashed over how to define the principle of following a rule. The most substantial area of disagreement concerns the existence of 'private language'. Discussion has centred on the debate between Baker and Hacker (who support the notion of a private language) and Malcolm (who rejects it on the basis that a consistent rule is impossible without the grounding of a political community).[29] The distinction between individualists and communalists has inspired further debates about the nature of rule-following. The definition of a convention as a communal practice – advanced by McDowell – has generated the most compelling reading of Wittgenstein's principle.[30] Nevertheless, others have continued to call these readings into question; and Mulhall's redefinition of the positions ascribed to Wittgenstein and his interlocutor in *Philosophical Investigations* offers a fascinating alternative thesis.[31] Drawing on these ideas, Liberal Organic Democracy identifies a coherent vision of an abstract – but compelling – theoretical principle.

Political theorists are divided about the implications of Wittgenstein's theoretical argument. Three different approaches have helped to frame the debate. *Social Wittgensteinians* have pioneered the positive application of rule-following principles to institutional structures and norms. *Sceptical Wittgensteinians* have taken a more circumspect approach, grounded in Wittgenstein's philosophical scepticism (in the conviction that philosophy leaves everything in its place, without resolving

[29] Norman Malcolm, 'Wittgenstein on Language and Rules', in *Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays 1978-89*, ed. Georg Henrik von Wright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity. An analytical commentary on the 'Philosophical Investigations' Volume 2* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).
[30] John McDowell, *Mind, Value, & Reality* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998).
[31] Stephen Mulhall, *Wittgenstein's Private Language: Grammar, Nonsense, and Imagination in Philosophical Investigations, §§243-315* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

contradictions).[32] And c*ontextualists* have traced Wittgenstein's historical context in order to (i) provide support for the positive or the sceptical interpretations or (ii) establish a new reading of Wittgenstein and politics grounded in early twentieth century intellectual culture.

Debate among these three approaches has resolved into a discussion about the conservatism of Wittgenstein's ideas, and the extent to which his philosophy remains insulated from political discourse. Sceptical Wittgensteinians have called attention to the limited role that Wittgenstein attributes to philosophy in ordinary life. Gellner and Nyíri suggest that Wittgenstein's model of rule-following practice precludes critical reflection, social criticism, and political reform.[33] Many contemporary theorists regard this conservative characterisation as a caricature of Wittgenstein's philosophy.[34] Nevertheless, it has had a lasting impact on the debate: Nyíri's argument steered discussion towards *Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough'* – a commentary on moral scepticism and cultural relativism discovered in Wittgenstein's unpublished notebooks.[35]

Others have advanced more sophisticated sceptical arguments. Cavell's interpretation suggests that philosophy must play a therapeutic role for the individual ensnared by scepticism and metaphysical confusion, rather than imparting any substantive theoretical arguments to politics.[36] As Temelini has emphasised, Cavell's therapeutic

[32] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §124, p. 55.
[33] J. C. Nyíri, 'Wittgenstein's Later Work in relation to Conservatism' in *Wittgenstein and His Times*, ed. Brian McGuiness (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982); Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things*, intro. Bertrand Russell (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1968). This claim will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.
[34] Andrew Lugg, 'Was Wittgenstein a Conservative Thinker?' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XXIII, no. 4 (1985), p. 470.
[35] Nyíri, 'Wittgenstein's Later Work in relation to Conservatism', p. 51; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough'*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. A. C. Miles (Bishopstone: The Brynmill Press Ltd., 2010).
[36] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

reading has had a dramatic influence over Wittgensteinian political thought.[37] It has inspired apolitical interpretations and movements – like the New Wittgensteinians – that reject the idea of a core Wittgensteinian principle that could serve as a model of politics.[38]

In response to conservative and apolitical interpretations, theorists from across the political spectrum have put forward alternative visions of Wittgensteinian political thought. Tanesini's feminist interpretation of Wittgenstein argues that all conventions are subject to rational revision, creating the potential for radical social change.[39] Marxist Wittgensteinians Rubinstein, Kitching, Pleasants, and Uschanov have tied the Wittgensteinian model of the development of meaning to social praxis.[40] They have emphasised that the sceptical preoccupation with *Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough'* gives disproportionate weight to cultural relativism in Wittgenstein's thought. And in recent years, a group of political theorists intent on harnessing Wittgensteinian insights to the cause of liberal pluralism have begun to reshape the debate. Heyes, Tully, Janik, and others have drawn upon Wittgenstein's ability to provide a philosophical framework for the liberation of the individual from contingent patterns of thought. They have focused on the emancipatory potential of Wittgenstein's philosophy – on the possibility of using these ideas in order to dissolve a captivating and oppressive 'picture' of human relations.[41]

Contextualists have attempted to settle the debate over Wittgenstein and politics through detailed analysis of the intellectual milieux of early-twentieth century Vienna

[37] Michael Temelini, *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2015), p. 19.
[38] Alice Crary, 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought' in *The New Wittgenstein*, eds. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 138.
[39] Alessandra Tanesini, *Wittgenstein: A Feminist Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 26.
[40] Rubinstein, *Marx and Wittgenstein: social praxis and social explanation*, pp. 14-15; Kitching and Pleasants, eds., *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, Morality and Politics*.
[41] See Heyes, ed., *The Grammar of Politics*. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §115, p. 53.

and mid-twentieth century Cambridge. Janik and Toulmin, O'Hear, and others have helped to elucidate Wittgenstein's theoretical and cultural influences.[42] But ultimately, historical analysis and broader arguments about what Wittgenstein might have meant have a limited role to play within this thesis.

Liberal Organic Democracy is a rule-following theory of democracy rather than a broader interpretation of Wittgenstein. It is therefore not primarily concerned with Wittgenstein's intent or with therapeutic readings, but rather with the application of the principle of following a rule to political life. Thus, the thesis does not discuss historical or sceptical interpretations in detail, but rather calls the reader's attention to the discussion of the 'civic status of a contradiction' in rule-following practice in order to apply Wittgenstein's insight to a model of political engagement.[43] In this respect, the thesis draws heavily on the Social Wittgensteinian tradition pioneered by Winch. Winch's translation of Wittgensteinian rule-following theory into the field of the social studies generated a new framework for understanding human interaction – distinguishing between habitual behaviour and conventional or rule-governed behaviour.[44] Critics have argued that Winch's interpretation errs in coming close to 'social ontology'.[45] But Liberal Organic Democracy suggests that a nuanced analysis of rule-following practices simply reveals the grammatical framework that forms the basis of social reality.

This thesis will engage with substantive discussion of the political dimensions of rule-following practice. Chapter 5 will discuss Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice* at length, and

[42] Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1996); Anthony O'Hear, 'Wittgenstein and the Transmission of Traditions', in *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, ed. A. Phillips Giffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[43] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §125, p. 55.
[44] Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (1958) (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).
[45] Nigel Pleasants, 'Towards a Critical Use of Marx and Wittgenstein' in *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, Morality and Politics*, pp. 168-9.

Chapter 6 will respond to dialogical readings of Wittgenstein advanced by Tully and Temelini.[46] The work of Tully, Janik, and other liberal democratic rule-following theorists will stimulate discussion throughout. But ultimately, none of these theorists have produced a comprehensive political theory that applies the principles of rule-following philosophy to the politics of a democratic community. And so, it will be necessary to go beyond existing scholarship. While the thesis builds upon the masterful interpretations offered by Winch, Pitkin, Tully, Janik, and others, it deliberately returns to the later Wittgensteinian texts in order to develop an independent reading, which can serve as a solid theoretical foundation for a dynamic theory of popular self-rule.

The fusion of New Liberal social ontology and Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy marks an innovation in Wittgensteinian political theory. By emphasising the political implications of rule-following, Liberal Organic Democracy brings rule-following philosophy into a New Liberal project for democratic self-realisation. This theoretical understanding traces a grammar of politics – a normative framework describing and directing political interaction.[47] It reveals the contingency of political meaning, and urges citizens to take an active role in continually redeveloping a shared picture of human relations: in constructing and regenerating a democratic form of politics.

The Structure of the Thesis

Liberal Organic Democracy builds upon a theoretical understanding of politics that is no longer commonplace within academic debate, and is practically unknown in popular political discourse. New Liberal theories of democracy are no longer read; and the

[46] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1972); Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key, Vol. I*; Temelini, *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*.
[47] Liberal Organic Democracy translates the New Liberal ontology into a normative drive towards a community that maximises political meaning.

principles driving these texts are seldom identified within modern campaigns for constitutional reform. In order to produce a coherent explanation of Liberal Organic Democracy, it is necessary to begin this thesis by reconstructing the organic social ontology that permeates New Liberal discussions of popular self-government. Chapters 1 and 2 will trace this understanding through a contextualist analysis of New Liberal democratic thought. Subsequently, the thesis will progress towards a more distinctly theoretical discussion of democratic politics. The New Liberal social ontology identified in Chapter 2 will be recast within a more coherent theoretical framework, and extended into the theory of Liberal Organic Democracy.

Chapter 3 will begin by analysing the theoretical and practical weaknesses of the New Liberal social ontology. It will then proceed to reground this ontology within a more formidable philosophical foundation – the Wittgensteinian theory of following a rule. This chapter will follow Wittgenstein's methodology, employing a descriptive analysis of meaningful interaction in order to rebuild the organic social ontology from the ground up. Nevertheless, the chapter will ultimately demonstrate the impossibility of constructing a coherent democratic theory within an exclusively descriptive framework. Chapter 4 will continue the work begun in Chapter 3, branching into normative theory. It will identify the normativity underpinning meaningful behaviour, and relate this insight to the normative assumptions that ground New Liberal theory. Chapter 5 will extend this normative framework into the political sphere. It will engage with Pitkin's argument that politics and language are distinct regions of language, and it will conclude by demonstrating how the political grammar drives citizens towards a form of civic flourishing, encapsulated in the New Liberal ontology.

Chapter 6 will launch into a discussion of the recast social ontology. It will trace the social and political characteristics that define the drive towards a more meaningful form

of democratic self-rule. And it will identify the properties that define this grammar of politics. Liberal Organic Democracy depends upon a framework of nonviolence, inclusion, and political engagement. Under these conditions, language models a particular type of freedom rooted in democratic self-determination.

Liberal Organic Democracy incorporates dynamic, democratic processes for building meaning *into its foundational theoretical assumptions*. And as a consequence, the theory automatically invites political discussion of institutional structures that facilitate the communal redefinition of meaning – including social-media forums, local government, and referenda. Chapter 7 will consider how these forms of civic engagement can be harnessed as powerhouses of democratic development: how they can help to reconstruct the New Liberal theory of democratic self-realisation within a responsive and mutually-reinforcing institutional structure. In the process, it will draw upon the expertise of key contemporary figures working in social-media.

A Project of Reconstruction and a New Vision of Democracy

Liberal Organic Democracy recaptures a compelling but neglected understanding of popular self-rule. And it develops this understanding into a philosophy of democratic politics. This new theory of democracy *reconstructs* the dynamic and expansive vision of popular political engagement advanced within New Liberal democratic theory – regrounding its core theoretical assumptions within the comprehensive analysis of human behaviour and meaning elaborated within Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy.

Liberal Organic Democracy returns to the responsive and loosely-bounded theoretical structure suggested by New Liberal theory. It uses the New Liberal analogy of organic

growth, evolution, and change in order to model a form of politics rooted in the everyday interaction of citizens. And it traces the linguistic and conceptual processes that underwrite this holistic theoretical understanding, enabling Liberal Organic Democracy to overcome the conceptual weaknesses that undermined New Liberal thought.

This project of theoretical reconstruction extends the core principle of democratic self-realisation – establishing a normative framework for a perpetually evolving political community. The synthesis of New Liberal democratic theory and Wittgensteinian rule-following provides a new insight into contemporary demands for democratic reform. At the same time, it is a remarkably fertile crucible of ideas that generates novel strategies for popular self-rule. Liberal Organic Democracy therefore provides a means to shoot beyond the boundaries of contemporary theoretical discourse – and begin to change the way that we think and behave in the political sphere.

Chapter 1: New Liberal Democratic Theory

§1

New Liberal political theory was inspired by an innovative sense of moral purpose and a powerful drive for tangible material improvement. Progressive campaigners resolutely rejected the laissez-faire political morality of mid-nineteenth century liberalism. And in its place, they substituted a holistic theoretical understanding of social and political phenomena (drawn from the latest developments in biology, philosophy, and economics), and an urgent call for collective political action.

Together, these radical reformers promoted a comprehensive political agenda – demanding parliamentary reform, state regulation of industry, and the extension of social welfare provision as a means to ensure the free and healthy development of individual and community.

This chapter will explore the philosophical foundations of this radical reform agenda, and examine how they shaped New Liberal democratic thought. It will begin with a broad discussion of the movement and a brief consideration of methodology. Thereafter, it will launch into a more detailed analysis of the inconsistent and dynamic vision of democracy that emerges from New Liberal texts. It will focus on the theoretical commonalities that define this vision of democracy, delineating how the New Liberals united around the mission to update and redefine the central tenets of liberal political theory. This line of inquiry will lead us to a close theoretical analysis of New Liberalism; and thereafter, onto a frank discussion of the metaphysical limitations of New Liberal thought, along with the reasons that we might have for re-grounding these liberal democratic ideas within a more secure epistemological framework.

In the following chapter, a partial solution to this philosophical difficulty will be identified in the work of J. A. Hobson – whose writings on popular self-government provide a particularly compelling insight into democratic behaviour. Chapter 2 will conclude by developing Hobson's core insights into an organic social ontology. It will emphasise the intuitive strength (and philosophical shortcomings) of New Liberal theorisation. In the process, it will begin to uncover a fascinating framework for popular self-government that has stood apart from contemporary democratic theory for far too long.

I. The New Liberal Project: Theorists and Ideas

Defining the New Liberals

§2

To develop a clear insight into New Liberal democratic thought, we must first identify the writers, intellectuals, and politicians that played a central role in defining and articulating New Liberal ideas. However, the complex nature of the movement raises questions about how this process of identification should proceed.

New Liberalism formed part of a broad spectrum of progressive ideologies pushing for social and political reform in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain. Between these nominally distinct ideologies there was often considerable theoretical overlap and widespread agreement on policy.[1] Yet only a few members of this progressive movement consistently defined themselves as 'New Liberals'; and most tended rather to identify themselves as Fabians, socialists, or idealists.

Party affiliation brought many of these progressive theorists and activists into the same fold. But it provided no permanent identity or theoretical home. Though progressives were content to work with the Liberal Party to secure their objectives prior to 1914, even the most enthusiastic New Liberals turned away from the party after the outbreak of the First World War appeared to illustrate the failure of the liberal movement – embracing the rising Labour Party instead.

[1] New Liberals consistently highlighted the common ground between different ideological frameworks (and primarily between liberals and socialists) in the early twentieth century Britain; see, for example, L. T. Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, second edn. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), pp. 225-34.

Hence, it is difficult to point to one determining factor that distinguished the New Liberals from their contemporaries. Plainly, it would be misleading to focus exclusively on the work of a narrow, self-designated core, or an organised party apparatus. New Liberal plans for social and political reform were the product of a dynamic exchange of progressive ideas among a diverse group of theorists and campaigners, who cared more about concrete political outcomes than party distinctions.

Nevertheless, by situating the foremost New Liberal theorists at the centre of a network of political and ideological innovators, it should be possible to identify other key figures that helped to shape the movement's drive for comprehensive social and democratic reform.

§3

J. A. Hobson (1858-1940) and L. T. Hobhouse (1864-1929) played the lead role in moulding, directing, and galvanising New Liberal thought over six decades of political change. They published prolifically, acting as theoretical powerhouses from the late 1880s through to the end of the interwar period.

Hobhouse made his mark in academia, as Fellow in Philosophy at the University of Oxford in the 1880s and 90s, and thereafter as newly-created Chair of Sociology at the University of London from 1907. But he also worked to popularise New Liberal principles, most notably during a period as leader-writer for *The Manchester Guardian*. As a radical journalist and academic, Hobhouse felt compelled to address the irrational foundations of late-Victorian social policy – framing his opposition to laissez-faire and 'Reactionary' politics within a formal philosophical and sociological critique of moral and economic individualism.

By contrast, Hobson never secured a permanent academic post, and spent much of his life touring, lecturing, and writing on a wide range of practical and theoretical topics. As a consequence, he developed many of his most compelling arguments for political reform through his involvement with a number of progressive publications.[2] Hobson's 'fragmentary' journalistic experience led him to adopt a much less systematic approach.[3] As an unorthodox liberal economist, dedicated free-thinker, and masterful propagandist, he deployed New Liberal ideas in critical and imaginative ways in order to expose the structural forces manipulating industrial life and subverting democratic rule.

Two further academic writers stand out for their formative contribution to New Liberal thought. David G. Ritchie (1853-1903) laid the ethical groundwork for New Liberalism while working as Professor of Philosophy at Oxford and St. Andrews in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. As an astute theorist and social critic, he combined philosophical idealism, utilitarianism, and the Darwinian evolutionary ontology into a comprehensive moral framework. And, in the decades after Ritchie's death, Graham Wallas (1858-1932) emerged as one of the movement's most influential thinkers.[4] As a pioneer of the academic study of social psychology, Wallas produced nuanced arguments for the New Liberal platform of social reform. His work helped to reframe New Liberal political theory within a scientific analysis of human nature; while his writings on democracy provided a unique insight into the developing phenomenon of mass politics.

Outside of academia, the New Liberalism flourished in an atmosphere of political activism and polemical exchange. New Liberal theory focused on concrete plans for

[2] As Boer War correspondent and occasional contributor to *The Manchester Guardian*, and as editorial contributor on *The Progressive Review*, *The Tribune*, and *The Nation*.
[3] J. A. Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic* (1938), ed. Michael Freeden (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1976), p. 85.
[4] Though he did not adopt the label, he occupied many of the same theoretical positions as his New Liberal friends and colleagues.

political reform, and some of the movement's most compelling thinkers were also highly successful parliamentary activists. Herbert Samuel (1870-1963) was an early advocate of New Liberal ideology, before rising to the position of Home Secretary and Liberal Party leader in the 1930s. His *Liberalism* appeared in print in 1902, with an introduction by Herbert Asquith (Prime Minister, 1908-16) praising the author for setting out theoretical justifications for a practical agenda of social reform.[5] Likewise, Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) helped shape the development of New Liberal political theory in the decades before he became Prime Minister, though he remained a committed socialist throughout his life. As a progressive social reformer, he worked alongside New Liberal theorists, producing some of the most nuanced scholarship on the organic state and constitutional reform.

Together, these radical thinkers developed a comprehensive political agenda under the ideological umbrella of the New Liberalism, generating an expansive body of publications that bolstered the movement's popular appeal and provided evidential grounds for its ambitious normative claims.

§4

The leading figures of the New Liberal movement were drawn together by a web of personal, political and professional connections. In the first instance, many progressive writers were profoundly influenced by philosophical idealism while studying at the University of Oxford in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. After leaving Oxford, they channelled this idealism into active membership of London's Ethical Societies. Participation in the ethical movement brought them into regular contact with

[5] Herbert Samuel, *Liberalism: An attempt to state the principles and proposals of contemporary Liberalism in England*, intro. H. H. Asquith M.P. (London: Grant Richards, 1902).

each other, and led to the development of a series of informal social networks built around shared moral and political objectives.

These social networks spiralled out in different directions, resulting in the formation of weekly lunch clubs, non-partisan discussion groups, and active political associations. Prominent socialists, liberals, and idealists working in London in the first two decades of the twentieth century debated and published together as 'The Rainbow Circle' under a unified banner of political reform. An army of New Liberal activists (including Hobson and John and Barbara Hammond) produced detailed surveys of social and industrial conditions, justifying increased state intervention in the economy. And progressive journalists of all stripes campaigning for social welfare reform came together to publish the weekly journal *The Nation* under H. W. Massingham's editorship (1907-1923), granting the movement a central focus and a forum for discussion in early twentieth-century society.

In such a dynamic intellectual environment, personal relationships developed alongside opportunities for professional and political collaboration. Samuel and MacDonald worked with Hobson on the short-lived *Progressive Review* from 1896-98, and remained in contact long after it folded. And, after working together at the Manchester Guardian, Hobhouse called on Hobson to join him for a brief period at *The Tribune* in 1905, demonstrating the continuing importance of the personal relationships to the New Liberal movement. This effect was so pronounced that by the time Massingham was appointed as *The Nation's* editor-in-chief, he was able recruit contributors from a close network of progressive writers (ranging from Hobson and Hobhouse to John Hammond and Harold Laski) dedicated to radical political reform.

Yet the intellectual boundaries of the New Liberalism were not sharply drawn. Many of the central figures of the movement also came into regular contact with social

democratic thinkers such as R. H. Tawney and G. D. H. Cole; centrist Liberals, such as Ramsay Muir and J. M. Keynes; and free-thinking intellectuals, such as J. M. Robertson and Stanton Coit; as well as other avant gardes and progressives, from The Fabian Society to the Bloomsbury Set. These interactions helped to sharpen the New Liberal vision of democratic rule, and motivated New Liberal theorists to repeatedly redefine their ideas within an ever-changing public discourse.

Mission and Methodology

§5

New Liberal campaigners sought to break away from the reluctant, piecemeal, and 'opportunistic' pattern of social and political reform established by successive nineteenth century governments.[6] In its place, they advanced a far-reaching and harmonious approach to progressive political change.

Echoing a central principle of mainstream liberal thought, New Liberals suggested that the highest form of human development consisted in the unconstrained determination of the individual will (i.e. the free cultivation of individuality). Yet they characterised the atomistic theoretical framework and moral individualism that had defined the *old* Victorian liberalism as an incomplete and 'mechanical' expression of this ethical idea.[7] And they argued for 'a fuller appreciation and realisation of liberty contained in the provision of equal opportunities for self-development'.[8]

[6] See J. A. Hobson, *The Modern State. The Changing World: A Broadcast Symposium* (London: The British Broadcasting Corporation, 1931), p. 30; and Samuel, *Liberalism*, pp. 3-4.
[7] D. G. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference: Four Essays on the Political Philosophy of Mr Herbert Spencer, J. S. Mill, and T. H. Green* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), p. 22.
[8] L. T. Hobhouse, *The Theory of Knowledge: A Contribution to Some Problems of Logic and Metaphysics* (London: Methuen & Co., 1896), p. 581; Hobson, 'Preface', in *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1909), p. xii.

No government would be able to create the necessary conditions for individual self-determination unless it also addressed the wider political, social, economic, and cultural constraints that hindered each citizen's personal development.[9] Disenfranchisement, hierarchy, poverty, and imperialism all threatened to prevent the abstract notion of universal liberty from becoming a concrete reality. And so, it was the democratic state's responsibility to legislate in order to dissolve these constraints on liberty – to realise the promise inherent in the liberal ideal.[10]

This was a concerted attempt to reframe the liberal political agenda, and reconcile it to the economic realities and collectivised political forces of the modern state.[11] The drive to build a 'new' liberalism shaped the way that this broad group of theorists wrote. Although New Liberal writers continued to cite older texts as justification for an expanded organic policy of reform, most of them were more focused on (i) referencing one another's work in order to move theoretical discussion forward, (ii) engaging with the most pressing political issues of the day, and (iii) attacking the work of contemporary polemical opponents that challenged New Liberal claims. To accurately reconstruct New Liberal democratic theory, we need to acknowledge the impact of this shared political mission at a methodological level.

§6

The dynamic interplay of ideas within the New Liberal movement requires us to adopt a nuanced methodological framework. This chapter (and the following chapter) will therefore employ a modified Skinnerian approach to the history of political thought, which aims to retrace the authorial intent of New Liberal theorists by (i) identifying the

[9] Hobson, 'Equality of Opportunity', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, pp. 96-7.
[10] See Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*, p. 102.
[11] Hobson, 'Preface', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. xii.

linguistic, political, and social context of New Liberal work, and (ii) interrogating each text with careful awareness of this specific context.

Yet this contextual analysis must proceed with care. Skinner's greatest insight about identifying authorial intent in a text is expressed in his demand to know what an author would have meant in the context of her own time.[12] He emphasises that meaning changes over time, and justifies the method of reconstructing the conceptual and linguistic understanding of the author by reference to the Austinian philosophy of illocutionary force (the understanding that contemporaries would have held about an utterance or a text).[13] The theoretical foundations of this approach are well-grounded; however a number of Skinner's methodological prescriptions for identifying illocutionary force are unduly influenced by the requirements of his own historical work. His primary focus is sixteenth century English pamphlet debates. Because of the dialogical nature of these discourses, Skinner suggests that it is necessary to identify which theorist each author was responding to in their writing, in order to reconstruct the ideational position each author sought to uphold or refute.[14] This is a sound proposition when the author in question intended to respond to the work of one theorist, but with New Liberal work, this is simply not the case.

New Liberal texts are defined by their philosophical purpose. Like sixteenth century pamphlets, they are broadly polemical pieces. But their primary aims are to synthesise ideas into a coherent body of thought, to educate the masses, and to influence the conduct of politics and the formation of social, economic and constitutional policy.[15] A

[12] Quentin Skinner, 'Motives, Intentions and Interpretation', in *Visions of Politics, Volume I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.100.
[13] Skinner, 'Interpretation and the Understanding of Speech Acts', in *Visions of Politics, Vol. I* (2002), p.120.
[14] Skinner, 'Retrospect: Studying Rhetoric and Conceptual Change', in *Visions of Politics, Vol. I* (2002), p.178.
[15] J. A. Hobson's *The Recording Angel: A Report From Earth* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932) is the perfect example of such a text.

holistic understanding encouraged New Liberal theorists to appropriate ideas from a variety of thinkers and blend them into a unified vision for political reform.

Because New Liberals were often more acutely concerned with the didactic presentation of a synthesis of ideas than with the careful attribution of theoretical influences, the Skinnerite injunction about the critical necessity of identifying an author's influences is less relevant.[16] The historian of political thought is better able to trace New Liberal intention by identifying the social and political context of the period, and by contextualising with reference to contemporary polemical and theoretical tracts that shaped specific public debate.

This is not to suggest that, where New Liberal authors identify major theorists in their work, these will not be discussed. But to prioritise the identification of minor theorists that New Liberals neglect to cite over the study of major political programmes or controversial parliamentary debates is to be led by an inappropriate methodological prescription, which fails to comprehend the polemical nature of the movement. The emphasis of this chapter is on recovering a compelling but neglected political conceptualisation; in this respect, it is more like Skinner's study of the republican concept of liberty, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, than his earlier theoretical work.[17]

§7

The historical approach driving our analysis will maintain an essential sensitivity to New Liberal texts when using them as sources. New Liberal theorists communicated their

[16] Freeden has noted that Hobson's failure to accredit his philosophical influences was not simply a result of scholarly laziness; it was a conscious prioritisation of the task of synthesising ideas into a unified master-narrative with immediate social utility. Michael Freeden, 'Hobson's Evolving Conceptions of Human Nature' in *Liberal Languages* (2005), p.109.
[17] Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

thoughts on democracy using a variety of distinct literary styles. Särkkä has rightly emphasised that a simple analysis of Hobson's longer published texts misses the urgent political engagement of his periodical work – his most immediate, propagandist writings.[18] Hobson expressed his theory through a variety of media – speeches, broadcasts, pamphlets, journal articles, and books.[19] Throughout, he shifted between propagandist, discursive, and educational styles. This allowed him to effectively convey his ideas and engage different audiences. Yet this plurality of styles was united by a core theoretical foundation: an unwavering commitment to democracy, driving an underlying philosophy of politics.

In the argument that follows, this foundation will be carefully explained. Throughout, attention will primarily be directed towards democratic thought (thereby avoiding extended discussion of New Liberal social and economic thought). There are good reasons for limiting our focus in this way. Although New Liberal writings were the product of a self-consciously organic, interdisciplinary approach, theorists clearly recognised the value of a distinctly political perspective. Many wrote on specific political and constitutional issues, and separated longer works into chapters on political, social, economic and religious issues for cognitive convenience.[20] By grounding this study of democratic theory in a strong awareness of this broader holistic understanding, the following argument avoids distortion whilst presenting an insight into a major area of New Liberal work.

[18] Timo Särkkä, 'Hobson's Imperialism: A Study in Late-Victorian Political Thought', *Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities*, no. 118 (2009), Preface.
[19] The thesis will also incorporate analysis of Hobson's unpublished papers (largely from the 1930s), many of which were first published in 2011 in a collection co-edited by Hobson's great-grandson, John M. Hobson; the few remaining unpublished pieces are provided by the kind permission of John M. Hobson (*Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932-1938: The Struggle for the International Mind*, eds. John M. Hobson and Colin Tyler (London: Routledge, 2011)).
[20] See for example Hobson, *The Recording Angel*.

Furthermore, though our analysis of New Liberal democratic thought has implications for international relations theory, limitations of space have restricted this chapter to an account of the core principles that defined the New Liberal understanding of popular rule. A study of New Liberal theories of international democracy would constitute an extended research project in its own right, and so cannot be considered at length in this thesis. As we move forward, we will seek to apply these methodological insights in order to reconstruct the dynamic understanding of democratic politics that lies at the heart of New Liberal discourse.

II. Democracy in New Liberal Thought

§8

New Liberalism exercised a formative influence over policy, propaganda, and public debate during a period of constitutional upheaval. From the 1880s to the 1940s, politics and international relations in Europe were transformed by structural economic change, the expansion of mass media, and the rise of assertive political ideologies. The political landscape was redrawn, as the campaign for universal manhood suffrage (and later women's suffrage) was intensified and finally won. Britain entered a new era of mass politics that redefined the relationship between individual and state.

New Liberal theorists were conscious of the plurality of democratic (and non-democratic) theories vying for legitimacy in this dynamic political context. They defined their vision relative to potential alternatives, and united behind an ambitious campaign for political reform, rooted in the holistic principle of democratic 'self-determination'.[21]

Nevertheless, partisan unity of purpose did not translate into a programmatic formula for popular self-rule; and the resulting prescriptions incorporated a broad selection of inconsistent (and occasionally incoherent) political ideas. In the following section, we will consider the complex character of democracy in New Liberal thought. We will begin by setting the New Liberalism within the political context of the period, before launching into an analysis of New Liberal proposals for democratic reform. Subsequently, we will examine commonalities and inconsistencies in New Liberal discourse as we begin to

[21] J. A. Hobson, *Problems of a New World* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 253; L. T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism* (1918) (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), pp. 32-6.

develop a deeper understanding of the theoretical principles underlying New Liberal democratic politics.

The Political Context of New Liberal Thought

§9

The evolution of New Liberal democratic theory reflects an intense political engagement with a rapidly changing world. New Liberal writers lived through the height of European imperialism, industrialised warfare, and the collapse of autocratic regimes after 1917. A significant number continued to work, lecture and publish through the suspension of civil liberties during the First World War (1914-18), the subsequent global economic crisis (the Great Depression), and the rise of communist and fascist regimes in Europe. Their writings drew attention towards these seismic shifts, and emphasised their implications for democratic government in Britain.

However, New Liberal theorists were not merely responding to political circumstances; they were proactive agents of political change. In the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, the New Liberalism exercised a formative influence over Liberal Party policy. The arguments put forward by Hobson, Hobhouse, Ritchie, Samuel, and others helped to stimulate the social welfare reforms of the Asquith government (1908-14). New Liberal policy proposals laid the groundwork for a series of radical measures, including the development of old-age pensions, national insurance, and a progressive system of taxation (the 'People's Budget' of 1909).

These measures redefined the responsibilities of the democratic state, culminating in a major disruption of parliamentary equilibrium. After the Lords rejected 'The People's Budget' in 1909, ongoing confrontation between the Liberal House of Commons and the

(Conservative) House of Lords exploded into Parliamentary crisis. *The Nation* began to make the case for Second Chamber reform and the supremacy of the Commons on a weekly basis, characterising the struggle as 'a direct question between political liberty and irresponsible oligarchic rule'.[22] And as the crisis wore on, New Liberal theorists took the lead in a public debate over the balance of constitutional powers, generating innovative institutional solutions that continued to shape British political theory well after Parliament voted to limit the Lords' veto power in 1911.

The outbreak of the First World War critically undermined the movement's influence. But the collapse of the Liberal Party after 1916, and the rise of the Labour Party – a predominantly working-class alternative to established Liberal rule – opened up new avenues for New Liberal thought.

§10

'Democracy' was a constant rallying-cry for New Liberal theorists, journalists, and politicians throughout this period. New Liberal authors rallied progressive support behind 'The Fight For Democracy' – calling on reformers and social idealists to put aside their 'sectional interests' in favour of 'general measures for the realisation of a distinct democratic ideal', and to join together in 'The Reformation of Democracy'.[23]

But this shared demand for popular self-rule obscures the complex variation between authors over the details of democratic reform. 'Democracy' did not correspond to a fixed constitutional model. Rather, detailed suggestions were clustered around a series of loose (and changeable) institutional objectives, which united the New Liberals in the continuous project of democratic reform. Campaigners rallied together in support of the

[22] *The Nation*, Vol. VI., No. 9, 27 November 1909, p. 354.
[23] J. A. Hobson, *The Fight for Democracy* (Manchester: The National Labour Press Ltd., 1917); Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. xxxii; J. A. Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1934), p. 81.

extension of citizenship rights, parliamentary reform, the democratisation of society, culture, and the media, and the introduction of economic democracy. In the following sections, each of these objectives will be examined in greater detail to give a clearer sense of the political foundations of New Liberal democracy.

New Liberal Institutional Objectives

§11

Foremost among these institutional objectives was the right to vote and participate in government. In a series of essays, New Liberal theorists called for the extension of the franchise and the inclusion of women and working-class men in decision-making at every level of politics.[24] Hobhouse's work tied the rights and responsibilities of citizenship to individual 'personality', on the grounds that:

> the full fruit of social progress is only to be reaped by a society in which the generality of men and women are not only passive recipients but practical contributors. To make the rights and responsibilities of citizens real and living, and to extend them as widely as the conditions of society allow, is...an integral part of the organic conception of society, and the justification of the democratic principle.[25]

[24] Hobson insisted that 'The admission of women to an equal voice with men...inheres in the very nature of democracy'. J. A. Hobson, 'The Crisis of Liberalism', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. 12.
[25] L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings*, ed. James Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 64-5.

New Liberals united behind a shared determination to broaden the electorate and ensure the 'frequent and direct contact' of government 'with the needs, aspirations, and experience of the whole people'.[26]

This objective put the long-established Liberal commitment to electoral reform centre-stage. However, it also reflected a more innovative and comprehensive political agenda, which acknowledged the practical limitations of popular enfranchisement. Samuel observed that Liberals 'once thought that a wide franchise would be a guarantee of continuous progress. But to perfect the machinery of government is one thing, to supply motive force is another'.[27] Democracy required more than simply the right to vote, and would need to be addressed in a more holistic manner:

> A wide franchise and the principle of "one man one vote" are not enough to make the constitution democratic. Something more is needed. We have to see that the elected chamber shall truly reflect in its composition the opinions of the country, and we have to see that it shall not be hindered or thwarted in its work...The House of Commons, as well as the franchise, must be democratized if self-government is to be complete.[28]

New Liberal reform rested on a comprehensive vision of democratic participation that went significantly beyond the formal mechanisms of political enfranchisement.

§12

A second set of New Liberal institutional objectives centred on the reform of parliamentary institutions, and was driven by the recurring issue of Second Chamber reform.

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[26] Hobson, 'The Crisis of Liberalism', p. 12.
[27] Samuel, *Liberalism*, p. 385.
[28] *Ibid*. p. 254.

Second Chamber reform served an instrumental purpose. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the partisan divide between Houses of Parliament brought the process of parliamentary legislation to a standstill. A staunchly Conservative House of Lords with an absolute veto posed an insurmountable obstacle to reform, leading New Liberals to focus their attention towards constitutional change, and prompting Samuel to suggest that:

> A movement against the Upper House will unite not alone the friends of democracy, but those also who find their chief political interest in the cause of social reform or in the cause of religious equality, since the most determined opponent of both is the House of Lords.[29]

And yet, the enthusiastic pursuit of a democratic Second Chamber also reflected a theoretical commitment to constitutional reform.[30] New Liberals were driven by a genuine enthusiasm for the 'reconstruction of [the] representative system' in 'the cause of popular self-government'.[31] In the context of early-twentieth century theoretical debates over representative rule, this enthusiasm helped pivot discussion towards ambitious and expansive proposals for constitutional redefinition. Hobhouse called for 'an impartial second chamber distinctly subordinate to the House of Commons, incapable of touching finance and therefore of overthrowing a ministry, but able to secure the submission of a measure either to the direct vote of the people or to the

[29] *Ibid*. p. 279.
[30] See the shared determination to establish 'Upon what principles a Second Chamber is to be formed' through the process of empirical analysis and theoretical debate in the Papers of the Rainbow Circle, Session 1910-11, *Second Chambers in Practice – In Modern Legislative Systems considered in relation to Representative Government, the Party System & the Referendum* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1911), p. 86.
[31] Hobson, 'The Crisis of Liberalism', p. 12.

verdict of a second election', while Hobson proposed 'the Referendum as the best substitute for the veto of the Lords'.[32]

New Liberal theorists were optimistic about the notion of augmenting parliamentary rule with an element of direct democracy, in cases where 'a suitable means for obtaining the verdict of a democracy on a simple, clear issue, of principle' could be found.[33] Elsewhere, they rallied behind municipalisation, the 'devolution of powers, and the shortening of the term of Parliament' – measures that encouraged popular participation, and enabled 'the ordinary citizen to know what he is voting for' by immersing him in public life.[34]

As the New Liberals vented their frustration with the established institutional framework, they continued to push the boundaries of democratic engagement. Nevertheless, they remained largely supportive of representative government, and sought to stabilise existing procedures through structural reform.[35] Many were committed to redressing the irrationality of the voting system. Wallas maintained that the emergence of a 'new quantitative and psychological' way of thinking about elections should lead Parliament to 'adopt the transferrable vote', while Hobson insisted that 'proportional representation would mitigate the tyranny of majority rule', and called for the 'destruction of the present plural vote'.[36] Both theorists were determined to address

[32] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, pp. 118-9; Hobson, 'The Lords or the Referendum?' in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. 42.
[33] *The Nation*, Vol. V., No. 13, 26 June 1909, p. 444; c.f. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*, p. 74.
[34] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, pp. 187-8.
[35] Ritchie repeatedly stressed the virtues of representative forms of government. Similarly, Wallas emphasised the need to work within the representative framework, highlighting that 'the proposals for non-representative democracy which were associated with the communist and anarchist movements of the nineteenth century' has failed to capture the broad consensus of representative government. D. G. Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', in *Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics*, ed. Stanton Coit (London: Grant Richards, 1900), pp. 20-1; Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, second edn. (London: Constable and Co., 1910), p. 2.
[36] Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, p. 226; Hobson, 'The Crisis of Liberalism', p. 13.

an outdated and irrational constitution, and thereby reform an artificial system of representative government.

§13

A third set of institutional objectives went significantly beyond traditional liberal concerns by calling for the democratisation of society, culture, and the media. Although New Liberals placed considerable emphasis on political reform, they recognised that a narrow plan to restructure the institutional machinery of the state would not be wide-ranging enough to generate meaningful self-government. Hobhouse argued that the 'development of social interest – and that is democracy – depends not only on adult suffrage and the supremacy of the elected legislature, but on all the intermediate organizations that link the individual to the whole'.[37]

Constitutional reform could not be limited to Parliamentary structures, for 'in reality General Elections determine less than appears. They decide who shall govern the country, but not how it shall be governed'.[38] Even after a succession of measures aimed at improving Britain's electoral machinery, 'the great material interests' that 'have "society" as their permanent defender' continue to exercise political control because they have captured 'almost the whole Press, which is definitely ceasing to be a representative organ of public opinion', and 'have the power of the purse, which, as expenses multiply and the scale of operations is enlarged, becomes more and more the controlling factor in political education and agitation'.[39] A more holistic programme of reforms would be necessary in order to disrupt the political stranglehold of the ruling classes, overturn a deferential political culture, and ensure that power comes to rest in the hands of the people.

[37] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 112.
[38] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.
[39] *Ibid*. pp. xxvii-xxviii.

In *The Higher Tactics of Conservatism* (1905), Hobson highlighted the inadequacy of a democratic system that failed to address the monopolisation of political culture:

> If the people possess the name of political power through the forms of a liberal constitution or a democracy, it is because the possessing classes have discovered ways of checking, controlling, and dividing public opinion, which render the forms of public government innocuous.[40]

A barren constitutionalism had enabled the propertied elite 'to divide and degrade the moral and intellectual forces of democracy' through the intellectual domination of the 'Universities, churches, political parties, press...literature, art and drama'.[41] Crucially, Hobson recognised that this was not 'a consciously constructed or consistent system of thought', but rather 'an improvisation of social theory out of the floating ideas and sentiments of the age'. Nevertheless, it was a system of control that had been able to take root precisely because of the limited 'civic consciousness' cultivated by democratic reformers.[42]

The only way to overcome this subversion of popular self-government would be to harness the intermediate institutions of civil society to the cause of democracy – to generate a social, cultural, and educational framework for popular self-rule. New forms of media such as radio broadcasting would have to remain independent of political partisanship and business interference in order to keep the electorate critically engaged.[43] More generally, political associations would need to be strengthened to limit the influence of the propertied classes in democratic discourse.

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[40] Hobson, 'The Higher Tactics of Conservatism', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. 178.
[41] *Ibid*. p. 184.
[42] *Ibid*. p. 189.
[43] J. A. Hobson, *The Modern State. The Changing World: A Broadcast Symposium* (London: The British Broadcasting Corporation, 1931).

§14

But perhaps the most innovative set of institutional objectives centred on economic democracy. From the beginning of the movement, New Liberals acknowledged the wider economic implications of democratic reform. MacDonald argued that 'When society is enfranchised, the social question becomes the political question'.[44] Democratic representation would redefine economic relations, diluting the influence of 'property' over political decision-making. In turn, economic development would help to break down many of the most entrenched obstacles to democratic engagement.

Poverty and inequality were major impediments to popular participation that needed to be overcome as part of a broader program of social reform.[45] Whether this meant an expansive programme of economic nationalisation and state provision, ensuring 'Free land, free travel, free power, free credit, security, justice, and education', or simply the payment of MPs so that members of the working-class could afford to enter the House of Commons, New Liberal theorists were unwilling to separate democracy from welfare in abstract constitutional terms.[46]

Nevertheless, after the First World War, economic structures began to play an increasingly central role. In response to the growing influence of Guild Socialism, New Liberal theorists rallied behind a much more comprehensive institutional model of economic democracy. Hobson's early theorising on industrial democracy was primarily concerned with developing a fair system of industrial arbitration under the aegis of the state, which necessitates a democratic government that labour can both trust and identify with. For the workers, 'Their present well-justified suspicion of the State should

[44] J. R. MacDonald, 'The People in Power', in *Ethical Democracy*, p. 73.
[45] Hobson, 'Equality of Opportunity', p. 112.
[46] *Ibid*. p. 113; Samuel, *Liberalism*, pp. 258-9.

be their chief incentive in the task of democratising it'.[47] But by the early 1920s, he sought to address the growing influence of Guild Socialism and other forms of economic representation in contemporary democratic discourse. Hobson outlined a competing model of industrial democracy that lauded rational state planning of the economy, and called for the democratic representation of capital, 'labour of brain and hand', and consumer in a distinct economic council (elected by workers and capitalist owners, with the consumer representation appointed by a democratic Parliament).[48] Wallas followed suit, suggesting that Guild Socialism fitted well with the existing structure of trade unions (which already acted as a form of representation), and had, 'from the point of view of their members, the great advantage over parliamentary democracy that the pressure which an individual member may hope to exercise over the community is continuous'.[49]

However, this new way of thinking marked a serious break from established liberal assumptions about political representation. Guild Socialism and other types of functional representation (*corporate* representation) denied the validity of representation by individual conscience, and refocused the discussion on democratic control of the economy, effectively undercutting the New Liberal project as the basis for democratic representation.[50]

Nevertheless, both Hobson and Wallas refused to abandon the idea of political representation as self-determination, allowing each individual an equal opportunity to direct the state. Hobson argued that 'a conscious struggle for economic democracy, with its equality of opportunity and standard of living' demanded that the 'planning of

[47] Hobson, *The Fight for Democracy*, p. 33.
[48] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, pp. 95-7; see also J. A. Hobson, *The Modern State*, p. 26.
[49] Wallas, *Our Social Heritage*, p. 105.
[50] R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1933)

economic life must be taken out of the hands of dictators and placed in the hands of the freely elected representatives of the people', who could be guided by the wishes of the individual voter.[51] And he strengthened his commitment to individual self-realisation through democratic self-determination, incorporating a form of federalism into his thought in order to expand the opportunities to engage in this process at different levels of civic life: 'The true picture of social evolution shows a series of expanding selves finding their determination in some federal form'.[52] Wallas conceded in 1921 that a final settlement combining the vocational and the individual (or 'the territorial') principles of representation was inevitable.[53] But he championed individual representation over functional representation on the grounds that it represented the best means of ensuring quick and effective action to secure the holistic welfare of the whole state. Wallas argued that the post-war 'hesitation and resistance' of economic interests and trade unions provided a clear argument against dramatic change, which was reinforced by the tendency of business to enforce corporate identity at the expense of individual self-realisation.[54]

Economic democracy became increasingly central to New Liberal thought. It was about more than just 'the destruction of the economic monopolies of the possessing classes'; yet it remained tied to the idea that the 'levelling of material opportunities' was the 'essential condition to the free development of the higher life of the people' and the emergence of democratic self-government.[55]

[51] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 133.
[52] Hobson, *Problems of a New World*, p. 255.
[53] Wallas, *Our Social Heritage*, p. 105.
[54] *Ibid*. pp. 114-9.
[55] Hobson, 'The Higher Tactics of Conservatism', p. 190.

§15

There was plenty of disagreement too. Hobhouse was implacably opposed to the democratic control of foreign policy, contending that 'there is not, and cannot at present be, any such thing as an effective popular control of foreign policy'.[56] Popular participation in the development of foreign policy was dangerous, because 'The average man gives little time and much less thought to politics'.[57] If he attempted to grapple with the complex problems of international politics, he would be 'confronted in the Press with a mass of assertions, true, half-true, or false' which undermined the possibility of an independent political decision.[58]

By contrast, Hobson embraced popular control of foreign policy as the central plank of his democratic theory during the First World War, arguing that 'nothing less than the democratic control of foreign policy will suffice' to ensure the survival of democracy against a resurgent militarism, bent on monopolising power through an unending state of emergency.[59]

Further differences emerged over the universality of democratic rule. While a majority of New Liberal theorists were passionately opposed to imperialism in theory and practice, Ritchie held a broadly favourable attitude towards the concept of empire. He refused to accept that imperial rule was incompatible with democracy; and as the collected volume *Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics* (1900) went to press on

[56] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, pp. 146-7.
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] *Ibid*.
[59] Hobson, *The Fight for Democracy*, p. 3.

the eve of the Boer War, insisted on publicly distancing himself from the anti-imperial arguments of his fellow New Liberal contributors.[60]

Where most New Liberals drew a dichotomy between democracy as 'government of the people by itself' and imperialism as 'government of one people by another', Ritchie offered an alternative understanding of self-government that placed greater emphasis on shared New Liberal concerns about social and ethical development.[61] His essay on 'Evolution and Democracy' maintained that 'uncivilised peoples' were not yet suited to democracy, and that without the intervention of great power democracies, there would either be 'white tyranny' (commercial exploitation) or 'black anarchy' (lack of rule).[62]

These theoretical differences cut across the movement's most consistent institutional objectives – from popular participation to democratic cultural reform. Yet they naturally emerged within the context of the movement's collaborative drive to recentre socio-economic relations around a more holistic principle of human development. Sawer has emphasised that the divergence between Ritchie and other New Liberals over empire was a consequence of the broad intellectual foundations of the movement. Ritchie conceived of himself as a 'social-imperialist', allowing him to cleave to New Liberal democratic assumptions while drawing distinct normative conclusions.[63]

Ultimately, inconsistency within New Liberal democratic thought underlines the need to frame the institutional objectives of the movement within a broader theoretical framework. Despite the polemical tone of many texts and pamphlets, the New Liberalism was more than simply a structural critique or a demand for welfare reform. It

[60] Stanton Coit notes in his 'Preface' that contributors Ritchie and Muirhead would like to make it very clear that they do not share the anti-imperialist sentiment of their fellow contributors. *Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics*, ed. Stanton Coit (London: Grant Richards, 1900).
[61] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. 149.
[62] Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', p. 28.
[63] Marian Sawer, *The Ethical State? Social Liberalism in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), p. 30.

was an evolving political ideology that encouraged Hobson and Hobhouse to take divergent positions on the democratic control of foreign policy, and enabled Ritchie to draw radically distinct views on imperialism.

§16

New Liberals rallied behind a series of broad institutional objectives. They sought to 'extend the franchise further, to abolish plural voting, to make the House of Commons more truly representative of the people and more effective in its work, to end the control of the peerage over the actions of the nation, to perfect the system of local government', to accomplish the democratisation of society, culture, and the media, and to oversee the introduction of economic democracy into the industrial system, as part of a broader programme of social and political reform.[64]

Nevertheless, the dynamic vision of democracy that emerges from New Liberal texts was not simply a matter of practical reform. It was underpinned by a deeper theoretical understanding of social and political phenomena. In the following section, we will examine the New Liberalism within the intellectual context of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century thought in order to reconstruct this understanding, and trace the philosophical foundations of New Liberal democratic thought.

[64] Samuel, *Liberalism*, p. 225.

III. The Theoretical Foundations of New Liberal Democracy

§17

The dynamic interplay of ideas within the New Liberal movement was heavily influenced by the flourishing intellectual culture of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain. Writers and campaigners outlined the theoretical foundations of the New Liberalism as they jumped head-first into the most divisive (and challenging) discussions of the day.

In the following section, we will examine how intervention in these debates led to the development of an innovative ethical position, rooted in the popular biological motif that dominated late-Victorian social and political thought. In the process, we will outline the theoretical principles (and antitheses) that shaped New Liberal democratic thought.

A Narrative of Social and Political Reform

§18

New Liberal theorists positioned themselves as the successors to the radical liberalism of the mid-Victorian era.[65] Yet they distinguished themselves from the radicals by adopting a more expansive narrative of social and political reform. Hobson contrasted the 'nineteenth century liberalism which virtually excluded economic life from the sphere of government' with 'a new liberalism which differs from the old in that it incorporates economic equality of opportunities in its full sense as equal access to nature, capital, education, and enterprise, as an integral factor of popular self-government, and

[65] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, pp. 225-34; Samuel, *Liberalism*, pp. 3-4.

recognises that property and income are joint products of individual and social activities'.[66]

The New Liberals praised the work of Bright, Cobden, Gladstone, and Mill.[67] But they also argued that liberals needed to move past the laissez-faire limitations of nineteenth-century reform.[68] Radical half-measures directed towards land and education reform did not go far enough to address the problems facing contemporary society.[69] As they fought to reshape the liberal agenda, New Liberal reformers expanded on the arguments for state intervention in industry and social welfare reform that developed out of 'the organic conception of the relation between the individual and society – a conception towards which Mill worked through his career, and which forms the starting-point of T. H. Green's philosophy alike in ethics and in politics'.[70]

New Liberal democratic policy proposals can be understood within the context of this political campaign. And yet, the underlying ethical arguments were part of a much broader political and intellectual debate. Building on the momentum of an emerging idealism, New Liberals campaigned tirelessly to shift attitudes away from an individualistic moral conception of social responsibility, towards a more comprehensive understanding of social development.

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[66] Hobson, 'Thoughts on Our Present Discontents' (1937-38), in *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson*, p. 157.
[67] Samuel, *Liberalism*, p. 225; Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 23; Hobhouse, 'Gladstone and Mill', in *Liberalism*, pp. 49-55; Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*, pp. 66-70.
[68] Duncan Bell has demonstrated that this involved a process of reclaiming older movements and characterising the New Liberalism as the realisation of a grand tradition of liberal reform. See Duncan Bell, 'What is Liberalism?' *Political Theory*, vol. 42 (6) (2014), p 700.
[69] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 23.
[70] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 60.

§19

Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century intellectual debate was immersed in ethical discussion. Stefan Collini's wide-ranging study of the culture of the Victorian intellectual, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930*, found that writers consistently accorded priority to the moral over the personal, the political, and the aesthetic.[71] Debate focused on the theoretical foundations of shared moral positions.[72] Popular political ideologies (such as philosophical idealism and Social Darwinism) did not seriously challenge established norms. But they elicited enough theoretical disagreement to stimulate an ongoing intellectual debate.

The New Liberalism developed out of this ethical discourse. However, it went well beyond the narrowly metaethical claims of established theoretical arguments. Marc Stears has highlighted that idealist thinkers largely adopted a radical theoretical position, while proposing a modest platform of structural reform that continued to emphasise individual responsibility.[73] Conversely, New Liberal theorists demanded a more proactive approach to moral and intellectual reform, advancing a holistic understanding of social and political issues distilled from the ethical movement. In contrast to contemporary public moralists, the New Liberals were acutely concerned to translate their vision of society into concrete reform, and to overcome any obstacles to progressive political change.

[71] Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 1-4.
[72] *Ibid*. pp. 78-9.
[73] Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State: Ideologies of Reform in the United States and Britain, 1909-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 35-9.

§20

As New Liberal democratic theory evolved through political and intellectual debate, theorists remained committed to the principle of popular 'self-determination' – the idea that all individuals should be able to share in the ends of political and cultural life through the democratic community.

This ideal was rooted in the metaphysical rejection of mid-nineteenth century individualism. Theorists maintained that the democratic solutions of the past were necessarily incomplete, and that the model of human relations that was taken for granted by an older generation of liberals was standing in the way of political progress. Ritchie identified the philosophical core of the problem in a searing indictment of the concealed theoretical assumptions of the old liberalism:

> Underlying all these traditions and prejudices there is a particular metaphysical theory – a metaphysical theory which takes hold of those persons especially who are fondest of abjuring all metaphysics; and the disease is in their case the more dangerous since they do not know when they have it. The chief symptom of this metaphysical complaint is the belief in the abstract individual. The individual is thought of, at least spoken of, as if he had meaning and significance apart from his surroundings and apart from his relations to the community of which he is a member. It may be quite true that the significance of the individual is not exhausted by his relation to any given set of surroundings; but apart from all of these he is a mere abstraction – a logical ghost, a metaphysical spectre, which haunts

> the habitations of those who have derided metaphysics. The individual, apart from all relations to a community, is a negation.[74]

The progressive ideals of the old liberalism were undermined by the tacit assumption that the moral and economic individualism of laissez-faire capitalism corresponded to mankind's natural condition. This atomistic model of human relations obscured the role of context, culture, and society in human development; tied individuals together in a system of contrived institutions; and prevented Victorian liberals from recognising the need for a more extensive program of social and constitutional reform.

A more comprehensive model of human relations would be able to address these problems. Building on the holistic ethical theory outlined by Hegel and developed by Green, New Liberals advanced a theory of 'social solidarity' grounded in a positive concept of liberty and a holistic understanding of social relations.[75] They resolved that 'A conception of social liberty – organic individualism – must take the place of the conception of political liberty – atomic individualism'.[76] If liberty was no longer defined in abstract political terms (as the determination of the individual will), but rather in concrete social terms (as the *self-realisation* – the free determination of the individual's true self – in response to his or her social environment), then progressive campaigners could anchor their arguments to a more realistic, comprehensive, and holistic ethical understanding.

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[74] Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference,* p. 11.
[75] G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §§105-7, §141; Thomas Hill Green, 'Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract' (1880), in *Collected Works of Thomas Hill Green*, Vol. III (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), p. 372; Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*, pp. 136-7; Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, pp. 82-5; Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, pp. 10-16.
[76] J. R. MacDonald, 'The People in Power', p. 71.

The Holistic Ethical Ideal

§21

The holistic ethical ideal was the cornerstone of the New Liberal narrative of social and political reform. First, the principle of self-realisation allowed progressives to escape the artificial constraints of atomistic individualism by reclaiming the role of the community in moral and intellectual development. Hobson insisted that 'common provision be made for all persons so far as they are alike in their wants and needs, in order that they may have more leisure, spare energy, and opportunity, to develop, cultivate, and enjoy, their personal tastes and activities in which they differ from one another'.[77] An expansion of social welfare provision in education, healthcare, and public insurance would remove the obstacles to self-determination that fell overwhelmingly on the poor and destitute, and allow every member of society the opportunity to flourish.

Second, social welfare reform prompted a corresponding redefinition of the role of the state. In the early 1880s, T. H. Green laid the foundations of the New Liberalism as a political movement when he suggested that the end of politics should be 'the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to a common good' through state intervention in social and economic life.[78] Building on these theoretical foundations, Ritchie stressed the importance of the state in political life, emphasising its value as a holistic framework of individual flourishing: 'The State has, as its end, the realisation of the best life by the individual. This best life can only be realised in an organised society – *i.e.*, in the State; so that the State is not a mere means to individual welfare as an end; in a way, the State is an end to itself'.[79]

[77] Hobson, *The Modern State*, p. 21.
[78] Green, 'Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract', p. 372.
[79] Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*, p. 102.

Third, because the state played such a pivotal role in self-realisation, it followed that the democratisation of the state was a core component of the ethical ideal. Hobhouse noted that:

> Self-government, with all its defects, implies a recognition of the duties of government and the rights of the people; it postulates a measure of personal freedom and of equal consideration for all classes. It is the natural instrument of a growing sense of social solidarity, and the appropriate organ of a stirring national life. In a word, it is the political expression of the idea of Right on which the modern State rests...[80]

New Liberals were sensitive to contemporary concerns about the oppression of individual liberty by the overbearing state. But they maintained that widespread democratic engagement would actually enhance liberty by allowing the entire community to realise the principle of self-determination in the dynamic, evolving context of political life. Stanton Coit, the leader of the ethical movement in Britain, articulated this idea clearly in *Ethical Democracy* (a collaborative work, incorporating essays by Ritchie, Hobson, MacDonald, and other core New Liberal theorists):

> Democracy is the only organisation which tends to transform itself into a spiritual organism. It alone allows every moral personality in the State to be at the same time both means and end to all the others, as are the members in every healthy living body. It alone can distribute the thought, foresight, and self-control of all to each and each to all.[81]

Coit sets the principle of self-realisation in terms of feedback and direction, evoking a conception of democracy that perfectly encapsulates the ethical (and metaphysical)

[80] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, pp. 188-9.
[81] Stanton Coit, 'The Dynamics of Democracy', in *Ethical Democracy*, p. 306.

foundations of a diverse and holistic programme of social and constitutional reform. New Liberal campaigners echoed this vision of democracy as they developed institution objectives centred on the democratisation of politics, the media, and social and economic life.

§22

New Liberal theorists aimed to build on the success of the old liberalism, while rejecting the mechanistic, atomistic understanding of the world that critically undermined its conception of the individual. They endeavoured to replace this theoretical framework with a much more expansive and holistic vision of individual development. In order to translate this complex and dynamic ethical theory into a compelling narrative of social and political reform, theorists and campaigners employed a more concrete image of biological development. In the following section, we will examine how this image came to define the New Liberal ethical ideal.

The Organic Analogy

§23

New Liberals borrowed from the most compelling philosophical, artistic, and literary tropes of the period to construct a comprehensive narrative of democratic reform. But none was more prominent, or more critical in shaping New Liberal political thought, than the biological motif.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, British intellectuals found themselves increasingly drawn to biological analogies in order to explain the complex interrelation

of social phenomena.[82] But the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 marked a tipping point, generating a growing enthusiasm for evolutionary ideas that permeated across late-Victorian intellectual culture.[83] As a wide array of sociologists, political theorists, and politicians began to ground their theoretical arguments in biological imagery, New Liberals followed suit, consciously incorporating biological concepts into their holistic understanding of social and political phenomena.[84]

Yet New Liberal enthusiasm for the biological analogy went beyond an appreciation of its immediate popular appeal. Theorists embraced the principle of organic development because it resonated with the underlying objectives of the movement. The principle of organic development allowed politics to break free from the mechanical understanding of social phenomena that had impaired nineteenth century liberal political philosophy. Ritchie observed that:

> In the present age the most conspicuously advancing science is biology; and the categories of organism and evolution are freely transferred to philosophy with the great advantage of lifting it out of the more abstract conceptions of mathematics or mechanics, but too often with insufficient consciousness of what is being done, so that striking metaphors are mistaken for indisputable facts or laws.[85]

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[82] The organic theoretical framework was advanced in the widely influential work of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer – two of the pioneering figures in the development of sociology in nineteenth century Europe. Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive* (Paris: Bachelier, 1830-42); Herbert Spencer, 'The Proper Sphere of Government' (1842) in *Political Writings*, edited by John Offer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[83] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859).

[84] Notable examples include Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), intro. Lewis Coser, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Macmillan, 1987), and Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, second edn. (London: Macmillan, 1910).

[85] D. G. Ritchie, *Darwin and Hegel, with other philosophical studies* (London: Sonnenschein & Co., 1893), p. 41.

Theorists needed to be conscious of how they applied holistic explanation to social and political issues: 'The conception of organic growth, if properly grasped, clears away mischievous abstractions in politics and history; but politics and history are not thereby turned into branches of imaginative biology'.[86] The unreflective application of biological ideas to political theory might encourage the propagation of false metaphysical assumptions and rigid social norms. But the careful integration of the organic analogy into social explanation would enable theorists to redefine the terms of political discourse – and conceptualise norms, institutions, and ideas using the dynamic biological principles of evolution and growth.

§24

Hobhouse noted that 'Organisation is worth much, but the most perfect mechanical organisation is something far inferior to organic life resting on the spontaneous cooperation of parts which preserve their independent vitality'.[87] Organicism provided a better model of society than an artificial framework of administrative institutions because it reflected the natural, evolutionary development of social and political communities. Ritchie underlined this point, arguing that 'society (or the State) is not an organism, because we must compare it to a beast or a man; but because it cannot be understood by the help of any lower – *i.e.* less complex – conceptions than that of an organism. In it, as in an organism, every part is conditioned by the whole'.[88]

As New Liberal theorists integrated the organic analogy into their writing, they pushed it even further towards the idea of a social organism. Hobhouse drew attention to the *epistemic* and *metaphysical* parallels between organism and society: 'The organic character of society is, we have seen, in one sense, an ideal. In another sense it is an

[86] Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*, p. 100.
[87] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. 166.
[88] Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*, p. 49.

actuality. That is to say, nothing of any import affects the social life on one side without setting up reactions all through the tissue'.[89] As Freeden suggests, the organic analogy became a powerful metanarrative that shaped the New Liberal understanding of all aspects of social life.[90]

§25

Nevertheless, New Liberal theorists were adamant that their social and political theory should not be constrained by the conceptual limitations of the analogy. Ritchie's writings caution that just 'because the conception of an organism is more adequate to society than the conception of an artificial compound, it does not follow that it is fully adequate'.[91] Theorists need to look beyond biological processes in order to understand social life: 'We must pass from "organism" to "consciousness," from Nature to the spirit of man'.[92]

Hobhouse suggested that ethical direction was critical to the overall spiritual (psychological) and material (physical) development of society:

> The progress of society like that of the individual depends, then, ultimately on choice. It is not "natural", in the sense in which a physical law is natural, that is, in the sense of going forward automatically from stage to stage without backward turnings, deflections to the left, or fallings away to the right. It is natural only in this sense, that it is the expression of deep-seated forces of human nature which come to their own only by an infinitely slow and cumbersome process of mutual adjustment.[93]

[89] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 119.
[90] Freeden, 'Hobson's Evolving Conceptions of Human Nature', pp. 111-12.
[91] Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*), p. 49.
[92] *Ibid*. p. 50.
[93] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 65.

As they applied the analogy to human behaviour, New Liberal theorists refined the principle of organic growth in line with the ethical principle of self-realisation.

Consequently, New Liberal use of the biological motif transcended its place in the public imagination. The fertile imagery and loose conceptual boundaries of the organic analogy allowed New Liberals to harness a series of radical and progressive proposals to an innovative moral and intellectual appeal. But the conscious determination to overcome the limits of the analogy – and to apply the ethical ideal throughout the entire theoretical system – meant that the organic analogy developed beyond a shared political metaphor, into a formative model of social development.

§26

The New Liberalism broke new ground as a holistic alternative to atomistic theories of political development. New Liberals tied the principle of self-determination to an ethical ideal of self-realisation through social welfare provision, state intervention, and democratic reform. Clearly, there were many different institutional expressions of this ideal. But these were fused and developed within an organic understanding of social life.

However, the conceptual uniformity of the movement should not be overstated. In the next section, we will examine how the New Liberals sought to overcome the problems of generality and theoretical instability by rallying together against rival organic theories.

IV. The Political and Metaphysical Instability of Organic Political Thought

§27

New Liberal use of the organic analogy was so diffuse that it sometimes served as little more than a loose approximation of the ethical ideal. It generated immense variation in terms of practical solutions and theoretical explanations.[94] As a result, theorists were able to build more common ground within this analogy by distinguishing themselves from rival organic theories than by articulating a shared justification of New Liberal thought.

This section will examine how the New Liberals defined their holistic ethical theory in contrast to the ideas that inspired and challenged them – emphasising their inescapable debt to (and unmistakable ambivalence towards) Hegelian idealism and Social Darwinism. It will illustrate how New Liberals endeavoured to distance themselves from the illiberal implications of these two theories. And it will explain how the inability to break free from these metaphysical theories critically undermined New Liberal democratic thought, leaving it open to charges of philosophical incoherence.

[94] Hobson and Hobhouse disagreed freely with one another in their characterisation of the organic idea. Freeden has emphasised that Hobhouse preferred to model society according to the principle of organic 'harmony', whilst Hobson was far more willing to explore the theoretical implications of a social organism. Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 102; Hobhouse, 'The Individual and the State', in *Liberalism*, pp. 164-5; Hobson, 'The Re-Statement of Democracy' in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. 77.

Parasitic Antithesis

§28

New Liberal critiques of Social Darwinism and Hegelian idealism were often combined in the early twentieth century into polemical attacks on the political culture of 'Reaction' – a 'parasitic', organic conception of representative government that competed directly with New Liberal theory for ideological dominance.[95] The political culture of Reaction was grounded in the conservative defence of propertied interests, and entailed 'war, compulsory enlistment, lavish expenditure, Protection, arbitrary government, class legislation', and dramatic inequality of wealth and opportunity.[96]

Reaction was condemned in New Liberal texts for its commitment to subverting popular control of government.[97] But New Liberals were also careful to elucidate the complex intellectual and cultural foundations that supported this competing framework to discredit it more comprehensively. The theoretical frameworks that drew from Social Darwinism and Hegelian idealism were identified, explained, and denounced in order to elevate the New Liberal ethical ideal.

In New Liberal texts, Social Darwinism was routinely attacked for its subversion of the idea of the organic community. As Hobhouse was quick to point out, Social Darwinist arguments fixated on 'the blind struggle for existence' contained in the principle of the survival of the fittest, and arbitrarily applied this to the competition between societies without considering the implications of the emergence of ethical impulses; however 'A

[95] Hobson, *The Fight For Democracy*, p. vi, p. 5.
[96] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. 57.
[97] *Ibid*; Hobson, 'The Higher Tactics of Conservatism', pp. 178-9.

truer, because more complete, science of evolution, justifies the rule of right no less certainly than an inadequate science of evolution appears to justify the rule of force'.[98]

Hobhouse suggested that the transition from physical evolution to 'orthogenic evolution' (a higher form of development defined by rational and moral thought) demanded the conscious participation of rational beings in shaping their society, rather than simply competing to survive within a hostile environment.[99] Ritchie echoed this understanding, arguing that 'Natural selection operates in the highest types of human society as well as in the rest of the organic realm; but it passes into a higher form of itself, in which the conflict of ideas and institutions takes the place of the struggle for existence between individuals and races'.[100]

New Liberal writers condemned the Reactionary appeal of Social Darwinism because it threatened to undermine the true democratic ends of the organic state: utilising self-government as 'the natural instrument of a growing sense of social solidarity, and the appropriate organ of a stirring national life'.[101] By denouncing this antithesis, New Liberal writers clarified the ethical ideal that supported their evolving, holistic conception of democracy.

However, the relationship to Hegelian idealism was a more complex one, as Freeden has noted in his examination of the development of New Liberal thought in *Liberalism Divided*.[102] The New Liberals borrowed heavily from Hegel's reconceptualisation of liberty as a determinate social end situated in ethical life (both directly and via T. H. Green and the British idealists). But their reception of Hegel's ideas varied in response to a changing political context. Throughout the period, political opponents on the right and

[98] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. 87, p. 243.
[99] *Ibid*. p. 115.
[100] D. G. Ritchie, *Darwinism and Politics; with two additional essays on Human Evolution*, third edn. (London: Sonnenschein & Co., 1895), p. 106.
[101] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, pp. 188-9.
[102] Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 42-3.

the left seized on Hegel's ideas to justify policies that jarred with New Liberal ideals. Nevertheless, antipathy towards Hegelian idealism hardened after the outbreak of the First World War. New Liberals began to distance themselves from Hegel, arguing that his ideas were directly responsible for the doctrines driving Prussian militarism.[103]

The potential for subversion was seen as sufficient justification to delineate the errors in Hegel's theory and the dangers it posed for democratic government. And yet, this was mostly done indirectly, through theoretical attacks on contemporary Hegelians that occupied similar but competing theoretical terrain. In precisely this way, Hobhouse used his attack on Bosanquet's *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* as a springboard for a broader differentiation of New Liberalism from Hegelian idealism, whilst admitting the value of a political theory centred on social welfare and material and ethical improvement.[104]

Of course, the New Liberals could not wholly expunge all aspects of Hegel's political thought without negating a substantial part of the New Liberal ethical ideal – centred on the realisation of positive freedom through the ethical institutions of the state. However, they could emphasise points of disagreement with what they perceived to be illiberal Hegelian ideas, which would help to disassociate New Liberal democracy from the stain of Reaction. Hobhouse and Hobson both highlighted 'the authoritative conservatism of Hegelian dogmas'.[105] And Hobhouse claimed that 'In place of the rights of the individual Hegel set the State', and that the state does not require popular participation, for 'an absolute monarch might express the popular will quite as well as a

[103] See the contrast between the praise for Hegel's conception of the general will given in Hobson's essay 'The Re-Statement of Democracy' (1902), p. 76, and Hobson's denunciation of Hegel as the progenitor of Prussian militarism in *Democracy After the War* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 113-8.
[104] Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism*, p. 61.
[105] *Ibid*. p. 19; Hobson, 'The Higher Tactics of Conservatism', p. 187.

democratic Parliament'.[106] By contrast, the ethical and political ideal championed by New Liberal theorists rooted its ethical universalism in the individual citizen's democratic engagement in political life.

In effect, the New Liberals were distinguishing their organic vision of democracy by (i) purging their shared ethical ideal of any resolutely illiberal elements, and (ii) reiterating that the universal aim of freedom as self-determination must be made available to every individual within the community. New Liberals used the antitheses of Social Darwinism and Hegelian idealism to reinforce their commitment to the self-determination of an organic political community. Drawing a dichotomy with these antitheses allowed New Liberals to rally around the core principle of self-determination.

Metaphysical Limitations

§29

New Liberal political theory clearly enjoyed a complicated (and conflicted) relationship with the organic political theory that inspired it. Early New Liberal texts were indebted to Hegelian idealism and Darwinian evolutionary thought; however, later texts retreated from any theoretical association with Hegel and Darwin.

This process of differentiation was partly a way of establishing the conceptual boundaries of New Liberal thought. But it also denoted a deeper theoretical concern. The early influence of Hegel and Darwin helped to define the ethical ideal and give shape to the New Liberal conception of organicism. Yet over the course of several decades, New Liberals developed an acute awareness of the metaphysical limitations of

[106] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, pp. 82-3; this characterisation is an unsympathetic caricature of Hegel's position.

the organic conceptual framework developed in Hegelian idealism and Darwinian political theory, and a corresponding determination to ground political theory within a more concrete conceptual foundation. Hobhouse epitomised the New Liberal position in *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism* (1918), when he distinguished the 'democratic view' from the 'metaphysical view' of political phenomena.[107] Having criticised nineteenth-century laissez-faire individualism from a holistic theoretical perspective, they were sensitive to unwarranted metaphysical assumptions that might undermine their organic political theory.

§30

New Liberal texts identified a number of metaphysical problems with idealist and Darwinian conceptions of organicism. First, New Liberals criticised these conceptions for their ideational incoherence. In *Democracy and Reaction* (1904), Hobhouse attacked the metaphysical foundations of idealism on the grounds that 'Every institution and every belief is for it alike a manifestation of a spiritual principle...Hence, vulgar and stupid beliefs can be held with a refined and enlightened meaning, known only to him who so holds them'.[108]

Second, New Liberals called into question the abstract evolutionary foundations of Hegelian idealism and Social Darwinism. Both conceptions integrated evolution into their ontological understanding of the universe. However, this process simplified and distorted the idea of evolution – generating metaphysical assumptions that New Liberal theorists were keen to address.

This criticism was plainly manifested in New Liberal attitudes towards Social Darwinism. Wallas maintained that 'it was the intellectual tragedy of the nineteenth century that

[107] Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism*, p. 137.
[108] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. 80.

the discovery of organic evolution' had led many scholars to conclude that progress entailed 'the ruthless struggle for life'.[109] Hobhouse offered a distinct criticism of the conservative implications of Social Darwinism, noting that 'for those who believe that improvement takes place only through physiological laws...there is no purpose to be achieved by a reform of institutions. The tendency of this line of thought is to fall back upon the good old maxim that each should improve himself'.[110]

Nevertheless, metaphysical criticism of Social Darwinism was tempered by the influence of evolutionary social theories on Victorian intellectual debate. New Liberals routinely condemned Herbert Spencer's pioneering attempt to frame the principles of liberal individualism within an evolutionary framework, on the grounds that it had effectively discredited the application of evolutionary ideas to political theory for a generation.[111] But Spencer's Social Darwinist conception continued to operate as a model for New Liberal thought, extending the biological principle beyond material concerns, towards a 'cosmic' or phenomenological conception of human development.[112]

New Liberals were equally critical of the theoretical foundations of Hegelian evolutionary thought. In *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism*, Hobhouse contended that 'our general charge against the method of idealism must be that it starts with and never corrects the fundamental confusion of the ideal and the actual'.[113] The putative failure to distinguish between the actual and the ideal concerned New Liberal theorists for two reasons: (i) It assumed that the ideal has either (a) already been actualised or (b) will imminently be actualised in social institutions, discouraging

[109] Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, p. 287.
[110] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, pp. 90-1.
[111] Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, pp. 10-16; J. A. Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 29.
[112] Hobson, 'The Task of Reconstruction', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. 264.
[113] Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism*, p. 23.

concrete plans for social and constitutional reform; and (ii) it grounded the idea of evolution in the metaphysical concept of abstract right.

And yet, this was a problem that the New Liberals could not easily escape. Meadowcroft has highlighted that 'even as Hobhouse argued about the distinction between the actual and the ideal, he linked the two through his theory of progress: for the upshot of his view of social evolution was that the ideal was becoming actual through the course of history. Progress was not automatic but it was real; the "ought" was not what existed, but at least it was tending to exist'.[114] In precisely this way, Hobhouse drew on Hegel's evolutionary teleology when he described the 'humanitarian ideal' as 'no mere sentimentality', but rather as 'the legitimate product, and the highest product, of healthy evolutionary growth'.[115]

The partial rejection of Hegel and Darwin left New Liberal theorists in an uncomfortable position. As they defined their organic political theory against the work of Hegelians and Social Darwinists, they found themselves falling back on an organic metaphysical foundation that they openly rejected.

Eclectic Instability

§31

The tendency to draw on an eclectic mix of theoretical sources in order to justify democratic ideas further undermined the authority of New Liberal work. As they challenged the atomistic model of social development, New Liberals freely incorporated

[114] James Meadowcroft, *Conceptualizing the State: Innovation and Dispute in British Political Thought 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 166.
[115] Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. 243.

ideas from many of the most influential social ideologies and theories of the period, from utilitarianism to philosophical pragmatism.[116]

Weinstein has emphasised that utilitarianism had a particularly formative effect on the development of New Liberal thought.[117] Ritchie's work defended utilitarianism from the theoretical arguments of intuitionism, and used this understanding to justify state intervention as self-realisation within a more highly developed economy.[118] Other New Liberals followed suit; as Weinstein has suggested, Hobson effectively combined the principles of social welfare and utility, arguing that if pleasure and happiness were replaced by the concept of welfare, then it would be possible to reconfigure utilitarianism as a metric of social development.[119]

As they blended different ideas from utilitarianism, philosophical idealism, radical liberalism, and a wide array of other theoretical traditions into a new theoretical framework, New Liberals placed particular emphasised the importance of empirical analysis. Wallas maintained that any attempt to develop a constructive social theory must be grounded in an empirical methodology, enabling the theorist to identify 'relevant and measurable facts about human nature' and 'make all of them serviceable in political reasoning'. Social reform was justified by exhaustive surveys of poverty, the industrial system, and global trade.[120] In the process, New Liberals tied the social idealism of their broad ethical framework to the empirical research of the social scientist.

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[116] J. A. Hobson, 'A Go-As-You-Please Philosophy', in *A Modern Outlook: Studies of English and American Tendencies*, pp. 45-9.
[117] David Weinstein, *Utilitarianism and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 19-20.
[118] Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', pp. 14-16.
[119] Weinstein, *Utilitarianism and the New Liberalism*, p. 168; J. A. Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1926), pp. 167-9.
[120] J. A. Hobson, *Work and Wealth: A Human Valuation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914); John and Barbara Hammond, *The Bleak Age* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934).

The eclecticism of this approach generated a dynamic understanding of social and political phenomenon. Ideas, institutions, and individuals were joined in a holistic theoretical framework that allowed the theorist to jump from the ethics of state intervention to the politics of constitutional reform. But this eclecticism makes it difficult to discern any clear theoretical structure within the dynamic conceptual framework. New Liberals appear to be cherry-picking among disparate theories and methodologies to support their immediate political objectives.

§32

New Liberal theorists defined a liberal vision of organic democracy in opposition to Hegelian idealism and Social Darwinism. And this vision became the basis for the struggle for democratic reform.

However, New Liberals were unable to shake off the metaphysical assumptions that grounded Hegelian and Darwinian theories of evolution; and as a consequence, their theoretical arguments were undermined by philosophical contradiction. The eclectic theoretical foundation that New Liberals used to justify their methodological approach compounded the philosophical instability of their organic conceptual framework. And this left New Liberal democratic theory in an uncomfortable position.

Although the New Liberalism provided a fertile framework for popular self-government, it was far less theoretically coherent than many of the theories that it opposed. In the next section, we will consider how New Liberal theorists attempted to resolve this dilemma by constructing a systematic theoretical foundation for this dynamic conceptual understanding.

V. Systematic New Liberal Organic Theories

§33

New Liberals reacted to the theoretical instability of their movement in different ways. Ritchie, Hobhouse, and Wallas endeavoured to establish the organic ideal on a more systematic basis. Their work attempted to resolve the metaphysical problems that the New Liberalism inherited from Social Darwinism and Hegelian idealism by grounding the principle of organic development within secure logical and psychological foundations. Others, like Hobson, adopted a more eclectic approach, drawing on new ideas without establishing any underlying theoretical framework.

This was a particularly creative period of system-building in organic political thought. In the following section, we will examine the systematic conceptions developed by Ritchie, Hobhouse, and Wallas in turn in order to develop a clearer understanding of the role of democracy in New Liberal thought.

Ritchie, Hobhouse, Wallas

§34

Ritchie emphasised the ontological implications of Darwinian evolutionary thought, arguing that 'Evolution has become not merely a theory but a creed, not merely a conception by which to understand the universe, but a guide to direct us how to live our

lives'.[121] And he sought to ground social development within this central evolutionary idea.

In a series of essays published at the end of the nineteenth century, Ritchie constructs a theoretical system around the principle of natural selection. 'Darwinism and Politics' (1889) and 'Evolution and Democracy' (1901) present a nuanced characterisation of the evolutionary principle in political life; and 'Darwin and Hegel' (1891) develops this system through a theoretical synthesis of Darwinian evolution and Hegelian philosophical idealism.[122]

Ritchie observes that social change is defined by conscious awareness, and suggests that developed theoretical explanation raises the principle of natural selection from mere negation to a higher state of consciousness (spirit), where it is self-determined and free.[123] He notes that the concept of evolution long preceded Darwin.[124] And he suggests that 'it is worth while to see whether we can get any help, not from the details in Hegel, but from his general method and spirit of philosophising, in making the attempt to *think* nature and human society as they present themselves to us now, in the light of Darwin's theory of natural selection'.[125] Hegel's idealism can help to capture the consciousness that drives the organic process of social development.

Ritchie adopts Hegel's institutional model of self-realisation (framed within a system of ethical life). He notes that 'morality is dependent upon institutions...Ideas can only be productive of their full benefit, if they are fixed in institutions. We cannot build up anything on a mere shifting basis of opinion'.[126] And he contends that this process of

[121] Ritchie, *Darwinism and Politics*, p. 2.
[122] *Ibid*; Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy'; and Ritchie, *Darwin and Hegel.*
[123] Ritchie, *Darwin and Hegel*, p. 56.
[124] *Ibid*. pp. 42-4.
[125] *Ibid*. p. 55.
[126] Ritchie, *Darwinism and Politics*, p. 38.

institutional development corresponds to the realisation of rational consciousness in human history.

Ritchie is therefore attracted to the Hegelian understanding of evolutionary change that suggests that rationality is imminent in progressive institutional change. But he is hesitant about accepting this understanding because of the philosophical problem of first cause. In Hegel's phenomenology, rationality is abstract right, the spirit of world history, and the will of God. However, Ritchie and other New Liberals assiduously avoid reference to God in order to free philosophy from its dependence on metaphysics and bring liberal principles into the modern era.[127]

Nevertheless, Ritchie maintains that Hegel's belief that society is constantly developing towards the realisation of the ideal could be explained and consolidated under the evolutionary principles of variation and natural selection.[128] Natural selection provides an explanation for development that is detached from God and from anthropocentric obsession, and thus fixed to a more objective rationality: 'This conception of Final Causes, which the theory of Natural Selection restores, is not the cruder form of teleology which attempts to explain everything in the universe by showing that it serves the good of man...In the conflict between individuals and between kinds that which is better equipped for the particular struggle is selected'.[129] Yet without Hegelian idealism, natural selection is simply an abstract principle with no moral dimension and no concrete political expression.

Thus, Ritchie suggests that an organic theoretical system needs to incorporate both theoretical frameworks in order to provide an objective, philosophical explanation of

[127] Most New Liberal references to God were either ironic conceits – such as the tongue-in-cheek angelic assessment of humanity in *The Recording Angel* – or detached considerations of religion's role in social and economic development. See J. A. Hobson, *God and Mammon: The Relations of Religion and Economics* (London: Watts & Co., 1931).
[128] Ritchie, *Darwin and Hegel*, pp. 57-9; Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', pp. 3-6.
[129] Ritchie, *Darwin and Hegel*, p. 61.

the conscious drive towards progress in political life. And he cites the development of representative government in support of this argument, noting that its original development was happenstance, but that its continuation was an instance of conscious moral evolution.[130]

> Representative government is the greatest political invention (if we may use such a term) which the world has yet known; it is the most valuable "variation," and has brought about a species of constitution which did not exist in antiquity. It has removed a great part of the danger and instability of democracy, and it alone has made it possible for vast nations to enjoy internal peace without submitting to the absolutism of one man'.[131]

As Mander suggests, 'Ritchie was not simply claiming that consciousness added a new thrust to natural selection; rather, it changed its workings so totally that Darwinism, originally a system for expressing the primacy of impulse, became an almost completely conscious and reasoned process'.[132] By building the principle of natural selection into Hegelian idealist thought, Ritchie created the most systematic – and perhaps the most metaphysically problematic – theoretical framework for the organic ethical ideal.

§35

Hobhouse outlined a distinct theoretical system, which grounded organic development in the principle of rationality. In an ambitious early work, *The Theory of Knowledge: A Contribution to Some Problems of Logic and Metaphysics* (1896), he addresses the philosophical problem of organicism within a broader theory of knowledge and reality.

[130] Ritchie, *Darwinism and Politics*, pp. 33-4.
[131] Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', p. 20.
[132] W. J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 267.

Hobhouse contends that reality can be modelled as a self-contained system. He notes that a 'completely articulated system' explains and determines each relation within itself, and suggests that if 'we extend our system in idea so as to be coextensive with the universe, this totality will itself neither be explained nor need explanation, but it would itself determine and account for the position or character of any one of its elements'.[133] From this argument, he concludes that the 'ideal of knowledge must be a completed system of this kind'.[134]

As he develops his theory of knowledge, Hobhouse attempts to categorise this completed system. He compares three categories – the mechanical, the teleological, and the organic – and concludes that the organic category provides the best means of conceptualising the system of reality. The mechanical category fails to illustrate how all of the parts of the system follow on from one another.[135] And the teleological category is unable to 'characterise reality *as a whole*' because 'There must be something or some one striving towards an end, but if this is so, the end must be but one element in reality, and not its final omnipresent essence'.[136] Yet the organic category naturally solves both of these problems. 'A living organism is a whole standing in a relation of reciprocal determination to the parts of which it consists': each part functions together with the others, and the laws that govern the system are determined by (and help to determine) the individual parts.[137] An organic system does not evolve for a particular end. The lungs do not develop for the sake of respiration (according to Darwinian evolutionary theory); rather, their development is organic, because they are part of a system of organs that could not arise or sustain themselves without one another. Ultimately, this organic idea defines the 'completely articulated system' of reality.

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[133] Hobhouse, *The Theory of Knowledge*, p. 578.
[134] *Ibid*. p. 578.
[135] *Ibid*. p. 581.
[136] *Ibid*. p. 585.
[137] *Ibid*. p. 586.

Hobhouse concedes that the organic relation of parts and whole 'counterfeits teleology...Any organism may be taken as an instance of quasi-teleology if we assume (what may be open to grave doubt) that life is an end of value in itself'.[138] Nevertheless, he maintains that this similarity does not undermine the arguments in favour of an organic system of reality. Indeed, Hobhouse's clarification actually illustrates the theoretical value of an organic conceptual approach. If the idea of the social organism can be defined as the healthy (and holistic) development of the whole without reference to any specific purpose or end, then it should be possible to justify the New Liberal agenda of social and constitutional reform without reference to political ideology.

Hobhouse defines organicism within the context of a bold and expansive theory of knowledge. Nonetheless, he also incorporates a brief section on the social dimensions of this organic system of reality into his theoretical argument. In human societies, there is an organic function tending to the survival of the whole that is not always conscious but is nevertheless always present. Under a competitive system, a man may work for his own profit, yet he generates a product that benefits everybody. The organic function of his action 'is due, not to his public spirit, but to his place in a social system'.[139] However, 'the very same functions that have been performed in accordance with organic requirements may come to be done under the impulse of a conscious appreciation of the welfare of the whole, and with a view to maintaining or furthering it'.[140] In this case, the welfare of the organism becomes the primary objective of society, providing a much more focused and directed form of social development.

Ultimately, Hobhouse concludes that all societies are imperfect in this regard: 'There is no greater mistake than to suppose human society to be at any time a perfect organism.

[138] *Ibid*. p. 588.
[139] *Ibid*.
[140] *Ibid*.

So long as the primary object of each man is his own good, conduct, though doubtless kept within limits by the power and requirements of the social system, will never spontaneously and perfectly adjust itself to the needs of the whole, and so far there will always be friction'.[141] Yet the potential for organic adjustment that Hobhouse describes in *Theory of Knowledge* illustrates why organic theory occupies such an important place in New Liberal political thought. It provides a rallying point for political activism, and explains the New Liberal determination to initiate the organic transformation of society through democratic political propaganda.

In his later philosophical work, *The Rational Good: A Study of the Logic of Practice* (1921), Hobhouse pulls back from his 'completely articulated system' of reality. He discards the idealist assumption that a logical system operates across political phenomena, and adopts a more grounded, psychological approach.

Hobhouse roots his new theoretical system in a holistic understanding of philosophical and psychological phenomena. 'The Good' is not only a state of being which is objectively good, but is also 'an acceptance of something propounded to the mind, and acceptance which may be expressed in the most general terms by saying that something fits in or harmonizes with a mental disposition'.[142] He explains that the most consistent, comprehensive, and universal expression of this principle is 'the rational good'.[143] Harmony 'is that relation of parts in a whole in virtue of which they maintain and (if they admit of development) further one another'.[144] But 'the rational principle is that which

[141] *Ibid*.
[142] L. T. Hobhouse, *The Rational Good: A Study of the Logic of Practice* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 67.
[143] *Ibid*. p. 78.
[144] *Ibid*. p. 69.

persistently extends the harmony, enlarging the view, resolving contradictions, penetrating to deeper sources of unity'.[145]

Again, this idea is framed in holistic terms. The rational principle is (i) focused towards 'a single system of thought' in cognition, and is (ii) developed as 'the effort of the mind towards harmony within itself, and with nature' in practical reason.[146] Hobhouse defines practical reason as 'not only the intellect, but the feelings, impulses and emotions of human beings that make for a harmony in life as a whole', which 'may all be regarded as rational in character'.[147] Rationality emerges (as in earlier work) as the formative principle of intellectual development. Yet it is not defined in strictly intellectual terms; and the Darwinian evolutionary origins of this rationality are made very clear. The different aspects of practical reason 'grow up originally, as all impulses grow, under the conditions of heredity as determined by natural selection'.[148]

Hobhouse explains that this rational-evolutionary system of reality is the conceptual basis for his political theory: 'just as the endeavour to establish coherent system in the world of thought is the characteristic of the rational impulse which lies at the heart of science and philosophy, so the impulse to establish harmony in the world of feeling and action – a harmony which must include all those who think and feel – is the essence of the rational impulse in the world of practice'.[149] In his mature work, rationality is tied to the psychological principle of harmony, rather than a much more expansive organic system of reality. However, this is not a departure from, but rather a development of, the organic conceptual system that Hobhouse used to ground his democratic political thought.

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[145] *Ibid*. p. 81.
[146] *Ibid*. p. 80, p. 81.
[147] *Ibid*. p. 91.
[148] *Ibid*.
[149] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 62.

§36

Wallas developed a much less rationalistic approach that oscillated between systematic and non-systematic explanation. His celebrated early work, *Human Nature in Politics* (1908), eschews the metaphysics of philosophical idealism, and advances an alternative system of thought grounded in Darwinian evolution.

Wallas suggests that an examination of human nature reveals the primary importance of impulse and instinct in political life. Theorists have tended to over-intellectualise behaviour. However, 'it is in the forecasting of the action of large communities that the intellectualist fallacy is most misleading', because 'original human impulses are, with personal variations, common to the whole race, and increase in their importance with an increase in the number of those influenced by them'.[150] The psychology of the crowd cannot be understood in strictly logical terms. Politicians must stop trying to anchor politics to human rationality, and recognise that members of the community are motivated by a system of (unconscious) drives that have emerged through Darwinian evolution.

Wallas's later work pulls back from the democratic political realism of his earlier theory in a way that explicitly acknowledges the importance of the New Liberal ethical ideal. *The Great Society* (1914) highlights how earlier work sought to combat the excessive intellectualism of the nineteenth century, but argues that 'the loose anti-intellectualism which now threatens to take the place of the old intellectualism may prove to be infinitely more dangerous in the twentieth century'.[151] The threats of war, nationalism,

[150] Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, pp. 29.
[151] Graham Wallas, *The Great Society: A Psychological Analysis* (1914) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), pp. 43-4.

and syndicalism in France illustrate the dangers posed to the individual, and the need to rescue social and political theory from the grasp of irrational ideologies.[152]

Wallas's theory of social development is complicated by a complex methodological approach. Throughout his work, he champions a consciously empirical approach to the study of human nature. However, in the course of his analysis he builds a comprehensive system of thought around shared human impulse. In *Human Nature in Politics*, he recommends modelling populations using 'polygons of variation' (i.e. on a normal distribution) in order to establish a framework of political reasoning that is capable of resolving abstract debates by reference to shared impulse.[153] And he suggests that 'our growing knowledge of the causation of political impulse, and the conditions of valid political reasoning, might be expected to change not only our ideals of political conduct but also the structure of our political institutions'.[154] In later work, Wallas appears to repudiate this approach, claiming that 'I shall not hope to succeed in inventing any new social system, and even in the tentative suggestions which I shall put forward I shall run the risk of discrediting a method of enquiry which may be right by connecting it with practical proposals which may be wrong'.[155] And yet, he maintains that it is possible to model society around the evolution of the instinct, the intellect, and the will.[156] Ultimately, Wallas advances a systematic approach to democratic politics that is rooted in an awareness of humanity's ethical development through the process of natural selection.

[152] Ibid. Wallas, *Our Social Heritage*, pp. 103-5.
[153] Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, p. 160.
[154] *Ibid*. p. 199.
[155] Wallas, *The Great Society*, p. 235.
[156] *Ibid*. pp. 237-40.

Democracy and the System

§37

The drive to establish an organic theoretical system led in different directions: towards a reconfigured idealism, a logical system of reality, and a psychological theory of impulse. But there were also commonalities, as each theorist attempted to wrestle the principle of natural selection into an abstract, holistic, and sometimes rationalistic form of social organicism.

For all three theorists, the New Liberal ethical ideal remained the most potent principle – a core idea around which it would be possible to build an organic theoretical system. Yet the relationship between ideal and system was often uncomfortable. Hobhouse and Wallas pulled back from earlier attempts at systematisation when they strayed too far from the ethical ideal. Hobhouse distanced himself from the abstract organic rationalism of his earlier work as he concluded that a completely articulated system of reality tended to blur the boundary between the ideal and the actual.[157] Wallas developed an increasingly uncomfortable relationship with his integrated system of social impulses as he reflected on the metaphysical implications of the concept of the social organism.[158]

When they did pull back (especially in polemical work), these system-builders were left with little theoretical grounding. Organic self-realisation was understood in a distinctly abstract sense, and so was applied to whichever campaign issue happened to be most pressing within the immediate political context – from free trade to parliamentary

[157] Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism*, p. 23.
[158] Indeed, in *The Great Society*, Wallas rejected the term 'organic' in favour of 'organisation', on the grounds that '"organisation" suggests an arrangement the constituent parts of which are alive, without suggesting, as "organism" does, that the arrangement itself has a "super-life" or a "super-consciousness" of its own'. Wallas, *The Great Society*, p. 236.

reform.[159] Ultimately, New Liberal theorists were never able to satisfactorily consolidate their organic political ideas within a systematic philosophy.

§38

The desire to frame the organic ethical ideal within a broader system made it easier for some New Liberals to adopt a consequentialist attitude to the principle of democracy as self-determination. Within the broader objectives of the New Liberal movement, democracy was often ranked behind other objectives – such as welfare reform and state intervention in economic life.

At times, democracy played an almost ancillary role in the systematic framework of the organic state. This is particularly evident in Ritchie's essay 'Evolution and Democracy'. Ritchie argued passionately (and persuasively) that majority rule and representative government were important stages of organic political development.[160] But his essay was nonetheless rather ambivalent about the centrality of democracy to the organic conception of politics: 'Evolutionary ethics certainly do not entitle us to say that democracy is the best form of government, but they lift the controversy out of the region of prejudice and sentiment and compel us to ask what institutions in any given case best further social cohesion and harmony without hindering the possibility of reform, if change should become necessary'.[161] Democratic government was loosely connected to a much broader organic political system. But it was this system – rather than the principle of democratic self-determination – that formed the primary concern of the New Liberal political theorist.

Ultimately, the inability to overcome the metaphysical difficulties of idealism and generate a new theory of organic development centred on democracy meant that the

[159] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 16.
[160] Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', pp. 20-1.
[161] *Ibid*. p. 17.

systematic conceptions developed by Ritchie, Hobhouse, and Wallas were unable to generate a stable theoretical foundation for New Liberal Democratic thought.

VI. The Problem of New Liberal Democracy

§39

Throughout this chapter, we have traced the contours of New Liberal democracy, emphasising the breadth of the movement and its ability to adapt to a changing political world. Over six decades, progressive theorists campaigned for the extension of the franchise, the reform of parliament, the democratisation of culture and society, and the establishment of economic democracy. They developed a uniquely organic conception of democracy, and championed this model against a wide array of alternative theories of popular government. For a time, their ideas dominated British politics and succeeded in shifting the liberal political agenda towards a more comprehensive programme of social and political reform. As New Liberal influence waned, the movement continued to evolve, to integrate new ideas, and to refine the organic principles of democratic rule.

New Liberals rallied around a variety of distinct (and sometimes competing) proposals for democratic political reform. They occasionally disagreed fundamentally about the nature of popular self-rule. Yet they united behind a comprehensive and holistic theory of social and political development. The New Liberalism was grounded in a shared ethical ideal, and developed through a fertile and expansive analogy of organic growth. Theorists drew on this understanding in order to justify social welfare provision, increased state intervention, and radical democratic reform. And they refined this understanding by drawing contrasts with the atomistic liberalism of the mid-Victorian era and the most prominent organic ideologies of the early twentieth century – idealism and Social Darwinism.

But even though the New Liberalism was a remarkably successful ideology, theorists failed to translate this success into theoretical stability. New Liberal democratic thought was too dependent on the metaphysical assumptions of Darwin and Hegel; too willing to embrace an eclectic mix of theoretical sources rather than building a theoretical justification for a holistic and dynamic theory of democracy. The most academic New Liberal theorists tried to place the New Liberalism on a more systematic theoretic basis. But this systematic approach distanced them from the immediacy of the struggle for democratic reform.

However, not all New Liberals responded to the problem of New Liberal democracy in this way. Hobson's work took a very different approach – one that put democracy centre stage. In the next chapter, we will consider Hobson's dynamic vision of popular self-rule, as we trace the most successful – and the most compelling – organic theory of democracy.

Chapter 2: Hobson's Unsystematic Theory and the Organic Social Ontology

§1

The New Liberalism redrew the boundaries of British political thought, challenging the dominance of social and economic individualism within late-nineteenth century theoretical discourse. It embraced a positive conception of liberty, grounded in democracy, equality of opportunity, and social welfare. And it reoriented liberalism around a holistic ethical ideal, centred on the healthy development of the organic political community.

In the last chapter, we traced the conceptual foundations of this organic political theory. We established that the New Liberalism rests on unstable and eclectic foundations. Further, we highlighted that New Liberal theorists were conscious of the metaphysical limitations of their organic understanding (derived largely from Hegelian idealism and Darwinian evolutionary thought), and that they sought to overcome these limitations by grounding the New Liberalism within a systematic framework. Ultimately, we determined that these systematic theories fail to provide a strong philosophical foundation for New Liberal democratic thought.

In this chapter, we will identify a partial solution to this dilemma in the unsystematic political theory of J. A. Hobson. We will continue our discussion of New Liberal democratic theory by reflecting on the inconsistency of Hobson's policy prescriptions, and the eclecticism of his theoretical argument, before moving onto an examination of the dynamic model of organicism that framed his democratic political thought. We will then explain how Hobson consciously combined ideas from a range of different theoretical sources under a dynamic theory of politics, before illustrating how he applied

this theory to the problem of popular self-rule. In the process, we will identify a compelling (but substantially underdeveloped) organic theory of democracy, resting on an organic social ontology.

I. An Unsystematic Theory of Democracy

§2

Despite his close theoretical relationship to Ritchie, Hobhouse, and Wallas, Hobson remained an outlier among the intellectual leaders of the New Liberal movement. Though at times an enthusiastic system builder, his political theory was more readily shaped by imagination and self-reflection than by a conscious drive to consolidate his theoretical analysis.

Hobson pushed the New Liberal ideal to its logical conclusions in political, social, economic, and cultural life. He appreciated more clearly than any of his contemporaries that the necessary implication of the organic principle of self-determination was that the citizens of the state (rather than any expert or politician or academic theorist) must continuously re-determine the constitutional framework of the political community.

Democracy was the powerhouse of organic political change in political, social, and economic life. It could never simply be an incidental part of the struggle for political reform. Writing in 1917, Hobson justified his choice of democracy (rather than liberty or welfare) as:

> the expression of the wider aims [of the New Liberal movement] because it makes the appeal to the power of a self-directing people, operative in industry, in government, and in all the institutions and activities of social life, as the goal of co-operative endeavour and the instrument for the

> attainment or support of all the special forms through which the common life finds expression.[1]

Unlike Ritchie, Hobhouse, and Wallas, Hobson did not attempt to subsume self-government under an objective principle of evolutionary development. While the other core New Liberal theorists argued that democracy was the product of natural selection among competing political systems, Hobson emphasised the normative dimensions of democratic self-realisation.[2] As a result, he generated a uniquely participatory strand of New Liberal political thought.

§3

Hobson was hardly the most consistent writer among the New Liberal theorists. He changed his democratic policy prescriptions so frequently that his constitutional theory appeared to fluctuate wildly between distinct conceptions of popular rule built around the referendum, democratic control of foreign policy, and industrial democracy. He staked out a very clear conception of democracy around parliamentary reform in *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1909).[3] But he articulated an entirely new theory of industrial democracy in *Problems of a New World* (1921). Hobson's later arguments cast doubt on his earlier approach, presenting a distinct socio-political view of the problems plaguing British democracy, along with a solution which would seek to disintegrate the institutionalised power of sectional interests in order to remove the obstacles to community self-rule.[4]

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[1] J. A. Hobson, *The Fight for Democracy* (Manchester: The National Labour Press Ltd., 1917), p. 12.
[2] D. G. Ritchie, *Darwinism and Politics; with two additional essays on Human Evolution*, third edn. (London: Sonnenschein & Co., 1895), pp. 33-4; L. T. Hobhouse, *The Theory of Knowledge: A Contribution to Some Problems of Logic and Metaphysics* (London: Methuen & Co., 1896), p. 588.
[3] J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1909).
[4] J. A. Hobson, *Problems of a New World* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1921), pp. 241-4.

Significantly, although Hobson argues in both texts that manipulation of public opinion (and of voting) by governing oligarchies represents an imminent danger of subversion for democratic rule, he derives quite different solutions to this dilemma.[5] In the earlier work, this challenge is met by the referendum, which provokes the public to adopt a critical mindset and a sense of incorruptible responsibility, and in the Swiss example may be instigated by a petition securing the assent of 30,000 citizens.[6] In the later text, Hobson denies the ability of the referendum to solve this problem, suggesting that it is simply an institutional measure which cannot resolve the deeper structural issues which political manipulators utilise to their own political advantage.[7]

§4

Evidently, the democratic institutional prescriptions that Hobson advanced changed substantially over the course of his life. Nonetheless, his enthusiastic endorsement of democracy continued unabated in the same way: the 'real spirit of democracy', the 'will of the people' realised in 'concrete acts of government' (1909), a 'real democracy' (1921), and 'The spirit of a free Democracy' (1932).[8]

These uses reflect a consistent definition of democracy: an organic idea that transcends a specific constitutional structure. Hobson's conception of democracy was dynamic – free from the need to focus on building a political or intellectual system, but wedded to the core principle of democratic self-determination. In order to understand this dynamic framework, it will be necessary to establish what Hobson meant by the spirit of democratic government. This calls for an examination of the rational foundations of Hobson's democratic thought.

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[5] Ibid, pp. 236-7; Hobson, 'The Swiss Referendum', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, pp. 50-1.
[6] Hobson, 'The Swiss Referendum', p. 54.
[7] Hobson, *Problems of a New World*, pp. 238-9.
[8] Hobson, 'The Crisis of Liberalism' in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. 6, p. 15, p. 15; Hobson, *Problems of a New World*, p. 250; J. A. Hobson, *The Recording Angel: A Report From Earth* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), p. 125.

II. The Rational and Irrational Foundations of Democracy

§5

Hobson's organic political writings are charged with an ethic of democracy. Whether assailing political opponents, proposing a new plan of constitutional reform, or propagating a novel ideal of citizenship, Hobson's arguments are not merely saturated with the language of democratic reform; they are driven by a moral demand for popular self-government. This indomitable commitment to democracy, articulated in different ways in response to an array of changing political debates, implies a determinative ethical rationality operating as a foundation for Hobson's political thought.

However, his writings display an inconsistent attitude towards the rational. Throughout, Hobson stresses the importance of rationality in giving politics – and in particular, the genuinely democratic state – a sense of direction and moral purpose. In *Problems of a New World* (1921), he plainly communicates his belief in the importance of rationality in government.[9] He argues that the division between higher and lower appeals in politics rests on a fundamental dichotomy of rationality and irrationality, a distinction that resolves itself into 'idealist' and 'realist' discourse. Hobson was seldom so explicit in his identification of political morality and rationalism; and yet his work stresses the need to improve the rationality of democratic governance – 'The spirit of a free Democracy must be operative in the rational planning of a world society'.[10]

Nevertheless, despite presenting a clear commitment to rational politics, Hobson's underlying philosophy is far from rationalistic. Unlike Ritchie and Hobhouse, Hobson does not explicitly ground organic social development within the abstract principle of

[9] Hobson, *Problems of a New World*, pp. 133-5.
[10] Hobson, *The Recording Angel*, p. 125.

rationality. Within his more discursive writings, he expounds a complex vision of the human relationship with reason. These texts suggest that irrationality is a fundamental and healthy component of human behaviour. Significantly, Hobson develops this claim beyond the level of idle hypothesis, arguing that the application of irrationality to the political sphere could have a distinctly positive impact.

The most developed expression of this philosophy is given in the pamphlet *Notes on Law and Order* (1926), which asserts the centrality of irrationality in human life – 'the human mind and the human body need areas of disorder, of risk, caprice, or undirected activity'.[11] The pamphlet advocates a widespread rediscovery of irrationalism (action guided by emotion and irrational impulse), and questions the validity of theory built upon a rational system of reflection: 'thought and language are in origin and function incapable of doing more than confronting us with a series of irreconcilable positions'.[12] By challenging the legitimacy and the utility of rationality, Hobson establishes a broader philosophical position that directly undermines the identification of rationality and political morality. His counter-rationalistic philosophy seems to negate the possible existence of a rational ethic of democracy within his thought.

Scholars have largely neglected the implications of this text, due to the fact that Hobson's counter-rationalistic philosophy does not appear to have strongly impacted on his polemical work. And yet, whilst the arguments made in *Notes on Law and Order* were not widely propagated throughout Hobson's books, they did reappear in a number of lectures to the South Place Ethical Society, given over the course of the 1930s, as well as in the 1938 article 'The Sense of Responsibility'.[13] Moreover, it is possible to trace

[11] J. A. Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 15.
[12] *Ibid*. pp. 12-13.
[13] J. A. Hobson, 'Our Selves', and 'The Will to Power', in *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932-1938: The Struggle for the International Mind*, eds., John M. Hobson and Colin Tyler (London: Routledge, 2011); J. A. Hobson, 'The Sense of Responsibility', originally published in *Le Sens de la*

elements of doubt over the importance of rationality in Hobson's earlier works. In *A Modern Outlook* (1910), a consciously discursive collection of essays, Hobson insists that instinctive feeling plays a more fundamental part in political activity than rational thought – anticipating elements of his later, more developed argument.[14]

Though these discussions of irrationality are fairly infrequent across Hobson's work, they define his understanding of the individual's relation to political society. The irrationality of each individual is ineliminable, and a democratic government will only be successful if it reflects this fact. Within a democracy, an individual's disordered, irrational creativity may generate innovative and beneficial measures of social reform: 'The creative impulse is the individual's break away, usually consumed in personal enjoyment, but sometimes sowing seeds of fruitful change within the social order'.[15]

Nevertheless, this irrational impulse exists outside of the state and does not automatically serve government. Rather, government must be defined in a way that accommodates individual irrationality. This theoretical claim has implications for Hobson's writings on democratic institutions.

A Plurality of Conceptual Foundations

§6

Deeper analysis of Hobson's philosophy illustrates the need to break free from a purely rational or systematic understanding of democratic rule. Hobson conceived of politics through a multiplicity of distinct conceptual frameworks (analytical perspectives),

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responsibilité dans la Vie Sociale (1938), republished in *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932-1938*, p. 178, p. 216.

[14] J. A. Hobson, 'The Compensations of Stupidity', in *A Modern Outlook: Studies of English and American Tendencies* (London: Herbert & Daniel, 1910), pp. 40-1.

[15] Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 31.

including ethics, aesthetics, and theories of disorder, power, and language. Each of these presented an independent and innovative way of thinking about democracy, which he seamlessly incorporated into his wide-ranging analysis.

After 1914 the application of these frameworks was undeniably more pronounced. As Freeden suggests, Hobson consciously began to draw upon a theoretical perspective that defined human nature in terms of psychological impulses, such as lust for power.[16] But these distinct frameworks are also discernible within the discursive texts that Hobson produced throughout his lifetime. And ultimately, his semi-conscious use of these different conceptual frameworks defined his analysis of democratic politics.

§7

Hobson's discourse on the instinctive revolt against order establishes an alternative analytical perspective that draws upon the concept of irrationality in order to define democratic politics. This perspective borrows heavily from academic social psychology of the period (notably the work of Tarde and Le Bon), and mirrors other New Liberal conceptions (particularly Wallas's systematic theory of impulse).[17] *Notes on Law and Order* outlines a strong case against uniform and overbearing social reform provision, on the grounds that democratic citizens actually resent the disappearance of the unexpected from the sphere of civil society: 'Is it possible that we may be in danger of carrying "civility" too far? That "polis" may bring too much polish?'.[18] 'The Ethics of Gambling' (1905) echoes this perspective: 'It is impossible, and it would be undesirable

[16] Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 229-30.
[17] Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, second edn. (London: Constable and Co., 1910), p. 29.
[18] Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 11.

to deny to man the satisfaction of his instinctive zest in the unexpected, the hazardous, the disorderly'.[19]

Building upon this contention, Hobson suggests that disorder has exercised a formative influence on the evolution of popular self-government. In *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, he asserts that the rebellious, emancipatory sentiment of the Romantic Movement was a prerequisite for the emergence of democratic political culture.[20] Ultimately, the instinctive commitment to disorder becomes a conceptual tool for defining Hobson's democratic state.

§8

Hobson also draws from aesthetics and discourses of power to expand his analysis of democratic politics. Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Hobson advocated an aesthetic of democratic progress. In his collection of discursive essays, *A Modern Outlook* (1910), Hobson is certain that the identification of 'a single emotional and intellectual experience, a "creation"' akin to poetry – which all within society could grasp – would precipitate collective harmony and social progress.[21] However, the addition of power discourse into Hobson's thought after 1914 allowed him to develop a dynamic theoretical framework for explaining political participation. Creativity and forceful self-assertion became two distinct expressions of power within political life.[22] Reversing his earlier hostility to power, and more specifically to 'will to power' – the ontology of self-assertion defined within the work of late nineteenth century

[19] J. A. Hobson, 'The Ethics of Gambling', *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1905), p. 142.
[20] J. A. Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1934), pp. 8-11.
[21] Hobson, 'The Faith of Free Thought', in *A Modern Outlook*, p. 242; see also the discussion of fictions in thought, art and politics in Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, pp 19-20.
[22] J. A. Hobson, *Democracy After the War* (1917), intro. Peter Cain (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 23.

philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche – Hobson embraced the notion that power could have a creative, inspirational influence on the individual.[23]

Power was no longer automatically identified with anti-democratic politics, as it had been in Hobson's pre-war polemics (such as *Traffic in Treason*, which condemned the worship of power by appropriating Nietzschean terminology with ironic bile: 'Laws and constitutions are not made for supermen…laws made by the common people and their representatives they will not obey').[24] By 1933, Hobson unreservedly employed his fusion of aesthetics and power discourse in a lecture delivered to the South Place Ethical Society, entitled 'The Will to Power'. He drew upon his established distinction between 'the art of self-expression and the lust for power', asserting that the latter 'hypnotizes or paralyse the will of a people', but maintaining that the former reflects 'the source of all human life and progress'.[25] These conceptual frameworks presented new ways of thinking about popular politics, which expanded Hobson's theoretical outlook.

Freeden has pointed out that the incorporation of a theory of power into Hobson's thought made him unique amongst New Liberal contemporaries, many of whom found their ideas becoming increasingly obsolete in the post-war period.[26] Nevertheless, Freeden overestimates the extent to which power was successfully integrated into Hobson's ethical-rational system of thought. All of the conceptual frameworks that Hobson incorporated were distinct theoretical foundations, shaping his analysis of democratic politics. Though they were employed in a complementary way, they also offered competing perspectives.

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[23] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, eds. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), §259, p. 153.
[24] J. A. Hobson, *Traffic in Treason: A Study of Political Parties* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914), pp. 17-19.
[25] Hobson, 'The Will to Power', p. 113, p. 120.
[26] Freeden, *Liberalism Divided*, pp. 290-2.

The difficulty that Hobson experienced when he attempted to harmonise his ethical perspective with his writings on the use of force illustrates this conflict. In a number of texts, Hobson asserted that 'armed force is the negation of both reason and justice'; whilst elsewhere he reconciled force and ethics, claiming that 'Force can be made a means for justice…Force applied socially by organised society is good'.[27] Thus, the integration of multiple conceptual approaches occasionally resulted in theoretical dissonance.

§9

Linguistic analysis added another conceptual framework to Hobson's theoretical framework. In *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (1926), Hobson questions the ability of political theorists to present a balanced analysis of government, based upon the fact that the language employed by these supposedly disinterested experts is already suffused with a cultural legacy, and is shaped by the interplay of political interests. He defines social science as determined by 'a mass of loosely related concepts and opinions couched in language of popular appeal, which constitute a public opinion, or a variety of conflicting public opinions'.[28] If public opinion determines the language of democratic government – and therefore defines the role that public opinion plays in a democracy – then theories of popular government will always be predicated on a socially-dominant understanding or ideology. Hobson's use of linguistic analysis expanded the breadth of his conceptual understanding of democratic governance and added to its comprehensive, holistic appeal.[29]

[27] Hobson, 'Remaking the World' (July 1932) in *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932-1938*, p. 86; Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 25.
[28] J. A. Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1926), p. 16.
[29] See also Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 19.

Political Metaphors: A Self-Reflective Theorisation

§10

The plurality of conceptual frameworks that were incorporated into Hobson's writings complicate any analysis of his democratic theory. To Hobson, democracy was defined by the New Liberal ethical ideal; but it was also shaped by an irrational instinct for disorder, creative self-assertion, and the formative influence of a linguistic conceptual framework. The scholar may decide that this level of theoretical complexity simply reflects a disordered and occasionally randomised thought-process. However, this conclusion is unsustainable.

As Clarke has suggested, among the New Liberals, Hobson developed a uniquely self-reflective theorisation – a perspective that consciously questioned the assumptions and methodology of the political theorist.[30] In *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (1926), Hobson argues that political theorising depends upon the use of metaphors in order to explain and order abstract relations between individuals and groups: 'All thinking of an abstract order involves the employment of words in a metaphorical sense. The nature of the metaphors employed depends upon the dominant trend of the interest and activities of the common people'.[31] Hobson cites the use of metaphors in order to conceptualise the British constitution, noting the biases that these analogies present:

> The Constitution, regarded as a tree, changes slowly by some internal laws of growth which cannot be safely interfered with by any Parliament or People! Radical reform is thus ruled out by metaphor. Or the constitution is a stately edifice, built up by the skill and industry of many generations of statesmen. Renewals and repairs may from time to time be needed, but

[30] Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 222.
[31] Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 22.

> structural alterations are dangerous, and any attempt to tamper with foundations will bring the edifice to ruin.[32]

Hobson therefore suggests that democratic theory is shaped by culturally-significant metaphors; that an analogy is selected because it is popular or because it reflects the aims of the political theorist. Crucially, Hobson applies his metaphorical analysis to his own approach, noting a desire 'to secure the full liberation of the social sciences and arts from the thraldom of mechanics' through the 'application of the dynamic concept of Evolution'.[33]

For all New Liberal theorists, the evolutionary analogy provided a means to reconcile distinct conceptual frameworks, and elucidate the deeper harmony underpinning social and political phenomena. But for Hobson, theoretical self-reflection led to the development of a unique form of organicism tied to democratic political theory. The next section will explain this difference, and consider how it supported his vision of popular self-government.

[32] *Ibid*. p. 24.
[33] *Ibid*. p. 27.

III. The Organic Analogy in Hobson's Political Theory

§11

Hobson's writings and speeches engage with an impressively diverse body of subjects, ranging from constitutional reform to economic planning; from human psychology to popular literary topics. Nonetheless, one core philosophical idea unites Hobson's social, political, and economic theory, and justifies the breadth of his theoretical work. The organic analogy provides the fundamental presupposition in Hobson's theory: individuals, society, institutions, and ideals are holistically and biologically connected; they form a living, growing unity that is greater than its component parts.

Each aspect of Hobson's thought is shaped by this conscious commitment to the organic metaphor. Within his writings, he repeatedly rejects the absolute separation of the political, social, and economic disciplines, emphasising the holistic unity of political and social life. When this ideational unity is realised in social reform policy, Hobson lauds the 'coherency of purpose, [the] organic plan of social progress'.[34]

In addition, he draws upon the image of an organism in order to express his vision of political society. This has immediate relevance for his theory of democratic government, as Hobson himself acknowledges: the question of how the organic analogy may be employed in politics 'is one of supreme practical importance, involving, among persons capable of practical politics, the complete re-adjustment of their conception of democracy and the means of attaining it'.[35] The organic metaphor therefore operates on multiple levels in Hobson's thought. It is more than simply a useful model for

[34] Hobson, 'Preface', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. xii.
[35] Hobson, 'The Re-Statement of Democracy', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. 71.

conceptualising the state, and is rather a cohesive metanarrative that permeates his philosophical outlook.

Hobson's use of the organic model is multifaceted and complex. Yet modern scholarship has tended to oversimplistically conflate elements of his organic political theory – most notably, his vision of democracy and his theory of the general will – while attempting to resolve the inconsistency of his constitutional writings. Consequently, it has been unable to explain major elements of his democratic thought. The following section will highlight this problem, and present an enhanced understanding of Hobson's complex use of the organic analogy, drawn from a close analysis of his democratic writings. This understanding will elucidate the nature of Hobson's theory of popular self-rule.

Hobsonian Philosophical Organicism

§12

Hobson's philosophy employs the organic analogy in a particularly creative manner. Part of this originality can be traced back to his theoretical influences. Like many of his New Liberal contemporaries, Hobson was strongly influenced by the organic idealism of Hegel and Green. But the experience of researching and writing *John Ruskin: Social Reformer* (1898), a comprehensive study of Ruskin's work, led him to develop a sophisticated and original conception of the organic unity of social and economic life.

Hobson took from Ruskin a socio-economic holism – a belief in 'the organic relation between work and life, between production and consumption'.[36] Nonetheless, as Matthew has observed, Hobson's organicism departed from Ruskin in one fundamental respect – Hobson opposed the static nature of Ruskin's organic utopia, preferring a

[36] J. A. Hobson, *John Ruskin: Social Reformer* (London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1898), p. 93.

more progressive, evolutionary conception.[37] In part, this reflects the influence of Hegel and Spencer on Hobson's organic idea. Though Hobson's post-1914 writings are highly critical of both Spencer and Hegel, the dynamic, holistic conception of politics that inspired Hobson's major political ideas owes much to both of these theorists.[38]

Hobson combined the holism, the biologism, and the evolutionary progressivism of his organicist predecessors, but significantly departed from these theorists through the uncompromising advocacy of mass democracy. He was particularly disparaging of the anti-democratic conclusions of certain organicist theorists – as his critique of Ruskin demonstrates: 'His diagnosis of the moral claims of democracy is false. He looks upon it as a rebellion, instead of as a necessary development of the general will, a moral process of popular activity'.[39]

Three core components define Hobson's distinct organic metanarrative: first, the depiction of the state (or political society) as a single, living biological entity; second, an intellectual commitment to a philosophy that postulates the holistic interrelation of concepts; and third, a strong sense of evolution or progressive change. These three core ideas delineate the use of the organic analogy in Hobson's work; and consequently, the scholar may reasonably assume that these ideas should shape his theory of democracy.

Nevertheless, there is a clear problem with any simplistic attempt to map Hobson's democratic thought onto his organicist ideas. Scholars have been unable to adequately describe Hobson's democratic theory because they have suggested that his organicist philosophy models a fixed ethical relation between individual and state, which sufficiently elucidates his ideal form of popular self-government. However, this

[37] H. C. G. Matthew, 'Hobson, Ruskin and Cobden', in *Reappraising J. A. Hobson: Humanism and Welfare*, ed. Michael Freeden (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 20-1; Hobson, *John Ruskin: Social Reformer*, p. 105.
[38] Hobson, *Democracy After the War*, pp. 113-18; Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 29.
[39] Hobson, *John Ruskin: Social Reformer*, p. 204.

approach does not explain Hobson's consistent focus on contemporary constitutional topics. Moreover, it cannot satisfactorily explain Hobson's constant drive to democratise key political institutions.

By overemphasising the importance of the general will within Hobson's organicist thought, and by ignoring the subtleties of his writings on popular government, scholars have consistently misinterpreted Hobsonian democratic theory.

The General Will – One Aspect of Hobson's Democratic Theory

§13

At the outset, it is important to note that like Hobhouse, Ritchie, and other New Liberal theorists, Hobson employs the concept of the general will across his democratic thought. The general will is a fundamental component within a number of discussions of democracy – whether as 'the enlightened, rational, free will of the people' or as 'social sympathy…the spirit of social reform'.[40]

However, modern scholarly debate on Hobson's political theory has fixated on the general will as the sole solution to his contradictory statements on constitutional democracy. This can partly be explained by reference to the apparent pre-eminence of the general will within what many consider to be Hobson's most innovative and significant contribution to democratic theory: 'The Re-Statement of Democracy' (1902). In this article, Hobson applies a psychological approach that traces the formation of 'a common will, the minds of a whole nation'.[41] Reflecting on his own theory, Hobson suggests that his argument goes far beyond the claims that philosophers Rousseau and

[40] Hobson, *John Ruskin: Social Reformer*, p. 204; J. A. Hobson, *Work and Wealth: A Human Valuation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), p. 309.
[41] Hobson, 'The Re-Statement of Democracy', p. 75.

Hegel made for the general will as the fundamental aspect of popular political consciousness.[42]

Scholars that have been persuaded of the importance of this idea have disagreed over the exact nature of Hobson's understanding of the general will. As Townshend notes, this disagreement has been defined by a difference of interpretation between Freeden and Allett.[43] However, the prevalence of this debate within Hobson scholarship has obscured the fact that neither interpretation fits well with Hobson's broader democratic writings. This section will first examine the debate in order to establish how Hobson defined the general will, and then demonstrate the limited significance of this idea within his democratic thought.

Both dominant scholarly interpretations of Hobson's idea of the general will endeavour to delineate the core concept driving his philosophy. Allett has argued that Hobson's organic idea of the general will describes a fundamental ethical relation that prioritises the collective over the individual. The natural existence of a collective consciousness within a community – the organic unity of thought and ideas – justifies the pursuit of a general will as a higher stage of human existence.[44] Individual flourishing is still highly desirable, but as a means to realise a positive social state. 'Species-consciousness' – realised in the subordination of the individual to the general will – is held to drive democratic government.[45] According to Allett, Hobson's constitutional prescriptions are wholly consonant with this idea: the referendum educates the general will, and actualises it in political society; and industrial democracy is interpreted as a system of

[42] *Ibid*. p. 76.
[43] Jules Townshend, 'Hobson and the Socialist Tradition', in *J. A. Hobson after Fifty Years; Freethinker of the Social Sciences*, ed. John Pheby (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1994), p. 34.
[44] John Allett, *New Liberalism: The Political Economy of J. A. Hobson* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 210-12.
[45] *Ibid*. p. 210.

functional representation which is entirely consistent with the collectivist principle – it forges 'stronger ties between individual groups'.[46]

By contrast, Freeden has argued that the general will describes a symbiotic and mutually-beneficial relationship between individual and society within Hobson's thought. Society promotes the pursuit of individual self-realisation because it is in the collective interest for all to determine their own individual freedom.[47] Neither society nor the individual can claim priority according to this relationship. Individuals cannot exist separately from the community that gives them meaning and nourishment. Individual and collective are united in an organic reciprocity.

Freeden suggests that this organic ethical relation determines Hobson's democratic philosophy, citing 'The Re-Statement of Democracy' (1902) in support of his interpretation. In this essay, Hobson dismisses traditional justifications for democracy of the basis of 'one man one vote' as 'undiluted individualism'; nonetheless, his solution does not subordinate the individual to the collective.[48] While dismissing the idea of an individual right to an equal say in government, Hobson argues that each citizen has 'a *duty* as a member of Society to contribute as best he can to the administration of the common property to the common good' as a precondition for self-realisation.[49] He evokes the metaphor of an organism in order to draw direct parallels with his new conceptualisation of democracy. Each cell needs an adequate supply of nutrition, yet cannot survive if any part of the organism becomes diseased, and must contribute in any way it can to keeping the organism healthy; in the same way, each citizen can demand sustenance, can complain about inadequate social provision through the franchise, and

[46] *Ibid*. p. 219.
[47] Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 110-11.
[48] Hobson, 'The Re-Statement of Democracy', p. 78.
[49] *Ibid*. p. 80

has a responsibility to feed back problems and opinions to the central government in order to ensure a genuinely informed policy – the 'right continuously to convey information and advice, and by protest to assist the due distribution of work and food'.[50]

Within Hobson's social and political thought, Freeden's interpretation of Hobson's organic ethical understanding appears far more credible. Though he rightly emphasises Hobson's preoccupation with the collective unity of the general will, Allett's analysis is ultimately unsupportable given the extensive explanation of the reciprocity of society and individual within Hobson's writings. Within the discursive text 'Character and Society' (published in a collection of essays entitled *Character and Life* in 1912), Hobson advocates 'a fusion of selves, a general will'; nevertheless 'A sane person will refuse to submit his mind to social tyranny'.[51] Elsewhere, it is evident that the general will does not merely dominate – the individual is of equal value: 'This is not a conflict or opposition between the individual and the community; it is a cooperative harmony'.[52]

Perhaps most significantly, Allett's interpretation simply cannot make sense of Hobson's democratic ideas. Though he notes Hobson's enduring preference for direct democratic engagement, Allett is unable to explain why Hobson consistently endorses this form of government over a government controlled by bureaucratic officials interpreting the general will.[53] Freeden's argument draws from a much narrower range of sources – primarily from the essay 'The Re-Statement of Democracy' – and yet his explanation of the ethical relationship between individual and society better explains why a democracy built upon the foundation of the general will requires each citizen to exercise an equal

[50] *Ibid*. p. 83.
[51] J. A. Hobson, 'Character and Society', in *Character and Life: A Symposium*, ed. Percy L. Parker (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912), p. 73, p. 82. Allett's argument draws from a misleading, collectivist interpretation of this article; see John Allett, 'The Conservative Aspect of Hobson's New Liberalism', in *Reappraising J. A. Hobson: Humanism and Welfare*, ed. Michael Freeden (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 82.
[52] J. A. Hobson, *The Modern State. The Changing World: A Broadcast Symposium* (London: The British Broadcasting Corporation, 1931), p. 21.
[53] Allett, *New Liberalism*, pp. 217-22.

vote. Because society is holistically related to the self-realisation of the individual, the general will both requires and facilitates each individual's engagement in political life.

A Deeper Understanding of Democracy within Hobson's Organic Metanarrative

§14

Freeden's understanding of Hobson's organic metanarrative presents a compelling account of the central organising concept in Hobson's social and political theory. His insight into the reciprocal nature of the ethical relation between individual and society establishes a foundation for many of the organic concepts that Hobson uses. In addition to defining the general will, this ethical relationship provides a fundamental justification for Hobson's foremost polemical position – the provision of welfare and opportunity to every member of society.[54] And yet, Freeden's interpretation remains an inadequate explanation of Hobson's more complex, dynamic democratic thought. Close analysis of Hobson's democratic writings over the course of his lifetime reveals that his ideas on government cannot be modelled according to a static ethical relation between individual and society.

Freeden's conception of the ethical nature of Hobson's organicism is derived from his focus on particular aspects of Hobson's socio-political thought – notably, his welfare theory and his reconceptualisation of 'natural' rights (from forbearance rights to welfare rights).[55] These aspects are also echoed in the work of other New Liberal theorists. In a 1910 pamphlet on democratic reform, Hobhouse reformulates the right to vote as a holistic welfare right, on the grounds that it 'is not a claim to which the social welfare must bow, but a claim which the deeper consideration of the social welfare makes

[54] Hobson, 'The Vision of Liberalism', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*.
[55] Freeden, 'Hobson as a Political Theorist', in *Liberal Languages*, p. 101.

good'.[56] The democratic franchise is justified as a means of ensuring the wellbeing and security of all members of society, and guaranteeing 'some relation between the acts of government and the large social forces at work in the nation'.[57] Attention to the reciprocal obligations of community and individual within New Liberal thought has led Freeden to emphasise a fixed ethical principle that can be universally and equally applied to all citizens – a symbiotic relationship that is essentially unchanging.

Within this reading, Freeden is nonetheless sensitive to change in Hobson's thought. Thus, he calls attention to the fact that during the 1930s Hobson re-evaluated his use of the organic metaphor, thereby challenging a simplistic organicist reading of Hobson's philosophy.[58] In May 1933, Hobson readily admitted his reluctance to use the term 'organism' to describe a group of men or women, claiming that that he had 'got into difficulties with others and with myself for doing so' in the past.[59] And yet, though Freeden's work has done much to elucidate the character of Hobson's organic political theory, his interpretation misses important aspects of Hobson's democratic organicism because it does not examine Hobson's constitutional writings in depth.

Hobson's democratic theory cannot be explained through a uniform model of ethical relations. Although Hobson's organicist philosophy is predicated on the idea that each individual holds an equal capacity to feed back to central government through his or her exercise of the franchise, his democratic theory is not characterised by identical political responsibility among citizens. In 'The Re-Statement of Democracy' he draws a distinction between the case for an equal right to vote – which rests upon a universal, organic and reciprocal interrelation between individual and society – and the actual political

[56] L. T. Hobhouse, *Government by the People* (London: The People's Suffrage Federation, 1910), p. 6.
[57] *Ibid*. p. 21.
[58] Freeden, *Liberalism Divided*, pp. 232-4.
[59] Hobson, 'The Popular Mind' (23 May 1933), in *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932-1938*, p. 122.

participation of individuals, arguing that 'political power rightly varies with the capacity for public service'.[60] Writing thirty years later, Hobson maintained that intellectual and physical superiorities should not compromise the equal political status of citizens, but that 'Their possessors are thereby enabled to make a somewhat larger contribution to the service of mankind'; and in *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation* he confirms that this justifies a differing level of political activity within an inclusive democratic society: 'democracy does not imply that all men are equal in their capacity for contributing to self-government…This does not in the least invalidate the electoral system, it merely indicates that all men are not political animals'.[61]

Hobson rejects the static, uniform relationship inherent in the idea of the general will that defines the democratic theory of so many of his New Liberal contemporaries. He is willing to concede that distinct political action from individuals or minorities may be necessary in order to maintain a healthy democracy conceived along organicist lines. In *The Modern State* (1931) Hobson argues that 'though the majority may not desire to assert a separate personality which perhaps they do not possess, it is of vital importance that the positive liberty of the minority who have this personality and desire to express it should be maintained'.[62]

The action of politically-engaged individuals does not undermine the organically-conceived democracy; on the contrary, political initiative reflects the more complex character of Hobson's organic metanarrative. A uniform model of interpersonal relations may adequately describe the equal right to welfare, but it cannot capture the dynamic political interaction which is characteristic of modern society.

[60] Hobson, 'The Re-Statement of Democracy', p. 78.
[61] Hobson, *The Recording Angel*, pp. 24-5; Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 82.
[62] Hobson, *The Modern State*, p. 22.

Furthermore, this interaction is not simply subject to a constant, slow change mediated by social forces. As Hobson makes clear within his consciously methodological work, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (1926), organic social evolution cannot merely rely on a presupposed gradual, impersonal progress; rather, a realistic conception of political evolution must incorporate the presence of decisive human action as a motor of change:

> As soon as it is realised that the human will may purposely interfere as an effective agent in bringing about the change, we get outside the play of ordinary evolutionary analogies into a sphere of conduct that is vague and unintelligible precisely because language has never been prepared to meet its needs.[63]

Free will is a natural part of Hobson's organicism. The organic metaphor must not be constrained by one model of the social organism, but must acknowledge that growth and change is inevitable and healthy.

In part, Hobson's philosophical principle reflects dissatisfaction with the staid, Ruskinian view of the organic society, and desire to incorporate a more evolutionary conception in line with contemporary Darwinian biologism and the ideas of Spencer and Hegel. In part, it is simply a development and a continuation of the principle of 'orthogenic evolution' that plays such an important role within New Liberal organic thought. But in its application, it also reflects an innovative organic idea. Democratic political change is described in terms that reject a monological principle of steady, generational evolution; rather, progress is realised through 'genuine mutation, a sudden collapse of an old position or arrangement sapped by the secret gathering of new organic forces – an occurrence as rational as any of the slower evolutionary changes in human nature'.[64]

[63] Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 29.
[64] Hobson, *The Recording Angel*, p. 109.

This image of unpredictable mutation is echoed elsewhere in Hobson's thought – despite minimising the role of force and physical action in human life, modern society nevertheless requires the occasional application of natural energy: 'However far we go in economising effort by custom and routine, some minimum of effort still remains, and there is always the possibility of some break in the routine, some sudden accident that calls for a reserve of force'.[65]

§15

The organic metanarrative is far more complex than general will interpretations would seem to suggest. Any adequate understanding of the consistently acclaimed 'spirit of democracy' must take into account Hobson's dynamic, mutating sphere of political discourse and activity, characterised by individual initiative.[66]

Hobson's arguments for social welfare policies elevate the concept of the social organism above the other aspects of the philosophical metanarrative. However, his democratic writings do not accord with this prioritisation. Instead, the holism of political discourse, and the (unpredictable) evolution of political ideas and concepts play a far more important role. Ultimately, the organic metanarrative cannot be encompassed by the idea of the general will, and a less conceptually-rigid understanding is required in order to explain how Hobson's consistent appeals to the spirit of democracy can be understood within his organicist philosophy.

[65] Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, pp. 22-3.
[66] Hobson, 'The Crisis of Liberalism', p. 6.

IV. Organic Political Conceptualisation – Hobson's Emerging Philosophy of Politics

§16

Hobson's democratic philosophy presents a dynamic vision of popular self-rule, driven by the initiative of an active and engaged citizenry. It is a challenge to staid, established, mechanistic conceptions of the democratic state. Nevertheless, it is a vision that appears inconsistent; that seems mired in a miscellany of philosophical approaches, encompassed by an idiosyncratic and complex biological analogy. This section will seek to resolve the dissonance and confusion that threatens to undermine Hobson's democratic theory by explaining the unorthodox conceptual foundations underlying his political thought. It will illustrate the fundamental unity of Hobson's mutating democratic theory.

§17

Examination of Hobson's repeated redefinition of democracy reveals that there is no constant rational ethic operating as the basis for his conception of popular self-government. In fact, analysis of Hobson's more discursive philosophical writings has demonstrated that he consciously rejects a purely rational conception of democracy. His philosophy is characterised by an approach that shifts between different (and occasionally competing) philosophical frameworks. By drawing upon a multiplicity of analytical perspectives – from the political psychology of impulse to theories of power and language– Hobson is able to broaden his discussion of democracy, and thus present a more expansive outlook to his audience: a holistic diagnosis of the democratic condition. However, this approach sacrifices precision and consistency, both on the more immediate institutional level, and on this deeper philosophical level.

Nonetheless, despite an undeniable inconsistency in his writings, Hobson maintains a constant commitment to a prevalent 'spirit of democracy'.[67] Drawing from his methodological writings, this chapter has sought to reconcile this unwavering call for a democratic ethos with his polyphony of philosophical approaches by elucidating Hobson's foundational metanarrative – the elemental metaphor that grounds and unifies his theoretical perspective. The organic idea is central to Hobson's thought, and defines his theoretical formulation. Nevertheless, close analysis has revealed that the dominant scholarly understanding of this biological analogy – focused upon the operation of the general will – cannot support Hobson's consciously dynamic democratic theory.

The fundamental problem remains: how to reconcile his consistent commitment to the principle (and spirit) of popular self-rule with his changeable prescriptions. The answer to this problem – and the key to understanding his democratic theory – is a new interpretation of Hobson's philosophy of politics. His organic understanding of the way in which the citizens of a state conceptualise and reinterpret political ideas explains his formulation of political concepts and his changing democratic model. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of individual initiative in shaping the dynamic evolution of democratic thought.

Hobson's Organic Political Conceptualisation – A Democratic Idea

§18

Hobson's steadfast commitment to the realisation of a better form of popular self-rule – alongside his consciously inconsistent policy prescriptions – illustrates that he conceived

[67] Hobson, 'The Crisis of Liberalism', p. 6.

of democracy in an unusual, original way. Hobson's repeated endorsement of 'The spirit of a free Democracy' reflects a consistent articulation of democracy as an ethos – a fundamental political condition which demands realisation and transcends a specific institutional form or static essential value.[68] His theory redefines the democratic engagement of citizens as a compelling political impetus that determines how political concepts and policies are formulated and reconceptualised. Hobson's understanding therefore constructs a new philosophy of politics: one which emphasises the way in which democratic activity drives the organic evolution of political concepts.

This assessment of Hobson's unique political conceptualisation requires careful explanation. Hobson's conscious use of the organic, evolutionary metaphor pervades every aspect of his thought. This organic idea operates in several different ways within his philosophy, drawing upon distinct aspects of the analogy. Hobson's social welfare theory is conceptualised in accordance with the contention that the state should be modelled as a biological entity; by contrast, his distinctly constitutional ideas draw upon the evolutionary, holistic components of the organic idea.

Crucially, at a further level of abstraction, organicism pervades Hobson's understanding of the process of political conceptualisation. Concepts and institutions are subject to continuous pressures and evolution – to mutation wrought by individual initiative. We should therefore not understand Hobson's politics in terms of fixed values, but rather in terms of ideas and forms that are changed by the actions and interventions of people involved in political life.

This unique political conceptualisation works on two levels. Firstly, there is a clear commitment to anti-essentialism in Hobson's work. As he suggests in his theory-driven autobiography, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic* (1938), the fundamental meaning of

[68] Hobson, *The Recording Angel*, p. 125.

values is indeterminate, and individuals change their values throughout the course of their lives: 'When we realize life in terms of values, we shall realize how the source of value and the processes of relation differs not only in different persons but in the same persons with the changes and chances of life'.[69] Elsewhere, Hobson observes that value is naturally altered in the process of valuation: 'thinking about anything makes it different from what it was before, gives it a new value and often a new intensity'.[70]

Secondly, there is a strong notion of politics as intervention – a sense that politics is the result of activity. A clear example of this approach may be perceived in the conceptualisation of law.[71] Hobson eschews the value-driven identification of the law of a democratic state as a reflection of the will of the people. Instead, he conceives of the law as the product of the actions of the 'real law-makers' in the 'non-elected Cabinet' and the interpretation of the 'citizens called upon to obey it'.[72] Thus, a democratic community that expresses the popular endorsement of a law through a referendum will experience an identity between this endorsement and the active observation of the law by the citizens – 'The demand for specific popular judgements in concrete cases stimulates interest and imparts reality to politics'.[73] If the active component of popular endorsement declines, obedience to that law will also decline. For Hobson, active engagement is the expression of value, and detached conceptual values are practically meaningless.

Democracy is a special phenomenon, because it is the active political engagement by all members of a society. An example from *The Modern State* (1931) illustrates this

[69] J. A. Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic* (1938), ed. Michael Freeden (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1976), p. 86.
[70] Hobson, 'The Will to Power', p. 112.
[71] Hobson, 'The Lords or the Referendum?' in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, pp. 40-5.
[72] *Ibid*. p. 43, p. 45.
[73] *Ibid*. p. 41.

clearly.[74] Hobson pointedly asks how contemporary democratic states can ever hope to achieve true democracy – government by popular will – if legislation is increasingly framed in order to commute powers of administration and interpretation to departmental bodies. Because these 'democratic' states deny the performative nature of democracy, they cannot hope to cultivate a level of popular enthusiasm great enough to meet the challenge posed by the nascent, charismatic dictatorial political regimes.

In essence, democracy is the active process in which all members of a community come to understand and define political concepts. Citizens will only truly understand complex political issues by engaging with them: 'politics is not only a branch of knowledge but of conduct', and, 'Paradoxical as it seems, you must do a thing before you can know it. Only by the exercise of self-control can a person or a people learn the art of government'.[75]

Democracy also embodies this collective process of political definition within a shared ideal – an ethos of popular rule. Democratic politics demands the enthusiastic engagement of the citizenry in order to maintain this ethos. Hobson therefore condemns the 'normal indifference of the great majority of the inhabitants of each country to the conduct of government' on the grounds that this 'favours [the] acceptance of competent autocracy', and the subversion of democratic politics .[76]

Crucially, Hobson developed, cultivated, and discarded political prescriptions across the course of his life in order to actualise his notion of democratic political engagement within the contemporary political context. Reacting against what he perceived to be illiberal central government control during the First World War, Hobson elevated

[74] Hobson, *The Modern State*, pp. 6-8.
[75] J. A. Hobson, *Towards International Government* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915), pp. 207-8.
[76] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 44.

political forms of federalism to a core position within his philosophy.[77] Political federalism, though contrary to his endorsement of centralised economic planning, accorded with the democratic ethos that was elemental to his active political conceptualisation. Federal decentralisation of political activity would provide 'a form of structure' which would establish 'self-determination…a rule of active and energetic process' – localised participatory democracy.[78] Ultimately, Hobson's active conceptualisation of politics necessarily requires that political prescriptions will change over time, in response to events and to new forms of activity, whilst remaining anchored to the core theme of democracy.

Democratic Redefinition and the Organic Social Ontology

§19

Hobson's political theory grounds the collective process of political redefinition in an organic social ontology – a principle that describes and determines the dynamic nature of social and political development. In order to direct democratic government, and define its ruling principles and its laws, all members of the community should engage with political ideas and political institutions. Yet through this process, a new understanding of political concepts and a new vision of the political state will emerge. In a speech delivered to the South Place Ethical Society in March 1933, Hobson commends Ecclesiastes for 'a sound idealism' which perceives that 'as we move towards attainment the ideals will themselves be moving forward in new forms and commanding and

[77] Hobson, *Problems of a New World*, pp. 251-7.
[78] *Ibid.* p. 255.

directing fresh allegiances in their followers'.[79] Essentially, the form of practical politics evolves through the political process.

Previous sections established that the dynamic, popular reconceptualisation of government and political relations is not simply a steady, gradualistic process of evolution, or a predictable change determined by the general will. It is driven by human initiative: by the passionate political engagement of individuals and groups pressing for their understanding of democratic government, alongside the majority of citizens who simply interact with political ideas within their ordinary lives. Hobson's organic social ontology encapsulates this process – it is mutation driven by human will, 'outside the play of ordinary evolutionary analogies'.[80]

Fundamentally, Hobson holds that this mutation, wrought by popular initiative, does not merely define a true democracy: it is the means of saving and reforming deficient contemporary 'democratic' states. Collectively, the 'half-instinctive, half-rational drive towards the common good' will act as a protective force, preventing rash action and establishing the basis for legitimate and receptive self-government by popular will.[81]

Hobson's organic social ontology frames his dynamic philosophy of politics within a holistic conceptual framework. Democracy is more than an institutional model, or the expression of an ethical principle. It is the dynamic political ideal; and it is the driving force within a community, compelling citizens towards the realisation of this ideal through 'the substitution of a wider and more fully representative Government for narrower forms of autocracy, or class-dominion'.[82]

[79] Hobson, 'Our Selves', p. 110.
[80] Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 29.
[81] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 78.
[82] Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 247.

§20

Though Hobson's dynamic understanding of politics is evident in his earlier work, the organic social ontology was only consciously articulated in texts produced within the last two decades of his life. Writing in the 1890s, Hobson sketched out his conviction that true knowledge and appreciation of any social activity cannot exist independently of intervention in or conscious engagement with that activity. For both the Member of Parliament and the political theorist, 'if he is safely to theorise, he must have had direct experience of facts and feelings belonging to the same order of those involved' – the MP must not blindly legislate on the agricultural labourer's behalf.[83] Nevertheless, Hobson's writings prior to the outbreak of the First World War do not consciously develop this identification of knowledge and activity into a stronger, anti-essentialist position. Hobson's pre-war work does not reflect upon the foundations of his political theory.

From 1914 onwards, Hobson was confronted with serious challenges to his world view. The First World War emphasised the significance of irrationality and power in human interactions, rocking his liberal-ethical perspective. In discursive texts such as *Notes on Law and Order*, a conscious process of reconceptualisation becomes clear which establishes an identity between political activity and political value – a politics that 'fastens itself upon us as spectators and actors in the human drama'.[84] This new understanding of politics drew upon the innovative theoretical frameworks that challenged the dominant liberal understanding of politics. Disorder, power, and creativity were reinterpreted as compelling drives to human engagement – 'reflection itself is for most persons an uninteresting process. Disorder, insecurity, irregularity, the

[83] Hobson, *John Ruskin: Social Reformer*, p. 256.
[84] Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 29.

exceptional, the unpredictable, the hazards of life, are always more interesting and more exciting' – and Hobson's political writings increasingly acknowledged their necessity as foundations of an active democracy.[85]

By the time that Hobson wrote his intellectual autobiography in 1938, he had come to recognise the expression of his action-centred philosophy of politics within in his own life and work. His failure to secure an academic position had led to a journalistic style; a series of polemical interventions which echoed the reality of thinking as a 'brief fragmentary process' and identified politics as a sphere of activity, which could only find inadequate expression in language.[86] Though organicist thinking still clearly pervaded Hobson's philosophy at this point, the development of the interventionist approach had led him to denounce philosophical *systems* (even organic socio-political systems) as unsound. A completely consistent philosophy 'overrates the rationality of evolutionary thinking' and relies upon the 'laws that can only generalize our past experiences'.[87] Hobson's understanding of politics matured into a holistic but anti-systematic conceptual philosophy, allowing him to consciously distinguish himself (from the mid-1920s onwards) from the 'Great system-mongerers, like Comte, Bentham, Spencer', whose theory aimed at 'putting the whole creative process of man under one formula', to break away from the systematic theorising of academic New Liberal theorists.[88]

[85] Hobson, 'Is World Government Possible?' (29 January 1933), in *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932-1938*, p. 94.
[86] Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, pp. 85-6. Kadish has highlighted that Hobson's conviction that his fragmentary style was the product of circumstances is only partly accurate. Hobson's exclusion from contemporary academic circles because of 'heretical' economic views expressed in *The Physiology of Industry* (1889) only lasted a couple of decades. Yet he maintained his journalistic style because of a philosophical commitment to anti-systematic thought. Alon Kadish, 'Rewriting the Confessions: Hobson and the Extension Movement', in *Reappraising J. A. Hobson: Humanism and Welfare*.
[87] *Ibid*. pp. 85-6, pp. 161-2.
[88] Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 29.

Hobson's intuitive understanding of the process of political conceptualisation only developed into a conscious theory in the last two decades of his life. Nevertheless, as an unconscious principle, it defined the ideas that he produced throughout his lifetime.

The Expression of Hobson's Philosophy of Politics

§21

Given that Hobson developed his theory of political conceptualisation in an increasingly self-conscious way throughout his later life, it is worth considering why he did not expressly delineate the conceptual basis of his democratic theory within a greater number of his published works. If Hobson genuinely aimed to persuade others of his philosophical approach, then an explicit account of his organic social ontology appears to have been a logical necessity. However, this line of argument fundamentally misunderstands the purpose of much of Hobson's work.

In the majority of his writings and speeches, he tackles an immediate political cause and adopts a polemical approach. *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1909) is a perfect example: Hobson insists 'We must destroy the power of the Lords to kill, mutilate, or unduly delay Liberal measures'.[89] As J. M. Hobson has suggested, 'Hobson's public persona was multi-dimensional and polymorphous … it would seem that his role as a political propagandist was perhaps the most important to him'.[90] Hobson's democratic polemic was drawn from his foundational philosophy of politics; nevertheless he rarely made this explicit because this was not instrumental to his propagandist intent.

[89] Hobson, 'The Lords or the Referendum?', p. 20.
[90] John M. Hobson, 'Introduction. John A. Hobson, the international man: A report from earth', in *Selected Writings of John A. Hobson 1932-1938*, p. 20.

Hobson simply did not devote the same focus to explaining his activity-driven theory as he did to embodying it. But, leaving aside the handful of deeply revealing discursive texts and speeches, evidence of the conceptual foundations of his thought can be found scattered throughout his polemical writings on democracy. It is there in the justifications he gave for institutional forms that he prescribed for democratic government, and in his opposition to non-inclusive or passive forms of democracy (such as the ancient Athenian form of government, which 'never amounted to more than an experiment in local self-government by an upper-class living upon the labour of a slave or depressed majority of the inhabitants').[91] If Hobson avoided delineating his theoretical presuppositions in every work of propaganda, it was because his anti-systematic philosophy of politics demanded it on the grounds of theoretical consistency – for 'free and fragmentary intercourse' is the 'mode for the discovery and communication of truth'.[92]

§22

Nevertheless, Hobson's writings do give conscious, clear expression to his philosophy of politics in one way that perfectly accords with his interventionist principle. His innovative doctrine of 'humourism' outlines the subjective component of the organic social ontology, explaining the implications for each individual citizen's experience of political reality. This idea is only expounded within a few core discursive texts, and it is given its most developed expression in the pamphlet *Notes on Law and Order* (1926). Humourism stands upon the conviction that politics should be the active domain of 'the artist or the gambler'.[93] Within political life, the emergence of the unforeseen – 'the variants, the novelties, the cases where experience is dumb' – will demand the spontaneous application of initiative, the reinterpretation of political possibilities by an

[91] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 1.
[92] Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, p. 85.
[93] Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 29.

individual.[94] And 'if you haven't got the creative instinct with some skilled aptitude for handling the novel, life is for you nothing but a gamble, a game of chance'; but it is possible to develop a talent for the reconceptualisation of the political world: 'it belongs to the artist to handle new opportunities in a creative way'.[95] The true humourist is not just a spectator, 'He can take a hand himself in life, and by virtue of his keenness and imaginative sympathy, help to covert a game of chance into a game of skill'.[96] However, he should not be over-steeped in culture, but rather reflect qualities of verve and lightness: temperamental qualities that naturally exist in every individual.

Though humourism was only substantially elaborated in a couple of works produced after 1926, earlier texts hint at a growing sense of the individual actor as a focus of political reinterpretation and change through a capacity for humour and psychological adaptation. In *The Psychology of Jingoism* (1901), Hobson suggests that the submission to the mob mentality of a crowd is accompanied by a 'collapse of humour' arising from 'the total eclipse of sympathetic imagination' in the 'self-absorption of the fray' – and this subsequently results in extraordinary misjudgements.[97] But it is important to note that humourism was only discussed in a handful of speeches and texts. Moreover, it was never fully explained within the context of the modern democratic state. Though it elucidated Hobson's vision of subjective political engagement (and therefore grounded much of his imperative political advice), he did not make the propagation of humourism an immediate priority.

§23

Hobson's organic political conceptualisation defines his understanding of democracy. Democracy is not reducible to a specific institutional structure or to one essential moral

[94] *Ibid*.
[95] *Ibid*.
[96] *Ibid*. p. 30.
[97] J. A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 78.

principle; nor can it be understood simply as the relation between the individual and the general will. Rather, democracy is an ideal created through the collective engagement of a community in the dynamic process of formulating and reconceptualising the political world.

This interpretation of Hobson's thought provides a solution to the apparent inconsistency of his democratic writings; but in addition to this, it suggests an original and compelling philosophy of democratic government. Hobson's use of multiple, competing philosophical frameworks makes sense within this holistic conceptual theory. His focus on action and intervention – on the performative nature of politics, rather than on ethical relations or power relations – unites his inconsistent prescriptions and relates them to the social, political and intellectual context. Political action within a community takes the form of inclusive political engagement – democracy. But as this democracy is constantly reconceptualised through activity in response to a changing world – and through individual initiative – it must be understood as a mutating political condition, in accordance with Hobson's organic social ontology. Popular self-government is therefore a political aspiration and the means to reach for and define that aspiration. In the next section, we will consider how this dynamic understanding of democracy shaped Hobson's political theory, and defined his understanding of representative government.

V. Democratic Government – Representation and Engagement

§24

Hobson's writings establish a unique theoretical understanding of politics, centred on political activity. Democracy is conceived as an ideal, active political condition, transcending any specific institutional structures or policies. Nevertheless, his writings on popular self-rule were not simply intended as theoretical contributions to an academic discourse. The polemical style that Hobson adopted in many texts allowed him to weigh into contemporary political debates and to propose policy solutions, to level searing and apposite criticisms at his opponents, and to critically engage with the political world.

In the process, Hobson developed and refined principles of democratic government. These general principles – maxims on the form that a democracy can or should take, relative to contemporary understandings (and concrete institutional expressions) of popular self-government – are a source of confusion in Hobson's work. His polemical writings occasionally seem to contradict one another. However, by focusing on his core democratic principle – political engagement – the following section will resolve some of this confusion, and explain how Hobson applied his theoretical approach to the problem of popular self-rule. It will begin by examining how Hobson sought to reconcile political engagement and popular representation. Thereafter, it will illustrate how this approach influenced his shifting model of popular self-rule.

Representation and Democracy

§25

Representative democracy presents a clear dilemma for Hobsonian democratic theory. The activity and initiative of the citizen are fundamental to Hobson's performative conception of popular self-rule. Representative forms of democratic government typically reduce the active participation of the majority of citizens in the process of political decision-making, thereby compromising the democratic political condition. Nonetheless, Hobson was consciously committed to engaging with polemical debates and parliamentary controversies in a country with a constitutional structure that enshrined representative forms of government. Writing in a late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British context, Hobson could not ignore the dominant democratic paradigm while remaining a key voice in the debate on democratic reform.

Hobson evidently perceived the theoretical dissonance between his active conception of democracy and the reality of representative government. His repeated insistence that 'the belief that the popular will is realisable effectively through the representative system in England, France, and the United States, has caused a greater waste of reform energy than any other single cause' – undermining the 'work of perfecting the constitutional machinery of democracy' – reflects his dissatisfaction with representative democracy.[98] This conviction is echoed in his insistence that the whittling down of democracy to the process of casting a vote for a representative every five years has brought about the failure of popular self-rule.[99] In 'The Sense of Responsibility' (1938) Hobson implies an even stronger, a priori opposition. He suggests that under a representative democracy, individuals are automatically resistive to government rule

[98] Hobson, 'The Crisis of Liberalism', p. 6; see also Hobson, *Democracy After the War*, pp. 5-6.
[99] Hobson, *The Recording Angel*, p. 25.

because obedience to the dictate of representatives compromises the political engagement that is inherent in the performative process of identifying and valuing political ideas:

> The State is an impersonal potentate imposing certain obligations without our personal consent, though we may have voted in some election for some Member of Parliament who has given his formal consent to an Act imposing these obligations.[100]

Yet in spite of these explicit challenges to the representative paradigm, Hobson did not entirely reject the idea of representation. Rather, he was able and willing to incorporate representative principles and institutions into his theory – but only when these principles reflected the popular will, and allowed for a greater level of political engagement than would otherwise exist. Hobson was realistic about mass participation in politics; he acknowledged that apathy could threaten to compromise engagement under direct forms of democracy, and he accepted that in particular contexts, representative forms of democracy might result in a more genuine collective political engagement. And this pragmatic position formed the basis for Hobson's evolving model of representative government.

From Referendum to Industrial Democracy: Representation in a Changing Context

§26

Despite his clear and continuing unease about the concrete forms of representative democracy exhibited in West European and North American states, Hobson proposed imperative reforms in order to enhance representative government throughout his

[100] Hobson, 'The Sense of Responsibility', p. 179.

lifetime. These reforms were expressed in the primary democratic institutional prescriptions that he advanced in each period; from the referendum, to the democratic control of foreign policy, to industrial democracy. In response to a changing socio-political context, and a mutating popular vision of democratic government, Hobson repeatedly re-evaluated the role that individual political engagement could play within government and altered his institutional prescriptions accordingly. The principle of representation was maintained throughout, though its extent depended upon the possibilities that existed for more active expressions of democracy.

Hobson's early enthusiasm for the referendum reflected the core theoretical contention that grounded his vision of democratic government. The process of actively engaging with a piece of legislation through a popular vote will lead citizens to identify with and accept this policy once it had been enacted as a law: laws passed by a government that incorporates the institution of the referendum will be 'consonant with the public will'.[101] Nevertheless, Hobson makes it clear that the reform of the British constitution that he is proposing does not aim to eliminate the role of democratic representatives. He does not believe that all political business in the modern state could be managed by the people as a collective; and in any case, as he maintains throughout his writings, not all individuals have the ability to participate in the political process in the same way – not all men are 'political animals'.[102]

Hobson consistently argues for the institution of the referendum on the grounds that it 'does not imply that representative institutions are destroyed, but that they are made supplementary to the direct action of the popular will'; that representatives are intended 'to relieve the people of a burden of public business too heavy for them to bear, to assist the popular will to attain adequate expression by providing discussion and

[101] Hobson, 'The Swiss Referendum', p. 65.
[102] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 82.

advice, and finally to form a substitute for the people in matters of emergency and particularity'.[103] Essentially, representatives are required to administer public business that could not be submitted to the collective will and to assist popular political engagement. To this end, Hobson specifies that the representatives (either a majority of a reformed, elected Second Chamber, or a minority of 200 MPs within the Lower Chamber) should have the responsibility of initiating referenda; of articulating and stimulating demand for popular engagement in the legislative process.[104] Representative and direct forms of democracy combine to ensure active democracy.

Hobson's commitment to representation alongside regular referenda was, at least in part, a response to the concerns of contemporaries across the political spectrum. A number of these contemporaries wrote pamphlets criticising the referendum on the grounds that it would erode the dignity and authority of representatives, and invite mob rule or majoritarian tyranny.[105] Ritchie opposed direct democracy on the grounds that 'in many matters it is likely to be excessively conservative and adverse to progress'.[106] Hobson argued otherwise; but his decision to propagandise in favour of a greater degree of popular participation within a representative democracy also reflects a clear belief that this would inspire political activity, given the popular will and the political context of the period. From the time that Dicey published his celebrated article on the possibility of introducing the referendum to Britain (1890), this issue had stimulated public debate; writing in 1909, Hobson echoed many of Dicey's sentiments and his use of the Swiss

[103] Hobson, 'The Swiss Referendum', p. 59, pp. 59-60.
[104] Hobson, 'The Lords or the Referendum?', pp. 36-7. Nevertheless, Hobson also holds that the provision within the Swiss Constitution that allows for the public initiation of a referendum (through the submission of a petition containing 30,000 signatures to the Federal Legislature) is an admirable democratic measure. Hobson, 'The Swiss Referendum', p. 58, pp. 66-8.
[105] See Lord George N. Curzon, and Fredk A. Maxse, writing in 'The Referendum', *The National Review*, no. 23 (1894), pp. 66-77; and Clifford D. Sharp, *The Case Against the Referendum*, Fabian Tract no. 155 (London: The Fabian Society, 1911).
[106] D. G. Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', in *Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics*, ed. Stanton Coit (London: Grant Richards, 1900), p. 21.

constitutional model in his argument.[107] Hobson believed that some degree of direct democracy would be achievable given the contemporary public appraisal of the need for change and the attractive practical blueprint that the Swiss constitution provided. By 1921, when he published *Problems of a New World*, the debate on the referendum had lost its inspirational appeal for the masses, and he dismissed the idea of direct democracy alongside representative democracy because it was unlikely to overcome public apathy – to maximise political engagement.[108]

Hobson retreated from the referendum after 1914. Nevertheless, throughout the First World War his attitude towards representative forms of democracy actually grew more hostile in response to political changes initiated under wartime governments. Parliament's decision to suspend democratic elections for the duration of the conflict led him to lament the invariable degeneration of representative democracy into a system of class rule. In books and pamphlets published during the war, Hobson repeatedly stresses that the contemporary form of representation actually precludes popular engagement. He dismisses the 'showy character of elections, Parliamentary representation, and legislative action' which distracts attention from the fact that real political control lies in the hands of an elite class that monopolises the representation.[109] And in his satirical dystopian pamphlet *1920: Dips into the Near Future* (1918), Hobson has a member of the governing elite declare 'it doesn't matter how many have votes, nor how they use them, now that we know we have the levers of real government firmly in our hands'.[110]

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[107] A. V. Dicey, 'Ought the Referendum to be Introduced into England?' *Contemporary Review*, no. 57 (1890), pp. 489-511; Hobson, 'The Swiss Referendum'.
[108] Hobson, *Problems of a New World*, pp. 238-9.
[109] Hobson, *The Fight for Democracy*, p. 34.
[110] J. A. Hobson, writing as 'Lucian', *1920: Dips into the Near Future* (London: Headley Bros. Publishers Ltd., 1918), pp. 45-6.

For Hobson, the only way to overcome this misleading façade of democracy and to institute real popular self-rule is to replace existing representatives with individuals that have experience of a working class life: 'Men fairly representative of the common interests of the people must be substituted at focal points for the present guardians of class interests'.[111] But this improvement to the representation would not be successful unless it was accomplished through the political education of the masses – the development of political engagement beyond the 'short-sighted, credulous, uncritical' form in existence.[112] This would transform political activity (such as voting in elections) and political representation into real democratic government.

Through the war period and into the 1920s, Hobson came to refine his conception of representative government in line with developments in popular opinion. Though he maintained his calls for improved education and better representation of the masses, he appears to have acknowledged that the extension of the suffrage in 1918 (and the subsequent decline in the popular participation), and the increasing public preoccupation with industrial government, meant that traditional rallying calls to political engagement were no longer effective. The political culture that had suggested that the referendum could galvanise political intervention had faded. In its place, the concept of industrial democracy appeared to stipulate a lesser degree of direct participation by citizens.

Hobson contended that 'The mass opinion of producer-consumers in their capacity as localized voters cannot be vested with any power to overrule such expert control' in the economy, and that specialised labourers of brain and hand should be accorded predominant industrial control within a parallel representative structure.[113]

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[111] Hobson, *The Fight for Democracy*, p. 35.
[112] *Ibid*. p. 36.
[113] Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, pp. 177-8.

Nonetheless, Hobson's argument for industrial democracy was predicated on the assertion that it could shake the languid electorate out of its apathy. Citizens would be eager to engage with the practical business of a government structured as an industrial democracy because 'an increasing burden of government consists in central economic planning' – and this constitutes each individual citizen's 'vital interests as worker and consumer'.[114]

It is important to note that Hobson's vision of industrial democracy consciously focused on the active experience of politics in an unusual way that incorporated all citizens within the political community. From its inception, though Hobson's model of industrial democracy demanded a 'representative body adequate to perform [the] task' of coordinating industry, capital, and labour across the whole country, the model also required that the administration of industries and services be decentralised in order to encourage active-minded citizens to participate in this democratic form of government.[115] Complete control by central government was branded 'no longer acceptable in any quarter'.[116] His conception of representative government evolved from his staunch wartime position, and remained anchored to his philosophy of politics emphasising intervention and activity. Though Hobson's Liberal contemporaries advanced similar theories of industrial democracy, they presented their ideas in a different way. Ramsay Muir advocated a system of industrial democracy in 1924 on the grounds that it would improve conditions and drive industrial efficiency.[117] Although Hobson was also concerned with these issues, his focus on industrial representation as a means to securing political and economic democracy evinces a consistent preoccupation with maximising popular participation within a representative democracy.

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[114] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, pp. 86-7.
[115] Hobson, *The Modern State,* p. 26; pp. 27-8.
[116] Hobson, *Problems of a New World*, pp. 241-2
[117] Ramsay Muir, *The New Liberalism* (London: The Daily News Ltd., n.d. [1924]), pp. 23-6.

Industrial democracy allowed for a greater level of political engagement than would otherwise exist, given the collective enthusiasm for industrial government. And ultimately, the evolving public conception of what precisely constituted the most elemental sphere of government dictated the degree of representative democracy in Hobson's writings across his lifetime.

§27

Hobson characterised democracy as an active political condition, transcending any specific institutional structures or policies. Instead of promoting a fixed institutional framework, he sought to maximise democratic political engagement within the rapidly evolving context of early-twentieth century Britain, generating a dynamic model of democracy. Hobson's institutional recommendations – and his views on representative government – shifted considerably over time; and yet they remained anchored to the core principle of political engagement. As he endeavoured to give expression to this evolving model of political relations, Hobson traced an organic social ontology, grounded in the process of political redefinition.

VI. Hobson and The Problem of Democracy

§28

Hobson's political writings reveal a deeply original, unorthodox, and compelling understanding of democratic politics. This unique philosophy unites the seemingly inconsistent constitutional recommendations that he propagated throughout his lifetime. Moreover, it offers a novel vision of the democratic process, which is deliberately constructed to adapt to a changing political and ideological context. Over the course of this chapter, we have traced this organic vision of popular self-rule. We have noted that Hobson resisted the idea of a rational ethic of democracy, embracing a plurality of different theoretical foundations. We have argued that this approach was shaped by his organic understanding of political phenomena. And we have explained how Hobson channelled this organic understanding into a dynamic theory of democratic self-realisation, centred on the active redefinition of political concepts and political institutions.

Hobson's democratic thought demands the evolution of institutional recommendations in response to a changing political context – brought about through collective political redefinition. Thus, his unsystematic approach and his inconsistent policy prescriptions are not indicative of a fruitless search for the perfect model of democratic government; rather they reflect a firm conviction that democracy is a dynamic political condition.

§29

Hobson was not the only New Liberal theorist to draw attention to political evolution, or to highlight the holistic connection between meaningful engagement and democratic political activity. Ritchie acknowledged that 'conscious thought and deliberate purpose'

drive political evolution by creating new institutional variations, while Hobhouse maintained that society 'flourishes by the harmonious growth of its parts' – illustrating the importance of individual initiative and organic political development within New Liberal political thought.[118] In this respect, the model of democratic evolutionary development that we have described within this chapter is a *New Liberal* social ontology.

But Hobson was the only theorist to incorporate democratic redefinition into the process of political evolution, to embrace the dynamic development of democratic institutional forms, and to bypass systematic theoretical explanation in favour of an organic social ontology that could integrate new ideas and new theoretical frameworks. Thus, Hobson's democratic model of political engagement breaks through the systematic organicism of the era, and establishes an organic theory of democracy that captures the dynamism of a changing world.

Nevertheless, though the organic social ontology allows Hobson to avoid the systematic limitations of New Liberal thought – and to build a theoretical argument around democratic activity – it remains constrained by its intellectual origins. Hobson's holistic understanding of social and intellectual phenomena was derived from a fusion of Hegelian, Ruskinian, and Darwinian evolutionary ideas; it borrowed heavily from the work of contemporaries, and developed out of a polemical campaign for social and constitutional reform. Like all New Liberals, Hobson was happy to draw on a range of conflicting theoretical sources in order to justify his arguments. Unlike other New Liberals, Hobson made a virtue of this process; and yet it left his work open to criticism on the grounds that it had no solid theoretical grounding.

[118] Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', pp. 25-6; L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings*, ed. James Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 65.

Hobson did attempt to frame his organic social ontology within a model of social subjectivity. But humourism was never fully developed within his writings, and the theoretical potential of this framework of democratic self-realisation was never comprehensively explored. In order to build on Hobson's political ideas, and construct a holistic alternative to atomistic theories of popular self-rule, we need to move beyond the subjective component of political engagement, and reframe the organic social ontology within a much more comprehensive philosophical foundation. In the following chapters of this thesis, we will move away from a historical methodology, towards the theoretical reconstruction of this democratic political principle.

Chapter 3: Rule-Following Philosophy and the New Liberal Ontology

§1

The New Liberalism prevailed as a dominant political rationale for less than a decade at the start of the twentieth century. Events soon overtook this ideology, and radically reshaped the views of its adherents. Yet the political ideas of this group – both in and out of power – provide a compelling means of understanding and ordering democratic politics in today's (very different) world.

The organic social ontology that shapes Hobson's democratic political thought establishes a dynamic – and theoretically rich – vision of a civic community. This ontology provides an insight into human interaction that remains relevant, and that continues to act as an animating polemical principle despite changing social and political circumstances. However, the explanatory potential of this organic social ontology is critically undermined by the complex and disordered philosophical foundations that inspired it. While the ontology continues to serve as a good guide to democratic political practice, critics can easily point to the dubious and contradictory assumptions underlying the New Liberal formulation in order to cast doubt upon its credibility. Though the democratic citizen may be persuaded by the practical utility of the organic social ontology, the political theorist will never accept it as the basis for democratic politics until this idea is underwritten by a logically-consistent philosophy.

The following three chapters will demonstrate that such a theoretical foundation can be established by appealing to the Wittgensteinian philosophy of 'following a rule'. The organic social ontology can be reformulated in accordance with a comprehensive body

of principles, drawn from the philosophical investigation of human meaning, concept-use, and behaviour.

§2

Chapter 3 will open with a consideration of the philosophical and political weaknesses inherent in the New Liberal social ontology. Subsequently, it will begin to reconstruct this ontology, using a descriptive analysis of the logical and epistemic processes that ground meaningful action (that allow us to follow a rule). Chapter 4 will illustrate that this process of reconfiguration requires the theorist to adopt a normative theoretical standpoint. It will identify the rule-following norm that drives the revised social ontology. And Chapter 5 will expand on the political dimensions of this social ontology.

As our argument progresses, we will show that the fusion of New Liberal social ontology and Wittgensteinian epistemology and philosophy of meaning produces a formidable democratic political theory. Liberal Organic Democracy is theoretically sound precisely *because* it is grounded in a clear understanding of the relationship between political meaning and democratic practice – because it focuses on the subject matter of the organic social ontology: the activity that orients our political understanding.

I. Theoretical Reconfiguration: Justifying the Transition from New Liberalism to Liberal Organic Democracy

§3

The New Liberal social ontology presents a compelling vision of civic engagement in a dynamic political world. In many respects, the appeal of this ontology operates below the level of conscious thought. Hobson's development of the New Liberal, evolutionary understanding of social development remains its most successful expression. But Hobson was never driven to fully articulate the theoretical foundations underpinning his predominantly polemical endeavours. Nonetheless, his theory captures the reality of democratic political interaction: constant interaction and political ferment – provoking theoretical change and institutional revision – as citizens seek to employ a series of political concepts in order to generate community self-rule within a changing political context.

Hobson's understanding of democratic politics therefore subtly orients the citizen within a theoretical structure that makes sense of both the fundamental and the minor discontinuities in democratic life, whilst rendering them meaningful within a consistent democratic spirit or principle. At the same time, this under-determined organicist worldview allows for the incorporation of new intellectual frameworks – from discourses of power to theories of language – into its broader understanding of civic life. As a result, novel modes of theoretical analysis do not threaten, but rather reinforce, the legitimacy of this unsystematic conceptualisation. The citizen's exposure to new intellectual frameworks drives political discussion and civic interaction, and is therefore a fundamental part of democratic life.

In short, in its most developed form, New Liberal thought suggests an intuitive and theoretically-malleable way to understand, articulate, and generate community self-rule through everyday conceptual and institutional engagement.

§4

In spite of its instinctive appeal, this ontological understanding suffers from a number of undeniable theoretical weaknesses. We can break these down into three distinct – but related – theoretical limitations (which give rise to a more fundamental philosophical dilemma), and a more practical, political problem.

Firstly, the intuitive nature of the organic social ontology appears to deny it the possibility of any comprehensive theoretical underpinning. Though it provides a compelling illustration of human interaction, there does not seem to be any substantive theoretical reason to prefer the ontology to any other model of human behaviour.

Secondly, the ontology's ability to absorb justifications from new intellectual frameworks results in a fragmented theoretical structure that is grounded in changing – and potentially contradictory – principles. The absence of a boundary delineating how to define New Liberal democratic thought (constraining it to a core set of principles) does not automatically undermine the ontology. Nevertheless, the existence of conflicting justifications for New Liberal policies makes it difficult to determine which ideas accord with the ontology and which do not.

Significantly, both of these objections subsist in part because of a third major theoretical weakness: the complex and conflicted relationship between the New Liberal ontology and the problematic metaphysics that inspired it. In later texts, New Liberals consciously rejected the metaphysical assumptions that stimulated their earlier ideas. But this act of rejection was far from total. And it resulted in a complex combination of old and new

ideas – which echo the form, but not the function, of more systematic theories. This loose conceptual amalgamation exacerbates the foundational instability of the New Liberal ontology; *and* it appears to link the ontology to a theoretical groundwork that the New Liberals openly discredited.

The combined effect of these three objections creates the impression that the New Liberal social ontology is theoretically ungrounded and therefore intrinsically unstable. But does this constitute an irresolvable foundational problem?

Ultimately, these three theoretical limitations are symptomatic of a philosophical approach that is deliberately unsystematic or *anti-systematic* (refuting the universal validity of one constant organising concept for all human thought and interaction). While an anti-systematic approach can provide a strong foundation for a political platform (and could be held consistently), in this case it *does* pose a philosophical dilemma.

Though the social ontology is consciously unsystematic, it nevertheless depends upon a core conception of collective and individual political engagement. This seemingly contradictory theoretical position needs to be more comprehensively explained and supported as an anti-systematic approach in order to make the ontology philosophically tenable.

On a more practical level, the identification of the New Liberal social ontology with the discredited metaphysics that helped to inspire it also generates a broader political problem. These metaphysical ideas are now commonly seen as politically undesirable. And so, New Liberal democratic thought appears to be in danger of being tainted by association.

Overall, a series of theoretical and political weaknesses threaten to undermine the vision of civic engagement set out in New Liberal democratic theory. The social ontology can only be justified and secured against these elemental flaws through a coherent exposition of its theoretical foundations.

§5

As Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrated, it is possible to trace the *historical* genesis and development of New Liberal democratic ideas. However, this approach only serves to further underline the problem at hand. The ontological assumptions that underpinned the entire New Liberal project were drawn from a number of highly systematic sources. New Liberal writers weaved distinct elements from holistic political theory and late Victorian intellectual culture into an organic metanarrative. Contemporary preoccupation with biologism – especially with Darwinian evolutionary theories – and with the idealist philosophy of Hegel both exercised a strong formative influence.

Early New Liberal ideas were often derived from (hostile) readings of Hegel and the British Idealists. The New Liberals also borrowed from the Darwinian evolutionary analogy, while opposing a more widespread group that also appropriated this analogy for political purposes – the Social Darwinists. These were dynamic and formative clashes, which led theorists like Hobson in a new direction – towards a distinct, organic understanding of the mutation and evolution of political ideas within contemporary democratic communities. Yet this new and anti-systematic understanding had its origins in systematic theories with strong metaphysical foundations.

The metaphysical assumptions derived from these theories are the source of one of the major weaknesses in the New Liberal ontology. Under historical scrutiny, the organic social ontology emerges as a paradox. New Liberal writings on democracy acknowledge

that conceptual and metaphysical explanations derived from the works of Hegel and the Social Darwinists must be rejected. Nonetheless, they inspired the ideas that generated and justified the organic ontology.

Plainly, anti-systematic foundations cannot be disentangled from systematic theories and metaphysical assumptions using this methodological framework. Historical analysis does not resolve the weaknesses that undercut New Liberal democratic theory – it simply amplifies them.

§6

It is clear that in order to benefit from the insights of the social ontology, we need to divorce it from its conceptual origins, and re-ground it in a comprehensive foundational philosophy.[1] The organic social ontology cannot simply be justified on intuitive or historical grounds. It must be anchored to a realistic, reflexive, and methodologically-driven philosophy of human interaction. We find precisely this foundation in the Wittgensteinian theory of following a rule.

Wittgenstein's anti-systematic philosophy of following (and modifying) a rule presents an astute way of conceptualising human understanding. His later writings are remarkable for the way that they re-orient philosophy away from metaphysical explanations and essentialist logic, emphasising the need to investigate human behaviour without drawing from established presuppositions and prejudices. These texts examine language and activity, and highlight the ways that humans engage with the world through established conventions – through the process of following a rule.

[1] This will invariably be a theoretical, rather than an historical project. The reconstruction of the New Liberal social ontology on firmer foundations (drawn from philosophy of meaning and language) is a philosophical undertaking that will enhance our general understanding of democratic human behaviour, rather than seeking to build a natural history of a democratic theory.

The central focus of Wittgenstein's rule-following philosophy is the phenomenon of meaning. He explores the use of concepts, the relationship between meaning and behaviour, and the issue of how humans develop and experience understanding. Reconfiguration of the organic social ontology in line with Wittgensteinian rule-following theory therefore allows us to ground New Liberal insights in a coherent epistemology and philosophy of meaning.

Significantly, this theoretical reformulation is not an attempt to import Wittgensteinian principles in order to bolster a crumbling New Liberal facade. Rather, the writings of Hobson and his contemporaries reflect a practical, intuitive, and polemically-successful appreciation of the nature of democratic politics – which can only be *fully* articulated through more comprehensive philosophical investigation into human behaviour. The two theoretical approaches complement one another, and together generate a way to understand the dynamic interplay of popular self-government.

Of course, the reconfiguration of New Liberal theory does fit with the (political and philosophical) objective of abandoning any residual theoretical entanglement with Hegelian organicism and Social Darwinism. Drawing from Wittgensteinian rule-following theory, the following three chapters will additionally illustrate that these competing organic theories are not simply insufficient and flawed foundations for an evolutionary ontology; they are conceptually misconceived.

§7

The political implications of this theoretical reconfiguration are fundamental. Emancipation from Social Darwinism and Hegelian idealism presents an invaluable opportunity to reclaim organic political thought, and to redevelop it in line with modern democratic principles.

Contemporary democratic theory too often begins from uncritical atomistic assumptions about the individual citizen's relationship to the wider democratic community. This is at least partly the result of the failure of alternative holistic (organic) theories of popular politics over the past century. Hegelian state-centred idealism and Social Darwinism have been held to represent two of the worst examples of organic political philosophy (and have often been identified with authoritarianism, and with eugenics-inspired ideologies – from arrogant imperialism to fully-fledged Fascism).[2]

New Liberals recognised solid reasons for distancing their work from these philosophies; reasons that persist into the present day. Hegel's idealism is illiberal, in the sense that it sublimates the individual will within the higher will of a rational political community. Social Darwinism is an arbitrary translation of Darwinian science into the realm of politics. It fetishises the notion of the survival of the fittest, reducing all political life to a metric of success, expansion, and domination. These principles are as unappealing to twenty-first century democratic citizens (who value pluralism, tolerance, and individuality) as they were to the New Liberal writers and democratic pioneers.

The opportunity to distance the evolutionary understanding of political life from these historically-situated examples represents a revolution in political ideas. Establishing the theory on rule-following principles links Liberal Organic Democracy to a wider understanding of how we make sense of the world (independent of metaphysical assumptions). It speaks to the relationship between citizens and the world of political concepts that they inhabit, promoting agency and conscious political action. And it

[2] Though theorists have developed a more sympathetic picture of Hegel's work since the mid-twentieth century, the negative characterisation developed from 1914 onwards and exhibited in Karl Popper's 'The Open Society and Its Enemies' (1945) casts a dark shadow over Hegel's reputation (See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Volume Two: Hegel and Marx* (London: Routledge, 2003).

gestures towards a series of practices that could improve modern democratic governance.

§8

Rule-following philosophy leads us to a greater appreciation of meaning – and of political meaning. Nevertheless, the theoretical and practical insights that Wittgenstein's philosophy generates should not be overstated or overextended. Any project that seeks to translate rule-following theory into the political sphere should not constitute a philosophical *system*.[3]

Liberal Organic Democracy aims to define a *grammar* of politics. This means that the thesis will present an argument explaining the ways that concepts are formed and change happens in political life. This grammatical approach substantiates the (anti-systematic) organic social ontology – it helps to explain meaningful action in the political sphere, and to identify the most meaningful political structure.

However, it cannot explain all forms of political motivation, or determine the precise content of the ideal polity. Paradoxically, this explanatory limitation renders the new democratic theory *more* effective: as we will see, a grammatical understanding of democratic politics leaves room for individual agency within the political structures of a meaningful political community. True to the liberal ideas that inspired it, this organic theory of government will not become mired in deterministic conclusions.

[3] This is not to deny the utility of philosophical systems for orienting understanding. Rule-following theory simply suggests that these determinate systems do not accurately reflect the reality of concept-use. Systems are the vehicles of our understanding – not the fundamental infrastructure of human meaning.

§9

Ultimately, Liberal Organic Democracy presents an opportunity for continuing political innovation alongside a fundamental theoretical reconfiguration. This is a substantial transformation of democratic thought and practice along reflective, grammatical lines, which nonetheless begins with an enquiry into the most elemental of questions: how do we understand and experience meaning?

II. Rule-Following Philosophy: Describing Meaning, Convention, and Conceptual Evolution

§10

All citizens (individual political agents) within a civic community depend upon a foundation of political meaning in order to make sense of their actions, preferences, and ideas – in order to engage with the political dimensions of their world. More generally, meaning is fundamental to all human agency, because it both *animates* and *orients* thought and behaviour.

§11

The later Wittgensteinian philosophy of following (and modifying) a rule explores the phenomena of meaning and understanding. Rule-following theory examines the ways that humans create, use, and challenge meaning; and how meaning orients, delineates and limits the way that individuals and groups interact within a linguistic community.

However, there are many ways to understand Wittgenstein's later work, and no one interpretation can claim automatic priority. Rule-following theory is set out in a number of texts, all of which were written in the period 1929-51 and published posthumously. The *Philosophical Investigations* (final draft 1945-6; published 1953) – the most comprehensive and interesting discussion of these ideas – was substantially completed.[4] Other texts (such as *The Blue and Brown Books*) were abandoned.[5] Others (*Zettel*, *On Certainty*) were developed in manuscript form, but lacked any structure or order until

[4] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4th edn. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).
[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books (Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations")* (1958), second edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).

prepared for publication by academic editors, who could only make an informed guess as to Wittgenstein's intent.[6] Given that these texts were brought to various stages of development, that they were written and edited at different times, and that they occasionally contradict one another, it is difficult to definitively assert that specific arguments presented in any individual work represent Wittgenstein's later ideas in their 'purest form' (i.e. most mature expression). This difficulty of interpretation is compounded by the ambiguity of Wittgenstein's writing. He regularly marshals a seemingly unsystematic series of explanations, examples, aphorisms, and images in order to bring the reader to an understanding (a philosophically-motivated approach, that sometimes simply underlines the fact that the same rule or understanding can be read in many different ways). And so, any reading of Wittgenstein's rule-following theory is simply *one* explanation of his ideas, among many possible interpretations.

This thesis does not therefore base its claims to legitimacy upon developing a reading that perfectly reconstructs Wittgenstein's train of thought, or distils the true essence of his philosophy. Rather, Liberal Organic Democracy is a consciously *Wittgensteinian* interpretation. It is a philosophy that identifies one of the most credible and compelling ways of reading Wittgenstein's later writings. It builds upon the masterful interpretations offered by Winch, McDowell, Pitkin, Tully, Janik, and others. At the same time, the thesis draws out the implications of ideas that are often overlooked by political theorists that have sought to incorporate Wittgensteinian insights.

[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (1967), second edn., ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (1969), ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

§12

Before we flesh out the Wittgensteinian philosophy of following a rule, and begin to examine the nature of meaning it is necessary to briefly sketch the methodology and the subject matter driving this enquiry.

Rule-following theory orients our understanding of how we interact with the world. It examines meaning within language. Indeed, this philosophical examination (or investigation) forms a core part of the theory. Wittgenstein suggests that rule-following theory must consciously avoid evaluation and judgement whilst aspiring towards philosophical description. In *Philosophical Investigations*, he actively promotes the idea that 'There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place'.[7]

Wittgenstein's determination to present rule-following theory as a purely descriptive account (and thereby to resist both explanation and normative theorising) can be understood as a desire to avoid being unduly influenced by existing prejudices or established philosophical presuppositions. As Wittgenstein states so clearly in *Philosophical Investigations*, the philosopher cannot assume that customary conclusions are automatically correct; that all groups have a common property, or that all ideas have a core meaning: 'Don't say...but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all...don't think, but look!'.[8] To accept assumptions about sense and meaning over verifiable evidence of meaningful and meaningless interaction is to abandon logical enquiry. And so – Wittgenstein argues – philosophy must be a descriptive process of 'looking', and of recording observations.

[7] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §102, p. 52.
[8] *Ibid*. §66, p. 36. Like Hobson, Wittgenstein emphasises the importance of self-reflective theorisation in order to avoid being constrained by a dominant cultural idea, or picture.

As we will see, there are distinct problems with the idea that rule-following theory could be a purely descriptive (non-normative) enterprise. However, the determination to avoid presupposition, and to establish a rigorous, self-reflective methodology, is a necessary precondition for unprejudiced, logically-consistent investigation. And at a basic level, Wittgenstein's injunction holds true. Rule-following theory *describes* how we use words: how we employ them to express sense.

Within this chapter, I will adopt Wittgenstein's descriptive methodology in order to gain an insight into the logical and epistemic processes that underlie meaningful interaction.[9] This insight will allow me to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive theoretical understanding of social and political life.

§13

Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy is preoccupied with language and the use of words. But the focus of this philosophical investigation is ultimately directed towards meaning – how we understand the terms we use, the relationship between understanding and behaviour, and the way that we communicate our meaning to one another. In order to understand, to act meaningfully, and to communicate, we need to use concepts (which we articulate through language).

Wittgenstein states that 'What forces itself on one is a *concept*'.[10] Significantly, this definition does not focus on the function of concepts (either: concepts are direct representations of reality; or less controversially, concepts are a means to communicate sense). And it does not justify concepts as the necessary component parts of a universal rationality. Rather, Wittgenstein defines concepts in terms of *action*. He emphasises that

[9] And yet, I will maintain a critical awareness of the limitations of a purely descriptive methodological approach. This awareness will allow me to illustrate the necessity of moving on to a more consciously *normative* approach in subsequent chapters.
[10] Wittgenstein, 'Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment', in *Philosophical Investigations*, §191, p. 215.

when a concept registers as meaningful, it forces a reaction (generally recognition or acceptance, or active use) from the individual agent.

This definition emphasises the ineliminable characteristic of concepts.[11] Other characteristics of concepts are not intrinsic to experience (and understanding). For instance, concepts can be and are used or subverted in different ways by individuals or societies. They may be broken up into smaller sub-concepts, or be dismissed as illogical or paradoxical. They may be employed in support of irrational or rational theoretical frameworks. But in every circumstance, concepts *occur* to individuals. And as they occur, they provoke attempts to grasp their meaning. Concepts therefore orient human understanding – through the *engagement* of the individual.

Fundamentally, then, understanding is generated and sustained through the use of concepts. This understanding forms the basis of all human behaviour and interaction (from the use of words to the ability to explain natural phenomena). And thus by definition, all political interaction – and political sense – depends upon the use of political concepts. In order to understand politics, it is first necessary to begin by examining the use of concepts in a general sense.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will use the investigation of concept-use developed in Wittgensteinian rule-following theory to elucidate how we experience meaning and generate understanding. Foremost, I will emphasise that the indeterminacy of concepts in ordinary language-use means that the philosopher cannot ascribe essential meaning to any particular concept. Rather, unprejudiced investigation shows that ideas are linked by a system of family resemblances. Secondly, I will illustrate that meaning and understanding occur in the *use* of words in response to circumstances – in the praxis of

[11] Ineliminable, as distinct from essential. For it is impossible to subtract this simple, existential fact – that concepts occur – from a concept without losing our grasp on it entirely. Yet to claim that this existential fact is the *essential* component of a concept would not fit with the overarching argument of this thesis – as this chapter will demonstrate.

following a rule. Finally, I will bring out the dynamic nature of concepts, arising out of conceptual indeterminacy and changing circumstances; I will show that following a rule naturally leads to modifying a rule. In the process, I will demonstrate how an anti-systematic philosophy supports our broader theoretical understanding; and I will illustrate a fundamental convergence between this understanding and the New Liberal social ontology.

III. Family Resemblances and Language-Games

Indeterminacy and Family Resemblances

§14

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* begins with a clear aim: to establish an accurate description of the ways that agents use concepts and words in order to generate and communicate meaning and understanding. This aim is developed through the text, and gradually conceptualised as the philosophy of following a rule.

Self-reflective examination of language- and concept-use challenges commonplace presuppositions about how we understand, learn, and share ideas. Perhaps most fundamentally, this examination suggests that words and concepts do not have fixed, essential meanings.

When different individuals evoke a particular concept – shared throughout their linguistic community – they are not engaging in a uniform activity. Instead, they are using the concept in a variety of subtly different ways. Each time the concept is used, an individual draws upon a communal, established, but ultimately flexible meaning; emphasising the elements of meaning that seem to accord with the circumstances. Significantly, there is no core element of meaning that is evoked every time each concept is used. There is no essential characteristic that defines the meaning of a concept.

Wittgenstein's analysis of the way we use the word 'game' in ordinary language illustrates this point clearly.[12] Our society is accustomed to the belief that each concept

[12] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§66-7, p. 36.

corresponds to a distinct idea or object; and the idea of a 'game' is no exception. But examination of the uses of the word 'game' reveals that there is no essential feature that is common to all the activities that we call games. If we scrutinise different board games, we observe various similarities – playing pieces, competitive engagement, turn-taking etc. If we move to analyse card games, we see that some of these similarities remain, whilst others fade. Moving on to ball games, many of these shared characteristics are retained, but many more are lost. We might want to suggest that all games have a common feature; for example, they are all entertaining. But many games exist that we would not describe as entertaining – including repetitive games designed to hone a particular skill (such as practising serving and returning in tennis). We may try to argue that all games are competitive. But some games are collaborative. Surveying the variety of activities that we incorporate under the word 'game', we must come to the conclusion that there is no set of characteristics that apply to all, just similarities that crop up and disappear. We can describe this as a relation of *'family resemblance'*.[13] As with the physical features in a family, there is no unifying characteristic, simply a number of overlapping features.

Thus, evoking the concept 'game' does not mean that we appeal to one core idea, but rather to a body of overlapping characteristics; and in fact it is this indeterminate assortment of features which forms the basis of our meaning and understanding of the concept.

In this respect, the concept 'game' is typical. Whenever we use a concept in ordinary language, we evoke meaning by appealing to certain characteristics, which are

[13] *Ibid*. §67, p. 36.

nonetheless neither necessary nor sufficient properties of that concept.[14] This holds true for objects, qualities, and abstract concepts.

For instance, the abstract concept 'representation' does not correspond to one form of activity or social arrangement. Representation may mean being delegated to actively communicate the views of another, or to advancing their material interests; it may mean presenting a summary of one's own ideas, or turning up to an event without speaking at all. There is no essential feature that is present every time we use the concept; although some activities – such as speaking on behalf of another, acting for another, or summarising a broader position – are common to many uses.

In ordinary language, the meaning of the words and concepts that we use is constituted as a series of family resemblances, rather than one ideal or determinate form.

§15

Philosophical investigation into the phenomena of meaning and understanding illustrates the indeterminate nature of our concepts. Wittgenstein suggests that this indeterminacy – or ambiguity – is a source of strength. Like a thread made out of a series of twisted, overlapping fibres, the meaning of each concept is contained in a series of overlapping characteristics.[15] Together, these overlapping characteristics constitute a broader meaning than one essential definition. They orient our understanding in a greater number of different situations, making the concept more useful.

[14] Where the use of words or concepts is not specifically anchored to an essential meaning (i.e. philosophical logic). In this respect, Wittgenstein's ideas characterise how meaning and understanding are expressed in ordinary language – the language that we think and communicate in.
[15] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §101, p. 50.

Ambiguity is a foundational part of ordinary language-use. Wittgenstein emphasises that when philosophers have attempted to redefine language – to reduce each concept to a determinate, ideal form – they have accomplished little more than to alienate philosophy from the way that we actually construct meaning in language. These philosophers mislead themselves that a true sense is hidden behind each concept.[16] They subscribe to a form of Platonism (the belief that each concept or object has an essential form). But examination of human interaction suggests that they have no grounds for this assumption. In fact, the stability of our understanding depends upon our ability to escape the slippery ice of ideal, analytic languages, and get back to the 'friction' of ambiguity.[17]

§16

The realisation that our concepts are characterised by an inescapable indeterminacy not only constitutes a comprehensive *rejection* of Platonism; it leads to a fundamental *inversion* of Platonism. An insightful passage from *Zettel* illustrates this point clearly. The meaning of our concepts is constituted as a series of family resemblances – an indefinite body of overlapping features. Indeterminacy/indefiniteness therefore delineates the way that we relate to objects and ideas; without indeterminacy/indefiniteness, it would be impossible to view any object conceptually:

> For the indefiniteness of our concept may be projected for us into the *object* that the word designates. So that if the indefiniteness were missing we should also not have "the same thing meant". The picture that we employ symbolizes the indefiniteness.[18]

[16] *Ibid*.
[17] *Ibid*. §107, p. 51.
[18] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, §381, p. 68.

Any object in the physical world is not a non-ideal reflection of a pure, ideal (essential) form. Rather, the opposite is true: it is simply one unique physical object, and we can only comprehend it by projecting an indefinite/indeterminate concept onto its physicality. Our attempts to categorise, differentiate, and define an object or an idea makes them meaningful, but these are all conceptual processes that are grounded in indeterminacy.

Consequently, *systematic* philosophies that attempt to fit all interactions and all objects to one core concept are doing little more than imposing an indeterminate body of overlapping characteristics upon the world. Any claim to have discovered a determinate *essential* idea is cast into doubt by the experience of everyday concept-use.[19] And where philosophies appear to identify a convincing central organising idea – as with 'reason' and 'rationality' – this is merely a reflection of the utility and the flexibility of the concept in question.[20]

Nevertheless, philosophers use these central organising ideas to order other concepts within a constructed framework of ideas – a systematic philosophy. These artificial structures can be useful in orienting human behaviour, but they do not accurately recreate the conditions of reality. If we reject essential, organising ideas, we must therefore reject a systematic theoretical worldview.

The unprejudiced examination of our interaction with concepts entails recognition of the importance of conceptual indeterminacy; it constitutes an intrinsically anti-systematic vision of philosophy.

[19] And it is precisely for these reasons that the New Liberal systematic philosophies that we identified in Chapter 1 – Hobhouse's 'completely articulated system of reality' and Ritchie's attempts to outline a Hegelian system of evolution – fail.
[20] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§322-4, p. 41.

Specific Meaning and Language-Games

§17

The indeterminacy of concepts is no obstacle to human interaction. In ordinary communication, members of a linguistic community use a concept – 'game', 'blue', 'representation', etc – and other members of the community understand the specific meaning of their words. All members are using words as tools of language in the same way; they are drawing on the same elements of meaning when they evoke this concept. They are playing the same 'language-game'.[21]

It is possible to use the same concepts and yet play quite distinct language-games. Workers on a construction site calling out the word 'slab!' to one another could precipitate a number of distinct actions through their use of the word: they may warn a colleague of a falling stone part and provoke an increase in caution; or they may stimulate another worker to pass them a piece of rock for use in building work.[22] In each instance, both the word that is used and the object to which it refers (i.e. a large stone block) are the same. What distinguishes how the word is understood – and the action that follows – is the instruction that the workers have learned.[23]

If all workers are instructed that on the building site, the exclamation 'slab!' is only ever used to order another worker to pass a block (and another word, 'danger', is used to alert others to falling masonry), then they are all playing the same *game* using language. This shared language-game directs the way that the community identify specific meaning, and allows them to overcome the indeterminacy that characterises their broader understanding of the concept.

[21] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §23, p. 15.
[22] *Ibid*. §6, pp. 7-8.
[23] *Ibid*.

§18

All language-games are grounded by *circumstances*. The circumstances that surround our words and actions shape our experience of meaning, because the instruction that enables us to identify a specific meaning is rooted in a specific set of circumstances. When these circumstances seem to recur, we recall the instruction and have the ability to react meaningfully to the situation.[24] If others have been given the same instruction, they will react in the same way in response to the circumstances. They will engage in the same language-game, and share the same meaning.

When we hear the cry 'slab!' on the construction site, we are reminded of our instruction and we act accordingly. In this instance, the language-game that we engage with is circumscribed by a straightforward and unchanging context: 'slab!' has just one meaning on the construction site, and this is taught to all workers in the same way.

However, in ordinary language-use the same words and concepts are frequently used in a multiplicity of different language-games. For instance, the term 'representation' is used when two individuals agree that one of them will speak about the ideas that are shared by both, and also when two individuals agree that one individual will assume the right to make legal or political choices on behalf of the other for a defined period of time.

A multiplicity of language-games appears likely to complicate concept-use. Nevertheless, when we engage in conversation with one another, we are able to effortlessly grasp each other's meaning – to differentiate between different language-games, and to select the appropriate meaning. The circumstances surrounding the use of a concept in conversation allow us to frame it in a familiar context, directing us towards a specific language-game.

[24] *Ibid*. §§28-9, pp. 17-18.

Here, *circumstances* should be broadly understood: incorporating the activities surrounding the concept-use; reference to related concepts; the social relations between speakers; the cultural, social, and grammatical context; and the tone and physical expression of the speaker. In ordinary communication, it is usually grammatical or referential cues that guide us towards specific meaning. In a conversation about 'representation', reference to a series of activities – such as the marking of a ballot paper, the delivery of a speech promising reform, etc – resonates with the circumstances under which we were instructed about parliamentary forms of representation. As a consequence, we are able to engage with one language-game among many potential alternatives.

§19

Ordinary language is defined by a multiplicity of different ways of using words and concepts – a plurality of different language-games. These take on different functions, and allow us to link concepts together into larger meaningful configurations (or sentences). Concrete nouns, abstract nouns, verbs, adjectives, and other grammatical forms operate according to different rules. Wittgenstein is eager to stress this point.[25] A plurality of language-games come naturally to us within our everyday discourse; and as a result, we are able to think and express ourselves using complex arrangements of concepts.

* * *

[25] *Ibid*. §27, pp. 16-17.

§20

At this point, we may wish to take a moment to review the argument so far. Philosophical examination of human understanding reveals that our appreciation of meaning ultimately depends upon concepts – indeterminate arrangements of overlapping characteristics. We employ these concepts in a series of shared and familiar language-games, thereby allowing us to grasp specific meanings (in the context of particular circumstances) and to communicate meaning to one another.

We may therefore conclude that through this examination, we have developed a comprehensive analysis of the tools that enable us to understand our world. Nevertheless, Wittgensteinian rule-following theory allows us to go far beyond this epistemological insight; it enables us to establish *how* humans experience meaning. And so we now turn to the *active* expression of meaning – the process of following a rule.

IV. Rule-Following as Praxis – Meaning in Action

§21

Meaning is shared through language-games. By engaging in the same language-games, members of a linguistic community are able to grasp specific meanings, and communicate with one another.

Individual understanding is often presented as a cognitive phenomenon – quite apart from the process of communicating meaning through words and gestures. But this rests upon a false presupposition: that understanding a concept means appreciating the essential truth that it represents. As we have already shown, this premise is not supported by a close examination of ordinary concept-use. There is no essential element of meaning at the heart of each concept – simply a series of overlapping characteristics.

In fact, we say that an individual has understood when she grasps a *specific* meaning: when she uses this meaning in order to make sense of new situations in a consistent way, applying the same response every time the concept reoccurs. In this way, understanding means that the individual engages with an established convention or language-game, which guides her towards a specific meaning. This process is an activity – a practice that requires the individual to have mastered the rules that direct how the game is played: 'we lay down rules, a technique, for playing the game'.[26] Significantly, these rules are often developed and imparted through communal language-games. And we continue to follow them in the same, consistent manner in order to indicate *specific* meaning when we strike up a conversation with another person that shares our linguistic conventions.

[26] *Ibid*. §27, pp. 16-17.

Understanding and communication are therefore grounded in the same practices, which constitute our experience of the phenomenon of meaning. To the individual, meaningful engagement is always experienced in the process of *following a rule* – of applying mastery of an established language-game. The following section will elaborate on the nature of this phenomenon, in order to illustrate how meaning occurs to us.

Rule-Following and Meaning

§22

Meaning does not exist in an ideal or purely abstract form. In his later texts, Wittgenstein repeatedly emphasises that understanding is constituted in the practice of following a rule.[27] Though our grammar may tempt us to talk of knowing a word or understanding a concept as an intermediary step (a cognitive experience that precedes our use of the concept), we only accept that an individual has understood a concept when she is (demonstrably) able to apply that concept correctly in a specific context – when she follows the rule that directs how the concept is used.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein illustrates this point by drawing focus to the way that we learn concepts, words and techniques. If we analyse how students are taught to read, or to continue a mathematical series, it is clear that our assessment of whether a student understands a technique depends upon her ability to demonstrate this new-found understanding. We accept that the student has understood the series of natural numbers when she correctly continues the series '0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5...' with the numbers '...6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11...' without significant prompting. We judge that the student

[27] Wittgenstein, 'The Brown Book', *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 130; and Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§148-50, pp. 64-5.

has mastered the rule (+1).[28] Moreover, the student experiences this mastery through her active adherence to the rule. Ultimately, from a subjective and from an intersubjective standpoint, the experience of understanding is constituted in the ability to apply the rule.

This is not to suggest that we always behave in the same manner when expressing our understanding. We may engage in a series of activities as we follow a particular rule. A student learning to read might spell out the syllables of the words, or may read to herself silently and then summarise what she has read; she may stare straight at the page as she reads, or she may gesture with her hands and her facial expressions as she reads aloud.[29] We incorporate many different activities under the grammar that we identify with reading. But in each instance, we accept that she understands how to read – that she has mastered the concept – because her *activities* demonstrate enough of a correspondence with our own to impress upon us that she follows the rules in the same way (that she has translated the written words into the same overlapping body of meaning). Understanding is therefore developed through shared rule-following practices.

The realisation that understanding is an active, intersubjective experience fundamentally re-centres our understanding of human cognition. The phenomenon of meaning seems quite different to us when it is expressed in private understanding and in public communication. But in both cases, meaning is grounded in the *practice of following rules* that are shared within a linguistic community (rather than in an abstract, idiosyncratic experience).

[28] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§155-6, pp. 67-8.
[29] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §156, p. 67.

§23

We teach a rule through explanation, or through a series of examples: as Wittgenstein notes, 'if a person has not yet got the *concepts*, I'll teach him to use the words by means of *examples* and by *exercises*. – And when I do this, I do not communicate to him less than I know myself'.[30]

An individual understands the rule when he develops the ability to go beyond the examples – as for instance, when the student is able to read any sentence that we place in front of him; or, when he continues a series of numbers beyond the highest number counted to during his instruction. If he is able to demonstrate this ability, we accept his declaration that 'Now I know how to go on'.[31] Meaning thus seems to arise out of examples, but it is always actively experienced through rules.

§24

When we follow a rule, we are playing a shared language-game. We appreciate the meaning of a concept as we follow the established rules, or *conventions*, that guide our use of the concept. These conventions are generated, reinforced and challenged within our linguistic community. As Malcolm suggests, the concept of following a rule *presupposes* a community that defines and reaffirms conventions through social interaction.[32] The rules that direct our use of concepts operate in the same manner as the rules that delineate techniques such as reading or completing a mathematical series. In each instance, rules develop out of social practices, and they continue to impart meaning within the context of the community. We may apply a rule individually (privately). Nevertheless, the meaning that the rule holds for us when we do so is

[30] *Ibid*. §208, p. 89.
[31] *Ibid*. §154, p. 66.
[32] Norman Malcolm, 'Wittgenstein on Language and Rules', in *Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays 1978-89*, edited by Georg Henrik von Wright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 145-7.

derived from the way the rule is used by the community, *in order to select one specific meaning from a fundamentally indeterminate body of uses*. Shared agreement in usage – a 'consensus of action' – is required to make a rule meaningful.[33]

Baker and Hacker's contrary contention that a rule does not presuppose a community – that each rule simply corresponds to a consistent and potentially communicable activity – is mistaken.[34] A consensus of action guides us towards a specific usage that is *conventional* at a particular moment in time (within a particular set of circumstances). Whenever we apply a rule, we do so within a *specific* context. Thus, communality is a fundamental part of the everyday process of following a rule.

We articulate the rules that we follow in the form of language. Language plays an axiomatic role in ordering other ideas and concepts.[35] But like other conventions, language develops out of human practices. As Wittgenstein suggests, 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life' framed in communal interaction.[36]

In short, the rules that delineate how we see the world are the product of interactions within a linguistic community. Meaning is rooted in social conventions.[37]

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[33] *Ibid*. p. 156. Malcolm makes the critical distinction between consensus of opinion and consensus of action. We do not seek a consensus of opinion before we act. And yet, if we did not follow the same practices – if we did not identify the colour in the same way as the others within our community – we would not all be playing the same language-game.
[34] G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity. An analytical commentary on the 'Philosophical Investigations' Volume 2* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 173-6.
[35] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§310-15, p. 40.
[36] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §19, p. 11.
[37] As Winch argues convincingly; see Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (1958) (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p. 38.

Rule-Following as Praxis

§25

Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy substantially re-orients our ideas about meaning and understanding. Perhaps most significantly, the theory suggests that meaning is produced *and constituted* through activity. Rule-following is a form of praxis: it is the meaningful engagement with conventions in response to circumstances.

To explain this further, we need to examine the process of following a rule closely. Rule-following does not constitute one essential activity. And yet, we seem to behave in a characteristic way when we follow any rule. We *act* in a way that accords with our understanding of the rule – we apply the instruction that we have been given. Rule-following therefore grounds meaning in *practice*.

Nevertheless, we do not always experience this activity in the same general way. When we follow a rule, we sometimes consciously choose between distinct instructions; and yet at other times we appear to automatically apply a technique. Moreover, the same rule can provoke different activities, in response to different circumstances.

§26

The fact that applying the same instruction can result in differing outcomes has led some philosophers to suggest that rule-following is the process of developing an interpretation. However, as Winch and McDowell suggest, following a rule cannot be a matter of seizing upon a specific interpretation.[38] Kripke's attempt to identify rule-following with interpretation appears to explain how individuals tend to assume that

[38] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, pp. 43-8; John McDowell, *Mind, Value, & Reality* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 236-8.

they have followed a rule correctly, independently of external verification.[39] But, as McDowell notes, any attempt to construe rule-following as interpretation is nevertheless flawed on two major grounds:

First, if every rule is just an interpretation, then there is no compelling reason for advancing any particular interpretation over others.[40] Each interpretation of a rule should therefore seem to hold the same value to us – and this is clearly not the case.

Second – as Wittgenstein perceived – interpretations are ultimately unable to bridge the gulf between a rule and its execution.[41] Rules are like signposts – they direct us as to where to go, because we are used to following them in a certain way.[42] If we treat a rule as an interpretation – simply as a system of signs or arrows – then we need a further interpretation to tell us how we should follow these arrows. [43] And this interpretation requires yet another interpretation; and so on. Thus, if a rule is an interpretation, then it explains little about how we grasp meaning.

But if a rule stands like a signpost, and we are accustomed to following it as a convention, then understanding does not need to be construed as interpretation. As Wittgenstein suggests, 'a person goes by a signpost only insofar as there is an established usage, a custom'.[44] The conventional nature of rule-following explains why members of a linguistic community are moved to action – to follow an order, or engage with a concept. The gap between instruction and execution is overcome by practice. The

[39] McDowell, *Mind, Value, & Reality*, pp. 266-8.
[40] *Ibid*. pp. 226-8.
[41] *Ibid*. pp. 236-8.
[42] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §85, p. 44.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] *Ibid*. §198, p. 86.

way that we grasp meaning through rule-following is a formative, active process that orients our perception of the world. Fundamentally, rule-following is *praxis*.[45]

* * *

§27

We can summarise the preceding argument as follows. Meaning is experienced through the praxis of following a rule. As circumstances change, the individual identifies a re-occurring pattern, which activates a convention – a customary practice (rule) that generates a sense of meaning.

But, if meaning is defined by a fundamental indeterminacy – if an alteration in circumstances can change how we experience meaning (how we follow a rule), and yet we still attempt to apply the 'same' rules in changing circumstances – then logically, meaning must change through usage. We now turn to examine the evolution of meaning; and to consider how we (as members of a linguistic community) relate to this process.

[45] Janik employs the term praxis to define following a rule, comparing it to Aristotle's concept of praxis. Allan Janik, 'Notes on the Natural History of Politics', in *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, ed. Cressida J. Heyes, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). See also James Tully's essay, 'Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection', in the same volume, which suggests that 'understanding must consist in the unmediated ability to "grasp" a sign manifested in actual *praxis*', p. 38.

V. Following (and Modifying) a Rule – the Evolution and Mutation of Meaning

§28

Our use of concepts – and thus our experience of meaning – is fundamentally dynamic. At a macro-level, this is evidently just an inevitable consequence of living in a dynamic world. In everyday interaction, we adapt to changing circumstances, consciously applying familiar rules in novel combinations to produce innovative systems of ideas. We are aware that we change our outlook in order to incorporate new information, and that our use of concepts alters over time.

However, meaning is also constantly changing at a micro-level. Each time we follow a rule, we grasp a concept in a distinct way, and this can cause a subtle modification in the rule itself. The following section will illustrate how we modify rules (and therefore meaning) through the praxis of following a rule. It will explain how we mislead ourselves into believing that our rules remain static and unchanging. And it will develop a framework for understanding the dynamic alteration that takes place within our nexus of rules: a framework that resituates the New Liberal social ontology within this broader, Wittgensteinian philosophy of meaning.

Dynamic Meaning – The Changing Rules

§29

We are not accustomed to thinking of rules as being in a state of constant (if imperceptibly gradual) change. We like to believe that rules are fixed; that they are

inscribed into our mind, so that when we return to them again and again, they provide the same instruction.

Baker and Hacker express this intuition clearly when they suggest that each rule identifies one objectively correct action.[46] Nevertheless, Baker and Hacker do not differentiate between the epistemic validation that we feel whenever we follow a rule, and the correctness of following a rule accurately, as instructed (a crucial distinction – after all, we have all experienced what it is like to be certain that we are following a rule correctly, only to discover that we have made a mistake).

The feeling of being correct *is* a crucial function of following a rule. McDowell explains this as confidence in our immediate usage – as ratification-independent practice – which allows us to function decisively, instead of constantly questioning our own meaning: 'Understanding is grasping patterns that extend to new cases independently of our ratification, as is required for meaning to be other than an illusion'.[47] Without a resolute belief in the meaningfulness of our own actions, we could not feel so convinced that we have understood a rule, or that we are using the same concepts in the same way as others when we communicate our thoughts and ideas.

However, examination of the way that we use concepts makes it clear that the reality (and the source) of this epistemic validation is not as we suppose. For, when we follow a rule, our behaviour is not always exactly the same. Rules are flexible, and they guide us in slightly different ways in distinct circumstances. As Wittgenstein suggests, each rule is like a signpost – we feel that it automatically directs us towards a particular action because we are familiar with a particular convention; *but* like any signpost, it does not *determine* the way we are to go.[48] This can change if, for instance, our other conventions

[46] Baker and Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, pp. 161-5.
[47] McDowell, *Mind, Value, & Reality*, p. 256.
[48] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §85, p. 44.

(our way of reading a signpost) change. And so, the automatic epistemic validation that we feel is not altogether justifiable. But in that case, how are we to explain the ratification-independent confidence that we experience when we follow a rule?

We feel confident that if we know the rule – if we follow our established conventions carefully – then our behaviour will not change. We believe that our minds have internalised a standard of correctness, resulting in consistent practice. And yet, as Wittgenstein highlights in the *Philosophical Investigations*, our metric for determining what is (and is not) correct is not in fact fixed. We will often accept that we have misremembered a particular shade or colour when we are confronted with external evidence that appears to contradict our mental image: examining a painted wall, we say that the colour is in fact lighter or darker than we thought.[49] But equally, we do not always accept external evidence over our own memory: and sometimes, when we are confronted by the wall, we claim that the physical manifestation has changed, that the colour has faded. Evidently, our confidence about the way that we follow a rule is not grounded in a determinative, consistent mental experience.

Ultimately, the intuition that we always follow a rule in the same way is instrumentally important, but it is not accurate. Instead, accordance with a range of sources (memory, the practices of other members of the community, empirical observation) supports our rule-following praxis. All of these sources do change – they alter, or present themselves in a series of different configurations. They make up part of the circumstances of our world, which – from the perspective of the individual – are constantly transforming.

[49] *Ibid*. §56, p. 32.

§30

If we cannot depend on our intuition that our rules are objectively fixed (even within the limited context of an agreed convention), then we must be open to the idea that as we follow a rule, we might be imperceptibly modifying that rule.

This idea is not as theoretically perverse as it may at first appear. Each concept is made up of a series of overlapping characteristics, none of which are essential or necessary components. When we apply the concept (when we follow a rule) in response to one set of circumstances, we might emphasise a number of connected features, but highlight one more strongly than others. But in response to another circumstance, we may feel obliged to apply the rule whilst consciously rejecting the feature that assumed central significance in the previous case. This second application may resonate so strongly that we come to see the concept differently; now we would not naturally emphasise the central feature that we highlighted in the first case.

We can illustrate this phenomenon by drawing upon a common example. As young children, we are originally trained to evoke the word ‘forbidden’ to express something that should never be transgressed. However, in response to what eventually turns out to be an irrational or unjust stipulation, we begin to use the word ‘forbidden’ in a subjective rather than an objective sense. We react to the unjust circumstances so that we now say that a certain action is ‘forbidden’ simply because the agent that established the stipulation aims to stop us from behaving that way. We no longer believe that the stipulation should never be transgressed – in fact, under certain circumstances, we would applaud any transgression. After this experience, we discover that we never use the word ‘forbidden’ in the original sense again. Following the rule in this particular set of circumstances led us to modify the rule – to change our understanding and our use of the word.

§31

Whenever we use a concept, we draw from the multiplicity of different conventions or language-games that define that rule. There is an *overlapping grammar* of different (and indeterminate) uses. When we apply a rule, we flatten that overlapping grammar – acting in accordance with a selection of consistent conventions, so that our meaning appears straightforward, linear.

Winch has highlighted that because human beings possess the ability to reflect upon their actions, and consciously behave in different ways on different occasions, the flexibility that is contained within this overlapping grammar sometimes appears to be manifested as choice.[50] But even when we do not actively choose to change our behaviour, the way that we follow a rule may alter *through* our application of that rule. Communication, conscious engagement and even the experience of understanding itself may change the way we understand the world. Rules are indeterminate, and this indeterminacy is reflected in the changing way that we describe and follow the rules.

§32

A number of rule-following theorists have noted the way that rules (and therefore meaning) alter over time within any society. In particular, Janik has explored the changes inherent in rule-following praxis by focusing on the way that we develop contesting rules and definitions:

> The lack of explicit rules and the fundamentally ambiguous, metaphorical character of their employment insures that there is always a plurality of ways of following a rule: we invent new ways of doing so continually. Thus

[50] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, pp. 60-2.

> following a rule can lead to conflict where there is more than one way to do so and the various senses to terms clash with one another.[51]

Janik suggests that because we are all rule-following animals (in line with Aristotle's definition of praxis), we are all constantly acting to impose a specific meaning on a series of family resemblances. But as the practice of generating meaning – of following rules – is not defined by a determinate set of activities, we invariably produce idiosyncratic definitions, which compete with the definitions that are simultaneously put forward by others. This results in a clash of 'essentially contested' concepts.[52]

Janik's characterisation of rule-following practice raises an important point. Rules are conventions that make sense within the context of a linguistic community. And so, any change in the rules must be viewed within this (inherently social) setting.

It is true that we may judge any alterations within our rule-following practices by drawing from a range of sources (including memory, empirical evidence, and the practices of other members of the community). And in this respect, our method of validating and normalising a modified rule depends upon a variable, circumstantial decision about which source of ratification is most fitting. Yet this decision always takes place within the context of a linguistic community. The need to establish a consensus of action (to reconcile divergent practices within our community) drives periodic revision/ratification of the rules. I will expand upon this point as my argument progresses. But for the time being, it is simply important to note that the presence of the linguistic community exercises a constant influence over the dynamic process of following (and modifying) a rule.

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[51] Janik, 'Notes on the Natural History of Politics', p. 106.
[52] *Ibid*. p. 105. Janik identifies this claim with Connolly's thesis that all concepts are contested and are therefore politicised.

Meaning does alter through use. Though we may feel certain that understanding is inscribed into our thoughts like etchings on a slate, our intuitions are misleading. Our appreciation of meaning is flexible – and this allows us to relocate our understanding in a changing world, and to situate this understanding in a shared set of conventions.

Rule-Modification and the Organic Model: Evolution and Mutation

§33

Following a rule is a dynamic practice. As we follow a rule, we may be modifying that rule. How should members of a linguistic community understand this process of rule-modification? How can we orient ourselves within a fluid framework of meaning?

I would like to suggest that examination of human interaction indicates that rules are changed in two distinct ways, echoing Hobson's intuitive understanding of the way that our values alter through political engagement: evolutionary change, and mutation (change by initiative).

Both of these forms of rule-modification take place within the context of a linguistic community. Therefore, in both forms of rule-modification, changes in meaning can be initiated and secured through different forms of communal engagement: through competitive or through collaborative action. Significantly, neither competition nor collaboration fully determines how we see the world.

Change by Evolution

§34

Evolutionary change in our rules is a continuous, and often imperceptible, process. We repeatedly reapply a rule in different circumstances. Each time we follow this rule, the circumstances shape how we formulate and articulate the rule. Consequently, on each occasion we emphasise particular elements of meaning that appear to fit with the circumstances over other, less relevant elements of meaning. As we repeat the process of following a rule, and as new circumstances recur, we find that we are consistently emphasising a body of specific characteristics that fits with these new circumstances (some of which may not even have occurred to us in past circumstances). These specific characteristics then become the most commonly-used among the body of overlapping characteristics that make up the concept. These in turn are linked to other, new characteristics – which increasingly come to prominence as circumstances shift once more, and we find ourselves applying the 'same' rule in very different ways. There is therefore a very real conceptual drift, which constantly defines our individual experience of meaning.

A simple example suffices to illustrate this process of evolutionary change. Children grow up playing together on a residential street. Together, they form a community, and their play defines how they use the term 'game' – which is a central concept within their everyday interaction. When they are young, the rules that define their use of the word 'game' are linked to forms of imaginative play (simulating different characters in games such as 'cops and robbers' or 'doctors and nurses') and to simple chase-games (such as 'tag'). No competitive objectives are assumed, no extra equipment is required, and the rules are often lacking in clear definition (in fact, the only common characteristics among these games are outdoor activity and role-play). Time passes, and the children

are given props that they begin to incorporate into the rules of play. Gradually, the use of a ball-prop comes to dominate, and the rules become focused on one set of activities that demonstrate kinaesthetic skills, whilst incorporating a competitive element. Role-play is abandoned for sport. But the children still invite each other to join the 'game'. The rules have *evolved*, though some characteristics – such as outdoor activity – remain. Conceptual drift in the rules that frame the use of the term 'game' has substantially altered the children's understanding of this central concept. By playing 'games' together, the children have modified the rules that define these 'games'.

All values and concepts evolve as they are expressed (in understanding and in discourse). Taking a long-term view, there are countless historical instances of this sort of conceptual drift. We need only contrast our understanding of concepts such as 'liberty', 'science' and 'virtue' with the understanding that is assumed in texts written centuries ago in order to illustrate how meaning gradually evolves through constant use.[53]

The only thing that prevents conceptual drift from entirely altering our concepts over time is the fact that we are constantly interacting with external sources of ratification within the context of our linguistic community (the practices of other members of the community, manifestations of the rules in texts and media, and other empirical evidence), which commonly act as a corrective to our new interpretations. However, rule-modification does occur. Within a linguistic community, the evolutionary change of concepts can be accepted and even promoted.

[53] The most developed analysis of this sort of conceptual change has been undertaken by historians of political thought and intellectual historians For an in-depth exploration of this phenomenon, see Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

§35

We should not assume that external sources of ratification necessarily contradict the new interpretations that emerge through the process of conceptual drift. True, textual manifestations of the rules cannot be persuaded to adopt a new definition.[54] But other external sources of ratification allow for flexibility and change. Each linguistic community is constituted through the constant interaction of its individual members, whose observation or alteration of the rule-following practices defines how meaning is perceived throughout. Any change in the way that the members of a community follow shared rules cannot therefore be ignored, and may even be emulated, and eventually adopted by the whole community.

We can appreciate this point more fully by considering how a linguistic community collectively superintends conceptual definitions and commonplace techniques. The community determines whether a member's activity approximates to a rule by establishing which activities constitute the rule in specific circumstances. Wittgenstein illustrates this point with a specific example: a community will decide whether a student truly knows how to read through a series of judgements about the conditions that illustrate aptitude.[55] If the student reads accurately first time, the community may accept that he knows how to read; but if the circumstances generate suspicion that the student has simply memorised or guessed the meaning of the words, the community could deny that the student can read until further proof of aptitude is provided. In the same way, the community may *accept or reject* an individual's novel interpretation of a concept in response to circumstances, expression, and association with related concepts. The practice of following a rule (the technique, or the act of definition) is monitored and decided by the whole linguistic community.

[54] Though we may of course impose our new definition on our understanding of the text.
[55] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§67-8, p. 70.

Significantly, this practice should not automatically be characterised as a combative process (an inevitable clash of contested concepts). It may equally be a collaborative process, where members of the community collectively help to define the rules that frame their experience of meaning. In the case of a student learning to read, engagement between individual and community will primarily be a cooperative rather than a combative procedure – the community will help the willing, engaged student to recognise when a written symbol corresponds to a specific meaning. Likewise, change in meaning generated by the praxis of following a rule might be resolved through cooperation, rather than through competition. The community may come to accept a new formulation of a rule (a new conceptual definition or value), as members and sub-groups within the community progressively emulate the new usage. Equally, a new interpretation of the rules may face opposition. Modifications in meaning may only be accepted throughout a community as a result of competition – i.e., through the interplay of contested concepts. So, rule-modification may be the result of collaborative *or* competitive forms of community engagement.

External sources of ratification thus provide a framework, allowing the community to either reject or endorse changes that have emerged through the practice of following a rule. If the changes are accepted – through collaborative or through competitive interaction – then the linguistic community collectively ratifies a new interpretation of the established rules (generating a recognised alteration in the conventions or language-games that orient human understanding).

§36

This form of rule-modification is best understood as *evolutionary* change, because the alteration emerges in individual members of the linguistic community, but only survives and spreads to the community as a whole if it proves to be a beneficial adaptation in the

circumstances. The analogy with *Darwinian* evolution (which emphasises the importance of environment in naturally selecting change in the species) is particularly fitting.

§37

How can we relate this theoretical understanding of rule-modification to the organic social ontology that drives New Liberal democratic thought?

Plainly, our Wittgensteinian insight into the evolutionary nature of concept-use reveals *more* than just a procedure for coping with linguistic change. It gestures towards an ontology of meaning and action – a rationale of growth and adaptation. This realisation leads us towards one fundamental conclusion: an ontology does *not* necessarily have to emerge out of a systematic approach to philosophy, grounded in metaphysics. Philosophical investigation (and a grammatical appreciation of meaning) guides us to an evolutionary ontology, which can accurately explain the changing nature of our reality. True to the principles of Darwinian evolution, this ontology is grounded partly in *contingency*, and not simply in necessity. It is not wholly determined by competition or by collaboration, but rather by the interaction of both. And it is animated by the consciously individualistic interaction of members of a community. In these respects, it corresponds closely to the (anti-systematic) social ontology developed by Hobson.

However – as the New Liberal ontology suggests – evolution only constitutes one part of a comprehensive and anti-systematic explanation of conceptual change. Significantly, human initiative also plays a key role in rule-modification. And it is to this subject that we now turn.

Change by Mutation (Initiative)

§38

Mutation, or change by initiative, is far from constant. It is characterised by substantial and deliberate modification of meaning (which, nevertheless, is not always perceptible).

An agent consciously seeks to change a rule – to alter our actions, or the way that we relate to a particular concept. The agent publicly follows the rule, evoking specific characteristics of meaning. These specific characteristics may be uncommonly-used characteristics from among the body of overlapping features that constitute the meaning of the rule. Or, they may fall outside the body of characteristics that we conventionally identify with that rule (and may even be the inverse of our conventional understanding).[56] Either way, their use represents a conscious reconfiguration of the rule. The linguistic community responds by adopting the new interpretation of the rule advanced by the agent, and thereafter emphasises the same specific characteristics of meaning.

Significantly, though the agent's actions may be provoked by alterations in circumstances, the change is not determined or shaped by the new circumstances. The agent has modified the rule by *deliberate mutation*.

If circumstances subsequently demonstrate the utility of the new, mutated rule, then the community is more likely to accept the new interpretation of the rule over the old interpretation. This may even lead the mutated rule to entirely displace the original form.

[56] Skinner's work on 'rhetorical redescription' – the conscious subversion of value-terms by evoking the precise opposite – illustrates this point using examples drawn from political theory over the centuries. See Skinner, 'Retrospect: Studying rhetoric and conceptual change', in *Visions of Politics, Vol. I*, p. 182.

We can illustrate how change may result from human initiative by once more returning to the analogy of the children at play on the residential street. The children are particularly fond of the chase-game 'tag', defined according to conventional playground rules (one player chases all of the other children in the hope that he can 'tag' (catch) another player, who then takes on the role of chaser). One afternoon whilst playing the game, a girl decides to insert a new rule into their conventional play. This girl introduces the idea that the chaser can attempt to 'tag' another child by throwing a tennis ball at them. If the tennis ball makes physical contact with the child, then this child has been 'tagged', and will thereafter become the chaser. The girl establishes the new rule by example when it is her turn to be the 'catcher'. The other children are delighted by this new rule (which they had never even considered), and they quickly adopt it, though the old practice of catching and tagging also continues. By a conscious initiative, the girl has changed how all of the other children understand the practice of 'tagging' another player. The ball is held to constitute an extension of the chaser's physical reach, elaborating and changing what it means to tag. And this change appears so natural that it is difficult for the children to imagine the concept in the original way. Effectively, one agent has modified the rules that orient the entire community.

§39

Janik describes the phenomenon of rule-modification by initiative as 'throw[ing] off a concept at will' – developing an awareness of the rules that delineate our actions through a repeated process of rule-following, which then allows us to subvert the rules.[57] This characterisation captures the core element of rule-change by mutation: a deliberate drive to alter a rule that emerges through the process of following that rule. Mutation is therefore a consciously innovative, even subversive process.

[57] Janik, 'Notes on the Natural History of Politics', p. 108.

However, in addition Janik's characterisation misleadingly identifies this form of rule-modification as a uniquely combative process. Though rule-change by initiative requires individual assertion, a successful modification of conventions does not necessarily entail competition between members of the community. In fact, the linguistic community's acceptance of a rule-change arising out of individual initiative may be a *collaborative gesture* (recognising the need for conceptual innovation), just as it may be the product of competition to determine the terms of discourse.

Moreover, the individual drive to innovate (or to subvert the rules) may be motivated by non-competitive principles. We tend to assume that any conscious attempt to subvert or redirect commonplace meaning is a competitive act – a deliberate foray into a polemical arena. And there are countless historical examples of this practice to support this presupposition. However, alterations grounded in initiative can also be promoted by communities acting together – they can be developed through cooperative practices.

Wittgenstein's writings underline this point. He highlights that grammatical rules or boundaries established by the linguistic community may be used to delineate or impose a particular way of following a rule. However, they may also be set in a way that encourages members of the community to 'jump over the boundary' – to develop new, creative ways of following the same rule.[58] Provocative aphorisms (for instance, 'Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions') and university examination questions are perhaps the most obvious expression of this phenomenon in our society – they deliberately attempt to spur us towards an innovative, idiosyncratic response.[59]

More subtly, collaborative stimulation of individual initiative is evident among a range of concepts – including 'fashion' and 'authenticity'. ('Fashion' requires a consistent

[58] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §499, pp. 146-7.
[59] Aphorism attributed to G. K. Chesterton.

appreciation of innovations in taste; to fall behind the rate of innovation is to fall out of fashion. 'Authenticity' requires an agent to constantly find and express the ideas that define her; but by expressing these ideas, there is a danger of imitation or identification with an 'inauthentic', commonplace culture. Authenticity therefore similarly requires constant innovation. Both of these concepts are formative structures within developed societies.) These examples do not delineate a perfect balance between cooperation and competition. The modification of rules by individual initiative may be foremost a matter of contestation and subversion. But crucially, it can also be a collaborative project.

§40

The realisation that rules are subject to deliberate alteration (change wrought by individual initiative) *as well as* non-deliberate alteration should lead us to revise the ontological picture that we traced earlier. The rules that frame our experience of meaning are constantly changing. We can *begin* to understand this dynamic process by drawing an analogy with Darwinian evolution. But this analogy will only take us so far; Darwinian evolution cannot acknowledge the deliberate alteration of meaning that operates within all linguistic communities. Thus, we need to extend the organic analogy in order to gesture towards a more satisfactory explanatory ontology.

We can easily develop the analogy by drawing upon the idea of *mutation* – which represents another way of conceptualising change within a holistic framework of meaning (i.e. within the dynamic practices of a thriving linguistic community). Understanding and communication are shaped by deliberate mutation. The overlapping grammar that enables meaningful expression encourages us to follow rules in idiosyncratic ways. As Winch repeatedly emphasises, following a rule in an unfamiliar context often incorporates a moment of reflection (granting us the ability to consciously

change the way that we follow rules).[60] And consequently, communal understanding of human action *simply does* depend upon individual agency. (The normative implications of the free play of initiative will be explored in the following chapter; for the moment, I simply note the role of initiative in conceptual modification.)

Winch's insight is mirrored in the New Liberal discussions of orthogenic evolution (that we examined in Chapter 1), and in Hobson's organic theory of conceptual redefinition. Hobson suggests that any explanation of behaviour must acknowledge decisive human action as a drive towards rule-modification. 'As soon as it is realised that the human will may purposely interfere as an effective agent in bringing about the change, we get outside the play of ordinary evolutionary analogies'.[61] This decisive human action – this conceptual innovation – plays a fundamental role in (re-)ordering the community. Drawing from their observations of human interaction, both theorists note that change by initiative is a fundamental aspect of communal rule-following behaviour. Both thereby refine a vision of behavioural change that might otherwise simply be framed in terms of anarchic change or Darwinian evolution. By combining their insights, we can expand our organic ontological picture in order to incorporate the presence of human agency.

And in this way, we develop a more sophisticated understanding of our changing world – an understanding that can be set within the dual theoretical framework of the New Liberal ontology.

* * *

[60] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, pp. 60-2.
[61] Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 29.

§41

Praxis-driven rule-modification can be understood in two distinct ways: as evolution, and as mutation. Both forms of rule-change can reflect individual drive and individual experience. But both can also reflect a collaborative process; indicating that *we are all shared architects in our conceptual world*.

This insight captures the plurality of ways that we follow rules, but it ultimately appeals to a number of fiercely contested, political concepts – individual, community, agency, choice, and determination. It also opens up the question of how best to balance competitive and collaborative drives for change – a question that cannot be answered in purely descriptive terms. Whether an unprejudiced description of the human experience of meaning is possible, given this progression of argument, is an open question.

Fundamentally, however, our examination of human behaviour and the phenomenon of meaning does illustrate the epistemic value of the New Liberal social ontology. The organic ontology intuitively elucidates the process of rule-modification using a metaphor that is compelling *because* it creates a dynamic framework in which to orient our understanding. The organic ontology instinctively posits an anti-systematic theoretical approach, which reflects the contingency of conceptual change. And crucially, it avoids bias towards competitive or collaborative drives. Of course, the ontology can only gesture towards these credible philosophical solutions without comprehensive philosophical foundations. And so, the complete theoretical reconfiguration of this ontology on coherent philosophical grounds represents a pressing theoretical objective; for this idea has the potential to re-centre our understanding of democratic interaction.

VI. Beyond Description – Who Changes the Rules and How?

§42

Philosophical examination has revealed much about the nature of concepts, and how we experience meaning. A descriptive approach has allowed us to dissect the phenomena of communication and understanding.

An investigation into human interaction reveals that the meaning of each concept is characterised by a fundamental indeterminacy, and is constituted in a series of overlapping characteristics. We evoke *specific* meaning when we engage in shared language-games, or conventions (which do not correspond to any objective or essential definitions, but rather serve to orient a community in a framework of meaning). And we experience this meaning as we follow the rules that define each convention.

Understanding and communication are both experienced as rule-following. The process of following a rule is a form of praxis: an activity shaped by circumstances. But the fundamentally indeterminate nature of meaning leads us to modify rules as we apply them. Changing circumstances and human initiative both exercise an influence over rule-modification; which leads us to characterise alteration in terms of the evolution and the mutation of the rules.

In this way, we develop a descriptive account of the dynamic, indeterminate phenomenon of meaning. We therefore ground our philosophical argument in a formidable epistemology and philosophy of meaning. By adopting this approach, we have been able to establish many of the insights developed by New Liberal writers in principles derived from unprejudiced philosophical investigation. We have illustrated that an organic ontology can emerge out of an anti-systematic theory of human

interaction. And we have suggested that this ontology directly mirrors the one pioneered by Hobson and the New Liberals. According to this understanding, change and development is as much a result of contingency as of necessity.

But, as soon as we begin to employ our new, comprehensive understanding – as soon as we start trying to describe how this change occurs – we discover that our description hits a major obstacle. Our analysis of change requires us to draw upon value-laden concepts: whether change is generated by an agent or the whole community; whether a modification in the rules is willed or unwilled, chosen or determined. And through this analysis, we are confronted by the question of how to balance competitive and collaborative drives towards rule-modification. These become compelling questions that simply cannot be answered in descriptive terms.

Any understanding of how we orient ourselves in a framework of meaning that pushes beyond the generality of indeterminacy compels us to take up value-laden conceptual tools in order to orient our investigation. In the next section, we therefore move away from the purely descriptive, towards the normative, as we begin to develop an appreciation of the political interaction that defines concept-use – and thereby embark on the reconfiguration of the New Liberal social ontology.

Chapter 4: The Political Foundations of Rule-Following Practice

§1

Liberal Organic Democracy *recasts* the New Liberal social ontology using a more coherent philosophical framework. Wittgensteinian philosophy of meaning liberates the ontology from its historical context, and reveals the mechanisms (the logical and epistemic processes) that support its intuitive vision of human nature. Wittgensteinian philosophy *substantiates* and *subtly reconfigures* these mechanisms. The resulting theory of human behaviour is a promising intellectual hybrid. And yet, in order to realise the potential of this theory, we need to carefully elaborate upon how the ontology can be rebuilt using an apparently unrelated philosophical argument.

§2

By investigating the nature of meaning, we have already begun to reconstruct the social ontology using Wittgensteinian analysis. In the preceding chapter, we linked New Liberal ideas to the anti-systematic behaviour that governs concept-use. We noted the way that expression is shaped by *grammatical* patterns or rules (which guide us towards different forms of conceptual and political engagement in different circumstances). And we highlighted that rule-following theory underwrites the evolutionary way that Hobson and his contemporaries explained concept-change within an inherently dynamic and pluralistic society.

And yet, through this investigation we came to the conclusion that a purely descriptive examination of meaning could not give any more than an inchoate impression of the

forces that shape understanding and communication. To move beyond indeterminacy, we need to acknowledge the normative aspect of the logical and epistemic processes that drive meaningful thought.

By pursuing our enquiry into normative theory, we will be able to reconfigure the evolutionary social ontology, and illustrate how New Liberal normative assumptions intuitively capture the principle of free and unimpeded concept-use. Hobson, Hobhouse, and their contemporaries advanced a shared vision of human interaction that emphasised the reciprocal relationship between individual and community, and endorsed the active participation of free-thinkers in social, political, and intellectual life. These normative assumptions underpinned the New Liberals' ideological commitment to individuality and democratic rule. But they also grounded an intuitive insight into the dynamic way that we use concepts in order to build a shared framework of meaning. By probing the normative processes that allow us to follow a rule, we will be able to demonstrate a philosophical convergence between rule-following philosophy and New Liberal ideology, and to re-ground New Liberal insights in a more comprehensive explanation of human behaviour.

Of course, this theoretical development rests upon a comprehensive understanding of the normative foundations of meaning. We can only gain this understanding through *a detailed analysis of rule-following practice*. And so, it is with this subject-matter that we must now begin.

I. Normativity and Meaning

§3

Rule-following theory offers an invaluable insight into the ways that we experience meaning in ordinary life. Drawing from observation of human interaction, rule-following theorists have constructed a comprehensive framework for understanding how we use concepts and words in order to orient ourselves within a linguistic community.

This framework can be applied to all meaningful forms of interaction. Rule-following theory does not prescribe an *essential* model of communication and understanding (an ideal language or behaviour); rather, it emphasises that sense is expressed in a plurality of different practices. The framework describes how we experience the broader *phenomenon* of meaning when we engage with these practices. Consequently, it seems difficult to reconcile rule-following theory with a (prescriptive) normative theoretical approach. However, close conceptual analysis reveals that the rule-following framework rests upon a number of basic normative assumptions about the way that humans meaningfully interact. Some of these assumptions permeate the way that we discuss meaning (precipitating the use of value-laden terms in our philosophical investigation); others are more deeply rooted in the theory.

By identifying the normativity that is intrinsic to rule-following philosophy, we can enhance our understanding of the way that communities and individuals interact in order to generate sense and meaning. In this way, we can begin to articulate *the political foundations of rule-following and rule-modification*. We can thereby develop a better appreciation of the phenomenon of meaning, while establishing the theoretical groundwork of a political philosophy that is rooted in this phenomenon.

§4

It should be noted that the idea that rule-following theory incorporates a normative theoretical standpoint is controversial. And so, before we can begin to carefully elucidate the political norm that underlies this philosophy, we must first address the claim that rule-following theory is a purely descriptive venture. In the process, we must call into question Wittgenstein's own view of the theoretical framework that he pioneered.

Normativity and Rule-Following: Practice

§5

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein characterises rule-following theory as an exclusively descriptive philosophy. Musing on methodology, he notes that many other philosophers are committed to using 'hypothetical' frameworks, such as explanation and judgement, in order to make sense of human behaviour (and the phenomenon of meaning).[1] Wittgenstein is adamant that this approach needs to be rejected, arguing that hypothetical reasoning too often falls back on established presuppositions rather than accurate analysis. He implores his readers to consciously avoid anything other than description in their investigation: 'Don't say...but *look and see*...don't think, but look!'[2]

Nevertheless, within the text Wittgenstein *does* acknowledge the multiplicity of language-games that we play in ordinary interaction – allowing each agent to go far beyond the game of 'description'. For example, in everyday conversation we issue orders (prescription), speculate on future events (prediction), evoke counterfactuals

[1] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §102, p. 52.
[2] *Ibid*. §66, p. 36.

(hypothetical supposition), and engage in countless other games in order to express and explore the phenomenon of meaning.[3]

Significantly, Wittgenstein does admit a major role for *normativity* in ordinary language-use. Normativity is employed in a series of prescriptive language-games, such as giving orders or instructions. But it also appears in everyday interaction in a much broader (and thus more compelling) sense: normative engagement is a fundamental part of the *process of following a rule*. This point warrants further elaboration.

§6

Wittgenstein recognises that normative engagement drives rule-following *practice*. And he illustrates this point by comparing the function of words in capturing and communicating meaning (in our experience of following a rule) to the analogy of a machine.

We think about the function of words in the same way that we think about a machine.[4] When we call to mind the machine, its regular functioning is implicit in our conception. This is the case, though we know that parts could distort or warp, altering the operation of the mechanism. Thus, we immediately envisage the machine as the symbol of a particular, conventional mode of operation.

However, when we are asked to accurately predict and delineate the *actual* functioning of the machine, we do not neglect the possible distortions of the parts or failure of the mechanism. We factor all eventualities into our assessment. The empirical perspective that we adopt in this instance is quite different to our ordinary (conventional) conception of the machine.

[3] *Ibid*. §208, p. 88; §480, p. 143; §587, p. 162.
[4] *Ibid*. §§193-5, pp. 83-5.

There is an evident dissonance between the two perspectives. In confronting this problem, we come to see our ordinary conception as something more than empirically determined – it is somehow present. We assert that the machine *should* function this way. And so we naturally imbue the conventional mode of operation with a normative significance.

In the same manner, we treat the conventional way that we use words in order to convey meaning about an idea as somehow present in that idea. From an empirical perspective, we would be forced to concede that this formulation may break down in certain contexts; or that it is simply one way of speaking about an idea among many. But this conventional mode of operation is foremost in our mind. As a result, we are driven towards the assumption that this customary formulation represents the objectively correct (or essential) way of arranging words and concepts into meaningful thought. Thus, our experience of sense is defined by a manifest normativity.

§7

If we continue to press our Wittgensteinian line of philosophical analysis, we can further elaborate upon the nature of this normativity, and the role that it plays in driving rule-following practice.

In his astute theoretical analysis of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Stephen Mulhall has emphasised that our relationship with this manifest normativity is shaped by 'the context in which our normal practices of employing words, our normal language-games, have point or purpose' – by the social and linguistic background of our conventional behaviour.[5] Because each member of the linguistic community shares in the same set of conventions, each member also experiences the same manifest

[5] Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 99.

normativity. Normativity directs us towards a shared set of rules – a grammar – that defines how a particular word or concept is used.

The way that this manifest normativity regulates our communal language-games differentiates it from ideal forms of normativity. The community's standards of correctness (and its metrics of value) do not depend upon what members perceive to be perfect or optimal. Rather, they correspond to what members perceive to be natural or conventional. Thus, there is 'a general dependence of the normative upon the normal and the natural, or more precisely a general interweaving of the normative, the normal, and the natural' – which distinguishes the normativity that drives rule-following from the ideal normativity that we associate with moral-valence.[6] As Mulhall suggests, the normativity that Wittgenstein identifies in rule-following practice determines what categorically should be, rather than what ideally *ought* to be. (It is this *Wittgensteinian* definition of normativity that I take to define 'normativity' in all subsequent discussion.)

Ultimately, the manifest normativity that emerges through our use of language shapes our actions, and defines a shared set of rules (or conventions) that guides us towards meaningful expression.

Normativity and Rule-Following: Theory and Practice

§8

Wittgenstein acknowledges the role of normativity in the subjective experience of following a rule. Nonetheless, he maintains that the philosopher must avoid normativity and adopt a descriptive approach. How does this *philosophical* approach relate to our subjective experience of meaning?

[6] *Ibid*. p. 103; pp. 118-9.

Wittgenstein's descriptive methodology is rooted in a consciously empirical procedure. We investigate ordinary behaviour in order to establish how humans experience the phenomenon of meaning. However, the realisation that human beings can only experience meaning through a series of flexible rules leads us to make these rules the subject of our study. We continue to describe the *physical* actions that accompany communication and understanding, while now also engaging with the *conceptual* frameworks (the rules) that animate them in order to fully comprehend these phenomena. And when we apply this methodology to specific cases, we describe the rules or grammatical patterns that orient our understanding and our activity.

We therefore move from an *empirical* investigation towards a *grammatical* philosophy. Crucially, this new approach remains grounded in description – even though this description delineates the fundamental role of normative structures (rules) in generating a shared framework of meaning.

§9

Wittgenstein thus argues for a consciously grammatical approach to philosophy, underpinned by an exclusively descriptive methodology. He has compelling reasons for adopting this approach:

(i) By avoiding subjective normativity the philosopher can look past philosophical prejudices, and perceive the behaviour that underlies our experience of meaning.

(ii) By consciously framing her writing in descriptive terms, the philosopher can distinguish her work from the essentialist philosophy that she critiques.

By adopting a descriptive approach in the previous chapter, we gained crucial insights into the phenomenon of meaning. We showed that meaning is not contained within

essential concepts as we assumed; that meaning is generated through praxis; and that this praxis is constantly (if imperceptibly) changing the meaning that orients our existence. We illustrated the usefulness of Wittgenstein's philosophical approach.

§10

However, we found ourselves critically constrained by this methodological framework. Wittgenstein's characterisation of rule-following theory – *as a philosophy that describes normative structures but avoids making normative claims* – has proven to be fundamentally unsound. It is unsound for three core reasons:

First, when we examine rule-following practice in the *political* world, we find that our analysis is refracted through the prism of normativity. Political thought, discourse, and activity depend upon conceptual dichotomies (right/wrong, democratic/dictatorial) that have a strong normative component. Any general understanding of our political practices *has to* incorporate a normative metric, against which all of these conceptual dichotomies can be measured or judged.

Second, there is a normative, political dimension to rule-following *in general*. As the previous chapter demonstrated, any investigation of the phenomenon of meaning can only go so far before we are obliged to frame rule-following activity in value-laden, political distinctions (individual/community, competition/cooperation). All of these political distinctions are valued using conceptual dichotomies, and so require a normative metric in order to render them comprehensible. Consequently, we need to draw upon a (foundational) normative theoretical outlook in order to anchor our *general understanding* of meaningful interaction and sense.

Third, the indeterminate, shifting nature of meaning generates a divergence in different individuals' understanding of words and concepts. In order to maintain a tenable degree

of conceptual agreement within a linguistic community, all individuals within that community need to habitually renegotiate the way that they follow the rules (the way that they understand individual concepts). This may be a simple matter of passively reconciling the individual's understanding with a redefined communal convention. Or it may be a far more active process of coming to an agreement through debate or deliberation. Either way, a theoretical assessment of the best way to consolidate meaning requires the philosopher to take a normative standpoint. As Janik suggests, altering our language-games is a highly political activity, which generates a political dilemma.[7] *To settle this dilemma effectively, we need to draw upon a normative political understanding*.

These three points illustrate the fundamental connection between understanding meaning as a process of following (or modifying) a rule, and a normative theoretical outlook. Normativity is not only *possible* within a rule-following framework; it is *necessary*. It constitutes an ineliminable part of the way that we model meaning using the (inherently political) idea of following a rule.

Normativity in Wittgenstein

§11

In order to conceptualise how a linguistic community deals with difference, and how individuals experience shifting meaning within a group context, we need to establish a *political* understanding of rule-following and rule-modification.

[7] Allan Janik, 'Notes on the Natural History of Politics', in *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, ed. Cressida J. Heyes, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); p. 111 – 'Politics, then, does not refer merely to those aspects of public life surrounding lawmaking; it is an ineliminable element in concept acquisition and use'.

Despite his general reluctance to move beyond description, at one point in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein acknowledges this necessity. Reflecting upon the manner in which we become tangled up in our (indeterminate) rules, he calls attention to the fact that we cannot resolve the problem of how we understand meaning without also considering the question of how we reinforce, reform, or contest our understanding of what is meaningful in ordinary language:

> ...we lay down rules, a technique, for playing the game...then, when we follow the rules, things don't turn out as we had assumed. So that we are, as it were, entangled in our own rules...The entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand: that is, to survey...[8]

When our meaning seems to fail, and we find ourselves faced with a contradiction, we are thrown back onto what it is to *mean something*. We develop a self-consciousness about our concept-use, which blossoms into critical thought. But we are still faced with a contradiction. And ultimately, the only way that we can (re-)establish meaning in our ordinary framework of language – and orient our new understanding relative to our old patterns of thought – is to determine which shared convention (or rule) should overrule all other uses.

The question of *how* we should determine the overriding rule from within an established language (and a dynamic linguistic community) becomes extremely important:

> The civic status of a contradiction, or its status in civic life – that is the philosophical problem.[9]

Underlying our basic comprehension there is a political issue: who has the power/ability/right to resolve the contradiction? Should we locate this agency with the

[8] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §125, p. 55.
[9] *Ibid*.

ruler/government, or with the community, or with the individual? A normative problem therefore arises, which is central to our understanding of meaning – it shapes and supports our theoretical perspective.

§12

By developing this point from the *Philosophical Investigations*, we are once again brought to the point of acknowledging the inherently political character of meaning. As a consequence, we are able to illustrate how normativity underwrites our experience of sense.

Evidently, this reading presents just one interpretation of this (ambiguous) passage from *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein's explicit statements elsewhere suggest that this is not a line of reasoning he would have reflectively endorsed. Nonetheless, it *does* constitute an implicit acknowledgement of a logical truth. The political status of any change in meaning is *fundamental* to our understanding of the phenomenon of meaning.

Ultimately, Wittgenstein's stalwart, descriptive characterisation of the methodology that supports rule-following theory is logically flawed. His hostility towards any attempt to characterise rule-following theory as even partly-normative renders his position untenable. A sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon of meaning – which acknowledges its dynamic reality, and models this as the process of following a rule – must accept that normative assumptions underpin our theoretical insights into the phenomenon.

Grammatical Normativity and Motivational Normativity

§13

At this point in the argument, we need to draw an important distinction. The normative assumptions that we have thus far discussed are a constant factor underpinning the *grammar* of meaning. They support the grammatical framework that delineates our understanding and guides our actions (they are activated whenever we attempt to behave meaningfully). They become particularly relevant whenever we seek to maximise sense or meaningful interaction.

But ultimately, these foundational normative assumptions do not circumscribe every aspect of political and social life. Grammar merely constitutes the rules that frame and delineate our expression – it cannot explain motivation, only sense. Grammar does not supply the social and economic pressures, the psychological impulses, and the moral and ideological compulsions that drive us. As Wittgenstein makes plain:

> Grammar does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfil its purpose, in order to have such-and-such an effect on human beings. It only describes, and in no way explains, the use of signs.[10]

Significantly, the social, economic, moral, cultural and ideological drives that motivate (*explain*) human action generate normative force in the political forum, *independently of the norms that underpin meaningful interaction*.

Nevertheless, these motivational norms do not dilute the importance of our study of human meaning. Motivational norms are *always* subordinate to the grammatical norms that support rule-following behaviour, because motivational drives cannot have any

[10] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §496, p. 146.

coherent effect in practice unless expressed in a way that *makes sense* – in a way that accords with the grammatical rules.[11]

§14

Identifying the grammatical norms that underpin sense will allow us to understand the forces that shape meaningful expression. Disentangling these norms from motivational norms will enable us to further develop our insight into the phenomenon of meaning. We will be able to delineate the politics of grammar, and we will thereafter be able to suggest a basic grammar of politics (a foundational normativity for human interaction, based around a reconstructed social ontology).

But disentangling norms is no easy task. Both normative and descriptive theoretical outlooks are required. Nevertheless, a refined grammatical approach shifts between description and normativity in order to generate an unrivalled insight into the phenomenon of meaning. Using this grammatical approach, in the remainder of this chapter we will elaborate upon the normative assumptions that underpin the practice of following a rule. We will identify the foundational norm that lies at the heart of meaningful interaction. And subsequently, we will substantiate my choice of norm by carefully dissecting and anatomising the political properties of rule-following – thereby illustrating how the norm animates the process of understanding and communicating ideas.

We will examine three major issues in rule-following practice. They are as follows: first, whether following a rule is a willed or an involuntary process; second, whether the agent or the community has the final power to resolve a contradiction and determine a

[11] This point is echoed in Bernard William's conception of a 'Basic Legitimation Demand (BLD)' in *In the Beginning was the Deed*. Norms have to 'make sense' (MS) before they can exert a normative force – whether in the establishment of a political regime or in more general normative interaction; see Bernard Williams, 'Realism and Moralism in Political Theory' in *In the Beginning was the Deed* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 11.

rule; and third, whether the process of following a rule is determined by convention, or by individual choice. Consideration of each of the three issues in turn will illustrate that our understanding of the ordinary practice of following a rule rests upon a distinctly normative standpoint.

From this *normative* standpoint, we feel a sense of agency in our interactions with the world and with one another. In this chapter, we will demonstrate that our experience of meaning *requires* this feeling of agency. Ultimately, we will emphasise that our ability to use concepts in a meaningful way – our *agency in language* – is the conscious manifestation of the *political* norm that underwrites our grammatical understanding.

§15

This line of argument will allow us to develop a comprehensive and wide-ranging insight into the normative processes that drive rule-following practice. To ground this insight within the broader thesis, we will annotate the following analysis with short digressions explaining how the political properties of rule-following practice are reflected in the intuitive democratic understanding shared by New Liberal theorists.[12] By drawing these annotations together, in due course we will be able to establish the rule-following norm as the central, animating aspect of a reconfigured social ontology – as the driving principle behind the theory of Liberal Organic Democracy.

[12] This annotative technique is methodologically consistent with the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophical explanation. Writing in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein contends that 'The work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections for a particular purpose' (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §127, p. 55). The philosopher is engaged in assembling reminders, or examples, which may be drawn together to give an argument grounding.

II. A Foundational Norm for Rule-Following Philosophy

§16

Before we can identify the norm that underpins rule-following philosophy, we need to remind ourselves of the limitations of normativity and the contingency of meaning. In the last chapter, we established that our experience of reality is defined by contingency. Both the world and our way of understanding it are constantly changing. Language allows us to frame our experience of a dynamic world in a consistent and meaningful way. But though we can generate meaning by identifying and adhering to clear patterns, the immutability of these patterns is an illusion: for the very act of following a rule (of grasping or communicating meaning in a new context) modifies that rule. Our understanding is subject to inevitable variation.

All of our attempts to fashion our changing thoughts and impulses into meaningful ideas and sentences are subject to an unlimited number of contingent factors. True, we are guided by an extensive grammatical foundation that provides a shared system of meaning across our linguistic community. But we are only imperfectly directed when we follow these grammatical rules. As we try to flatten our overlapping grammar into determinate expressions, we find that our *solid* grammatical foundation is reconfigured according to circumstances; that our grammatical conventions are subject to evolution, and that they may be switched on or off by the presence of cultural norms. When we try to explain the world, we are manoeuvring among contingencies, rather than simply imposing a fixed understanding upon a chaotic universe.

Contingency plays a *major* part in the way that we comprehend meaning. No system of thought or form of reasoning is intrinsic to human behaviour. No pattern of behaviour is

entirely stable; and so no model can delineate the perfect (*ideal*) form of meaningful interaction.

§17

Wittgenstein's work illustrates this instability in our understanding, while noting that each system of thought does support and shape human cognition – acting as a 'picture', or conceptual framework, that delineates how we think.[13] He highlights that our use of these intangible systems of thought is a double-edged sword: it allows us to group and order meaningful propositions, whilst making us vulnerable to confusion and self-deception. A dominant picture might come to seem natural or necessary as we lose sight of its contingency. As a result, we may find ourselves constrained by the picture's limitations: 'A *picture* held us captive. And we couldn't get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably'.[14]

Many of the writers that have subsequently sought to apply Wittgenstein's ideas to politics have focused on this part of *Philosophical Investigations*, emphasising the epistemic and political constraints imposed upon individuals by a dominant picture.[15] (Few have noted that the picture also enables human thought and interaction – although David Owen's work stands out as a clear exception.[16]) These writers have tended to highlight one core concern: the normative drives that support a dominant picture may very easily become oppressive or constricting to members of a linguistic community, *if the contingency of this picture is forgotten or deliberately obscured*.

[13] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §115, p. 53.
[14] *Ibid*.
[15] See Cressida Heyes's 'Introduction', p. 3; James Tully, 'Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection', pp. 17-18; Janik, 'Notes on the Natural History of Politics', pp. 112-5; all in *The Grammar of Politics*.
[16] Owen rightly argues that pictures are 'necessary conditions of thought and action'. David Owen, 'Genealogy as Perspicuous Representation', in *The Grammar of Politics*, p. 83.

As a consequence, most political applications of rule-following theory have drawn on the theory's ability to provide a philosophical framework for the emancipation of the individual from oppressive, contingent patterns of thought. As will become clear, this thesis engages with rule-following theory in a very different way. Liberal Organic Democracy brings Wittgensteinian philosophy into a New Liberal project for democratic self-realisation. The thesis emphasises the contingency of political meaning, and urges citizens to take an active role in manoeuvring together amidst changing circumstances: in constructing and regenerating a democratic form of politics.

§18

Philosophical examination illustrates that: (i) our practical experience of meaning is always subject to contingency; and (ii) normativity may compromise our awareness of the contingency of meaning, on an epistemic and a political level. But this discovery does *not* in itself preclude the existence of a central rule-following norm.

The changeable and contingent nature of meaning undermines the notion of a perfect or fixed system of thought, and discounts any normativity that drives towards the ideal, or reifies the status-quo. Yet it does not rule out the possibility of a non-ideal normativity *that incorporates contingency at a foundational level* – a dynamic rule-following norm that generates an evolving framework of meaning, and supports a broad plurality of meaningful practices.[17]

Although contingency creates a wide variety of different ways in which to follow rules, there are a few constant characteristics of rule-following praxis. These include a number of agent-centred phenomena that follow on from the experience of cognition – which can only be understood in political terms. These political characteristics ground a great

[17] Here, we refer to the possible existence of dynamic rule-following norm that does not provide conventional direction in any specific circumstance, but rather underwrites our entire grammar (our use of conventions).

variety of different forms of meaningful behaviour, and function together in a particular way – indicating the existence of a dynamic, foundational normativity underpinning rule-following praxis.

§19

We can identify these non-contingent characteristics of rule-following behaviour under the norm *every agent should have the opportunity to be understood.*

This norm provides a compelling and fitting foundation for rule-following theory. In what follows, we will elaborate upon the non-contingent, political properties of rule-following in order to explain and justify the selection of this norm. Furthermore, we will elucidate how this prescription should be understood as a distinctly *political* norm.

§20

As we endeavour to understand how we generate, modify, and communicate meaning, we come to acknowledge the political dimensions of these acts. By elaborating on the *political properties* of rule-following behaviour, we will now be able to map out the 'civic status' of our system of concepts and words – and to perceive how a normative foundation orients our broader understanding.

The political properties of rule-following behaviour can only be distinguished through philosophical investigation into the nature of meaning.[18] Our philosophical investigation has thus far already indicated a number of non-contingent properties. Value-driven concerns about will, choice, and agency all hinted towards the political dimensions of rule-following praxis. Probing the non-contingent characteristics of meaning, we find that the most fundamental political properties of rule-following can be arranged under

[18] They cannot be identified by intuitive reasoning, as our intuition automatically draws upon highly contingent *pictures* that frame society's understanding of meaning.

three core issues. These issues will be examined in turn in order to generate a careful understanding of our experience of meaning. Foremost, we will establish whether rule-following is willed or involuntary; thereafter, we will consider whether meaningful interaction is determined by the agent or the community; and finally, we will examine whether rule-following is driven purely by conventional patterns, or whether creativity and individual initiative play a role in the way that we build our understanding.

III. Willed or Involuntary Praxis? Behaviourism and Following a Rule

§21

The question of whether the practice of following a rule is willed or unintentional is much more complex and intractable than it initially appears. While rule-governed physical action may seem obviously deliberate and intentional (as Wittgenstein notes, 'voluntary movement is marked by the absence of surprise'), concept-use is much less clear-cut.[19] Thoughts *occur* to us in response to particular circumstances in fully-formed, grammatical sentences. Hence, our reflections are (or at least *empirically* appear to be) basic responses to stimuli – and by implication, our use of concepts is less voluntary than we suppose.

Wittgenstein makes this point in *Philosophical Investigations* when he reminds the reader that 'When I follow the rule, I do not choose. I follow the rule *blindly*'.[20] The theorist may take this passage to mean that rule-following is simply unwilled. But this is a misreading, both of Wittgenstein's work, and of rule-following more generally. True, Wittgenstein is adamant that we are unable to think outside of a framework of rules.[21] The existence of such a framework is an automatic fact of cognition. *However*, this does not mean that rule-following behaviour is an involuntary response to drill; in fact, the

[19] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §628, p. 171.
[20] *Ibid*. §§219-30, p. 92. Wittgenstein's direct statements on the issue of intentionality present an ambiguous answer to the question of whether rule-following is intentional or involuntary. In *Zettel*, he characterises the *phenomenon* of the will as subsidiary to the *language-game* of willing. Intention is simply a linguistic convention that relates to a specific rule-governed concept-use or activity. The real phenomenon of the will is therefore uninteresting – it is a by-product of the language-game of willing – Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, §§45-8, p. 9. Conversely, at points in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein both asserts that all voluntary movements are willed, and signals clear scepticism about the real existence of the will by suggesting that we are only able to determine which rules we follow retrospectively (we impose a coherent will on the past, rather than harnessing it to our present actions). Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §628, p. 171; §82, p. 43.
[21] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §125, p. 55.

opposite is true. Following a rule means acting in accordance with our understanding (the mastery over certain techniques that allows us to deliberately select and apply a specific rule in an appropriate context). We *engage with* our training in order to match a convention to the circumstances.[22] The training does not *cause* our reactions; it does not lead us to apply a rule independently of our understanding and contrary to our intention (in an involuntary manner).

We are not propelled forwards by the rules – we are guided by them (though we remain blind to their directing influence). Following a rule is distinct from automatic, conditioned behaviour. Wittgenstein acknowledges and further compounds this distinction by emphasising that it is possible to respond to a rule-governed situation by enacting one of a multiplicity of actions that 'accord with a rule' – or, alternatively, by ignoring the circumstantial stimuli.[23]

Close examination of rule-following philosophy therefore disambiguates some of the confusion over this fundamental issue. Our analysis reveals that rules are not *determinative*. We might be tempted to go further, and draw the conclusion that rules depend upon *willed* action or engagement. But presently there are insufficient grounds for this much stronger claim; and in order to overcome our earlier theoretical objections, we need to expand our analysis.

§22

The difference between involuntary conditioned behaviour (drill) and rule-following practice is much better understood when we bring to mind a core conceptual distinction that Wittgenstein makes between *bounded* and *unbounded* language-games.

[22] Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'The Blue Book', in *The Blue and Brown Books (Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations")* (1958), second edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), pp. 12-14.
[23] Wittgenstein, 'The Blue Book', pp. 12-14.

When we engage in a *bounded* game, we interact with another player in a very circumscribed manner. Our options for action (or inaction) are limited to a discrete set of pre-agreed moves. We can visualise this quite clearly by imagining a game played with numbered cards. In this scenario, potential moves are limited to those specified at the beginning of the game by the rules, and outcomes (the cards that we lay) are circumscribed by the determinate number of options available (the cards that are in the deck).[24] On any given turn, the decision that we make about which card to play is not preordained by the rules: we enact a choice. And yet, our choice is heavily constrained. The game is *bounded* by a limited number of outcomes. In the same way, when we take part in a bounded *language-game or convention*, our actions or responses are limited to a discrete series of options. When we act, we are compelled to select from among these options.

By contrast, in an *unbounded* game our interactions with another player are only very loosely constrained. Our options for action are guided by the rules of the game (by conventions), but we are *not* limited to a discrete or finite number of moves – instead, there is an infinite number of outcomes. An unbounded game can be visualised as a game played with blank cards and a pen: the rules allow us to write down any number we choose on the cards before we play them. The potential moves are regulated by the rules specified at the beginning of the game; so for instance, we must write down a numeral (writing down a letter means that we have ceased playing the game). But we are not constrained in the same way that we were in the previous game, because our move-set is unbounded. And so, when we engage in an unbounded *language-game or convention*, our actions/choices are governed by rules, but are *not* limited to a discrete series of options. An infinite plurality of outcomes is possible, and the determinate content of any individual outcome is generated (and not simply selected) by our actions.

[24] Wittgenstein, 'The Brown Book', in *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 91-2.

§23

An analogy that Wittgenstein draws upon in *The Brown Book* helps to further distinguish between bounded and unbounded games.[25] In an unbounded game, the rules *guide* us towards a potential outcome without generating the outcome in advance. In this way, an unbounded game operates like a pianola (a player piano), whilst a bounded game operates like a bolt lock. The pianola is constrained by limitations such as the number of strings in the piano (in the same way that we might be constrained by the number of words in our vocabulary), and by the pianola roll or cylinder that directs which keys are pressed (in the same way that we are guided by the rules and circumstances we find ourselves in). But the pianola can play an infinite number of different tunes. It can play keys in a variety of different combinations; and could potentially play forever, if we continue to feed it new cylinders. The outcome generated by the pianola is not limited. The bolt lock, by contrast, is restricted to one of two positions – and despite the element of choice, both outcomes are 'predetermined in the construction of the lock'.[26]

The bolt lock is not able to operate beyond its two, programmed outcomes; and therefore it follows a highly *systematic* pattern. The pianola is 'able to read new combinations of signs', and in this sense it follows a *grammatical* pattern (signs can be replaced and reordered into different meaningful outcomes).[27] Any language-game that is not limited to a determinate series of outcomes – but nonetheless operates according to a series of rules that guide meaningful behaviour – likewise follows an unbounded, grammatical pattern.

[25] *Ibid*. pp. 118-9.
[26] *Ibid*. p. 118.
[27] *Ibid*.

§24

We tend to assume that most rule-governed activities are bounded; that we are constrained by a limited number of outcomes, and that our actions are selected from among a small number of possible options. In some cases, this assumption is justified: the process of voting by ballot in an election (from a circumscribed list of candidates) is a clear example of political behaviour that is systematically constrained by a limited set of outcomes. But in the vast majority of cases, including virtually all examples of concept-use, rule-governed activities do not follow this circumscribed pattern; they are unbounded or they are a mixture of both bounded and unbounded types.[28]

Communication and understanding are usually experienced as *unbounded* language-games. By definition, they follow a *grammatical* pattern, *unless* a specific scenario is established which systematically constrains and delineates action. Grammatical rules: (i) delineate how we can build meaningful sentences from concepts and articulate them in language; and (ii) allow for an unlimited set of interchangeable outcomes. Crucially, the determinate content of a specific grammatical sentence is *generated (and not simply selected) by the practice of speaking or thinking*.

§25

So how are bounded and unbounded language-games distinct from involuntary drill? Can we confidently assert that either of these practices is *willed*?

[28] Wittgenstein notes in *Philosophical Investigations* that most of our activities or games incorporate a combination of bounded and unbounded rules. When serving in tennis, there are clear, bounded rules about how to hit the ball, which part of the court counts as 'in', etc. But there are also aspects that are not strictly bounded. There is, for instance, no rule saying how high the player is allowed to throw the ball when serving. As Wittgenstein notes, almost all rule-governed activities are – to some degree – unbounded. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§68-9, p. 37.

In *both* bounded and unbounded language-games, the way that we behave is not determined by conditioning, as we consciously follow the rules of the language-game. But in the bounded scenario, our action is circumscribed by the boundaries of the game. And significantly, we can imagine scenarios in which circumstances seem to constrain our choice (from a limited range of options) so strongly that our action is forced into accordance with one *default* option. In this case, it may seem perverse to call bounded rule-following *willed*. However, in the unbounded scenario, our action generates (and does not simply select) the outcome. Although still subject to rules and constraints imposed by circumstances, the outcome in an unbounded language-game is never simply a default option. On the contrary, its content is the manifestation of our *will* (the linguistic outcome accords with our ordinary understanding of the concept of 'willing').[29]

In short, while we can identify a clear distinction between both types of language-games and conditioned behaviour (drill), it is difficult to determine whether bounded language-games are always *willed*. Yet we face no such conceptual dilemma when we turn to unbounded language-games. By their very nature, unbounded language-games constitute a form of willed action. This is important, because our ordinary rule-following practices do not tend to conform to the category of bounded language-games. Rather, they are either unbounded language-games (conversations, explanations, arguments, etc) *or* language-games that incorporate both bounded and unbounded rules. And because of this unbounded aspect, the process of following (or modifying) a rule in order to convey meaning can be categorised as a *willed* act.

[29] Here I refer to the ordinary will of the agent, rather than the rational or *real* will, as described in the works of philosophers from Rousseau onwards.

§26

How does this insight into meaningful behaviour relate to our foundational, rule-following normativity?

The use of concepts is willed (rather than involuntary) praxis. At first glance, the constant application of the will appears to be an innate feature of human existence. However, close analysis reveals that willed praxis is a *normative phenomenon*. The use of language in social interaction is so conventional that it has become second-nature to us. And yet, language- and concept-use are not necessary in themselves. The material existence of humanity is not predicated upon the use of concepts to understand and communicate ideas. To return to the analogy of the pianola – as long as it is maintained, the pianola does not need to exercise its distinctive function (its piano-playing ability), it can simply sit unused. Because we conceive of such an existence as lacking in worth (as unnatural, or sub-normal), we project a normative value onto the active operation of the player-piano – just as we project a normative value onto the use of concepts to understand and communicate ideas.

We therefore view the application of willed, rule-following praxis as a normative good. We value the agency that derives from the mastery of concepts; and we value the opportunity for understanding that this brings. And crucially, this matrix of values goes part-way towards demonstrating the validity of our central, rule-following norm: every agent should have the *opportunity to be* understood. In the everyday, *willed* activity of following a rule, we instinctively affirm the *normative value* of using concepts to generate understanding.

* * *

§27

At this point, it is worth briefly reflecting upon our political characterisation of rule-following practice. We have illustrated that rule-following behaviour is qualitatively different from conditioned behaviour (drill). Furthermore, through the application of a conceptual distinction between bounded an unbounded games, we have been able to identify meaningful interaction (communication and understanding) with willed praxis. And we have demonstrated that we tend to attach a normative significance to this application of the will.

These conclusions are echoed in the theoretical assumptions that underlie New Liberal democratic thought. The New Liberals believed that each individual should be recognised for his ability to will. In *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism* (1918), Hobhouse insisted that the universal exercise of the individual will is the foundation of self-government: 'The claim of the free individual is not the impossible one that the common decision should coincide with his own, but that his decision should be heard and taken into account'.[30]

Moreover, as propagandists, the New Liberals principally demonstrated their normative commitment to the importance of willed praxis through their polemical interventions in public discourse. New Liberal appeals to the masses through consciously democratic propaganda embody the foundational philosophical conviction that every individual and every group could be *persuaded* and *animated*; that New Liberal ideas could inspire the democratic agents that would change the world. Crucially, these agents would have to consciously will New Liberal reforms for them to be both *democratic* and *meaningful*.

[30] L. T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism* (1918), (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 61.

The realisation that meaningful interaction depends upon willed praxis substantiates the intuitions that drive New Liberal political theory. It helps to explain and delineate the normative grounds of a reconfigured evolutionary social ontology. However, while our investigation has allowed us to explain parallels with New Liberal thought, and we have emphasised that meaning is generated through willed rule-following praxis, we have not determined *who* the final arbiter of meaning actually is. We have not distinguished whether the individual, the group, or the whole community exercises the decisive will when determining how words and concepts are used. This is the second major political issue that defines rule-following practice, and it is to this issue that we now turn.

IV. Determining Conventions in Concept-Use: Agent and Community

§28

The grammatical structure that frames our understanding depends upon the interaction of individuals and groups within a shared framework of meaning. This interaction entails that we coexist within a community. Consequently, our notion of what makes sense is built upon a civic structure that enables conceptual agreement and social coexistence – that mediates between the willed practices of individual, group, and community.

This civic structure is one of the most important foundational aspects of rule-following praxis. However, it is also one of the most challenging parts to dissect and anatomise. For the ability of particular elements within the community to influence others into accepting one form of meaning over another reveals that our understanding (and our use of language) rests upon a changeable and potentially problematic political dynamic.

This dynamic needs to be explored in detail in order to properly characterise rule-following philosophy. We must elaborate upon the political balance between individuals, groups, and the community, so that we can ascertain *who* determines the content of our rules – and establish *how* we orient ourselves within a shared framework of meaning.

§29

Foremost, we need to set out a secure theoretical basis for the presupposition that meaning can be generated by an individual, a group, or the whole community.

The phenomenon of meaning is experienced in the practice of following a rule. On some level, the basic facts of cognition dictate how we follow rules: each individual registers

meaning, and feels compelled to act in accordance with her own understanding of a rule. Individual cognition precipitates individual agency (and individual will).

But this does not preclude the possibility of following rules in other ways. It is perfectly possible to follow rules collectively – to develop a communal understanding that compels us towards collective action. We need only consider how a constructive dialogue works in order to illustrate this point: two or more individuals decide through discussion upon a course of action. By following a rule together, they are able to engage *as a group* in a willed form of action. And the outcome of this action is the product of their collective will.

Although it may jar with our subjective experience of cognition to posit the existence of a collective will, it does not seem illogical to suggest that the group will or the communal will nonetheless plays a major part in shaping the (intersubjective) political dynamic underlying meaningful interaction. New Liberal theory identifies the collective will as an intrinsic feature within any political community, and suggests that preoccupation with the individual will undermines theoretical understanding. In 'The Re-Statement of Democracy', Hobson notes that opinions, ideas, and priorities can easily emerge out of the interaction of individuals and groups – precipitating 'a common desire, a common will', that drives social and political discourse.[31] Musing upon why we might have difficulty identifying this common will among our motivations, Hobson proposes that the process of collective cognition may not be immediately accessible to the individual mind – just as the will of the whole organism is not present in the operation of the individual cells of that organism.[32]

[31] J. A. Hobson, 'The Re-Statement of Democracy', in *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1909), p. 75, p. 76.
[32] *Ibid*. p. 76.

Examination of meaningful interaction and social behaviour illustrates that willed praxis is not limited to simple forms of individual cognition. The agent in rule-following praxis may either be the individual, a group of individuals that unites to follow a particular practice, or the community as a whole. Each agent has the potential to form a will, and to be compelled by that will.

Having established the potential actors that shape meaningful behaviour, we will now move on to consider the actual practice of following a rule (of generating conceptual meaning).

§30

Whenever an agent (an individual, a group, or a community) engages in the willed practice of following a rule, the agent is using the rule to manoeuvre within a shared framework of meaning.

But agents overlap and coexist within the linguistic community. An individual may be part of any number of groups – or be subject to their influence. Furthermore, all individuals and groups combine to form the broader community. Therefore, it is not immediately clear *where* we should locate meaningful agency. Individual, group, and community may each be involved in (or may impede) the process of following a rule. The rule-following practices that create and maintain our framework of meaning raise a foundational political issue: who determines (and controls) our use of language? Is meaning the product of the individual will, the group will, or the communal will?

§31

This is an exceedingly broad and complex question. But we can approach this issue more easily by considering whether a *particular* speech act (a specific use of a linguistic rule to convey sense) is determined by the individual will, the group will, or the communal will.

We may be tempted to conclude that, as the process of forming grammatical sentences is an unbounded language-game, the will of the particular *agent* determines the speech act, and defines the meaning of the statement. However, this immediate and simplistic answer does not really address the problem of meaning, because it fails to take account of the political context surrounding any form of rule-following praxis.

First, it fails to appreciate that any speech act – any interpretation of a rule – may be contested by the linguistic community, thereby undermining its provisionally-established meaning. The social and linguistic conventions of the broader community exercise power of veto over meaningful interactions. When we use a rule in an unusual or innovative way, our linguistic community (or the dominant group within our community) may reject our use of the rule. Equally, the community may accept the new use of the rule, and modify the conventional means of following the rule. Either way, the value of the new definition *depends* upon its acceptance into our social and linguistic conventions – and these conventions are superintended by the linguistic community.

Second, it fails to recognise that certain *agents* may exercise a far greater degree of influence over which definitions pass into conventional usage. Members of a group tend to echo a shared definition in their interactions with one another, legitimising their definition within the broader community. Thus, *groups* have a disproportionate influence over the determination of meaning. As both Hobson and Hannah Arendt have emphasised, the enthusiasm of the crowd (the 'hysteria' of social conformity) can suppress or overpower any dissenting voices among those assembled, diminishing the importance of the individual will within a shared framework of meaning.[33]

[33] J. A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 9; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 58.

Once we acknowledge the political context that surrounds a speech act, we are forced to recognise that meaning is not simply a matter of individual intention. A particular speech act may be generated by the individual will, but the meaning of the speech act is *determined* by the interplay of individual will and collective will.

§32

Meaning is manifested within the interaction of individual, group, and community. The communal will exercises considerable power over the *conventional framework of meaning*, which controls the meaningfulness of an individual speech act. But this power must be weighed against the formative influence of the agent – who generates the content of the speech act.

It is not possible to circumscribe this interaction using a fixed *ethical* relation, which subordinates the individual to the collective (or vice versa), because the influence of individual, group, and community is plainly changeable and responsive to circumstances. Any philosophical system that consistently prioritises individual over group, or community over individual (i.e. any fixed individualistic or communitarian position) simply does not reflect the dynamic reality of concept-use and of linguistic, social, and political discourse.

The question at hand (*who* determines linguistic and conceptual meaning?) cannot be resolved in a neat, definitive way. Meaning emerges out of a changeable process of balancing the collective and the individual will.

§33

This conclusion invariably provokes a further question: *how do we* balance the clash of individual and collective wills? We are therefore faced with a much more overtly political problem. Clearly, the solution varies between societies (there is no blueprint for

harmony that is intrinsic to rule-following practice). And yet, the need to consistently re-balance our conventions is a foundational political characteristic within any shared framework of meaning. Our understanding depends upon a broadly stable set of conventions that allow us to recognise the meaningfulness of one another's actions.

Such stability does not necessarily emerge out of a 'natural' or politically benign process. Agents within the community have the ability to coerce or influence others into accepting one form of meaning over another – thus altering the political dynamic of the linguistic community, and further complicating the process of generating a stable framework of meaning. Deliberate acts of political manipulation inflame the clash of wills that is inherent to our conceptual understanding. Consequently, the question of how to stabilise our conventions becomes even more pressing once we acknowledge the political ambition of members of the linguistic community.

§34

So, how do we resolve this confusion, and generate a stable basis for meaningful interaction?

Plainly, in order to promote meaningful interaction, every community needs to establish a normative process that re-balances the conventions that define meaning (without fixing ethical relations in a permanent, inflexible state). The grammatical norm identified in this chapter – *every agent should have the opportunity to be understood* – reflects this need to carefully balance contrasting wills. The norm stabilises rule-following praxis, minimising the impact of deliberate manipulation in order to maximise the free interplay between individual will, group will, and community will.

Undoubtedly, the norm promotes a particular type of interaction – advancing discourse and willed agency over collective domination and chaos. But in the process, it forms a

solid foundation for rule-following; thus underwriting (and maximising) meaningful interaction. It is a procedural norm (rather than an ethical relation), which promotes understanding and communication as ends in themselves. And ultimately, any structure that realises this norm creates the conditions that support a *plurality* of ways of following rules and generating conceptual meaning.

§35

The practice of following rules naturally leads to digressions in the rules. And digressions in the rules require cooperation to stabilise the use of concepts within the linguistic community. Agents must either (i) collaborate or (ii) come to some form of agreement over the use of concepts in order to maintain a workable form of linguistic convergence.

Meaning is therefore the product of intersubjective interaction between agent and community. The rule-following norm helps to delineate how this sort of interaction may be accomplished: individual wills and collective wills are balanced in order to accommodate one another. And the outcome of this accommodation is a framework of meaning that shapes individual, group, and community.

In this regard, rule-following praxis strongly echoes Hobson's explanation of the harmonious relationship between individual and state that underpins the organic social ontology. Hobson emphasises that individual and collective will exercise a dynamic and formative influence over one other. 'In the strong and really efficient personality, the "socialisation" of the will is an essential of extreme importance' – for the guiding and educative influence of the collective will allows the individual to develop his critical faculties, thus enabling individual self-realisation.[34] And yet, the intelligent and probing individual will that results makes the citizen able to contribute far more effectively

[34] J. A. Hobson, 'Character and Society', in *Character and Life: A Symposium*, ed. Percy L. Parker (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912), pp. 75-6.

towards the development of a democratic, collective will. Therefore, individual will and collective will exist in a symbiotic relationship: the intellectual and political development of either individual or community will turns upon engagement with (and cultivation of) the other. Occasionally, either the community or the individual will may need to predominate. But the pursuit of one at the expense of the other is likely to harm both individual and community.

Ultimately, collective and individual will interact to generate meaningful existence: 'This is not a conflict or opposition between the individual and the community; it is a cooperative harmony'.[35] Our framework of meaning reflects the organic symbiosis between individual, group, and communal will.

* * *

§36

To review: we have illustrated that the meaning that we experience as we follow a rule is generated and determined through the interplay of individual, group, and communal will. This makes meaning an inherently political phenomenon.

Our use of concepts depends upon maintaining a balanced framework of meaning within an evolving socio-political context – a symbiosis between agent and community. And the normativity that we have identified with the process of following a rule produces this symbiosis.

[35] Hobson, *The Modern State*, p. 21.

Thus, we have demonstrated that meaning is determined by *both* agent *and* community. However, we have not identified whether the process of following a rule is more a matter of choice, or of conformity with convention. We have not distinguished whether individual initiative plays a political role in the way that we build our understanding. We will now consider these issues, as we continue to explore the political properties that ground meaningful behaviour.

V. Rule-Following and the Capacity for Individual Initiative: Agency and Analogy

§37

Using words and concepts to express sense is a dynamic, willed process. An individual agent generates (and does not simply select) a meaningful outcome by following a rule in an *unbounded* language-game.

Throughout, the agent is *guided* by the conventions that are shared across her linguistic community. These conventions constitute the community's framework of meaning: the grammatical structure that distinguishes between meaningful and meaningless practices. Shared conventions enable the agent's actions, and direct her towards specific practices. Crucially, her behaviour is not circumscribed or determined by these conventions; and yet she is impotent without them. The agent depends upon her familiarity with social and linguistic conventions in order to *make sense*.

This dependence appears to compromise the subjective indeterminacy of the agent – to diminish the importance of free choice in the process of following a rule. In effect, the limitations of the agent's training seem to correspond to the limits of her world.[36]

However, this dependence is more apparent than real. There is more to meaning than an educated familiarity with a foundational set of linguistic conventions. And it is possible for an agent to grasp rules without detailed instruction in a specific social convention. In the following sections, we will suggest that meaning can be learned through analogy (through a process of 'sympathetic imagination'). We will explain how

[36] Here, I deliberately echo Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in order to draw a contrast with his later perspective. In later work, he corrects the notion that language represents a system that can be modelled and categorised from the inside, remarking instead upon the way that the use of words and concepts is fundamentally unfixed. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), trans. C. K. Ogden (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 5.6-5.633, pp. 88-9.

the use of analogy helps to ground linguistic agency. And ultimately, we will show that a political norm rooted in individual initiative plays a fundamental part in our experience of meaning.

§38

But before we can elaborate on the political properties of rule-following praxis, we need to remind ourselves of how we come to understand the social conventions of our linguistic community.

In Chapter 3, we noted that we learn rules through explanations, examples, and exercises. Another agent instructs us by *explaining* a rule – by matching a practice to a particular context. If this is not successful, the agent gives us examples, in an attempt to communicate a pattern. We are encouraged to recognise the operation of a consistent rule in these examples. Yet we have only truly understood when we are able to go beyond the examples that we have been given. We have grasped the rule when we demonstrate the ability to follow it: to put the convention into practice without hesitation or uncertainty, in response to an appropriate set of circumstances.

The ability to go beyond the examples – to identify abstract patterns or conventions, to fit them to a particular set of circumstances, and to generate *new* outcomes – is especially significant to any attempt to categorise meaningful behaviour. It illustrates that the process of following a rule depends upon an imaginative faculty that goes far beyond instruction and imitation; that rule-following practice requires the ability to transcend past experience.

§39

Nevertheless, many philosophers and political theorists have suggested that the process of following a rule is simply dependent upon past instruction (on pre-existing familiarity

with convention). Consequently, they have inferred that rule-following theory has overtly conventionalist (or even conservative) implications.

This characterisation has gained credibility (and has become subtly pervasive across the debate) because it is grounded on a sophisticated appreciation of rule-following practice. It reflects many of the political properties of meaning already identified in this chapter. And yet, it misapprehends these properties, and misconstrues the nature of rule-following behaviour more generally.

We need to emphasise the inaccuracies of this characterisation in order to be able construct a more accurate image of the political properties of rule-following practice. If we can discard confusion about the inevitability of custom, then we can begin to understand the political role that imagination and initiative play in meaningful interaction. We can start to project the communal interactions that shape meaning onto a distinctly liberal political culture.

But this is by no means a simple task. The characterisation that we are challenging can be advanced and defended in a stronger or a weaker form. We need to understand both forms, to examine their appeal, and to discredit them in turn, if we wish to understand the political dynamics underwriting rule-following praxis.

Two Conventionalist Characterisations

§40

The stronger characterisation presents a much more robust justification for the claim that agents are wholly dependent upon past instruction in order to generate meaning.

However, it emerges out of a misunderstanding about the way that customary practices seem to determine rules (and rule-following behaviour).

In the previous section, we noted that rule-following theory is grounded upon the constant operation of shared communal conventions. The agent draws upon an *established* framework of meaning as she acts. This framework is enshrined in the past interactions of members of the linguistic community – in the symbiotic interplay of agent and community. The agent is directed by a grammatical framework that is based upon historical uses of words and concepts that have become conventionalised.

This insight provides the basis for confusion. Rule-following philosophy links meaningful behaviour to the socio-linguistic patterns of the past, which *appears* to undermine the idea that meaning emerges through novelty or initiative. This conventionalism is then compounded at a higher level of philosophical analysis. According to the logic of rule-following theory, a community's customary framework also guides the agent's means of critical reflection, making her subject to contingent and historical forms of reflection.[37]

In effect, rule-following theory *seems* to suggest that the agent's apprehension of meaning is predetermined in the (rule-generating) practices of past generations. And if this is in fact the case, then the agent's actions are triply constrained by the communal framework of meaning:

(i) The agent is limited to the conventions that she has been trained to recognise;

(ii) Her actions are dictated when she follows these conventions according to the precedent set by a historical third party; and

[37] As Wittgenstein suggests, our language acts as a picture, supporting our cognition. We cannot think outside of this language. And so the attempt to discover of abstract truth through philosophy is misleading – for all of our thoughts happen within our linguistic conventions. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §125, p. 55.

(iii) The agent is unable to transcend these precedents by developing an external vantage point, from which to critique her received concepts and conventions. In which case, any attempt to marshal truth or rationality in an effort to overturn a parochial framework of meaning is impossible.

Significantly, the latter constraints appear to justify and reinforce the former, thereby establishing an almost impregnable conventionalist line of argument. The agent is dependent upon her past instruction *precisely because* her understanding is inscribed in the customary practices of her linguistic community.

§41

We should note that this characterisation is persuasive, and that it has unambiguous political implications. *Agents are powerless unless they have mastered the conventions that emerge as artefacts of past interactions and cultural practices.*

Both critics and proponents of rule-following theory have suggested that it espouses a conservative perspective, and denies the possibility of progressive reform or revolution. Gellner's critique of ordinary language philosophy contends that it precludes the possibility of rational criticism, undermining any conscious attempt to challenge habitual practices.[38] Nyíri argues that the limitations of critical reflection justify a conservative deference to convention: the system cannot be criticised, for 'All criticism presupposes a form of life, a language, that is, a tradition of agreements; every judgement is necessarily embedded in traditions. That is why traditions cannot be judged'.[39] Neither theorist concedes much opportunity to escape from the dead weight of tradition. Both assume that rule-following is innately resistive to radical redefinition.

[38] Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things*, intro. Bertrand Russell (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1968), p. 249.
[39] J. C. Nyíri, 'Wittgenstein's Later Work in relation to Conservatism', in *Wittgenstein and His Times*, ed. Brian McGuiness (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 59.

It is these charges that contemporary Wittgensteinian political theorists have been so eager to counter. Marxist, feminist, and democratic Wittgensteinians reject the unreflective, conservative characterisation of rule-following practice as unduly reductive.[40] Heyes argues that 'the necessity of working from within particular language-games to inspire critical reflection or effect social change does not obviate critique'.[41] However, the strong conventionalist characterisation remains credible because the options for critical reflection appear to be strictly limited by a set of preconceived grammatical rules. Tradition may not obviate critique, but it fundamentally limits and undermines it.

§42

We can contest the strong conventionalist argument by showing that it is built upon a basic confusion about the nature of our relationship with grammatical rules.

We are not compelled to recreate the past. Novelty and initiative clearly do play a major part in meaningful interaction. Though our grammar (our framework of rules) is the product of contingent and cultural developments, it is not a complete blueprint for our actions; in fact, it incorporates a considerable degree of latitude for free choice, which allows us to reconfigure meaning. Whenever we follow a rule, we select from a plurality of different conventions, arranging them in an original manner to suit our purposes.

True, we are unable to purposely escape culturally-established forms of critical reflection, and reach an objective standpoint – from which to critique our own conventions. And yet, we are never strictly constrained by this limitation. We are not

[40] Heyes, 'Introduction', pp. 3-6; Tully, 'Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection', pp. 27-9; and David R. Cerbonne, 'The Limits of Conservatism: Wittgenstein on "Our Life" and "Our Concepts"', pp. 43-5; in *The Grammar of Politics*. T. P. Uschanov, 'Ernest Gellner's criticisms of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy' in *Marx and Wittgenstein: Knowledge, Morality and Politics*, eds. Gavin Kitching and Nigel Pleasants (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), pp. 23-5.
[41] Heyes, 'Introduction', in *The Grammar of Politics*, p. 6.

tied to one form of critical reflection. As Tully has pointed out, we may choose from among a vast range of critical perspectives, while (consciously or unconsciously) altering these perspectives and creating new patterns of human cognition.[42] When we draw on different critical frameworks in this way, we are able to continuously critique customary practices and make judgements that distinguish between traditional forms of life. Ultimately, we are only really limited if we neglect to employ the multiplicity of critical perspectives that we discover through creative interaction with our set of communal conventions.

Choice and critical reflection are not predetermined by the socio-linguistic patterns of the past. Therefore, the theoretical foundation that supports the stronger form of the conventionalist characterisation is fundamentally untenable. After discarding this theoretical foundation, we are left with nothing other than the assertion that (i) the agent is limited to the conventions that she has been trained to recognise. This is the weaker form of the conventionalist characterisation, and it is to this that we now turn.

§43

The weaker form of the characterisation presents a much less comprehensive claim about the purely conventional nature of rule-following practice. It accepts that we are not compelled by a conservative or customary framework. It does not deny the role of choice in rule-following practice. It merely maintains that our choices, our actions, and our understanding are limited by our past instruction in communal conventions.

Significantly, it is in this *weaker* form that the conventionalist characterisation has proved especially pervasive. Underlying much of the most developed and compelling

[42] Tully challenges the idea that our language has bequeathed one form of critical reflection (one form of rationality) for use in political debate. Tully, 'Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection', p. 41.

writing on rule-following practice, there is an assumption that the ability to follow a specific rule or convention can only be gained through direct instruction or observation.

Lugg wholeheartedly rejects Nyíri's deference to tradition, asserting that 'existing practice constrains how we proceed, but it does not force us to proceed in any particular way'.[43] However, his argument nonetheless rests on the idea that established convention completely defines and delineates meaningful engagement. And Janik simply states more openly what many others tacitly assume: 'To realize any human potential whatsoever we have to learn language and, therefore, to master a plethora of techniques' that enable meaningful action.[44] It is only after we have been trained to follow these techniques that we can begin to consciously alter our practices. Though we can depart from a rule, we *cannot* imagine our way towards a rule without practical instruction.

Janik cites a compelling historical example in support of this characterisation: the populations of Eastern Europe were ultimately unable to maintain the conventions required for democratic government after the First World War because they lacked experience of the practices that upheld these conventions (ironically, the introduction of the *idea* of democracy without any substantive training in democratic practices led to the emergence of populist absolutism in this region).[45] In short, Janik argues that we cannot grasp a rule unless we have been led (through theoretical *and* practical instruction) towards secure knowledge of the rule as a convention. And this characterisation entails a simple political conclusion: if the agent does not possess

[43] Andrew Lugg, 'Was Wittgenstein a Conservative Thinker?', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XXIII, no. 4 (1985), p. 471.
[44] Janik, 'Notes on the Natural History of Politics', p. 108. Other theorists tacitly assume that an agent is limited to the conventions that he has been trained to recognise: see Denis McManus, 'Wittgenstein, Fetishism, and Nonsense in Practice', in *The Grammar of Politics*, pp. 67-72; and John McDowell, *Mind, Value, & Reality* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 238-42.
[45] Janik, 'Notes on the Natural History of Politics', pp. 115-6.

knowledge of the requisite convention, then she is powerless. In effect, 'the substance of the rules we have mastered determines what constrains us politically'.[46]

§44

This weaker form of conventionalism constitutes an empirical assertion about rule-following practice. It does not draw from a comprehensive theoretical justification. This appears to be an advantage. The theoretical propositions that supported the stronger conventionalist characterisation were remarkably persuasive; but ultimately, they were based upon a mistaken assessment of rule-following practice. An empirical assertion stands or falls by its own validity in human interaction. And yet, there are compelling reasons to doubt the assertion in question. The assumption that an agent cannot follow a specific rule (or master a specific convention) unless she has been trained to do so is undermined by the unbounded way that we follow rules; by the original manner in which we express our ideas and construct meaningful sentences within our shared grammar. If we generate meaning by creatively reconfiguring and combining conventions, then it follows that rule-following is not wholly dependent upon past instruction. We cannot be rigidly constrained by our training.

Still, it *might* be argued that this creativity does not eliminate our dependence upon instruction. Janik's characterisation of rule-following practice suggests that we *cannot* deliberately imagine our way towards a pre-existing convention. We need to be trained in a series of specific rules in order to be able to combine a series of concepts into a complex idea. Our capacity for creativity and invention in concept-use is just a function of the vast number of conventions that we have been trained to use (and to weave together). In which case, we are still fundamentally constrained by ignorance. We are

[46] *Ibid*. p. 108.

lost if we step outside the conventions that we have been trained to recognise – as we are when we enter an unfamiliar community, governed by alien mannerisms.

Theorists are divided over this issue. While Gellner has suggested that a Wittgensteinian approach is tantamount to cultural relativism, O'Hear maintains that it is possible to step outside our customary practices and learn from alien traditions, enabling us to critique our established rules.[47] O'Hear makes an important point about the ability to communicate across cultural boundaries. For it is patently not impossible to learn alien mannerisms. As Wittgenstein states in *Philosophical Investigations*, we learn another culture's conventions by finding common ground: 'Shared human behaviour is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language'.[48] In order to find common ground, we make comparisons, note similarities within our own conventions, and try to map our framework of meaning onto unfamiliar interaction. We use *analogy* in order to trace and construct meaning: we *imagine* our way towards conventions.

Analogy

§45

If we examine the role that the use of analogy plays in rule-following practice, then we can begin to develop a clearer understanding of processes that shape (and constrain) meaningful expression. We can demonstrate that shared understanding is underwritten by an innate human capacity for imagination. And we can identify the normative implications that follow from this critical insight.

[47] Gellner, *Words and Things*, pp. 247-9; Anthony O'Hear, 'Wittgenstein and the Transmission of Traditions', in *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, ed. A. Phillips Giffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 56-8.
[48] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 206, p. 88.

The use of analogy is not limited to the translation of ideas between different cultures. It is a foundational part of rule-following practice. Whenever we learn a new rule, we begin by grounding our understanding in a series of examples. We then compare examples, drawing *analogies* in order to identify similarities and patterns. Wittgenstein exemplifies this point in *The Brown Book* by calling to mind a conventional scenario. A pupil is shown a table featuring the words 'hammer', 'pincers', 'saw', and 'chisel', with corresponding pictures.[49] The pupil is encouraged to match the words to the correct pictures, and to use the words to represent these objects. When the pupil has mastered this technique, the word 'plane' is added, along with the corresponding picture. The pupil is not given the same sort of direct instruction, and yet he is encouraged to use the new word in the same manner as the words he has already encountered. The pupil perceives the analogous relationship between word and object, and uses the word 'plane' in the same way as the others. Analogy allows the pupil to move from repetition of concrete examples, to an abstract pattern or rule, to new applications of the rule. And in the same manner, analogy allows us to grasp rules more generally, and then apply them in order to generate new outcomes and new examples.

§46

The use of analogy is intrinsic to rule-following practice. Analogy allows us to learn and apply unfamiliar rules – to share in a common understanding. However, there is a real ambiguity in rule-following theory about the nature of analogy. As Uschanov points out, theorists fundamentally disagree about whether learning a rule (the use of analogy) is a learned convention, or whether it is an innate human ability.[50]

[49] Wittgenstein, 'The Brown Book', pp. 89-90.
[50] Uschanov, 'Ernest Gellner's criticisms of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy', pp. 31-3.

Wittgenstein appears to veer between these two extremes within his writings. He presents both perspectives without definitively endorsing either. This generates an ambiguous impression of the processes underpinning rule-following praxis. Nevertheless, by examining how he presents either side of the debate, we can draw a fairly definitive conclusion about nature of analogy and our dependence upon learned conventions.

Wittgenstein's preoccupation with language-games adds credibility the idea that the use of analogy may simply be a very basic (but important) convention. Writing in *Philosophical Investigations*, he states that 'One ought to ask, not what images are or what goes on when one imagines something, but how the word "imagination" is used'.[51] The process of using analogy in order to imagine a convention or a rule is therefore characterised as a language-game that must be learned like any other.[52] This impression is confirmed later in the text, where he notes that 'you can only learn to calculate in your head by learning to calculate'.[53] Wittgenstein appears quite convinced that rule-learning techniques can only be developed by actively engaging in shared conventions (i.e., that these techniques are not innate – they are simply internalised through practice).

However, this conventionalist characterisation is overturned by a number of important observations in *The Brown Book*. As he confronts the problem of how we are able to learn our most foundational techniques, Wittgenstein reflects that in order to respond to instruction, humans must have an innate ability to translate examples into abstract patterns or rules. We are born with a 'mechanism' that allows us to learn through

[51] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 370, p. 123.
[52] It has no special status – 'Instead of "imaginability", one can also say here: representability in a particular medium of representation'. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 397, p. 127.
[53] Wittgenstein, 'Philosophy of Psychology: A Fragment', in *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 232.

training – to distinguish a rule, and to put this rule into practice.[54] Even complex configurations of rules that overlap one another depend upon this innate mechanism. Though 'The use of a rule can be explained by a further rule', the ability to understand a convention and relate it to a further, justificatory rule ultimately rests upon our intrinsic use of analogy.[55]

§47

Since rule-following theorists have often followed Wittgenstein's lead, few have improved upon his fleeting and inconsistent gesture towards an innate capability for imagination and analogy. However, Winch's work has built upon the position that Wittgenstein reflectively adopts in *The Brown Book* – generating a compelling and consistent argument.

Winch's examination of the difference between rule-following behaviour and habitual and conditioned behaviour illustrates that rule-following practice depends upon an innate (as opposed to a programmatic or conventional) ability to learn or extend a rule. To follow a rule, the agent must go on in the same manner, whilst 'doing something *different* from what one was originally shown'.[56] Crucially, Winch notes that in order to identify how to go on in the same manner, the agent must have a concept of sameness, *and* he must naturally be able to reflect upon how to realise this sameness in a changing context.[57] Because the agent reflects as he acts, his behaviour is fundamentally distinct from habitual and conditioned behaviour:

(i) Whereas conditioned behaviour (or drill) is a robotic, programmed response to stimuli, rule-following behaviour incorporates a conceptual understanding of the

[54] Wittgenstein, 'The Brown Book', p. 97.
[55] *Ibid*. p. 90.
[56] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, p. 56.
[57] *Ibid*. pp. 60-2.

significance of the act in question. (This makes meaningful practice distinct from the actions of a dog that has been conditioned to balance a sugar cube on its nose – the dog must be trained to refrain from eating the sugar cube, and is not psychologically capable of weighing this choice against hypothetical alternatives.) Conscious awareness is an *innate* characteristic of all meaningful behaviour.

(ii) Whereas habitual behaviour simply calls for *conscious repetition* of customary or traditional procedure, rule-following behaviour may require the agent to *reflectively transcend* past practice in order to continue the same rule in a changing context. Following (and extending) a rule may be characterised as a variable, idiosyncratic, and *imaginative* process. This process does not exhibit key properties that we might identify with an internalised conventional procedure: it does not follow a consistent or programmatic pattern. The agent may idiosyncratically reflect on how to apply the rule in a number of distinct ways. Or she may act immediately, without reflection. But the *ability* to reflectively transcend past experience, and locate the rule in a variety of new circumstances, acts as a fundamental prerequisite for rule-following practice. It grounds our understanding of what it means to have mastered a rule.

We can frame this insight within the context of a familiar Wittgensteinian metaphor. We follow a rule as we follow a signpost. On most occasions, we feel as though the signpost tells us where to go. But we still need to be able to reflect on how to follow the signpost, so that we can orient ourselves if the landscape changes dramatically.[58] We also need to be able to identify unfamiliar signposts (new rules), in order to know *how to go on* if we

[58] See Wittgenstein's development of this analogy: Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §85, p. 44.

stray beyond our conventional environment.[59] Our innate capacity for reflection allows us to do so – to learn or to extend a rule by analogy.

The process of identifying and using a rule ultimately rests upon an intrinsic and universal human trait. The reflective 'mechanism' that allows us to deconstruct or recreate a convention through the use of analogy is a natural human capability. Moreover, it is this natural capability, rather than any specific rule, that acts as the precondition for meaningful praxis.

Initiative and Imaginative Sympathy

§48

This insight into the nature of analogy leads us to the third and perhaps most significant political property of meaningful interaction: rule-following practice is *less* dependent upon familiarity with convention than on the individual's innate capacity for choice and initiative. The use of analogy does not require special training. It is not the product of a specific moral system or a comprehensive education. Rather, it is a basic human ability. By drawing upon this foundational ability, any agent can follow a rule within a dynamic context, or master a new convention without instruction.

Rule-following practice *does not* require familiarity with any specific set of conventions, but it plainly does require choice and individual initiative, and the deliberate use of analogy.

[59] As Uschanov suggests, our capacity to engage in different cultures' language-games through shared physical language should not lead us to conclude that rule-following is simply a matter of convention. Our ability to decode signs and apply physical cues to our framework of meaning requires a natural capacity for analogy. If we embrace naturalism (an 'organic, "grammatical" interpretation' of rule-following theory), then we are able to explain the way that conventions *enable* our actions. And we are able to distance our approach from Gellner's argument that a Wittgensteinian approach leads to cultural relativism. Uschanov, 'Ernest Gellner's criticisms of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy', pp. 31-3.

§49

The third political property of language- and concept-use has significant implications for the way that we understand the civic dynamics of a linguistic community. We can employ this new insight in order to build upon our theoretical comprehension of the political processes that balance the competing claims of individual, group, and community.

Rule-following behaviour does not depend exclusively upon past instruction or observation. As individual agents, we have the ability to trace and reconstruct a rule through the use of analogy – to imagine our way towards a communal convention.

Furthermore, this technique is not a learned form of behaviour; it is an intrinsic part of human nature, which grounds meaningful interaction. By drawing upon this foundational capability, we are able to understand an alien convention (an unfamiliar perspective), and imagine a way towards a shared outlook – which acts as a communal framework of meaning. Even if we are ignorant of the views of others, or we find it hard to empathise with unfamiliar reasoning or practices, we are able to overcome the limits of our instruction, to engage with other conventions, and build an innovative and apposite shared understanding through the determined use of analogy.

§50

Working from very different principles, Hobson identified this use of analogy as a basic principle for promoting concord and understanding in the social and political sphere. His characterisation of this phenomenon as ‘imaginative sympathy’ brilliantly captures the way that humans are constantly seeking to find common ground with one another. It embodies the way that we naturally and imaginatively reach beyond our established conventions in order to find a shared foundation for the understanding of words and

concepts. And it aims to encourage individuals to employ the same basic techniques in order to build a shared foundation of social and political understanding.

Hobson notes that an 'eclipse of sympathetic imagination' – a loss of individual judgement and initiative – compromises our willingness to engage with others and to seek understanding, leading to nationalistic behaviour.[60] Yet the unimpeded operation of 'imaginative sympathy' – a 'skilled aptitude for handling the novel' – allows us to flourish in an unfamiliar situation, to see common ground in the midst of disagreement, and to 'handle new opportunities in a creative way'.[61] Imaginative sympathy is a foundational tool, which we may use to reach new insights and to generate a shared perspective. This process is grounded in choice and initiative – and is therefore a normatively-charged mechanism. And yet, it is one that each member of the community may use to understand her compatriots, and to collectively generate the community's shared framework of social, cultural, and political ideas. It is a fundamental part of the New Liberal social ontology.

By applying Hobson's concept of 'imaginative sympathy' to the depiction of meaningful behaviour that we have developed through our examination of rule-following practice, we can enhance our understanding of the way we connect with others to build meaning. We can illustrate how the big ideas that shape the social ontology are grounded in more foundational philosophical processes. And we can perceive that the use of analogy to grasp one another's' meaning is a matter of natural human sympathy, spurred on by human initiative.

[60] Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism*, p. 78.
[61] J. A. Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 30, p. 29.

§51

We have discussed the processes that underpin meaningful behaviour at length. But we have not yet explained the consequences that these processes have within our wider theory. How does our elaboration of the third political property of rule-following practice relate to the rule-following norm? How do analogy and initiative justify the claim that *every agent should have the opportunity to be understood*?

First, the unbounded and creative processes that ground meaningful behaviour validate the universality of the normative claim. All individuals within the community have the innate ability to learn social and linguistic conventions through the use of analogy. Therefore, no one should be excluded from the process of determining and reinventing the way that we use concepts and words in order to make sense. *The grammatical norm acts as a principle of popular inclusion*.

Second, the communal interactions that support these creative processes illustrate the importance of *being understood*. Our framework of meaning relies upon conceptual convergence. This convergence is possible so long as agents are willing to employ imaginative sympathy in order to grasp one another's conventions, and generate new understandings which allow for the future expression and development of ideas. *The grammatical norm acts as a principle of mutual obligation and free expression*.

Third, the use of analogy illustrates that the opportunity to be understood should not be limited to the original or indigenous members of the linguistic community. Any new members are able to learn established conventions, to generate new conventions, and to contribute to the development of a shared grammar. Unfamiliarity with convention is no reason for disqualification from speech and expression. And to argue that an agent cannot participate because she holds a more 'primitive' conception of linguistic

conventions misses a point that Wittgenstein makes very clearly. We would not argue that a language that preceded the invention of calculus was incomplete; that it could not operate as a foundation for a complex and coherent grammar. In the same manner, we should not hold that a grasp of linguistic conventions that lacks one specific technique constitutes a fundamental inadequacy, or a legitimate basis for exclusion.[62] Meaningful interaction demands an inclusive ethos of participation – opportunity for *every agent*, irrespective of background. *The grammatical norm acts as a principle of cosmopolitanism and unprejudiced inclusion*.

§52

This final normative insight begins to move us away from the principles underpinning rule-following practice, towards the social and political norms that govern a meaningful community. The realisation that any agent (irrespective of background) can learn an unfamiliar convention by drawing analogies between this unknown practice and the other conventions that they have encountered leads to a foundational political conclusion: *all agents within the linguistic community are intrinsically qualified for the practice of government*.[63] Whilst an individual may lack knowledge of political concepts, her experience of social conventions will provide the expertise necessary in order to grasp the meaning of political concepts through comparison and analogy. Furthermore, as the individual grows more familiar with the political conventions of the community, she may even come to refine or expand upon these conventions, thereby benefitting the whole community. We will expand on this point in Chapters 5 and 6, but for the moment

[62] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §18, p. 11.
[63] Here, it is important to note that I am not claiming that all agents will naturally be capable of good government. At this point, I restrict my claim to the idea that all agents are naturally qualified to take some part in political rule. In subsequent chapters I will go on to argue that it is only through direct engagement that citizens can learn the art of good governance.

it is important to note that the model of rule-following practice that we have identified and elaborated on at length carries loosely democratic implications.

* * *

§53

So, to review: we have dissected the process of following a rule in detail. We have examined the relationship between convention and choice, and have demonstrated that the assumption that an agent is entirely constrained by past instruction is false. Every agent has the inherent ability to transcend her past experience through the use of analogy. And whilst this can be used to learn new conventions, it is also an ineliminable part of the process of following a rule (it allows each agent to identify a rule and to generate new outcomes).

The use of analogy has significant normative implications. It galvanises our understanding of the rule-following norm, and reveals the political prescriptions that follow on from meaningful interaction. Analogy illustrates that a coherent framework of meaning (which is constantly evolving in response to changing circumstances, but nonetheless maintains a level of conceptual convergence) can be realised through imaginative sympathy – through the willingness to learn one another's conventions, and to imagine a way forward. And it recasts this possibility as a foundational normativity – a drive towards inclusion and mutual understanding. Moreover, because it entails the ability to imagine our way towards unfamiliar conventions, the use of analogy also imparts normative value to creativity, choice, and individual initiative.

These normative components of rule-following praxis combine to support a broader normative commitment to *individuality* and *democratic interaction*. They underwrite the universality our rule-following norm: in order to promote and to maximise communication and understanding, every agent should have the opportunity to be understood.

VI. Agency and Ontology: The Rule-Following Norm Manifested in Everyday Life

§54

Our examination of three political properties of rule-following practice has demonstrated how the process of making sense is determined and shaped by a grammatical normativity. The constant characteristics of meaningful interaction operate together in combination in a way that allows us to grasp meaning, to differentiate between concepts, and to understand how we build, maintain, and reconfigure our shared grammar. And this mode of operation – or normativity – animates understanding and communication.

The structure of this rule-following norm is simple but important: *every agent should have the opportunity to be understood*. It embodies the fundamentally willed nature of rule-following behaviour; the importance of choice and initiative (alongside convention); and the need to determine final meaning by balancing individual, group, and communal will.

When the norm operates, we experience it as *agency*: we feel it in the creativity that comes in understanding/grasping a rule by analogy, in the wilful application of a rule, and in the process of generating (or modifying) meaning through the agreement of the agent and the linguistic community. There is no sense without this agency. It is the lever of a dynamic and evolving interchange of words, ideas and gestures. *And yet, this free and universal intercourse makes sense to us; it is not simply chaotic*. The grammatical normativity that underpins agency maintains a tolerable degree of order and consistency. It grounds our capacity for thought and action.

§55

The grammatical normativity that we have identified supports a broad plurality of rule-following practices. In ordinary life, our sense of agency is coloured by circumstances, and by social, economic, moral, cultural and ideological drives – which advance particular priorities, and motivate us towards specific actions.[64] Nevertheless, the conviction that *every agent should have the opportunity to be understood* remains fundamental to our experience of the phenomenon of meaning. Communication and understanding rest upon a series of logical and normative processes, which stay constant within a changing world.

We can maximise these logical and normative processes by removing impediments to meaningful expression. But in order to accomplish this, we need to prioritise understanding and communication by promoting unbounded forms of concept-use; to endorse and institutionalise the processes that support choice, initiative, and the use of analogy. We need to pursue an inclusive means of regulating the use of language and concepts – which balances individual, group, and community – and incentivise the development of a shared understanding. In effect, we must attempt to realise a foundational normative commitment to individuality, and to democratic interaction.

The New Liberal social ontology reflects this drive towards individuality and democracy. The ontology intuitively incorporates these normative commitments, and explains them by reference to metaphysical explanations and contemporary political developments. By tracing these normative commitments, and by carefully anatomising the rule-following processes that produce them, it has been possible to reconfigure the normative grounds of the social ontology: to establish a *philosophical* understanding, focused on the

[64] The drives act as a form of motivational (as opposed to grammatical) normativity.

democratic, liberal, and organic principle that guides our thoughts and our interactions (the grammatical normativity).

This fusion of ideology and philosophy allows us to establish a compelling and comprehensive theory of human behaviour. The grammatical understanding of meaningful practice substantiates and reconfigures the New Liberal social ontology. And in turn, the ontology provides a clear animus for the pursuit of a particular model of political interaction – a meaningful democracy.

VII. From Normativity to Theory

§56

Within this chapter, we have delineated the normative processes that underpin communication and understanding. Furthermore, we have linked these processes to human agency, and to a broader ontology that defines our relationship with the phenomenon of meaning.

Rule-following behaviour cannot be defined through a purely descriptive methodological approach. The grammatical foundations of rule-following philosophy require the theorist to alternate between description and normativity, and to trace the political processes and civic conditions that allow us to *make sense*. By fixating on the civic status of a contradiction, we can understand an evolving, indeterminate conceptual system.

While contingency plays a major part in distinguishing between what makes sense and what does not, a non-ideal (grammatical) normativity still operates whenever we express ourselves in a meaningful way. The rule-following norm identified in this chapter – *every agent should have the opportunity to be understood* – perfectly embodies this process.

It is a willed process, which balances individual, group, and community will. And it is a free process that requires choice, initiative, and imagination – as well as sympathy for others who would also seek to make themselves understood. The norm promotes individuality, inclusion, and democratic governance; and it forms a strong foundation for a broader understanding of how we follow and modify rules within a social or political context. All of these insights elucidate how we experience meaning, and guide us towards the next step in our theoretical project. In effect, the rule-following norm lays

the foundations for a meaningful politics, grounded in the community's experience of what it means to *make sense*, and to be understood.

Now, we will begin to consider this form of politics. In the next two chapters, we will move towards identifying the social and political characteristics of a community that embodies the rule-following norm effectively – that successfully translates the way that we experience meaning into the political sphere. We will start to develop the democratic form of politics that emerges out of the marriage of New Liberal social and political thought and Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy: Liberal Organic Democracy.

Chapter 5: From Normativity to Ontology – Politics, Self-Realisation, and Civic Flourishing

§1

Over the last couple of chapters, we have begun to reconstruct the New Liberal vision of democracy on much firmer philosophical foundations. By taking the basic features of civic life – the day-to-day experience of concept-use in language, thought, and action – as our starting point, we have been able to develop a broader insight into the nature of meaning. We have established that meaningful engagement can be modelled as the process of following a rule. And, by carefully scrutinising the practice of following (and modifying) a rule, we have been able to uncover the normative foundations that underpin meaningful behaviour.

The rule-following normativity that we have identified has important political properties. Following a rule is a willed and freely-chosen process, mediated between agent and community. Moreover, as Wittgenstein suggests, there are fundamental questions surrounding the 'civic status of a contradiction'.[1] Meaning is subject to disagreement, competition, and shifting group influence. The normative drive to minimise deliberate manipulation of meaning and ensure that *every agent has the opportunity to be understood* carries broadly democratic connotations.

But these properties do not add up to a comprehensive theory of democratic politics. The basic structures of meaning do not automatically translate into a blueprint for

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4th edn. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), §125, p. 55.

political rule. Therefore, we need to do more to demonstrate that our grammatical norm amounts to a political norm; and to indicate how it might serve as a groundwork for democratic politics. We need to re-engage with *the political* in order to demonstrate that our argument really does help to reconstruct and redevelop a forgotten but meaningful vision of popular self-government.

§2

In the first part of this chapter, we will establish the political dimensions of the rule-following norm – and contend that it is not simply a linguistic normativity, but also a broader framework of political interaction, directing and shaping a social ontology. Foremost, we will examine the political function of the rule-following norm, drawing on theoretical insights developed over the course of the previous chapter. Then, we will consider the impact of this rule-following norm on the aspects of human behaviour that we conventionally define as political (i.e. the arena of the distinctly *political* community – rather than the wider *linguistic* community).

We will confront a countervailing argument advanced by Hanna Pitkin that seeks to separate politics and language and prevent the application of rule-following norms to the political sphere. In order to overcome this countervailing argument, and explain how the rule-following norm might shape our political and constitutional framework, we will consider how the norm provides a comprehensive philosophical explanation for human behaviour and development – walking it through the broad cultural principle of self-realisation advanced by New Liberal theorists. In the process, we will establish the theoretical basis for the organic social ontology.

Thereafter, we will scrutinise this ontology, demanding to know why we should follow it. We will examine its nature, determining whether it is an instrumental or an evaluative

phenomenon. And we will address a competing conception of the organic social ontology contained within Social Darwinist thought. Ultimately, we will illustrate the primacy of the New Liberal social ontology, and explain its pivotal role as the foundation of a comprehensive theory of democratic politics.

I. The Political Normativity

§3

The rule-following norm that we identified in the last chapter circumscribes a democratic form of interaction, characterised by popular inclusion, free expression, and non-discrimination. If we take this *democratic* characterisation to be political in the broadest possible sense, then we appear to have generated a theoretical framework for popular self-government. But this generalisation is methodologically lazy – and assumes an outcome that is (thus far) theoretically unfounded.

The democratic form of interaction that we have described relates to thought, language, and action, and does not deal with a conventionally political subject-matter (i.e. constitutional design, ideology, and the development of public policy). We need to examine the norm more carefully in order to determine whether or not the civic relations that structure meaningful engagement may also be understood – and subsequently employed – as a normative groundwork for *political* interaction.

The Political Dimensions of the Rule-Following Norm

§4

What makes the normativity that drives rule-following practice distinctly *political*?

To answer this question, we could point out that the norm balances the influence of individual, group, and community, thereby establishing a balance of power between different agents. We could emphasise that the norm demonstrates the importance of self-determination. Furthermore, we could highlight the role that the norm plays in

mediating between conflicting interpretations, and encouraging collective decision-making.

Engagement with these issues might conventionally be characterised as normative ethics. However, as we noted in the previous chapter, the flexibility and contingency that have been incorporated into rule-following theory colour all of the theory's normative prescriptions with a distinctly political character. The rule-following norm does not model the way that we determine meaning using a fixed ethical relation. Rather, it identifies a procedural principle that reflects the dynamic influence of individual and community in a changing political forum.

We can add another dimension to this characterisation by noting that the norm imposes a tolerable degree of order and consistency upon our everyday language-use, while enabling us to contest or to collaboratively alter our linguistic conventions. The grammatical norm does not simply play a static, definitional role. It allows us to coordinate with others in order to shape language and thought within a highly contested conceptual environment.

Taken together, these insights illustrate that the rule-following norm fulfils distinctly political-ethical and political-epistemic functions – which facilitate the ordinary use of concepts.

§5

Plainly, meaningful engagement does not arise out of a depoliticised pattern of civic interaction. The civic dimensions of a contradiction raise a resolutely political problem. As we confront this problem through grammatical conventions and innovations, we are guided by a *political* model of communicative praxis.

Translating Norms From Language to Politics?

§6

The rule-following norm delineates a basic *politics of grammar*. We orient ourselves within a shared framework of meaning by drawing on a fundamentally political normativity. The rule-following norm is intrinsic to every language-game that we play. But this does not mean that the norm provides a suitable model for political life.

Hanna Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice* (1972) offers an astute analysis of Wittgenstein's work – arguing that meaning is rooted in grammatical regularities or norms, which reflect the realities of human activity or 'forms of life'.[2] Nevertheless, she is deeply sceptical about whether we can translate norms that circumscribe rule-following behaviour into the political sphere.

Pitkin emphasises that participation in the political community is different from participation in the broader linguistic community. Further, she argues that the artificial and interchangeable nature of constitutional structures means that the rules governing language and sense should not be taken as a model for the rules of politics:

> ...political membership is not like membership in a language group, or a culture, or even a society. It is true, of course, that part of the culture we internalize – the behaviour patterns, manners, values, standards, and language – is relevant to political life, forms our "political culture." And clearly the political culture we have acquired, the political selves we have become, undergird everything we subsequently do in politics: what we will want to do, how we will perceive political events, what political means will

[2] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1972), p. 132.

> be possible for us, and so on. But they are not the whole of politics, and they do not characterize what is distinctive about it.[3]

Her theoretical objections raise a powerful counterargument against the direct application of rule-following theory to political life – and pose fundamental questions about how we define *the political*. Pitkin acknowledges that language plays an important role in political culture. Nevertheless, she insists that there is no automatic progression from the mechanisms of rule-following theory to the principles of political life.

In the following sections, we will trace the philosophical foundations of Pitkin's position. As we examine her understanding, we will reflect on the connection between politics and language by tracing the stratification of different regions of language, emphasising the loose correspondence between political and grammatical norms, and advancing a more indirect, formative relation between language and politics. In the course of our investigation, we will come to a conclusion about how best to employ the grammatical normativity across an expansive, political canvas.

Regions of Language

§7

Pitkin's scepticism is grounded in a grammatical understanding of human interaction. She seeks to engage with Wittgenstein's ideas; and in response to his analysis, she adopts an unusually thick characterisation of language rooted in communicative practice. Her approach defines language very broadly to include spheres of linguistic *and* cultural interaction. As a consequence, she uses language, culture, custom, and education interchangeably (and at times ambiguously) as she draws comparisons

[3] *Ibid*. p. 201.

between: (i) a diffuse conception of language, and (ii) a more focused conception of politics (rooted in the specific characteristics of civic life).[4] The following analysis accepts this basic dichotomy, merely adding that a Wittgensteinian understanding of language extends beyond traditional linguistic and cultural phenomenon, to all forms of meaningful interaction.

§8

Pitkin's position is bolstered by a series of critical observations about the functional differences between language and politics. However, her argument is principally rooted in the contention – borrowed from the work of Wittgenstein's student, Friedrich Waismann – that politics circumscribes a distinct set of procedures and activities from language- and concept-use.

Waismann's theory of language introduces a formal distinction between spheres of life. He rejects the notion that 'all statements are on the same level and are constructed according to a simple and uniform plan'.[5] He explains that any attempt to reduce language to a series of interchangeable 'atomistic propositions' distorts the differences that exist between different types of discourse. And he proposes grouping 'all those sentences which are homogeneous, i.e. which logically behave in the same way' into the same *strata* of language, in order to differentiate between different systems of thought and practice.[6]

Thus, Waismann contends that each rule-governed area of life (including ordinary linguistic expression, historical discourse, scientific analysis, etc.) constitutes a distinct

[4] For conflation or interchangeable use, see Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pp. 194-5; p. 201; p. 203.
[5] Friedrich Waismann, *How I See Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 101.
[6] *Ibid*. p. 99. Waismann uses the expression 'language strata', which Pitkin translates as 'regions of language'. Ultimately, it is Pitkin's argument that interests us most; so it is this conception that we will examine at length.

region of language, bounded by a distinct set of second-order rules. When a difference of opinion emerges, the procedure that is followed will be quite dissimilar in the two regions of language that we call arithmetic and history.[7] In the first instance, the truth is established deductively. In the latter case, it is established by the much less direct process of interviewing the relevant witnesses, interrogating the evidence, weighing up conflicting testimony, and establishing a judgement. In each instance, a specific *logic* – or set of second-order rules – defines (and lends determinate content to) a distinct region or discourse.

The normative connotations of this logical variation are striking. *Although contradictions arise in all forms of interaction, the decision-mechanisms for resolving contradictions vary significantly between different rule-governed areas of life.* Therefore, a grammatical norm that determines 'the civic status of a contradiction' *would not* (and *could not*) apply across all spheres of human activity.

§9

Waismann's differentiation of regions of language emphasises the normative difference between forms of rule-following behaviour without establishing any fundamental separation between politics and grammar. However, Pitkin's argument outlines a much thicker conception of regions of language – with more sweeping theoretical implications. She contends that politics entails an *essential* (distinct and determinate) model of normative experience, and warns that 'To interpret political life entirely on the model of language, culture patterns, morality, or education is to obscure this crucial difference, and thereby to endanger both politics itself and political freedom'.[8] This distinction introduces a hard theoretical demarcation between regions of language.

[7] See Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pp. 145-9.
[8] *Ibid*. p. 203.

Pitkin's interpretation effectively insulates politics from everyday interaction. Temelini has countered that the demarcation of language (in political life) and the activity of politics 'is at odds with Wittgenstein's basic thesis that language is social practice, a form of life, which is to say that the boundary between language and the practice of politics is blurred'.[9] The drive to distinguish between regions of language certainly appears counterintuitive, given Wittgenstein's opposition to essentialism. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see how a hard stratification might be defended. Wittgenstein's emphasis on behaviour means that if we behave in a manner that distinguishes regions of language, then we must take this distinction seriously.

Pitkin's characterisation of the relation between politics and grammar grows out of the structural and normative differences between politics and everyday interaction. Yet we might reasonably question whether Pitkin is exaggerating the importance of this distinction, and overlooking the normative and descriptive similarities between politics and language. In the following section, we will examine the correspondence between political and grammatical frameworks in order to evaluate the relevance of rule-following theory in political life.

Politics and Language

§10

The introduction of a categorical distinction centred on regions of language calls attention to the central paradox of political practice. Politics is a form of rule-following behaviour (like all forms of meaningful engagement). Therefore, it is subject to grammatical rules governing sense and coherence. Nevertheless, *there is no perfect*

[9] Michael Temelini, *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2015), p. 21.

identity between the range of activities and institutions that we conventionally associate with politics, and the range of grammatical exercises and cultural discourses that we conventionally associate with language and meaning.

Politics represents a limited (but indeterminate) set of rule-following practices and institutions – which cannot be dissolved into the broader dynamics of everyday interaction. We cannot assume that politics operates according to the same norms as ordinary language. But we can examine the normative correspondence between politics and language.

§11

Let's consider the possibility that even though the normative pressures that drive politics are by nature distinct, the grammatical norm provides an excellent model for political interaction. *There is a close correspondence between politics and language-use. Political interaction follows an unbounded grammatical pattern. Therefore, the grammatical normativity that shapes language and culture may be translated across into the political arena.*

This proposition paints a nuanced picture of the relation between politics and language. It enshrines the practical and normative distinctiveness of politics, without extrapolating this difference into a rigid theoretical framework. Thus, it precludes any attempt to bind the indeterminate body of conventions that define politics to a fixed constitutional structure. And it models the dynamics of politics using the fluid, contingency-sensitive normativity that we identified in Chapter 4.

In short, the parallels between politics and language appear to justify a grammatical approach. Nonetheless, Pitkin's analysis raises two major obstacles to a straightforward correspondence between politics and everyday interaction. First, she challenges the

assumption that politics should be modelled using a grammatical framework. Second, she argues against the direct translation of linguistic norms into political life. We must address each of these obstacles in turn.

§12

Foremost, we will consider the claim that politics should be modelled using a grammatical framework. The parallels between the rule-following norm and political practice are open to question at the most basic, molecular level. All forms of interaction (all language-games) operate according to a series of rules. Any set of interactions that is *not* limited to a determinate set of outcomes follows an unbounded, grammatical pattern. But a set of interactions that has been deliberately designed to frame action within a narrow set of determinate outcomes does not correspond to this loose grammatical framework. It follows a bounded, systematic pattern.

Many political systems are dominated by a bounded structural component – chiefly in the form of a fixed set of institutions or regimented procedure of constitutional rule. Yet this contrasts with the largely unbounded pattern of ordinary conversation, inviting uncertainty about whether politics can be modelled using a grammatical framework grounded in language- and concept-use.

§13

Pitkin's argument fixates on this point. Her analysis turns upon an extended discussion of the similarities between rule-following theory and conventionalist explanations of political development (ranging from Marx and Engels' historical materialism to Rousseau's theory of the general will).[10]

[10] Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pp. 197-200.

She acknowledges that one of the chief *descriptive* advantages of a grammatical explanation of politics is its ability to weave a disjointed series of idiosyncrasies into a cohesive political whole (echoing Marx's social explanation of historical change):

(i) Though individual actions may be at cross-purposes, their interaction produces unintended, patterned consequences – just as individual speech acts combine in order to build the pattern of a meaningful language.[11] A grammatical model helps to frame the complex reality of public interaction within a coherent theoretical framework.

And yet, she maintains that a grammatical explanation of politics provides insufficient insight into the political process *at a normative level*:

(ii) Shifting the discussion towards social contract theory, Pitkin suggests that politics provides a forum for deliberate, comprehensive, and systematic change – in sharp contrast to the more gradual and uncoordinated change that characterises linguistic development. Though politics is defined by revolutionary collective action, 'People simply do not stage linguistic revolutions, draft new linguistic patterns, or band together in a new language group'.[12]

Pitkin concludes that an account that is rooted in political culture is inadequate because it fails to address a crucial element that defines politics – the systematic development of political norms.

[11] And give direction to language-drift; Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pp. 197-8.
[12] Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pp. 201.

§14

Pitkin's analysis makes an important point about the artificial nature of political norms. But it does not prove that politics should be modelled using a systematic theoretical framework. We build political systems in order to frame behaviour within a fixed structure of overarching rules. Yet, though we appear to think and act within the constraints of a bounded system, we are constantly forced to redefine the boundaries of that system in response to new challenges and new situations (i.e. to operate at a grammatical level).

Grammatical understanding always entails a degree of systematic thought. In order to build meaningful sentences and express ourselves to others within the linguistic community we need to draw on conventional structures – specific syntaxes or systems of expression – within an unbounded grammatical framework. In much the same manner, as we engage with different parts of our political system, we draw on institutional and ideological structures that form part of a much larger sphere of political interaction.

Yet our ability to think within this larger sphere of political interaction means that we are not constrained by the limits of our political system. When we argue about the theoretical foundations of political rule, we weigh one constitutional system against the other. We acknowledge a plurality of different systems, resting on an overlapping cluster of political structures. We are able to think and act in relation to politics within a much broader, grammatical framework.

§15

If we accept that a grammatical framework incorporates (and explains) deliberate and systematic change, then we can begin to demonstrate the relevance of this

understanding of rule-following practice. Modelling politics on a grammatical – rather than a systematic – framework has a number of distinct theoretical advantages.

Systems help to ground our understanding and orient our actions. But they may also hold us captive within a dominant set of norms. Crucially, a systematic understanding does not give us a general overview of political experience. By contrast, an anti-systematic, grammatical understanding of politics allows us to shift between the normative perspective of the political system and a descriptive account of the *process* of defining and building political systems – generating a more comprehensive (and intersubjective) insight into political life.

At the descriptive level, the grammatical model of politics allows us to trace the development of broader trends in public rule. It acknowledges the existence of a plurality of political systems within an evolving grammatical framework. And it reveals a contingent conceptual structure, which enables external developments (in language, morality, aesthetics, etc) to be absorbed into political discourse. And at the normative level, a grammatical understanding reflects the fact that politics is a grammatical enterprise. It is *the art of the possible*: centred on the construction of different patterns of government, and the coordination of norms, priorities, and conflicts within the community.

§16

We will now turn to the much thornier issue of translation between politics and language. Even if we grant the utility of a grammatical perspective in political theory, there is no reason to assume that the loose patterns that define language, culture, and everyday interaction automatically correspond to the more specific dynamics of political association. Pitkin's argument is primarily concerned with this problem. She

acknowledges the value of a grammatical methodology in political theory (and employs a Wittgensteinian analysis in the latter half of *Wittgenstein and Justice*), while rejecting any attempt to transpose a linguistic and cultural grammar into political life.

§17

Pitkin presents three major objections to the idea that politics can be modelled on linguistic and cultural terms, which may be countered in turn.

First, she argues that language is automatic and conventional, while 'the role and character of political change is quite different: it is collective, public, rather than individual, and it is at least partly deliberate and intentional'.[13] This characterisation appears to overlook the fact that language-change can be swift, organised and deliberate, without being substantively political – a point that we discussed at length in Chapter 4.

Second, Pitkin suggests that the application of linguistic norms to politics neglects the roles played by conflict, power, and interest in political interaction: 'Rarely if ever does some individual or group have a serious stake in the maintenance or alteration of linguistic patterns. Rarely if ever is change in language effected or prevented by the exercise of power'.[14] This pre-Foucauldian argument looks less credible in light of more recent analysis of the way that discourse shapes power. Foucault's work contradicts Pitkin's depoliticised characterisation of language – pointing out that 'discourses' and 'gestures' are components of subjectification, and situating power in the normative

[13] *Ibid*. pp. 203-5.
[14] *Ibid*. p. 202.

patterns of everyday interaction: 'power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted "above" society as a supplementary structure'.[15]

Third, she asserts that the mechanisms of enforcement are very distinct in language and politics. 'The regularities of cultural patterns and language are internalized' while politics relies on both internal and external enforcement (i.e. by individual and government).[16] This argument overlooks the role of standardised knowledge in the modern state. It ignores the development of national curricula, and organisations such as the Académie française, which blur the boundaries between internal and external enforcement of linguistic norms.

Pitkin argues that these three objections illustrate that membership of the linguistic community involves different criteria from membership of the political community. Evidently, the cumulative impact of these objections falls short of the comprehensive distinction that she claims. Nonetheless, it is hard to shake her wrinkle about membership. Membership of a linguistic community is not synonymous with membership of a political community. And this fact casts doubt on the direct application of a conventionalist approach (rooted in the principle of following a rule) to politics.

§18

Pitkin's objections raise a number of general (though by no means determinate) differences between politics and language. And she mobilises these general differences in order to suggest a normative disparity between politics and language/education/culture:

[15] Michel Foucault, 'Two Lectures' in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (Harlow: Longman, 1980), p. 98; Michel Foucault, 'Afterword: The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), p. 222.
[16] Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, p. 202.

> There are spheres of human life, like language, where all norms are internalized so that they become our way of self-expression. There are other spheres where norms are internalized, but inner conflict is also possible, and impulse or interest run counter to the dictates of those norms; morality, I think, is such a sphere. Political life has underpinnings of both of these kinds, but crucial and distinctive aspects of it are different from either, involving not internalized, implicit norms, but explicit ones, consciously adopted and externally enforced.[17]

Furthermore, she contends that if we turn away from the linguistic model of rule-following practice, we can see that politics marks a middle path between norms of scientific and moral discourse. She casts this intermediacy as a struggle between the institutional form and the philosophical substance of government; between proponents of political science and champions of philosophical idealism:

> On the one side, there begins to emerge a picture of politics that is participatory and democratic, equalitarian rather than hierarchical... a politics that centers on action, and does not hesitate to call traditional institutions into question. On the other side, there emerges a different picture: a stress on the role of hierarchy, organization, and elites in politics; a linkage between political rationality and support for traditional institutions; a stress on power and the conflict of interests...a politics in which men relate by bargaining, propaganda, and manipulation.[18]

But as compelling as this framework seems, her analysis cannot help returning to the basic elements that define rule-following practice: action, convention (tradition),

[17] *Ibid*. p. 203.
[18] *Ibid*. pp. 208-9.

linguistic manipulation, and the norms that circumscribe engagement with the discourse or the debate. Pitkin's premature rejection of the correspondence of political and grammatical norms leads her to overlook the common ground that politics shares with language, culture, and everyday interaction.

§19

Nevertheless, the wholesale application of a linguistic grammar to politics would clearly compromise the normative distinctiveness of political rule. Politics is characterised by preoccupation – and conflict – over the basic problem of how to determine the details (and limits) of political rule. As Pitkin suggests, a survey of political activity demonstrates 'a plurality of legitimate views' about how to make a political decision.[19] Each view presupposes an underlying political framework: 'If one says that there are no generally recognized experts...one seems to be presupposing a democratic, participatory model. If one proclaims instead the universality of political elites, the significance of authority and hierarchy in political life, one seems to be presupposing an elitist model'.[20]

Competition between these different frameworks is not incidental; it is written into the structure of political interaction. Citizens vie for control over the theoretical and practical institutions of politics, because they understand that these institutions define which rule-following practices fall into the domain of political action. The dynamic struggle to decide how to resolve a contradiction is an *intrinsic part* of political interaction – and this distinguishes politics from other areas of rule-following behaviour.

Politics is defined by an *interchangeable* set of second-order rules (regimes/theories/ideologies) – which does not necessarily track onto the democratic preconditions for maximising meaningful engagement in language- and concept-use.

[19] *Ibid*. pp. 205-6.
[20] *Ibid*.

Furthermore, the process of political contestation invariably leads to rule-change and divergence from a fixed normative template. Hence, any attempt to impose the grammatical norm onto all forms of politics is bound to fail.

§20

Direct translation from language (or from scientific or moral discourse) to politics undoubtedly misses some of the major functional distinctions between different forms of rule-following practice. Any straightforward attempt to import the norms and hierarchies that define one region of language (i.e. linguistic grammar) into another (i.e. political grammar) would be naive and ineffective. However, this objection does not amount to a philosophical prohibition on the translation of *specific* (and appropriate) norms between language and politics.

Pitkin's position is expressed in a hard theoretical distinction between regions of language. Yet this distinction ultimately overestimates the normative divergence between politics and language. There *is* a fundamental structural difference between political and linguistic interaction. But this structural difference has no *determinative* impact on political norms. Politics entails the opportunity to effect systematic change – i.e. to select and build a new political system around a fixed set of procedural norms. And this potential for conscious self-determination undermines the conclusion that structural differences justify a hard *normative* distinction between spheres of language, or prevent a political community from adopting the democratic, grammatical norm as a basic framework for politics.

* * *

§21

At this point, we will take a moment to review our analysis of the way that politics is shaped by language- and concept-use. We noted that politics does not directly track onto the rule-following norm. While there are clearly parallels between politics and language, it is misleading to pretend that the single rule-following norm neatly encompasses the plurality of normative priorities that drive political conflict (ranging from distributive justice to social recognition).

Yet we have also called into question Pitkin's hard distinction between regions of language, on the grounds that a community can redefine their political system in the context of a grammatical framework. Our examination of Pitkin's argument has touched on what it means to apply the rule-following norm as a model for politics. Evidently, a Wittgensteinian theoretical approach should not simply impose the grammatical norm on the political arena (thereby reducing a plurality of political systems to a single grammatical template). But we should not accept a hard theoretical distinction that caricatures the normative distinctiveness of politics, and overlooks the role of linguistic and cultural mechanisms in political definition. Pitkin is unable to resolve the complex relationship between politics and grammar; to explain how politics relates to the rule-following norm.

Plainly, the notion of regions of language grants a limited insight into the connection between politics and language. But if we shift discussion onto the degree of normative correspondence between *parallel grammars*, then we are able to think about this complex relationship using a more fine-grained and flexible theoretical framework. Political and linguistic interactions mark out grammatical patterns, which may be overlaid and compared in order gain a dynamic understanding of a seemingly

paradoxical connection. As we continue to investigate the correspondence between politics and the rule-following norm, we will expand on this simple idea.

II. A Grammar of Self-Realisation

§22

Once we discard the hard stratification of regions of language, we can consider the possibility that language and culture exercise an indirect, formative influence over political norms. *The grammatical normativity acts as a groundwork for social and political life. It enables political thought, communication, and action. As a consequence, it shapes the foundations of political rule.*

Rule-following normativity offers a means to develop a foundational model of politics that is rooted in convention, but not constrained by it. Cultural and linguistic patterns exert an indirect (and non-determinative) influence over political interaction. So the norm operates obliquely, through the interconnectedness of different forms of life. In the following section, we will consider the connection between parallel grammars in order to demonstrate the interdependence of language and politics, and trace the impact of the rule-following norm on human development.

Interdependence, Human Development, and the Foundations of Ontology

§23

A hard stratification between spheres of life is challenged by our experience of political interaction. In ordinary debate about policy and governance, we blend discussion of political, social, economic, and moral issues together without a second thought to the *distinctive characteristics* of politics.

Abstracting from ordinary discourse brings us no closer to conceptual purity. Theorists are openly divided about how to define the political; and yet their disagreements highlight the complex and interdependent grammar surrounding the subject:

(i) Contemporary analytical theorists routinely blur the boundaries between politics and ethics as they seek to determine a just distribution of power and resources.[21]

(ii) Nietzsche presents a very different vision of politics aspiring to a position 'beyond good and evil' (i.e. beyond morality) – which aims to link politics to aesthetics through the cultivation of those 'who are strong and original enough to give impetus to opposed valuations and initiate a revaluation and reversal of "eternal values"'.[22]

Taken individually, each of these approaches advances a distinct understanding of the political, without creating an impermeable boundary to other theoretical discourses. Taken side by side, they underscore the indeterminacy and malleability of our political understanding. Granted, politics may also be framed in far more rigid and autonomous conceptual terms:

(iii) Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* (1932) defines politics existentially according to the antithesis of friend and enemy.[23] It assigns a great degree of autonomy to the category of the political – defining is as the strongest of several conceptual spheres.

[21] See, for example, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edn. (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1999).
[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, eds. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), §4, p. 7; §203, p. 91.
[23] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (1932), trans. George Schwab (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), p. 26.

Yet even from this extreme viewpoint, Schmitt admits that the political antithesis frequently draws from the antitheses of other conceptual categories such as religion, economics, ethics, and culture. Even if we assume a quite distinctive arena of political life, it would be wrong to conclude that politics functions independently of all other types of interaction.

The artificial stratification of spheres of activity is undermined by investigation of the way that we think about political problems. If we allow that parallel grammars of interaction are not fundamentally separate, then we must acknowledge the interrelation of different normative mechanisms within a shared cultural framework. Political decision-makers draw upon moral, judicial, aesthetic, economic, and linguistic procedures as they seek to resolve conflicts in the political arena.

§24

The overlapping of normative mechanisms establishes a constitutive link between politics and language. But we need to elaborate on this link in order to explain *how* the rule-following norm acts as a model for political engagement. The grammatical norm that guides language, thought, and praxis plays an important epistemic role in directing the community's theoretical framework – channelling motivational normativity into concepts, words, and forms of meaningful engagement.

Critically, the role of this normativity should not be overstated. Political thought, communication, and action depend upon the grammatical norm. But politics simultaneously limits the realisation of the grammatical norm. The interrelation of politics and language transcends any *simple* determinative relation.

§25

Elaboration of normative overlap illustrates the tangled causality of cultural, linguistic, and political interaction. Nevertheless, we should not suppose that this inter-determination leads to a theoretical dead end. Normative entanglement does not result in a random jumble of diverging norms. Indeed, the opposite is true. The holistic interdependence of different spheres of life finds expression in an amorphous nexus of social activity. Advances in language, education, art, religion, morality, psychology, philosophy, science, and politics drive advances across the field.

Within such a broad nexus of activity, it is difficult to determine how (and to what degree) the rule-following norm shapes the direction and pace of human development. But it is easy to distinguish a basic interrelation that governs the loose pattern of change. Parallel grammars of human interaction are linked within an *overarching grammatical relation*. This relation is fundamentally *fluid*, meaning that no individual grammar is *entirely determinative* or *entirely distinctive*.

This is a complicated and abstract theoretical idea. To explain it, we will turn to an illuminating example drawn from the canon of political thought. Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) builds an encyclopaedic picture of political societies around a recurring tripartite division (centred on republics, monarchies, and despotisms).[24] Over the course of the text, Montesquieu explores an expansive series of political, sociological, and physical subjects, ranging from constitutions and manners to climate and terrain. His theme is the culmination of all of these subjects, 'the spirit of the laws', the 'various relation that laws may have with various things'.[25]

[24] Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller & Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[25] *Ibid*. I.1, p. 9.

In each section, Montesquieu traces how these different aspects of political society reflect and reinforce his core tripartite model. Yet he is careful to avoid attributing a universal (and enduring) influence to any single factor:

> Many things govern men: climate, religion, laws, the maxims of government, examples of past things, mores, and manners; a general spirit is formed as a result...To the extent that, in each nation, one of these causes acts more forcefully, the others yield to it.[26]

Montesquieu notes that no single aspect (or circumstance) fully explains social development. The character of the state is framed within a series of parallel and related grammars (Arab communities are dominated by climate and terrain, while France is largely shaped by mores and institutions, and England is the product of the dynamic fusion of rainy island outlook *and* a peculiar liberty-loving constitution).[27] The overall impact of any individual grammar is indeterminate; constitutional, religious, moral, economic, and social norms prevail in different circumstances. And yet, all grammars invariably fit together into a broader coherence-relation (a flexible but recurrent pattern – such as Montesquieu's tripartite division of forms of government).

This overarching grammar – or 'spirit of the laws' – is sensitive to contingency, particularity and exception. It provides a fine-grained descriptive tool for disentangling the interrelation of normative mechanisms within an evolving political framework. At

[26] *Ibid*. XIX.4, p. 310.

[27] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, XVIII.19, p. 294; V.10, pp. 56-7, XIV.12-13, p. 242. Obviously, Montesquieu did not conceive of his theoretical analysis as a grammatical framework. But he did advance an indeterminate model of the spirit of the laws that cannot be reduced to a systematic political theory. Though he attributes a particular role to mores or 'principles' (which tighten 'all the springs of government') he: (i) is mindful of exceptions to the simple tripartite division of virtue, honour, and fear (Sparta: larceny, England: liberty); (ii) overlays his tripartite distinction with a more particular framework citing a unique purpose of each state; (iii) reminds his audience of the influence of other factors in maintaining or shaping a regime independently of the mores (i.e. religion in Spain, laws in Japan). Montesquieu's major contribution is to model politics in a way that is not purely empirical or normative; to trace an unbounded grammatical relation. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, XI.5, p. 156; IV.6, p. 36, XIX.4, p. 310, II.4, p. 18.

the same time, it charts a broad pattern of configuration and change, anchored in culture, convention and circumstance.

§26

One fundamental problem remains: the shape of this broader coherence-relation is unclear. Montesquieu's work helps to elucidate the dynamic, interdependent relationship between grammars in a very general sense.[28] Nevertheless, the theoretical model advanced by New Liberal theorists addresses this ambiguity – pointing to an all-encompassing philosophical explanation for human development.

New Liberal theory outlines a holistic conception of human society, extending across distinct spheres of social and cultural activity. In his discursive writings, Hobson opposes the theoretical division of political, social, and economic life, emphasising the organic interdependence of social phenomena.[29] Material and intellectual pursuits cannot be treated in isolation. For as Hobson makes plain, the adequate provision of economic and social needs is a necessary precondition for 'self-development in life and work…realisation of spiritual and intellectual opportunity'.[30]

The healthy development of one sphere of social activity depends upon the healthy development of *all* areas of social life. Hobhouse insists that 'one-sided progress cramps as much in one direction as it liberates in another. True development is not in metaphor but in essentials comparable to organic growth'.[31] Innovations can emerge in any sphere of social activity. Nonetheless, such innovations only exercise a determinative influence

[28] We inevitably reject Montesquieu's tripartite distinction as a blueprint for change when we come to reflect that the modern political and cultural community is less defined by a strict hierarchy of rule, and is more preoccupied with individual and communal development.
[29] J. A. Hobson, 'Preface', in *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1909), p. xii.
[30] Hobson, 'The Vision of Liberalism', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, p. 94.
[31] L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings*, ed. James Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 164.

over the broader pace and direction of human development if they tend towards the overall cohesion and flourishing of the whole.

New Liberal thought traces holistic unity within the complex and amorphous nexus of social activity. Human development is not random; rather, it is generated by the *organic* principle of self-realisation that drives the New Liberal ontology. In Chapters 1 and 2, we outlined this organic principle in New Liberal thought. In Chapter 3, we traced a descriptive understanding of meaningful interaction onto the ontology. In the following section, we will marry these ideas under the grammatical normativity that we set out in Chapter 4. As we move forward, we progress from parallel grammars to the unifying principle of grammatical change – from normativity to ontology.

Self-Realisation and the Organic Social Ontology

§27

The organic metanarrative that extends throughout the writings of New Liberal theorists acts as an intuitive framework for explaining – and driving – social, political, and economic development. This metanarrative was primarily expounded in abstract ethical and metaphysical forms (following Hegel, Darwin, and late-Victorian moral discourse). But in the hands of successive New Liberal writers, the philosophical principle took on a more concrete character – extending to all aspects of society, culture, and politics, and to the pressing economic issues of inequality and industrial development. Hobson pushed the notion further than most, drawing particular emphasis towards aesthetics – adding a strong metaphorical component into a burgeoning philosophical framework. As the New Liberals built layer upon layer of social detail, the abstract principle of

organicism was progressively expanded into an all-encompassing ontological understanding.

In its primary form, the organic ontology draws from the Hegelian principle of self-realisation. This *ethical* principle models the symbiotic relationship between individual and state within a holistic theoretical framework. Hobhouse suggested that 'The ideal society is conceived as a whole which lives and flourishes by the harmonious growth of its parts, each of which in developing on its own lines and in accordance with its own nature tends on the whole to further the development of others'.[32] Hobson echoed this ethical conception, claiming that 'In the strong and really efficient personality the "socialisation" of the will is an essential of extreme importance', enabling the citizen to 'become more individual than the individualist of commerce'.[33] New Liberal writers thus argued that the drive towards reform was mandated by the moral potential of the unrealised self.

Elsewhere, the New Liberals expanded this organic principle of self-realisation into a more general *functional explanation* rooted in welfare. Hobson's writings on equality of opportunity explain how 'access to knowledge and culture' through education enables 'personal and social progress...the liberty to grow', and how access to infrastructure and financial resources plays a major role in determining economic success.[34] Meanwhile, Hobhouse's work suggests that 'the true "rights" of the individual are just the fundamental conditions of good social organisation' – the necessary prophylaxis of a

[32] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 65.
[33] J. A. Hobson, 'Character and Society', in *Character and Life: A Symposium*, ed. Percy L. Parker (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912), pp. 75-6, p. 83.
[34] Hobson, 'Equality of Opportunity', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, pp. 109-11; pp. 99-100; pp. 103-4.

healthy welfare state.[35] In this way, New Liberal theorists shifted theoretical emphasis onto the function of organic development as a self-contained causal construct.

Together, these approaches provide a broad ontological framework for New Liberal thought. But in both instances, this framework is conspicuously lacking in detailed philosophical grounding. There is no adequate explanation of the causal mechanism at play. Despite a series of imaginative attempts, New Liberal theorists were unable to escape from generality in their own explanations of social development. Hobson wrote about 'humourism': a 'skilled aptitude for handling the novel'.[36] Ritchie recentred Hegelian arguments around a broad non-subjective causal mechanism (natural selection).[37] And Hobhouse tracked organic change onto 'the rational impulse which lies at the heart of science and philosophy' and 'the impulse to establish harmony in the world of feeling and action'.[38] These were all vague, partial, or inconsistent theories that either failed to adequately explain the ontological structure of organic growth (Chapter 2), or fixated upon abstract principles (such as rationality and impulse) that diverged from the ethical ideal (Chapter 1). They are unable to provide substantive philosophical justification for the mechanisms underpinning the unsystematic organic social ontology.

Even though the organic social ontology lacks philosophical detail, it nevertheless fulfils an extremely important role within our conceptual framework. The organic principle gives us something to hold on to. It provides a compelling and self-contained picture of a multi-layered, holistic, grammatical relation. Moreover, it explains this relation in two ways: vertically (incorporating both descriptive and normative explanation) and horizontally (delineating how individuals orient themselves within a holistic cultural

[35] L. T. Hobhouse, *Government by the People* (London: The People's Suffrage Federation, 1910), p. 6.
[36] J. A. Hobson, *Notes on Law and Order*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 29.
[37] D. G. Ritchie, 'Darwin and Hegel', in *Darwin and Hegel, with other philosophical studies* (London: Sonnenschein & Co., 1893), pp. 55-6.
[38] Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 62.

framework). Thus, the organic principle endows us with a framework for practical reasoning and a pattern for social development.

From Functional to Philosophical Explanation

§28

New Liberal theory is built around the simple idea of organic development. The application of the organic principle of self-realisation to social and political thought transforms a moral relation rooted in subjective normative experience into a universal principle of ontological change. The New Liberals give a general account of this ontology, using functional explanation of organic improvement (centred on welfare). However, by returning to the Wittgensteinian grammatical framework, we can push beyond functional explanation – towards a more detailed form of philosophical explanation.

Self-realisation describes a fundamentally normative symbiotic relationship. The intellectual and political development of either individual or community will turns upon engagement with (and cultivation of) the other. A grammatical understanding (centred on the rule-following norm) helps to disambiguate this symbiotic engagement, and project the normative relation between individual and community into different spheres of social interaction.

Detailed analysis of the pattern of linguistic development further demonstrates the ontological penetration of the rule-following norm. Pitkin's argument is clearly opposed to the application of linguistic models to the sphere of social and political life. Her descriptive account of language-change attempts to bracket off political interaction from linguistic norms. And yet, she gives an explanation of language as rule-following

that accords with the functional and ethical components that define the New Liberal principle of self-realisation:

> Our insight that the model of language membership suggests, then, is that our customary distinction between individual and society, between the self and some larger whole to which it belongs, are not fixed, mutually-exclusive dichotomies. Rather, they concern different aspects of, different perspectives on, a single reality. Society is not just "outside" the individual, confronting him, but inside him as well, part of who he is.[39]

Pitkin's assessment of the formative impact of language on human development illustrates that language operates at a micro-level as a mechanism for social and cultural definition: generating sense and stability, and in the process enabling the possibility for redefinition. Indeed, her work appears to provide a linguistic philosophical explanation that illustrates the validity of the organic principle of self-realisation.

Pitkin resists the implications of this ontological insight. But her characterisation of what makes politics unique corresponds closely to the formative aspects of the rule-following norm. She muses that 'Perhaps what characterizes political life is precisely the problem of continually *creating* unity, a public, in the context of diversity, rival claims, unequal power, and conflicting interests'.[40] She therefore draws politics back to the issues of cohesion and communal self-realisation: to the grammatical relation defined by the underlying norm. In the process, she illustrates the philosophical workings of a holistic ontological principle.

[39] Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, pp. 194-5.
[40] *Ibid*. p. 215.

§29

The political dimensions of the organic ontology are every bit as important as the cultural and linguistic dimensions. A fully-realised conception of human development does not simply describe ethical or functional self-realisation – it enables self-realisation within a constantly changing, contingent environment.

New Liberal theorists were acutely concerned about the impact of institutions on the formation of the individual will within a dynamic political context. They acknowledged that self-realisation depended on education, the media, and socio-economic opportunity, but cautioned that each of these areas could be hijacked by reactionary elites. And, as we illustrated in Chapter 1, the New Liberals responded to this danger by calling for the democratisation of culture and society, and for the development of an ideology centred on healthy organic development.

The Wittgensteinian framework can further elucidate this process. Political communities set cultural, linguistic, and political grammars within a framework of rules. Individuals take a role in perpetuating (and establishing) these rules – which operate as a means of individual self-realisation. By adopting a grammatical perspective, members of the political community are able to understand their role within the grammatical framework – and take control of the process at a political and at a deeper cultural-linguistic level. By accepting that self-realisation operates as a principle of human development, individual members become shared architects laying the groundwork of an organic society. And by consciously implementing the grammatical norm in political life and political institutions, governments guarantee citizens the ability to manoeuvre within a constantly changing world. In effect, rule-following theory justifies the New Liberal emphasis on each citizen taking an active role in politics as a means of democratic self-determination.

* * *

§30

Our investigation has allowed us to begin to see how this loose democratic grammar operates as the groundwork for the politics of a meaningful society. Language, culture, and politics are so intertwined that it is impossible to attempt politics without drawing from processes of meaning. They follow parallel and related grammars – that are united through an ontological framework.

The practice of following a rule circumscribes and guides political interaction. A philosophical explanation centred on the organic principle of self-realisation and framed in grammatical terms helps to understand and harness this relation. This enhanced philosophical explanation brings our model of human development into accordance with the political aspects of rule-following behaviour identified at the beginning of this chapter. The rule-following norm fulfils both ethical (political-ethical) and functional (political-epistemic) roles, thereby establishing a democratic pattern of meaningful interaction.

Ultimately, meaningfulness defines social and political development as it defines the formation of linguistic and cultural patterns. In the next section, we will elaborate on this meaningful definition as we unpack and expand this organic ontology.

III. The Organic Ontology

§31

Investigation into the logical and normative processes that underpin rule-following practice has demonstrated that meaningful interaction and concept-use may be modelled using a dynamic, organic ontology.

The New Liberal understanding of social, political, and conceptual change captures the foundational indeterminacy, the practical yet inconsistent stability, and the contingent clash of wills that defines the way that we experience meaning within a complex linguistic community. Furthermore, it addresses the civic status of a contradiction (Chapter 4) – confronting the question of *how* we collectively determine sense and meaning.

If we model reality using the New Liberal social ontology, it is possible to conceive of the normativity that shapes meaningful interaction as a holistic, balanced, and constantly evolving *political* drive.

§32

However, the organic model of reality does not explain *why* we should allow ourselves to be guided by this process. It does not illustrate why we should aim to maximise meaningful engagement in the political sphere, and accept the democratic grammatical norm as the basic pattern for political interaction, when we have acknowledged that:

(i) Many different political systems are possible under the grammatical norm, and

(ii) Political normativity is tied to a plurality of institutional frameworks, resulting in a natural drift from the democratic pattern of rule-following practice.

The decision to prioritise the realisation of the rule-following norm over other political objectives represents a deliberate political choice. To understand this choice – and explain the relevance of the grammatical model in political life – we need to examine the organic ontology in greater detail.

An Ontological Dilemma

§33

First of all, we should acknowledge that the New Liberals faced a similar ontological problem. Their insistence on the principles of self-realisation and individual liberty threw them up against a basic political quandary: *Freedom may be the natural (or most perfect) condition of mankind; but, for all this, why should the citizen strive to be free in the way that the New Liberals claim?*

New Liberal theorists were confronted with this dilemma because they adopted the Hegelian model of self-realisation without endorsing the metaphysical assumptions that justified this organic principle (i.e. God's will as a divine cause, and the inevitable actualisation of the rational). Without a good reason for writing it into the political structure of society, the New Liberal idea of freedom remained abstract: one ideal among many. Sensing this foundational weakness, New Liberal writers sought to shore up the organic model using a complex combination of metaphysical frameworks (ranging from utilitarianism to Darwinian evolutionary thought). In *Darwin and Hegel*, Ritchie attempts to reconcile Hegel's metaphysical framework to the modern world

using the principle of natural selection. He contends that the 'dialectical movement' of natural selection helps to reconstruct the Hegelian theory of historical development.[41]

> This conception of Final Causes, which the theory of Natural Selection restores, is not the cruder form of teleology which attempts to explain everything in the universe by showing that it serves the good of man...In the conflict between individuals and between kinds that which is better equipped for the particular struggle is selected.[42]

Darwin replaces God as the motor of ontological change. And as a consequence, recourse to the organic model could be justified within a pluralistic political framework. The objective characteristic of the model would simply make it a more successful fit – and a better bridge between the actual and the ideal – than other models of politics.

Other New Liberals attempted similar forms of theoretical reconciliation. But most were reluctant to push their understanding of human development too far towards the danger that they perceived in Social Darwinism. Nevertheless, in their drive towards a more justifiable philosophical foundation, New Liberal theorists highlighted the fact that the ontological nature of the organic relation is intrinsic to its application and expression in the public sphere.

§34

Ultimately, the ontological characteristics of the organic model – its intersubjectivity, functionality, and purpose – define its normative impact in political life. In the first section of this chapter, we discussed the grammatical functionality of the ontology at length. Now, we will consider the purpose of the ontology, as we strive to understand why we should allow ourselves to be governed by an organic vision of meaningful rule.

[41] Ritchie, 'Darwin and Hegel', p. 64.
[42] *Ibid.* p. 61.

Unfortunately, in a changing world defined by indeterminate meaning, the purpose of the ontology is almost impossible to identify. Plainly, the organic model served a unique (and changeable) purpose to each New Liberal theorist. Since we have sought to capture a much broader concept of social development – and to update and reconfigure the New Liberal theoretical framework – authorial intent provides limited insight into the *ontological* purpose of the organic model. Nevertheless, a theoretical approach allows us to develop a more grammatical understanding of the problem at hand. By harnessing a different model of organic development and comparing these two ontologies, we can throw the (intersubjective) purpose of these theoretical frameworks into relief. As we move forward, we will therefore consider two contemporaneous organic models of human development: the New Liberal ontology, and the Social Darwinist ontology.

An Ontological Purpose: New Liberalism vs. Social Darwinism

§35

The New Liberal social ontology is not the only theoretical tool that allows us to effectively model meaningful praxis. The works of Fritz Mauthner illustrate that Social Darwinism can be used to frame insights about linguistic interaction within an alternative organic framework.

Social Darwinism echoes the dynamic, holistic vision that drives New Liberal thought. But it identifies the normativity that animates praxis with a distinct metric of power, domination, and survival. As a consequence, Social Darwinism expounds a very different ontological understanding of change. Meaningful interaction is characterised according to the logic of natural selection. The compulsion towards sense and coherence is cast as

an advantageous trait (or a survival mechanism), which is not simply expedient, but necessary.

Comparing both ontologies, we note two very different conceptions of language- and concept-use, with contrasting philosophical implications. Ontologically, the rule-following norm (everyone should have the opportunity to be understood) could either be perceived as an *evolutionary necessity*, or as a foundational normativity that orders and empowers meaningful interaction.

§36

We can tease these two ontological positions apart by contrasting Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy with a competing theory of language, developed by journalist and commentator Fritz Mauthner in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

As Janik and Toulmin have illustrated in their masterful work, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, Mauthner's theoretical writings preceded (and loosely anticipated) the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein.[43] Though Wittgenstein was aware of Mauthner's work (referencing Mauthner's position in the *Tractatus*), he initially pursued a different methodological approach.[44] This drew him into conflict with Mauthner's ideas; and it was only later in his mature philosophy that Wittgenstein began to develop a position that was at all close to Mauthner's.[45] Nevertheless, Janik and Toulmin have emphasised

[43] Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (1973), second edn. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1996), pp. 121-3.
[44] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), trans. C. K. Ogden (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 4.0031, p. 45.
[45] Janik and Toulmin delineate how this clash of methodology led to distinct philosophical positions. Mauthner adopted a Machian understanding of the relationship between words and objects, suggesting that phenomena are *represented* in a sensory manner. This representation, 'Vorstellung', could be explored through empirical analysis. By contrast, in his early period, Wittgenstein adopted a competing methodology, which posited that phenomena could be represented in the form of conceptual or mathematical models. This type of representation, 'Darstellung', allowed the theorist to map the limits of his conceptual framework from within – i.e. without needing to take a detached (non-subjective) empirical approach. Wittgenstein only adopted the Machian conception of 'Vorstellung' (and the empirical methodology) in his later

that many of the compelling insights in *Philosophical Investigations* (including the notion that language is a form of activity; the realisation that language should be viewed as a game or convention that can be understood through rules; and the idea that conventions change over time, altering meaning) were already present in some form in the writings of Fritz Mauthner.[46]

Yet there are also a number of substantial differences between the philosophical explanations offered by Wittgenstein and Mauthner. We can highlight three distinctions that are particularly pertinent to our current theoretical dilemma:

(i) Mauthner employs the organic analogy in his writings, identifying the shared body of socio-linguistic conventions with a common sensorium or collective mind.[47] Wittgenstein does not engage with this organic analogy or make such a strong claim about the collective mind.

(ii) Mauthner advances a nominalist argument, in contrast to Wittgenstein's more nuanced analysis.[48] Wittgenstein critiques nominalist explanations of meaning (all words are simply used to name or represent distinct objects or ideas). He emphasises that within our grammar we play a variety of language-games – we employ words to denote a series of complex relations and qualities, which means that we are not limited to the naming language-game (Chapter 3). Our plurality of language-games gives us far more flexibility in language-use than the nominalists suggest.

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writings; and this resulted from the comprehensive development of his own philosophical arguments. As a consequence, it is difficult to trace a direct influence between Mauthner and Wittgenstein. See Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, pp. 132-3, pp. 144-5, and pp. 121-3.

[46] Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, pp. 125-8.

[47] *Ibid*. p. 127; this directly echoes Hobson's depiction of the common mind of the community in 'The Re-Statement of Democracy' (1902). Both posit the existence of a 'common sensorium', an idea that was commonly used in late-Victorian theoretical discourse that drew upon biological analogy. Hobson, 'The Re-Statement of Democracy', in *The Crisis of Liberalism*, pp. 71-3.

[48] Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, pp. 121-3.

(iii) Mauthner adopts the idea that language is part of man's biological equipment; it is an instrument that has been developed for survival.[49] By contrast, Wittgenstein develops a much less instrumental conception of language. Janik and Toulmin note that Mauthner's argument allowed him to overcome the conceptual difficulty of reconciling individual sensory experience with the collective definition (and articulation) of this experience through language. Language arose in a *communal* rather than an individual setting, because humans needed to communicate in order to survive and to compete in a hostile, Darwinian environment: 'If the original purpose of words was to insure the survival of a group of men in a situation where a single individual could not survive, it made little difference whether or no the same sensory image was before different men's minds when a word was used, just so long as they all knew how to react, what was expected of them, when a word was used'.[50] Depicted as an instrument of survival, language plays a clear ontological role in human existence.

As these three distinctions demonstrate, Mauthner's theory of language presents the use of words and concepts as a matter of evolutionary necessity, which closely aligns his work with the Social Darwinist ontology. By contrast, Wittgensteinian rule-following theory advances a distinct understanding, rendering the theory fundamentally incompatible with this ontological position.

[49] *Ibid*. pp. 127-8. This theoretical position – first popularised by Mach – was common among late-nineteenth century theorists. As we illustrated in Chapter 1, Hobhouse, Ritchie, and Wallas all sought to ground human development (and concept-use) in the Darwinian principle of natural selection. However, Hobson's sense of the aesthetic drew him away from such an instrumental evaluation of the role of language.
[50] Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, pp. 127-8.

§37

Philosophical analysis favours the Wittgensteinian understanding over Mauthner's competing conception. If we press the critique of nominalism advanced by rule-following theory, we see that it is difficult to maintain that language remains ontologically wedded to human survival.

While it is very easy to imagine a primordial situation where the use of name-language (nouns) gave humans a survival edge over other species, to justify the *modern* use of language on these grounds is inherently problematic. Modern humans play a variety of language-games, *and these cannot all be justified instrumentally*:

(i) Our language-games fulfil a variety of different functions (as verbs, nouns, adjectives, prepositions etc).

(ii) They build complex pictures or images, which are subsequently recycled into unrelated language-games (i.e. a compelling image may be used as an analogy in order to explain an abstract or complex phenomenon in an unrelated field of human endeavour – as an organic metaphor may be used to describe conceptual change).

(iii) Our language-games allow us to playfully redefine meaning; and they depend upon a complex and ephemeral context in order to be effective.

(iv) And they add to the aesthetic life of our societies, without holding any instrumental value (poetry, song, narrative, and prayer do not necessarily provide a competitive advantage or facilitate hegemonic control).

Language does not simply fulfil an instrumental purpose in ordinary interaction. It allows for a plurality of different forms of expression, which alter in different contexts, producing different psychological effects – from aesthetic appreciation to moral

approbation. These effects are all part of the way that we experience the phenomenon of meaning; and none of them are any more or less valuable than the purely instrumental part of language-use.

Therefore, the language and culture of a community are not simply a means to survival. Rather, they are the vehicles of an unending *cultural digression* (a medium for invention and expression). And when we are confronted with this realisation, we are able to draw a clear distinction between rule-following theory and the vision of organic evolution presented in Social Darwinist ideology. The contrast between Mauthner's theory of language and Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy demonstrates the latter's incompatibility with the Social Darwinist ontology of survival and domination. Moreover, it illustrates that any system of thought that fetishises the notion of the survival of the fittest – reducing all social and political life to a metric of success, expansion, and domination – has limited philosophical or empirical validity.

Civic Flourishing

§38

We can trace a clear disparity between the political normativity that drives Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy and the ontological assumptions that underpin Social Darwinism.

The plurality of language-games that we uncover through rule-following theory illustrates that our diverse and complex grammar does not simply exist in order to fulfil an instrumental function. Rather, it incorporates a great variety of different conventions and expressions, and allows for the dynamic alteration of meaning through conscious or unconscious redefinition. Words and ideas are utilised, arranged and reconfigured over

time into expressions that convey instrumental, moral, aesthetic, social, and cultural properties and values. These expressions allow for the civic flourishing of a linguistic community (for the development of an ordered, rich, and meaningful form of social life). And they enable the modification of, reconfiguration of, and rebellion against any civic structure imagined or imposed upon human existence.

The foundational, normative process that supports expression therefore plays a uniquely *political* role in human life. The rule-following norm promotes a diversity of conceptual distinctions, and a plurality of different ways of behaving, thinking, and communicating. It facilitates civic flourishing, and drives the imaginative reflection that is needed in order to sustain a coherent framework of meaning within a changing world. (Or, alternatively: the grammatical normativity that defines rule-following practice enables the development and diversification of motivational norms.)

This flourishing and dynamic political condition may be valued as an end in itself. We can appreciate the plurality of conceptual structures that allow us to make sense, to make choices, and to develop ideas collectively. And we can reaffirm the normative value of the complex political grammar that orders these conceptual structures through the everyday process of following (or modifying) a rule. The *instrumental and normative* value that all humans perceive in civic flourishing transforms it into the categorical, *political* purpose of meaningful practice.

§39

Ultimately, the political norm that defines our experience of meaning can be identified with a specific ontological position. Language-use is not a Darwinian evolutionary necessity. The process of building understanding is not a simple progression towards

domination and expansion in thought and action. Rather, the phenomenon of meaning accords with an ontology of *cultural digression* – of flourishing and change.

In this respect, the rule-following norm fits closely into the New Liberal social ontology. New Liberals advance an agenda that they believe will lead to progress; and yet they also describe (and rail against) regressive change, and contemplate drift and digression in social thought.[51] Furthermore, the New Liberal social ontology incorporates a thick concept of civic flourishing – of self-realisation through education, expression, imaginative sympathy, and activity. Healthy development entails a great degree of variation in social and political discourse, and the conscious cultivation of plurality.[52]

One example highlights the convergence between rule-following practice and the New Liberal social ontology perfectly. Writing in *Imperialism* (1902), Hobson notes that the ontological assumptions of Social Darwinism have no real grounding in domestic and international affairs. The mantra of 'social efficiency' – of encouraging populations to compete for domination, enabling the strongest to defeat and eliminate the weakest – is not intrinsic to human experience.[53] It simply acts as a convenient justification for national assertion, and for military action. In direct opposition to the ontological idea of 'social efficiency', Hobson posits the idea of 'cross-fertilization' between cultures.[54] Ideas pass between borders, influencing different cultures, modifying and enriching social and cultural life. This is not a metric of survival, but of growth and flourishing – of digression of language, concepts, and conventions. Crucially, Hobson acknowledges that

[51] J. A. Hobson, *Democracy After the War* (1917), intro. Peter Cain (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 5-7; L. T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), pp. 23-5.
[52] In contrast to Ritchie's claim that variation is subordinate to natural selection, Liberal Organic Democracy follows the New Liberal ontology in elevating variation over natural selection in social evolution. Variation enables human flourishing – and enriches the grammatical framework that forms the foundation of human action. D. G. Ritchie, 'Evolution and Democracy', in *Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics*, ed. Stanton Coit (London: Grant Richards, 1900), p. 5.
[53] J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), (New York: Cosimo, 2005), p. 154.
[54] *Ibid*. pp. 191-2.

this is no more than a *picture* that helps to model human interaction; and yet it closely reflects the political reality of unimpeded concept-use.

The congruence between New Liberal ideas and rule-following normativity helps us to delineate the ontological foundations of meaningful political interaction. Because the New Liberal social ontology advances a pluralistic, holistic, and evolving image of social interaction, it provides the perfect template for rule-following practice.

* * *

§40

Philosophical investigation of meaningful practice allows us to redefine the New Liberal social ontology, and reground it in a solid theoretical understanding. This reconfiguration generates a newly galvanised social and political conception, built upon a grammatical worldview – a liberal, organic, democratic social ontology.

The normative principle that *everyone should have the opportunity to be understood* describes a broad cultural process, which is experienced individually as self-realisation. More importantly, this rule-following norm embodies and drives civic flourishing within the linguistic community. And because it enables the digression of motivational norms within the political community, it constitutes a good general pattern for political interaction – and a loose model for political rule.

IV. Towards Liberal Organic Democracy

§41

Over the past chapter, we have moved from normativity to ontology: from the subjective experience of the rule-following norm to its complex expression in ordinary life. We have demonstrated how a grammatical normativity provides a formative foundation for political interaction. We have determined that this grammatical norm traces a holistic unity in social development. And we have tied this unity to the organic principle of self-realisation in all spheres of life.

This transition into ontology has diversified our understanding of rule-following practice. The normativity of meaningful engagement supports an ontological position – an understanding of human behaviour as a drive towards sense and expression, and towards a growing and evolving framework of meaning. This organic ontology is prefigured in the holistic social ontology advanced by New Liberal theorists; it is fundamentally distinct from the drive towards 'social efficiency' and domination that defines Social Darwinism. Meaningful engagement is not a matter of evolutionary necessity; it drives a process of civic flourishing and conceptual redefinition. It is therefore a distinctly political phenomenon, with tantalising political implications.

The reconstruction of the ontology has enabled us to build a theoretical framework around a shared social subjectivity – and to switch between a normative and a descriptive understanding of human experience to gain some purchase on the dynamic foundations of social development.

§42

All of these insights elucidate how we experience meaning and guide us towards the next step in our theoretical project. In effect, the rule-following norm lays the foundations for a meaningful politics, grounded in the community's experience of what it means to *make sense*, and to be understood. Now, we will begin to consider this form of politics.

In the next chapter, we will move towards identifying the social and political characteristics of any community that embodies the rule-following norm effectively – that successfully translates the way that we experience meaning into the political sphere. We will start to develop the democratic form of politics that emerges out of the marriage of New Liberal social and political thought and Wittgensteinian rule-following philosophy: Liberal Organic Democracy.

Chapter 6: The Natural Political Grammar of a Meaningful Democracy

§1

In the last two chapters, we outlined the *civic* dimensions of rule-following practice. We identified a normative framework that allows individual, group, and community to work together to generate meaning and to redefine conceptual boundaries. We demonstrated its application across language, culture, and society. And we tied it to the New Liberal idea of self-realisation. In the process, we established a grammatical model of politics.

This model is not a monological framework of political rule. The rule-following norm enables meaningful political interaction; and there are many different social and political arrangements that a flourishing community might take. But if we apply the norm to the sphere of political interaction (if we allow that all agents should have the opportunity to be understood in the political as well as the linguistic sphere), then we can distinguish a set of characteristics that enable the democratic self-realisation of all members of the community.

We can thereby begin to trace the natural political grammar underpinning Liberal Organic Democracy. This political grammar is not natural in the sense that it is naturally-occurring in political societies. History suggests that communities have seldom developed along these lines; and we cannot assume that circumstances always drive citizens towards meaningful rule. It is an artificial political framework that (i) supports and enables the organic social ontology, and (ii) realises a natural pattern of conceptual and linguistic engagement. In short, it is a loose pattern of meaningful democratic rule.

In the following chapter we will explore three core political characteristics of this natural political grammar: nonviolence, inclusion, and political engagement. We will demonstrate how these characteristics may be derived from the rule-following norm, and we will consider how competing political drives prevent them from being realised in popular politics. As we trace the implications of these characteristics, we will address the New Liberal antithesis of nationalism and democracy. We will draw from this antithesis to outline a framework of meaningful democracy that is grounded in an active model of citizenship. And we will conclude this chapter by drawing parallels with radical and republic models of citizenship, and establishing an organic conception of democratic citizenship grounded in an expanding sphere in individual autonomy.

I. Three Political Characteristics of Liberal Organic Democracy

§2

The rule-following norm that we identified in Chapter 4 states that '*every agent should have the opportunity to be understood*'. We can identify three political characteristics of this norm that define the grammar of a meaningful political community: (i) a commitment to an ethos of nonviolence; (ii) a commitment to an ethos of inclusion; and (iii) a commitment to an ethos of meaningful engagement. In the next three sections, we will discuss each of these characteristics in turn, illustrating how they can be derived from the rule-following norm, and tracing their role in shaping political interaction.

(i) Nonviolence

§3

A shared set of conventions helps to orient members of the political community within a stable normative framework. We have argued that these rules should be defined by the entire community. However, it is possible for a shared system of rules to be decided by a subsection of the community and imposed by force – to be established through violence or threat of social sanction. History is littered with examples of governments that have sought to impose language-games upon subject peoples. From the political and cultural dislocation of colonised societies during the nineteenth century, to the linguistic violence of calls to 'exterminer les patois' during the French Revolution, force has historically played a major role in establishing shared frameworks of meaning.

Nevertheless, in the long term, violence is not a sustainable system of rule for a meaningful community, for two reasons. First, there is the Nietzschean insight that in the long term the strong will be vulnerable to an alliance of the weak. Subject peoples can band together through communication in order to overthrow their masters, subverting established language-games through the repetition of alternative meanings.[1] Second, the evolution of political meaning over time will bring shared meaning into conflict with a standard of meaning that is imposed by force. The strong cannot impose a lasting agreement or understanding on the people.

While a regime of understanding can be established by violent means, it cannot be sustained within a dynamic framework of meaning. In the long-term, the only way of applying the rule-following norm to politics is through an ethos of nonviolent communication. In the next section, we will elaborate on the need to extend this ethos across society in order to ensure the all agents really do have the opportunity to be understood.

(ii) Inclusion

§4

Democratic theorists often ground the claim that no citizen should be excluded from the political process in an abstract ethical ideal. Yet Liberal Organic Democracy provides an alternative justification for democratic rule. To exclude any citizen from the process of political engagement is to exclude a party that may play an important role in refining the meaning of political concepts. As a result, the state may lose contact with the popular

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 17.

understanding of political concepts as meaning evolves through the natural process of following (and modifying) a rule.

The demand for democratic inclusion is an intrinsic part of the New Liberal social ontology. Yet a tension exists in the demands for inclusivity made by the New Liberal theorists. Though all members of the existing political community must be offered the opportunity of political engagement – 'the common man, the ordinary elector, has a contribution to make, and it is important for him and for the community that he should make it' – there is no universal qualification that determines whether other members may join, or whether certain groups may be excluded prior to the establishment of the democratic state.[2] In this regard, the theory is substantially underdeveloped.

However, rule-following theory strengthens the principle of inclusion in an organic state and elucidates a more general qualification for citizenship. The evolution of political concepts is precipitated by the natural human compulsion to follow or modify a rule. As this is a universal human process, there is an implicit requirement for the political sphere to include all persons who actively engage with the social and linguistic conventions of the community.

This requirement is further elaborated within the account of social subjectivity that we traced in Chapter 4. All beings that engage with language can be taught new concepts through the use of examples or analogy.[3] This training communicates the apposite conventional usage of a concept by drawing on comparable conventions. The student will be able to make an educated guess at the meaning of the concept, which will be confirmed through the experience of using the concept in ordinary discourse.

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[2] J. A. Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1934), pp. 76-7.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4th edn. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), §199, p. 89.

All language-users are therefore naturally capable of mastering alien conventions, and cannot be excluded from public discourse on grounds of unfamiliarity. If we acknowledge that politics follows a grammatical pattern, then it is possible to extend this argument into the political sphere. While an individual may lack knowledge of political concepts, her experience of social conventions will provide the expertise necessary in order to grasp their meaning. Thus, no individual should be excluded from active participation in popular self-government – from the rights and duties of citizenship – so long as they actively participate in shared conventions.

The application of the rule-following norm to political life means that every agent (regardless of origin) should be given the opportunity to be understood as a member of the political community – to engage in the political language-games that help to govern the community. While practical objections may prevent new members from instantaneously joining a new political community, there can be no presumption that membership is the birthright of a privileged group. In the next section, we will delve into the practice of citizenship as we consider a third characteristic of the rule-following norm: an ethos of engagement.

(iii) Meaningful Engagement

§5

The way that we use concepts mediates whether our actions and our intentions are meaningful to ourselves and to others (Chapter 3). In politics, citizens experience meaning by drawing on shared political concepts such as ‘representation’ and ‘democracy’. However, our use of concepts is not fixed. Concepts take their meaning

from the way they are employed by a linguistic community. Members of the community play subtly different language-games, using ideas like ‘representation’ in distinct ways.

The language-games that citizens play are woven into an indeterminate grammatical framework. The rules that govern how we use political concepts are not strictly bounded or fixed. Circumstantial constraints influence how concepts are used, and how they change over time. And there is an inevitable conceptual drift, as the community applies and gradually modifies the political concepts that frame political understanding. Conceptual engagement is therefore a constant process of learning new conventions: of redefining the rules of our language-games as we use them in order to justify the meaningfulness of our actions to ourselves and to others. It is a form of praxis that informs every aspect of political interaction.

§6

By actively engaging in the language-games of politics, members of a community are able to harness political ideas and norms and thereby experience political meaning. It follows that individual citizens *must* be able to play language-games in order to generate and sustain a flourishing form of politics. If we push this point a little further, we can argue that the members of the political community should have a basic awareness of their ability to apply (and to modify) specific political conventions, and a broader consciousness of the role that the whole community plays in regulating political activity.

This position amounts to a very narrow conception of meaningful self-government, centred on the role that participation plays in shaping understanding. We will expand this conception into a more comprehensive model of democratic political engagement as this chapter progresses. Nevertheless, before we consider any models of government

in depth, we need to examine how far conceptual engagement structures our sense of political meaning.

§7

We can get a clearer sense of how engagement structures political meaning by focusing on the subjective foundations of politics. Conceptual engagement is constrained by the subjective limits of cognition. The meaning of a concept is defined within a shared grammatical framework (the rules that govern how the language-game is played). But this meaning is *experienced* individually by the agent in the practice of following a rule.[4] Because we engage with concepts in order to think, speak, and act within the political sphere, this complex subjectivity is a major part of political interaction.

However, the individual agent also experiences other forms of meaning that run parallel to, and compete with, the subjectivity of conceptual engagement. We derive meaning from the subjectivity of coexistence (with other agents, or with the world), and through the subjectivity that develops out of the satisfaction of impulses and desires (whether these are physical, psychological, or otherwise).

The subjectivity of coexistence describes a family of meaningful sensations that we associate with being part of a much broader group. This includes the tribal feeling of living alongside a community of other people; the feelings of identification with a much larger imagined community (as Benedict Anderson has described in his work); the profound appreciation of physical coexistence with nature; and the feeling of being part of a much broader cosmic order.[5] The experience of meaning can be activated (in

[4] The cognitive experience of meaning is not registered within a collective mind; it is registered in the mind of the individual agent. Crucially, this does not suggest that meaning is experienced in the mind in a way that is prior to practice – it is experienced in the activity of grasping, applying, or modifying a rule.

[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*, second edn. (London: Verso, 2006).

different ways) by the potentiality, or the actuality, of each of these forms of coexistence – resulting in the sense of belonging that we feel within the nation, the party, the environment, and the mystical or eternal truth.

The *subjectivity* that develops out of the *satisfaction of desire* is the meaning that we derive from physical and psychological impulse. The desire for food, excitement, superiority, etc. are experienced as impulses that drive us towards action. The fulfilment of these non-rational drives can result in a sensation of meaning that (temporarily) displaces the need for a more reflective form of life.

All three forms of meaning must be satisfied in order to sustain a meaningful human existence. Nevertheless, once all forms are minimally satisfied, conceptual engagement needs to be prioritised if we wish to maximise meaning and allow for the civic flourishing described in Chapter 5. Let us pause for a moment to consider why this must be the case.

§8

Conceptual engagement enables us to develop an understanding of our actions and to build upon these actions in a deliberate manner. Applying a rule is a form of praxis: it is reflexive (in the sense of reactivating or redefining the rule within a new set of circumstances) and constructive (in the sense of providing the grammatical tools to choose between options and build meaning in an epistemic framework).

Alternative forms of meaning are less reflexive and less constructive. The subjectivity of coexistence acts as an end in itself, and does not operate in a reflexive manner. This is apparent in the tribalism of elections – the tendency to dismiss the arguments of candidates from another party without reflection, or the refusal to engage in debate with the other side. Similarly, the subjectivity that develops out of the satisfaction of

desire exerts an unreflexive influence on political life. Impulses disrupt political equilibrium as they are traded off against one another in the government of the community. Meaning is not constructed but commodified in the pursuit of satisfaction.

Both alternative forms of meaning limit our ability to go beyond established norms and conventions – to critically reflect on subjectivity, and to construct new patterns of meaning. However, we cannot simply dismiss them, as they play an important role in political life.

§9

All three forms of meaning run parallel to one another in ordinary political interaction. They compete for our attention, generating clashing priorities and (dynamic and entrenched forms of) political disagreement. But they also draw upon one another in two very important ways:

First, they require (or develop out of) one another. This is true at the most basic, foundational level of human subjectivity. In order to derive meaning from coexistence we must be able to imagine that those around us constitute a group. We must have a rudimentary concept of group identity before we can belong. (This relation runs both ways. In order to develop a shared grammar, we need to have a rudimentary experience of coexistence; of playing language-games with others.)

Second, most aspects of civic interaction draw on multiple forms of meaning (even if they maximise one form over the others). For example, organised religion combines different aspects of meaning into a *multi-layered social subjectivity*. Meaningful religious behaviour can maximise feelings of belonging (with a deity or a community) or conceptual engagement (through engagement in rituals or meditation on theological ideas).

§10

The complex interrelation of different forms of meaning prevents us from anchoring politics to a single subjectivity. In addition, it makes it much harder to prioritise in cases where forms of meaning are drawn into competition with one another. But an examination of New Liberal political theory helps to unravel this complexity and demonstrate the importance of prioritising conceptual engagement over other forms of meaning.

The New Liberals recognised the centrality of different forms of meaning in political life. Though they did not think in terms of distinct subjectivities, their work highlighted the complex relationship between impulse, identity, and conceptual engagement. Hobson and Wallas wrote extensively about the transformative effects of tribal feelings on 'the psychology of the crowd'.[6] Drawing on the work of pioneer French psychologists Tarde and Le Bon, they emphasised that communal identification distorted the individual relation to meaning. The reflection and intensification of a single instinct through mass forms of politics generated a 'herd impulse' which competed with the individual decision-process.[7] Elsewhere, New Liberal writers devoted significant attention to the dynamic interaction of physical and psychological drives with other forms of political meaning. They emphasised the need to satisfy basic human impulses in order to ensure healthy social development. Parliament would have to legislate on social and economic issues 'to create the conditions under which morality can develop'.[8] Self-realisation would not be possible so long as the individual felt the physical pain of poverty and the psychological anguish of social inequality.

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[6] J. A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London: Grant Richards, 1901); Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*, second edn. (London: Constable and Co., 1910), pp. 53-5.
[7] Graham Wallas, *The Great Society: A Psychological Analysis* (1914) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), p. 136.
[8] L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings*, ed. James Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 69.

The ideas that are raised within these discussions help us to disambiguate the complexity of political meaning in three important ways. First, they illustrate why it is necessary to satisfy all three forms of meaning. Even if the individual's physical needs are met, failure to address the role of psychological impulse and interweave it into conceptual engagement will undermine healthy human development. Equally, failure to incorporate identity into politics could provoke more harmful or erratic forms of meaning that compromise the subjectivity of conceptual engagement. At the very least, politics must provide a foundation for all forms of meaning. Second, these writings consistently emphasised that the level of satisfaction required for each form of meaning changes over time. No model of politics can serve indefinitely. Third, these discussions illustrate that New Liberal thought rests upon a nuanced understanding of the role of conceptual engagement in democratic political interaction. In the next section, we will expand on this theoretical understanding. In order to explain why we should aim to maximise conceptual engagement, we will turn to one of the most important dichotomies in New Liberal political theory: nationalism and democracy.

Nationalism and Democracy

§11

New Liberals devoted significant attention to the way that competing ideologies mobilised different forms of political meaning in order to eclipse their organic vision of democracy. Detailed examination of the tribalism of Reaction and imperialism – the 'nationalism that bristles with resentment' and 'glows with the animus of greed and self-aggrandisement' – led them to draw a dichotomy between nationalism and democracy.[9] The 'confused and intransigent idea of nationality' was opposed to 'effective self-

[9] J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005), p. 11.

government' in propaganda pamphlets that demanded that the public take a more active role in public administration and international diplomacy.[10]

§12

The dichotomy of nationalism and democracy also reflected a more nuanced understanding of popular rule. New Liberal theorists were careful not to caricature the idea of the nation in their more discursive work. While they remained broadly hostile to the influence of nationalism in politics, they acknowledged the importance of national feeling in defining the organic political consciousness that lies at the heart of democratic government. Hobhouse emphasised that:

> The form of democratic theory which ignores national differences and national rights is the result of a false abstraction. It rests on a mechanical view of society, and lays stress on only one element in the democratic ideal. It treats the State as though it could be formed by any aggregate of men selected at haphazard and endowed with equal voting power. It forgets that patriotism is not a product of the ballot-box but rather a heritage.[11]

Hobhouse's argument concedes that the national community is a foundational component of democratic rule. Political consciousness develops organically within the shared conventions, institutions, and symbols of the community. The individual draws on this framework of ideas and norms in order to make sense of the political sphere. As a result, the nation becomes the principal focus of individual political identity and the forum of popular engagement. Other New Liberal writers echoed this theoretical understanding. Hobson noted that 'only within the national area is the democratic

[10] J. A. Hobson, *Towards International Government* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915), pp. 124-5.
[11] L. T. Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, second edn. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), p. 161.

sentiment strong enough' to secure the aims of economic democracy.[12] This admission was partly an acknowledgement of the political reality of the 1930s. Yet it was also a theoretical reflection on the formative impact of nationalism on the subjective framework of democratic politics. For as Hobson freely acknowledged, contemporary democracy 'finds its parentage in the nationalism and rationalism of the last century'.[13]

§13

New Liberal theorists recognised that national subjectivity helped to structure and define popular rule. But they were determined that democracy should not be reduced to national self-determination – and they addressed this concern through the antithesis of nationalism and democracy. In *Problems of a New World* (1921), Hobson contends that nationalism is 'a feeble substitute for democracy'.[14] He defines self-government as the direct participation of the whole people in the practice of political rule. And he maintains that national feeling does not necessarily entail this level of popular engagement. Nationalism is the struggle for the people to have a voice in common affairs; to determine the course of their own national destiny. However, nationalist leaders often utilise their position to foster the servile consent of the governed. Therefore, nationalism frustrates popular self-government as often as it facilitates it.

Hobson warns that the confusion of nationalism and self-government threatens to undermine democracy. He repeatedly describes the way that conservative politicians mobilise national enthusiasm in order to promote a competing conception of national self-government.[15] In his discussion of the 'Closed State', he elaborates on the use of nationalism to displace democracy as the motivational ethos and organisational

[12] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 133.
[13] *Ibid*. p. 2.
[14] J. A. Hobson, *Problems of a New World* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 16.
[15] J. A. Hobson, 'The Higher Tactics of Conservatism' in *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1909), p. 188; J. A. Hobson, *Traffic in Treason: A Study of Political Parties* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914), pp. 28-9.

principle of popular self-rule. Democratic government is challenged by a 'close nationalism, the organised national or imperial State, self-sufficing in all the essentials of government, economics, and defence'.[16] The Closed State threatens to co-opt the principles of state socialism, and adopt the semblance of popular rule in order to divert the people from the desire for genuine self-government. 'Though the forms of popular self-government might survive, and even be extended, not merely in the field of politics, but of industry, the dominant purpose of the closed State would quench the spirit of popular control wherever it asserted itself. For the closed State must remain a military State'.[17] Nationalism lends the trappings of popular legitimacy to class rule, while stultifying debate and discouraging any attempt at structural reform.

Nationalism thus became a means to define New Liberal democracy: a potent antithesis that illustrated the creative tension between political practice and political identity. National assertion, racial prejudice, and passive acquiescence to authority were contrasted with human welfare, imaginative sympathy, and active engagement in the political community.

§14

Still, Hobson's nuanced appreciation of the role of the national community in democratic rule allowed him to take the antithesis one stage further, and turn it towards a constructive political solution. In *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation* (1934), he develops the principle of federalism into a hybrid model of self-government. Federalism harnesses the ethos of nationalism to the organisational principle of democracy, generating an intense normative drive for political engagement, with 'each area, from the family through the widening areas of local and national government to

[16] J. A. Hobson, *The Fight for Democracy* (Manchester: The National Labour Press Ltd., 1917), p. 42.
[17] *Ibid*. p. 50.

internationalism, practising free self-government in such matters as fall predominantly within the compass of its own knowledge, interest, and capacity'.[18] Ultimately, this federal structure allows democracy to accommodate divisive national instincts within the subjective framework of the democratic state. It stimulates democratic self-realisation in the least active citizen by appealing to a familiar feeling of belonging.

§15

The dichotomy of nationalism and democracy helps us to explain why the political community should maximise conceptual engagement over other forms of meaning. New Liberal theorists acknowledged the interdependence of different forms of political meaning in political life. However, they encouraged political interaction that embodies (and amplifies) the careful prioritisation of practical and conceptual engagement.

They treated democracy as a contested concept, and constructed an antithesis in order to outmanoeuvre a competing populist conception of self-government. Nationalism fosters a sense of belonging and political agency, but it also discourages participation and structural reform. Therefore, it could not be allowed to displace democracy as the main motivational ethos and organisational principle of popular self-rule. In a democracy, each citizen must engage with other citizens (who may have different understandings of concepts) in order to agree on policies, institutions, and values for the whole community. Each citizen is constantly learning new language-games in order to sustain the democratic discourse that lies at the heart of popular rule. This democratic discourse facilitates the development of new patterns of social engagement. It encourages the individual to take an active role in reshaping the conventions and institutions of government. And it generates awareness about the role that the community play in defining the language-games of politics.

[18] Hobson, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 138.

By maximising engagement on a practical and conceptual level, the political community stimulates the diversification of language-games – leading to civic flourishing, democratic self-realisation, and critical reflection. It satisfies the rule-following norm, ensuring that every agent has the opportunity to be understood. Conversely, by maximising other forms of political meaning beyond the (variable) level required to sustain human satisfaction and support engagement, the political community simply encourages a the development of a series of mutually-reinforcing sensations. And by prioritising these sensations, the community stands to lose by limiting the constructive framework of meaningful engagement.

Competing political and ideological frameworks will continue to thrive within an organic democracy. Nationalism will generate more calls for populist political solutions. Nevertheless, by harnessing these competing frameworks to the subjectivity of conceptual engagement we should be able to prevent the stultification of democratic discourse and the degeneration of popular self-government.

§16

The dichotomy of nationalism and democracy was a direct response to the threat of nationalist populism in early-twentieth century Europe. This threat has re-emerged in the early-twenty first century, illustrating the preponderance of this issue and inviting us to say more about the relevance that these arguments hold for contemporary global politics.

In early-twentieth century Europe, New Liberals were confronted with competing models of popular rule that sought to minimise the participation of citizens in political decision-making, or to divert attention away from socio-economic inequality, using national or imperial sentiment. Cecil Rhodes, among the most prominent imperialists of

the nineteenth century, stated that 'In order to save the 40,000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets'.[19] New Liberals condemned Rhodes, asserting that 'Governments use national animosities, foreign wars, and the glamour of empire-making, in order to bemuse the popular mind and divert rising resentment against domestic abuses', and lamenting that 'vested interests' employ appeals to nationalism to 'protect their economic and political supremacy at home against movements of popular reform'.[20]

As the interwar period wore on, the challenge grew more extreme, as populist models of government evolved into Fascist and Communist forms of totalitarianism. Nevertheless, the New Liberals remained committed to popular engagement. They maintained that nationalist populism generates an illusion of popular self-rule, denying citizens the chance to participate in the practice of government. It therefore compromises the citizen's capacity for democratic self-realisation, critically undermining the growth of a meaningful connection between individual and community.

Political conditions have undoubtedly changed. But the lessons that we draw from New Liberal theory – about the use of political meaning in order to discourage active participation and democratic reform – still hold. In an era of renewed nationalist populism and growing liberal fatigue with democratic government, the reconstruction of this theoretical viewpoint appears to offer a way forward for the future of popular self-rule.

[19] Quoted in V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), p. 79.
[20] Hobson, *Imperialism*, p. 201; p. 142.

II. Meaningful Democracy

§17

At this point, it would be helpful to draw together some of the arguments that we have developed over the course of this chapter. There are many viable political systems. Different forms of government are meaningful to political communities, and therefore provide stable frameworks for political rule. Liberal Organic Democracy aims to maximise meaningful engagement by establishing a loose political grammar that corresponds to the organic social ontology.

There are three foundations to this political grammar. Foremost, the community must incorporate an ethos of nonviolence. Next, this must be combined with an ethos of inclusion. It is impossible for the community to remain meaningful in a dynamic world if it excludes a section of the community. Finally, the community must prioritise an ethos of practical and conceptual engagement, while satisfying other forms of political meaning. Political participation is not only desirable but necessary. All three foundations help satisfy the rule-following norm. They institute a normative drive towards participation, while cultivating self-awareness about the role the community play in defining the language-games of politics. Ultimately, they establish a dynamic model of meaningful democracy.

However, these three foundations generate little information about the structure of a meaningful society. They are the second-order rules that frame the grammar of democratic politics. Democratic self-realisation forces the political community to constantly redefine the conventions and institutions that lend meaning to the political community in response to a changing political context. This process prevents us from

treating democracy as a fixed ideal, or from appraising the government of a political community without reference to social and intellectual context. Any attempt to define the perfect constitutional structure of a meaningful democracy in detail would not only undermine the democratic process – it would be futile.

And yet, it is not really the case that we cannot say anything concrete about the structure of a meaningful democracy. The political foundations that we have traced over the course of this chapter correspond to an active model of citizenship: a normative pattern of political behaviour that establishes many of the constitutional aspects of democratic self-rule. It is to this model of citizenship that we now turn.

The Liberal Organic Model of Active Citizenship

§18

We have identified democratic activity as the site of organic political development, allowing us to shift focus away from grand political narratives and abstract moral concepts, towards the process of political definition. This has helped us to capture the dynamism of political meaning and the contingency of political conventions, without losing sight of the citizen's role in shaping and reconfiguring the shared political grammar.

Within a meaningful democracy, this active political role can be resolved into a more comprehensive model of citizenship. This model of citizenship is defined by political activity. Citizens are recognised as participants in the process of reshaping political concepts and rewriting political rules. And they are guaranteed an *equal opportunity* to be understood and an *equal status* as shared architects in the process of political rule.

This model of citizenship is inclusive, because it is extended to all those that have access to the social and political conventions of the political community. It is liberal, because it promotes the autonomy of individual choice and the self-realisation of all members of the community. And it is organic, because the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are constantly evolving and developing in response to changing political circumstances.

Republican and Radical Democratic Models of Active Citizenship

§19

The liberal organic model of active citizenship shares common ground with republican and radical democratic alternatives. These models of citizenship are also built around democratic participation. But whereas Liberal Organic Democracy focuses on the praxis of political engagement, republican and radical models of citizenship place far more emphasis on agonistic or dialogical aspects of meaning. This contrast raises an important theoretical point about the nature of meaningful participation, which needs to be addressed before we move on to consider the institutional framework of a meaningful democracy. In order to address this point, we will draw a comparison between Liberal Organic Democracy and two particularly influential approaches: Arendt's republican model of citizenship and Tully's radical democratic model of citizenship.

§20

Arendt's republican model of citizenship centres on the principle of agonistic political participation. She maintains that action is '*the* condition…of all political life', and suggests that intervention in the public sphere grants an objective character to the

conventions or forms of life that ensue.[21] Her political theory therefore draws a close parallel with the way that we have applied Wittgenstein's philosophy of the rule to political life. It is only by engaging in the language-games of politics that we are able to develop a comprehensive intersubjective framework of political rule.

Tully's political theory makes this Arendtian and Wittgensteinian form of participation – the agonistic freedom of speaking and acting differently, of 'modifying the rules or even transforming the game itself' – the foundation for a radical democratic model of citizenship.[22] Tully defines citizenship by reference to the agonistic dialogical relation between governors and governed:

> Citizenship in a democracy consists in the participation of citizens in the ways in which their conduct is governed by the exercise of political power in any system or practice of governance. Citizens participate by "having a say" and "negotiating" how power is exercised and who exercises it. This kind of government is "democratic" just because it involves a "dialogue" between those who exercise power and those over whom it is exercised, as opposed to non-democratic forms of governance that coordinate human action without the say of those affected...[23]

Both Tully and Arendt develop models of citizenship that are anchored to democratic participation. Both theorists make action central to their model of participation, though they place less emphasis on the citizen's experience of praxis than on dialogue, disagreement, and definition.

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[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958), second edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 7.
[22] James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key. Volume I: Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 139.
[23] *Ibid*. p. 145.

§21

Tully's radical democratic theory of citizenship emphasises that 'What shapes and holds individuals and groups together as "citizens" and "peoples" is not this or that agreement but the free agonistic activities of participation themselves'.[24] He concludes that if these activities are unavailable, or are arbitrarily restricted, then people are not citizens but subjects of the state. However, instead of simply assuming that this problem can be overcome by engagement, he raises an important point about participation that challenges our presuppositions about active forms of citizenship.

Embattled minorities in modern constitutional democracies increasingly find themselves facing an obstacle to participation in the very activities that are supposed to constitute them as citizens. They are denied their preferred forms of participation in public life:

> When the multicultural citizens of contemporary democracies came forward to participate in the direct and indirect *ways* and in the *range* of structures of governance, they found that the forms of recognition under which they had to act in order to be acknowledged as "citizens" place arbitrary constraints on the diverse, identity-related forms of thought and action that matter to them and by which they engage in citizen activities.[25]

The prevailing forms of citizenship are experienced as structures of domination. 'They are presented as the background conditions of free and equal participation', preventing the recognition of any alternatives, or of a plurality of different forms of participation.[26] Even though they are billed as universal, they tend to favour the participation of those who have been in power for decades – the white, the rich, the heterosexual, the male, etc. Citizens are forced to choose between assimilating to these forms of participation

[24] *Ibid*. p. 147.
[25] *Ibid*. p. 149.
[26] *Ibid*.

and expression and challenging the existing framework in the hope of negotiating a more expansive model of citizenship. Neither alternative maximises political meaning.

This failure of meaning leads Tully to argue for the recognition of alternative forms of participation by the political community. He insists that a monolithic model of citizenship grounded in active engagement denies meaningful participation to many groups that have distinct traditions, or distinct ways of following language-games.

However, the recognition of distinct forms of participation raises serious problems for an active model of citizenship centred on praxis. It elevates the idea of coexistence as source of meaning to a dominant position within the democratic discourse, compromising the model of self-determination that is so central to the development of meaning within political community.

Tully's democratic model of citizenship is certainly not the same as the nationalist populism that the New Liberals identified as a major threat to democratic rule. Nevertheless, his argument is a concession to the subjectivity of coexistence – and he acknowledges that many of the groups that are seeking recognition are nationalities seeking governments defined by national principles. It is therefore an open question as to whether the politics of recognition undermines meaningful democracy or enhances it.

§22

There are a number of compelling reasons to reject the politics of recognition, and to suppose that a model of citizenship that aims to maximise meaningful participation by granting distinct forms of recognition would prove counterintuitive.

First, the agonistic and dialogical aspects of meaning that underpin Tully's model of citizenship can be called into question. Tully's theory is profoundly Wittgensteinian, and he draws many of his ideas about meaning straight from the *Philosophical*

Investigations. However, the agonistic aspects of his theory are derived from Arendt and Foucault. Tully makes this relationship quite clear:

> According to Foucault, the study of any game will involve the analysis of the rules in accordance with which the game is routinely played and the techniques of government or relations of power that hold them in place. Simultaneously, it will involve the "strategies of freedom" in which some participants refuse to be governed in this way, dispute and seek to modify the rules…[27]

As Wittgenstein's ideas are translated into the political sphere, they are pressed into a Foucauldian mould, which presupposes an agonistic relation between governed and government. As a consequence, the activity of following a rule takes on a distinctly dialogical character. Politics is conceptualised as a struggle for freedom; and it is experienced as a subjectivity of power. However, there is no reason to assume that a Wittgensteinian theory of politics should take on this agonistic, dialogical form. In fact, as we noted in Chapter 3, following a rule is often a cooperative, and not a competitive, matter. If citizens really are shared architects in the process of political rule, there is no reason to assume that failures of recognition are the symptom of irresolvable conflicts.

Second, if we reject the agonistic Foucauldian assumption underpinning Tully's argument, then we can suggest an alternative theoretical explanation that might help to overcome the issues that surround participation and citizenship. Tully's theory is compelling because, despite claiming that politics is deeply influenced by group identity, he acknowledges that this identity changes – that meaning is constantly evolving. Nevertheless, a theory of meaning that is rooted in praxis offers another way forward. Engagement with the world causes citizens to redefine political language-games. Civic

[27] *Ibid*. p. 142.

flourishing leads citizens to develop different customs and conventions, *but* the ethos of inclusion and the ethos of conceptual engagement that are central to meaningful democracy force the political community to come up with new forms of participation that suit all members of the community – that ensure that each agent has the opportunity to be understood.

Third, we might raise doubts about Tully's claim that human beings are the product of dominant identities, which establish a cultural need to participate in a very specific way. There certainly are distinct cultures, with distinct political traditions. But it is hard to ignore the pluralistic point that human beings are the product of many different cultural and political identities – that all members of a political community are driven towards certain forms of participation by different aspects of their identity. Citizenship is a distinct structure of political meaning, tied to political praxis; its form is changeable, and it is therefore not an oppressive picture that holds us captive in one form of participation, but rather a way to enable political meaning.

Taken together, these points lead us to the conclusion the identity politics is less well suited to a meaningful democracy than to an imperfect and inflexible form of democratic rule. Tully's arguments raise valid concerns about the nature of participation, and the way that we conceptualise citizenship. Perhaps most importantly, they demonstrate that before we can begin to develop a more meaningful form of democracy, it is necessary to change the way that we think about meaning and politics – to embrace a more organic vision of the political community.

A Growing Sphere of Individual Autonomy

§23

The model of active citizenship that we have begun to develop is tied to the impersonal principle of political praxis. However, it is clear that participation requires the cultivation and protection of individual autonomy. The community needs to ensure that the citizen is granted the comprehensive sphere of autonomy that is required in order to satisfy the rule-following norm: that she is able to choose between different alternatives, to consciously and unconsciously modify the rules, to register dissent, and take an active role in democratic self-government.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to reduce citizenship to a static model of individual autonomy. Civic flourishing opens up new ways of participating in the political sphere, allowing the individual more opportunity to make themselves understood – and more opportunity for self-government. The sphere of individual autonomy is constantly expanding to match the pace of social development. New Liberal theorists were acutely aware of this fact. As they endeavoured to address the static, atomistic individualism of their contemporaries, New Liberals stressed the need to abandon an absolute vision of individual autonomy, in favour of a developing and expanding conception of democratic flourishing. Ritchie emphasised that 'There *is* a sphere of individual action into which we have come, or are coming, to see that other individuals ought not in a well-regulated society to intrude; this sphere is not, however, something fixed and known beforehand, but an ideal differing at different times, always more or less vague, and to be permanently secured only by the help of a strong, and vigorous, and enlightened State'.[28]

[28] D. G. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference: Four Essays on the Political Philosophy of Mr Herbert Spencer, J. S. Mill, and T. H. Green* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), p. 99.

Liberal Organic Democracy elaborates on this New Liberal insight. As more opportunities for democratic expression develop, the institutional framework of a democratic society needs to adapt – and the model of citizenship needs to expand to provide more opportunities for the realisation of the rule-following norm through political practice.

* * *

§24

Meaningful democracy is defined by the active engagement of citizens rather than the agonistic clash of competing parties in a political sphere. The process of redefining concepts and generating new decisions helps to shape the organic political community, and ensure that it is developing in a healthy direction.

Republican and radical democratic theories emphasise the need to resist civic structures of domination. But Liberal Organic Democracy emphasises the way that citizenship responds to the demands of a dynamic political society. Citizenship is defined by a growing sphere of individual autonomy – a drive to ensure all individuals can take a more active role in political life.

Meaningful democracy is rooted in the promise of participation and the recognition that the patterns of political engagement are constantly being reshaped under the conscious direction of all members to the political community. It is a model of democratic self-realisation.

III. From Ethos to Institutions

§25

In this chapter, we began to apply the ideas that we have developed throughout the thesis, as we outlined the natural political grammar of a meaningful democracy. There are many meaningful patterns of political rule. But Liberal Organic Democracy maximises the opportunity for meaningful interaction within a foundational political framework. We established that the development of an ethos of nonviolence, an ethos of inclusion, and an ethos of engagement allows for the realisation of the rule-following norm in democratic political interaction. We illustrated that competing drives – towards violence, exclusion, other forms of political meaning – obstruct the realisation of the rule-following norm (leading to the development of imperfect or ineffective forms of democratic rule). And we highlighted the role of nationalism as a competing principle of self-determination, and emphasised the importance of practical and conceptual engagement to democratic self-realisation.

We outlined a theory of meaningful democracy by establishing an active model of citizenship that enshrines these principles within the rights and duties of membership of the political community. Furthermore, we illustrated that citizenship acts as an organic framework of meaningful engagement within a dynamic political society – expanding to allow an ever-greater sphere of individual autonomy. Yet much remains to be said about the nature of meaningful democracy. The next (and final) chapter will consider this point in greater depth, as it seeks to identify the institutional expression of liberal organic democracy.

Chapter 7: The Institutional Forms of Liberal Organic Democracy

§1

In the last chapter, we started to unpack the dynamic political structure of Liberal Organic Democracy. We identified three political conditions that facilitate democratic practice and promote a broader process of civic flourishing. And we established that meaningful engagement requires a comprehensive – and developing – sphere of individual autonomy, rooted in organic engagement with the political community.

In the final chapter of this thesis, we move from political theory to constitutional framework. Drawing on the theoretical insights of preceding chapters, we will channel the normative patterns of meaningful practice into a discussion of democratic institutional forms.

Identifying the constitutional framework of a meaningful democracy is no easy task. The indeterminate nature of political meaning, the shifting balance of institutional power in democratic government, and the necessity of democratic self-determination mean that we cannot draw a prescriptive institutional template for Liberal Organic Democracy. But we *can* point towards the kind of institutional solutions that fit with meaningful democratic practice, by focusing on the patterns of rule-following behaviour traced throughout this thesis. In the process, we can give determinate form to a holistic vision of government rooted in everyday interaction, and gesture towards the constitutional structure of Liberal Organic Democracy.

§2

Over the course of this chapter, we will focus on the way that meaningful engagement can be translated into specific institutional structures. Our analysis will begin with the institutional principles that define meaningful engagement. First, we will highlight the structural indeterminacy of Liberal Organic Democracy, and the importance of institutional pluralism in maintaining robust democratic engagement. Next, we will briefly consider how a vision of politics rooted in meaningful engagement departs from the dominant themes of contemporary democratic discourse, while leading us towards many of the same institutional conclusions. Then, we will apply these insights as we move into a tentative (but theoretically-grounded) discussion of the institutional structure of meaningful democracy.

In the latter part of this chapter, we will consider how digital democracy fits into this institutional model of meaningful practice. In contemporary democratic states, the internet plays a crucial role in shaping social and political development. Later sections will examine this issue carefully, drawing normative conclusions from contemporary political theory and interviews with experts in the field of social media. By focusing on institution-building and the co-creation of user-generated content, we will be able to incorporate online engagement into the dynamic model of democratic politics that we have traced throughout this thesis.

I. The Institutional Principles of Liberal Organic Democracy

The Indeterminate Nature of Liberal Organic Democracy

§3

Liberal Organic Democracy advances a dynamic understanding of politics, which sets it apart from more systematic and determinate models of democratic self-rule.

In Chapter 5, we established that the interchangeable structure of systems, norms, and conventions that define political interaction corresponds to a grammatical framework. Before we consider an institutional model of Liberal Organic Democracy, we need to remind ourselves of the implications of this indeterminate grammatical structure.

§4

Members of a community draw on a shared grammar of politics in order to orient themselves within a collective framework of political rule. The customary patterns and constitutional procedures established by past generations serve as a foundation for contemporary political practice. But this foundation is not fixed. It is constantly being redefined, as members of the political community adapt established patterns and procedures to shifting political circumstances.

The process of political redefinition exerts an indirect influence over the institutional structure of society. Changing patterns of political engagement generate a rising demand for institutional reform. And this demand undermines static models of political rule, while furthering the expansion and diversification of grammatical forms.

The community might try to ignore or to minimise this process of political redefinition by holding fast to fixed institutional procedures, historical narratives, and the statutory

authority of venerated constitutional texts. But intransigence cannot prevent the gradual evolution of political norms. Redefinition occurs in every system, at a level below conscious political interaction. Everyday language-use and exposure to ideas drawn from other cultures contribute to an organic process of political evolution that redefines the institutional framework of society and challenges political leaders to develop innovative institutional solutions.

In a meaningful democracy, the community is in command of this process of political redefinition. Members of the community are conscious of institutional and conceptual drift. Inclusive social norms channel this drift towards democratic institutional outcomes. And the constitutional structure of the state is consciously – and continuously – (re)defined by citizens as they navigate a changing political landscape. The indeterminate grammatical structure of politics is therefore harnessed to the principle of democratic self-realisation.

§5

Liberal Organic Democracy seeks to maximise meaningful political engagement by incorporating the rule-following norm (everyone should have the opportunity to be understood) into the community's evolving patterns of civic interaction. It outlines a model of meaningful democracy that is fundamentally indeterminate. So any discussion of corresponding institutional structure should not make the mistake of being overly prescriptive.

The political community must take an active role in developing its own democratic institutions. This does not mean that the community cannot draw on established institutional structures or existing constitutional models. But it does mean that it would be unwise to prescribe a uniform set of democratic institutions that compromises the

process of democratic self-determination. Political theorists must be sensitive to the role of culture and political contingency in establishing patterns of democratic engagement.

Nevertheless, sensitivity to context does not mean that Liberal Organic Democracy is forced to accept that all institutional models that develop organically within the community are equally democratic. Those that undermine the inclusive, active conception of citizenship that we traced in Chapter 6 cannot sustain a system of popular self-government. By focusing on the model of engagement that we have traced throughout this thesis, we will be able to differentiate between political systems, identify those that are moving in a democratic direction, and suggest institutions that are most attuned to meaningful democracy. It is to this task that we now turn.

Practice Pluralism and Plural Bias

§6

In Chapter 6, we identified three social conditions that help to define the dynamic theoretical framework of a meaningful democracy: 1) nonviolence; 2) inclusion; and 3) engagement. However, these three social conditions do not constitute a detailed and prescriptive model of political rule. Different political grammars build on these social conditions in different ways, generating divergent pathways for meaningful political interaction. So the problem remains: how do we translate the rule-following norm into an organic framework of political institutions?

§7

Democratic self-realisation hinges on the civic flourishing of the political community – on the expansion and diversification of meaningful forms of political practice. A multiplicity

of political conventions allows the individual to call upon a broad range of techniques in order to express ideas and opinions, participate in public life, grasp unfamiliar conventions (by analogy), and generate innovative policy solutions. While this flourishing does not correspond to a specific set of institutions, it does point towards an institutional principle that enables democratic self-realisation: practice pluralism.

Practice pluralism is distinct from more conventional forms of liberal pluralism. Liberal pluralism demands the toleration of reasonable disagreement and the decentralisation of political authority in order to protect the individual from political domination. By contrast, practice pluralism promotes the development of different sets of rules, conventions, and practices in order to maximise meaningful political engagement. Nonetheless, it has important liberal-democratic implications. Practice pluralism promotes variation and reform, and ensures that democratic governments do not develop totalitarian or populist characteristics.

When it is directly applied to the institutional structure of the state, practice pluralism promotes the diversification of institutions. Practices are actualised and developed through institutional structures. Voting becomes a solemn and confidential trust within the institution of the secret ballot. Violence becomes a means of asserting or contesting legitimacy within the authoritative institution of the state. Hence, democratic self-realisation takes on determinate form within a diverse framework of political institutions.

This diversity prevents authority from being concentrated in one place. If there are many overlapping institutional mechanisms for political engagement, then it is impossible for any group to monopolise power or to deny others the opportunity to participate in government. A tyrannical government rests on a system of institutions that limits the diversity of political conventions, restricting the individual citizen's

capacity to think, act, and understand new conventions as they come to define political life. But a meaningful democratic government rests on a system of institutions that encourages a broader flourishing of political conventions.

§8

The principle of practice pluralism is rooted in the socio-linguistic arguments of rule-following philosophy. Pitkin suggests that Wittgensteinian political theory entails the hostility to generality that defines Wittgenstein's later work, and is therefore grounded in specificity and plurality.[1] Practice pluralism allows members of the democratic community to engage in different forms of rule-following practice – from voting to petitioning, and from deliberation to constitutional design – within a heterogeneous framework of institutions.

Tully has developed this idea further, suggesting that the growing tendency to 'participate directly at a multiplicity of sites' – from the boardroom to volunteer organisations, and from the United Nations to localised demonstrations – marks the development of a Wittgensteinian model of politics that recaptures the 'strange multiplicity' that was largely extinguished by the monological uniformity of the modern state.[2] As a theory of meaningful democracy, Liberal Organic Democracy draws many of the same conclusions, welcoming the development of a plurality of political practices, and seeking to increase the diversity of engagement in political life.

[1] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1972), p. 328.
[2] James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key. Volume I: Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 154-7; James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an age of diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 111.

§9

Yet Liberal Organic Democracy also acknowledges the limitations of practice pluralism. In contrast to other socio-linguistic theories, it recognises that Wittgenstein's theoretical hostility to generality was qualified by an awareness of the limitations of particularity.

Wittgenstein's remarks on linguistic pluralism highlight the danger of plural bias in democratic political engagement. In *Zettel*, Wittgenstein suggests that knowledge of multiple languages can seem to enhance our understanding, while simply modifying our theoretical perspective: 'Being acquainted with many languages prevents us from taking quite seriously a philosophy which is laid down in the form of any one. But here we are blind to the fact that we ourselves have strong prejudices for, and against, certain forms of expression; that this very piling up of a lot of languages results in our having a particular picture'.[3] If we multiply conventions we do not necessarily generate a superior picture; but we do become captivated by a particular heterogeneous understanding of politics. Moreover, this insight is directly applicable to politics. A multiplicity of institutions grants members of the community access to a greater array of practices. However, it will also generate plural bias – a tendency to exaggerate the value of plurality, and to ignore the advantages of homogeneity.

There is significant value in tempering particularity in political interaction. Homogeneity plays an important role in political development, allowing the individual to learn within a communal environment, while facilitating discussion between as many members of the community as possible. A healthy institutional framework combines plurality with homogeneity, enabling the community to reap the advantages of practice pluralism without falling into the error of plural bias.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (1967), second edn., ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), §323, p. 59.

§10

Contemporary democratic states mix heterogeneous and homogeneous practices in a complex framework of political rule. However, there is a common tendency to encourage plurality and particularity at the local level, and to demand uniformity and generality at the national level. A diverse range of local political associations is combined with an overarching monological procedure for voting in local, regional, and national elections. This division between local-plurality and national-uniformity seems logical, given the inevitable generality of national policy.

But if we take practice rather than policy as our main focus, then we are inclined to invert this relationship. Homogeneity at the local level allows the individual to identify with a basic framework of institutions. It encourages direct participation in political life. Heterogeneity at the national level enables the individual to engage in a variety of different political practices. It encourages the individual to take an active role in reshaping the constitutional framework of the community. Moreover, this configuration helps to check political authority without compromising local identity. Practice pluralism at the national level means that a democratic national executive can intervene whenever local homogeneity shows signs of compromising democratic engagement.

Practice pluralism is an intrinsic part of a meaningful democracy. But because meaningful engagement is a complex phenomenon – and because plural bias threatens to extinguish the benefits of a limited homogeneity – we must find the right balance between generality and particularity within a federal structure of democratic institutions.[4]

[4] Crucially, the need to balance particularity and generality echoes Hegel's determination to incorporate particularity into the universality of the state. However, our Wittgensteinian theory of politics does not fall back on the metaphysical argumentation of Hegel's categorical system. There is no requirement for the particular to be developed through the universal, simply a

* * *

§11

At this point, we will take a moment to review the argument so far. Meaningful democracy is indeterminate. Its constitutional structure does not correspond to a fixed set of institutions; and is shaped by the democratic self-realisation of the political community.

Practice pluralism helps to maximise meaningful political engagement. It serves as a core institutional principle, promoting civic flourishing and enabling the organic process of democratic self-realisation. However, Wittgensteinian philosophy illustrates the importance of balancing heterogeneity with a small amount of homogeneity – of ensuring that practice pluralism does not lead to plural bias.

A federal system that enshrines homogeneity at a local level while encouraging plurality at the national level appears to strike the right balance between meaning and agency, without sacrificing either. We will build on this institutional principle as we begin to delineate a meaningful model of democratic engagement in the following sections.

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determination to maximise the opportunity for meaningful linguistic-political development. And the implications of the Wittgensteinian argument – that pluralism and particularity must win out at the national (and international), but not the local level, is an inversion of Hegel's political system. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §41, §283.

II. A Meaningful Model of Democratic Engagement

§12

In the early sections of this chapter, we linked political engagement to self-determination and practice pluralism. In the process, we began to trace the contours of meaningful democratic rule. In the following section, we will contrast this model of popular engagement with contemporary theories of democracy. As we proceed from the form to the practice of political engagement, we will distinguish meaningful democracy from representative, aggregative, deliberative, and plebiscitary forms, highlighting the unique theoretical insights of Liberal Organic Democracy.

§13

The failure of modern representative government to deliver popular, responsive, and enlightened rule has led many contemporary political theorists to question the value of representation – and to reassess the theoretical foundations of democracy.[5]

However, democratic debate has remained tied to an individualistic understanding of politics. Discontent with representative government has fuelled a growing determination to identify a better way of translating individual preferences into a system of popular self-rule. As a result, the idea of the citizen as a holder of atomistic preferences has exercised a prevailing influence over academic discussion, generating competing models of democracy that place too much emphasis on the way that the individual will finds expression in the political system.

[5] This is a primary concern for participatory, deliberative, and plebiscitary theories of democracy. See Carole Pateman, 'Participatory Democracy Revisited', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 10, no. 1 (March 2010), pp. 7-8; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 21-3, pp. 30-1; and Jeffrey Green, *The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 17-18.

Liberal Organic Democracy adopts a different approach. It does not assume that individuals can be reduced to preferences, or build a model of democracy around the process of combining and balancing these preferences. Instead, its theoretical starting point is a much broader, organic consideration of democratic meaning. It touches on questions of procedure and power, but largely as a function of the emphasis that is placed on democratic meaning. Therefore, Liberal Organic Democracy advances an understanding of politics that obliquely intersects with contemporary democratic theory debate, rather than directly engaging with it.

To illustrate this point, we will draw a detailed comparison between meaningful democracy and two of the most compelling (yet distinct) examples of contemporary democratic theory: deliberative democracy and plebiscitary democracy. There are a number of important similarities between these two theories and meaningful democracy; and a more comprehensive analysis of these points of intersection will help to illustrate the unique characteristics of this innovative theoretical approach.

Deliberative Democracy and Plebiscitary Democracy

§14

Deliberative democracy emphasises the role of discourse in democratic rule, shifting focus away from the simple aggregation of preferences through the voting process, towards the way that we generate and refine individual political preferences through public debate. It has been extensively developed through the work of Jürgen Habermas,

Joshua Cohen, James Fishkin, Bruce Ackerman, Amy Gutmann, and Dennis Thompson, among others.[6]

Deliberative democracy shares a great deal of common ground with the model of meaningful democracy that we have traced throughout this thesis. Both theories acknowledge the underlying significance of language, drawing attention to the way that we collectively change political conventions (and understanding) through discussion. And both theories require collective control over this process, in order to prevent mass-manipulation and the subversion of democratic rule.

However, deliberative democracy is distinguished by its normative commitment to an ideal deliberation procedure. Although deliberative democrats are generally sensitive to the limitations of ordinary discourse, their institutional models are grounded in an ideal framework of communication and agreement. Cohen emphasises that 'the justification of the terms and conditions of association proceeds through public argument and reasoning among equal citizens', while noting that institutions are legitimate insofar as they 'establish a framework for free public deliberation'.[7] Free and equal deliberation is justified on the grounds that it generates consensus and improves the quality of democratic decisions. In short, theories of deliberative democracy incorporate a model of public reason into a democratic institutional context.

[6] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990); Joshua Cohen, 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy', in *Democracy*, ed. David Estlund (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Inc., 2002); James Fishkin, *Democracy When the People are Thinking: revitalizing our politics through public deliberation* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2018); Bruce Ackerman and James S. Fishkin, *Deliberation Day* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*

[7] Cohen, 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy', p. 91.

§15

Theoretical opponents of deliberative democracy have questioned whether this deliberation procedure is an unjustifiable mediation of the popular will. Urbinati highlights that deliberative committees require instruction and adjudication, subordinating democratic discussion to the 'rational' principles established by an unaccountable intellectual elite. And she builds this distinction into a much broader *theoretical* objection. 'Political judgement' is a different type of public reason from impartial deliberation; it 'has *generality* (the general interest of the political community at large) as its criterion. The ideal of deliberation championed by deliberative democracy aims at *impartiality* in evaluating a certain fact or set of data or deeds'.[8] This distinction renders any attempt to combine the two within a rational deliberative procedure inherently problematic. Under an ideal deliberative system, citizens would be insulated from the propaganda, political commentary, and forms of partiality that characterise political judgement. Urbinati's argument reflects a broader dissatisfaction with an ideal procedure for preference-formation and preference-aggregation, illustrating the procedural divergence that drives modern democratic theory debates.

§16

But Liberal Organic Democracy rejects deliberative democracy on different theoretical grounds. It is not primarily concerned with the mechanics of preference-aggregation. Instead, it takes issue with the instrumental characterisation of language-use that underpins deliberative democracy.

Habermasian theories of deliberative democracy are carefully constructed in accordance with the argument that the propositional, illocutionary, and linguistic aspects of

[8] Nadia Urbinati, 'Unpolitical Democracy', *Political Theory*, (February 2010), p. 81.

language are the most critical part of meaningful expression.[9] These components of linguistic expression all fulfil an instrumental function in discourse: they are the intersubjective grounds for assertion, validation, and communication respectively. Instrumental meaning is held to be *necessary* to mankind's emancipation from illusory objectivist and subjectivist worldviews.[10] So necessary, in fact, that it is taken as the basis for all social and political interaction (within the common *Lifeworld*).[11]

Yet language does not simply fulfil an instrumental function in linguistic interaction. As we noted in Chapter 5, it allows for a plurality of different forms of expression, which alter in different contexts, producing different psychological (perlocutionary) effects – from aesthetic appreciation to moral approbation. These effects are all part of the way that we experience the phenomenon of meaning; and none of them are any more or less valuable than the purely instrumental, illocutionary part of language-use. To assume otherwise is to unjustifiably raise the instrumental aspect of language to some higher purpose or rationality.

Liberal Organic Democracy takes issue with the theory of deliberative democracy on the grounds that it elevates the illocutionary (instrumental) over the perlocutionary (affective), resulting in a rather limited model of communication that cannot comprehensively capture the diversity of democratic meaning. The ideal deliberation procedure assumes a model of human understanding that is not simply apolitical: it is incomplete. Nevertheless, Liberal Organic Democracy remains sympathetic to the reflective norms and institutional solutions proposed by deliberative democracy. Inclusive forums, citizen's conventions, and deliberative polls all resonate with this new theory's emphasis on meaningful democratic engagement.

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[9] Jürgen Habermas, 'An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centred Reason', in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 312-6.
[10] *Ibid*. pp. 296-8
[11] *Ibid*. p. 326.

Ultimately, the theoretical priorities of Liberal Organic Democracy are orthogonal to contemporary debates about the nature of democratic decision, sundering any close connection with deliberative theories of democracy. Liberal Organic Democracy does not fixate on atomistic individual preferences, or on the instrumental function of language in coordinating between conflicting views. Nevertheless, both meaningful democracy and deliberative democracy are grounded in discussion and socio-linguistic interaction, resulting in a series of close institutional parallels.

§17

Jeffrey Green's theory of plebiscitary democracy provides another interesting counterpoint to the model of meaningful democracy that we have traced throughout this thesis. In *The Eyes of the People*, Green argues that contemporary democratic theory is founded upon a misconception, because it 'assumes that the organ of popular power is the *decision*: an empowered form of voice by which the People identifies its will—or wills—and brings this will to bear upon political life through elections, instructions, delegation, or other processes that might communicate opinions, values, and concerns'.[12] Green jettisons this assumption, along with the 'normative rubric of representation' that frames contemporary theoretical debate.[13] And in its place, he champions a more limited conception of democracy that eschews the principle of collective decision-making in favour of a more realistic principle of popular spectatorship.

[12] Green, *The Eyes of the People*, p. 9.
[13] *Ibid*. p. 17.

§18

Green's analysis illustrates how the metaphor of the voice frames the way that theorists debate democracy, and provides a point of convergence between deliberative, pluralist, and aggregative visions of democracy:

> Deliberative democrats look at how politicians, advocates, jurists, and other public figures ought to talk with each other and how their deliberations can refine and enlarge the People's voice. Pluralists have reminded us that there is no single sovereign voice in modern democracy, but a multiplicity of voices that compete and cooperate to produce the harmony that prevails within stable democratic systems. And aggregationists, who focus on the mechanics of voting, choose for their analyses the one moment when the People—or, to be much more accurate, the majority of those who vote—formally expresses itself through voicing a preference about who should hold power.[14]

But he insists that this shared model of political engagement does not correspond to contemporary political conditions. Democratic theory is 'out of touch with the way politics is experienced by most people most of the time...The fact is that for most of us, our political voice is something we exercise rarely if at all: in periodic votes, the occasional poll, and perhaps also in pursuit of a particular issue that galvanizes us'.[15]

Green contends that 'political philosophy of a democratic stamp has a special obligation to develop political principles in a manner that respects the everyday structure of political experience' – that democracy should be meaningful to 'the

[14] *Ibid*. p. 3.
[15] *Ibid*. pp. 3-4.

mass of everyday, non-office-holding citizens in their *collective* capacity', rather than to the ideal citizen.[16] Building on this normative insight, he constructs an innovative defence of plebiscitary democracy that 'offers a way of reasoning about and pursuing democracy from the spectator's perspective'.[17]

Plebiscitary democracy is grounded in the limited political agency of a populace ruled by an elected political elite. It suggests that the people do not command, because they do not speak together. Instead, they watch their leaders, and attempt to hold them to account. Political participation is limited, and democratic decision-mechanisms (such as voting) fail to weave individual preferences into a cohesive whole. Nevertheless, Green argues that the people do exercise political power through the popular gaze – the 'hierarchical form of visualization that inspects, observes, and achieves surveillance' over the activities of the political elite.[18]

The popular gaze enables citizens to generate a politics of candour – of unscripted, unstructured publicity: 'Leaders are candid to the extent their public appearances are neither rehearsed, preplanned, nor managed from above, but rather contain all the risk and uncertainty of spontaneous public events'.[19] By denying their leaders control over the conditions of publicity, and forcing them into a position of uncertainty, the people are able to temporarily upset the established power dynamic, to scrutinise and subjectify elected elites, and to generate a spontaneous – and therefore meaningful – political event.[20]

[16] *Ibid*. p. 6; pp. 3-4.
[17] *Ibid*. p. 5.
[18] *Ibid*. p. 9.
[19] *Ibid*. pp. 13-14.
[20] *Ibid*. p. 20.

§19

The emphasis that Green places on citizens' experience, patterns of rule, and the role of media in political life make this model a compelling alternative to deliberative, participatory, and aggregative forms of democracy. Crucially, it appears to break away from the narrative of individual preference-aggregation and decision, and to illustrate the shortcomings of contemporary deliberative and participatory theories.

Nevertheless, Liberal Organic Democracy diverges from plebiscitary democracy on the grounds that plebiscitary democracy assumes too much about contemporary political experience. The metaphor of the voice drives Green towards a narrow conception of political realism 'grounded on the condition of inequality between political leaders and everyday citizens' in democratic decision-making.[21] Liberal Organic Democracy rejects this narrow conception, and traces an alternative vision of political realism grounded in the grammatical structure of political interaction.

Green's theory makes an important distinction between 'political engagement' and 'political involvement' – between active participation, and 'various measures, such as political interest and knowledge about politics, that are distinct from active political engagement'.[22] He points out that most empirical studies of modern political behaviour acknowledge that a majority of citizens do not actively participate in politics, but remain involved to some degree. And his injunction to pay closer attention to political involvement helps to ground his theory within a

[21] *Ibid*. p. 23.
[22] *Ibid*. p. 48.

pattern of everyday political interaction. But his claim to realism is undermined by a static and individualistic understanding of the world.

He argues that political spectatorship provides a more practical model of democratic rule. However, Liberal Organic Democracy suggests that political involvement prevails over political engagement in the real world because of the fixed (and bounded) nature of our political systems. As political meaning evolves, a fixed model of political rule becomes increasingly disconnected from everyday political interaction. Citizens feel alienated by their governments, and are driven to inaction and spectatorship. Because government is unresponsive, there is little opportunity for the community to participate in the dynamic process of democratic self-realisation. Green's model of everyday political interaction assumes that a static model of engagement is a necessary political reality. However, it is simply the unfortunate consequence of a failure of political institutions. Political life is constantly changing, so a more dynamic and holistic model of democracy is better attuned to the reality of ordinary political activity.

Plebiscitary democracy seeks to break free 'from the hegemony of representation and the ideal of self-legislation' that defines aggregative, deliberative, and participatory forms of democracy.[23] And yet, it remains tied to the static and individualistic understanding of political self-assertion that defines democracy in terms of preference-formation and preference-aggregation. Liberal Organic Democracy suggests that democracy is not simply a matter of weighing preferences and imposing control – it is a meaningful process of self-realisation.

[23] *Ibid*. p. 19.

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§20

We can summarise the preceding argument as follows. Liberal Organic Democracy is not anchored to an individualistic understanding of politics. It does not aim to develop the perfect system for disaggregating and amalgamating individual preferences, or endeavour to find some consolation for the impossibility of popular rule. As a result, it only obliquely intersects with contemporary democratic debate.

Liberal Organic Democracy breaks from more prescriptive theories of democracy, and holds that the institutional frameworks of deliberative and plebiscitary democracy are overdetermined and incomplete models of political engagement. At the same time, Liberal Organic Democracy runs parallel to these two theories because it embraces many of the same institutional clusters as potential sites of meaning. In the next section, we will gesture towards the institutional forms that correspond to this holistic institutional framework, while avoiding a prescriptive institutional approach.

III. The Institutional Forms of Meaningful Democracy

§21

Liberal Organic Democracy cannot provide a fixed constitutional blueprint for meaningful democracy. But it can suggest a series of institutional forms that maximise political engagement, and enable democratic self-realisation. In the following section, we will elaborate on this institutional framework as we explore the complex relationship between representative and participatory institutions, the importance of unbounded political practice, and the role of the citizen in reframing the constitutional structure of society.

Representation and Participation

§22

The constitutional structure of Liberal Organic Democracy aims to maximise political engagement, enabling the community to play a formative role in democratic self-determination, while ensuring a plurality of different opportunities for individual political expression.

Like many contemporary theories of democracy, Liberal Organic Democracy could plausibly be described as a 'post-representational' theory of democracy.[24] It does not tie popular self-government to the metaphysical logic of representation. Instead, it

[24] Though representation has enjoyed a resurgence, it is nonetheless true that many of the most compelling theories of the last few years are sceptical about the validity of representation, and have sought to address this issue in new frameworks – from participation, to deliberation, to spectatorship. Green gives a clear account of his theory as a 'post-representational' theory of democracy. Green, *The Eyes of the People*, p. 17.

contends that democracy is the active process in which all members of a community come to understand and define political concepts. And it suggests that democratic participation allows members to forge an identity between policy and practice.

This does not mean that meaningful democracy precludes a framework of representative institutions. Liberal Organic Democracy echoes Hobson's insight about democracy: representative institutions are justifiable insofar as they promote meaningful engagement, and succeed where participatory mechanisms fail (Chapter 2). However, it does suggest that social development gradually reduces the need for representation – that civic flourishing opens up new ways of participating in the political sphere, and gives citizens the tools to coordinate effectively in an open political forum (Chapter 6). A meaningful democracy is defined by the fact that it is evolving from a representative towards a participatory institutional framework.

§23

Participatory institutions grant individual citizens the opportunity to engage in the process of democratic self-determination. Members of the political community are able to learn by doing: to grasp political conventions, and to modify these conventions in response to changing circumstances.

Local government is a critical part of the participatory framework of Liberal Organic Democracy. If power is redistributed away from the centre, then members of the community can come together at the local level to determine (and to execute) the laws that have the most immediate impact on their everyday lives. Individual citizens are able to actively engage with a common set of practices, to confront opposing viewpoints, and to collectively decide on the best way to resolve conflicts through shared decision-

mechanisms. In the process, members of the local community play an active part in affirming or redefining these decision-mechanisms: in democratic self-realisation.

Participation is not limited to local politics. The institution of the referendum enables democratic self-realisation at a national level. Members of the political community pass judgement on a single political issue, and in the process, develop a meaningful connection to the resulting legislation. Nevertheless, we must be careful to draw a clear distinction between the referendum and the plebiscite. As Ritchie suggests, polling for 'a mere *yes* or *no* of a bare majority, is a very bad, because "abstract" and "inorganic" way of arriving at the general will', while 'a *referendum, after* decision by representative bodies, may, in some cases, be a convenient manner of getting the "royal assent" or veto of the sovereign people'.[25] A yes or no vote is a blunt and imprecise institutional tool, which is unable to distinguish between complex political motivations, or identify compelling political alternatives. If it is deployed in order to shut down debate, or to establish a popular mandate for a predetermined policy, then it evidently compromises the democratic self-realisation of the political community.

Yet the popular vote does not have to be used in this way. The shortcomings of the referendum can be resolved through sophisticated and meaningful debate on the issue at hand – either at the parliamentary level, or at the national level – and through careful institutional design. Cheneval and el-Wakil have highlighted the need to distinguish between different variants of referenda, and have argued that a top-down referendum is less likely to generate a genuinely democratic decision than a bottom-up referendum that arises out of popular discontent.[26] If the referendum is used as a popular veto on parliamentary legislation, or if it is triggered by popular initiative after a prolonged

[25] D. G. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference: Four Essays on the Political Philosophy of Mr Herbert Spencer, J. S. Mill, and T. H. Green* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), p. 74.
[26] Francis Cheneval and Alice el-Wakil, 'The Institutional Design of Referendums: Bottom-Up and Binding', *Swiss Political Science Review*, vol. 24 (3) (September 2018), pp. 294-5.

period of public debate (say by a petition signed by 5% of the total electorate) – rather than being employed as a legitimation device for a democratically-compromised regime – then it can act as an invaluable institutional tool within a democratic political community. The popular veto and the popular initiative provide an organic institutional expression of democratic activity, and a means to realise popular political rule.

However, local government and the referendum are simply the most obvious (and most constitutionally-defined) means for maximising political engagement. A meaningful democracy will also encourage the development and diversification of independent political associations, through social and institutional mechanisms (i.e. through cultivation of communal spaces, social entrepreneurship, and financial incentives).

Unbounded Institutions

§24

The distinction between bounded and unbounded rules that we traced in Chapter 4 allows us to further refine this model of meaningful democracy.

Liberal Organic Democracy suggests that passive involvement often prevails over political engagement in the real world because of the bounded nature of our political systems. When institutions are defined by strict boundaries, enthusiasm is low. Citizens have little input over the terms of political engagement. They are expected to choose between a limited range of options, which may all seem unappealing. Thus, they remain involved yet unengaged with politics. But when an unbounded institutional structure introduces an element of choice into the system, political activity develops beyond involvement, into engagement. Members of the community consciously participate in the dynamic process of political redefinition, at a conceptual and an institutional level.

Bounded institutions (and practices) should be replaced by unbounded ones wherever possible. A simple example helps to illustrate this point clearly. The bounded practice of choosing from a determinate list of candidates when voting in an election should be replaced by the unbounded practice of choosing from a list of candidates that includes an option to write-in a preferred candidate. The write-in option does not radically alter the procedure. But it does encourage a degree of agency that is absent in the bounded case.

§25

Strictly speaking, unbounded rule-following practice is not simply about participation in existing institutions – it is about co-creation of constitutional forms, and engagement in a shared process of political redefinition.

Hence, political redefinition should be incorporated into institutional structures at every level of government. First, the community should take an active role in framing the terms (and the language) of any referendum, rather than allowing the government to monopolise this process. This does not mean that citizens need to come together to legislate collectively on the way that the question is asked in the referendum. It simply means that a widespread consultation – with ample opportunity to register individual viewpoints – is a necessary prerequisite for an unbounded constitutional procedure.[27] Second, parliamentary committees should adopt a procedure for crowdsourcing information and evidence from experts and ordinary citizens, in order to avoid a strictly

[27] Many of the most egregious examples of plebiscitary rule in history have been characterised by a lack of public consultation (and therefore by a bounded constitutional structure). Norman Davies has argued that the near-unanimous endorsement of unification with France in the Savoy plebiscite of 1860 was largely a product of the way the question was framed, rather than a legitimate democratic decision based on popular views. Norman Davies, *Vanished Kingdoms: The History of Half-Forgotten Europe* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 423. Moreover, John Dunn has highlighted that the use of the referendum has often operated as a way to outmanoeuvre political rivals in cases where citizens are not directly involved in the process of initiating or establishing the procedure. John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), pp. 176-7.

bounded and static institutional perspective. Third, government should implement a petitioning system for changing the constitutional structure of government, allowing a substantial minority of the electorate (say 10%) to modify the institutional landscape of government, and introduce new popular forums or committees on a provisional basis (with the important caveat that any such modification could be overwritten by an inverse proportion (in this case, 90%) of representatives in the national legislature). These measures would help citizens to overcome the inertia of a defined constitutional structure. Since democratic self-realisation flourishes within unbounded institutional structures, and meaning is constantly evolving, the shape of government institutions must be responsive and malleable.

Unbounded institutions lead to more experimentation, more popular engagement with politics, and the development of a dynamic constitutional structure. By combining political activity, institutional pluralism, and an unbounded institutional framework, Liberal Organic Democracy generates a dynamic model of popular self-rule.

Constitutional Design

§26

However, the most powerful institutional mechanism for democratic self-realisation is the constitutional convention. A public citizens' convention grants members of the political community the opportunity to participate in the process of constitutional design – to set the terms of political discourse, institutional expression, and policy formation.

Evidently, the terms of the constitutional convention will need to be as open, inclusive, and unbounded as possible, while remaining grounded in the political conventions of

the community to maximise democratic political engagement. A multi-stage process that incorporates widespread consultation, mass deliberation, and an open redrafting procedure (as well as a final public veto) has the potential to build meaning into the constitutional structure of the state, and generate a healthy foundation for the growth and evolution of political norms. This process does not necessarily have to constitute a complete overhaul of the state, or to occur at the founding (or a re-founding) of the state. Its use as circumstances demand is part of its profound political resonance. By drawing attention towards the dynamic and holistic way that the community reshapes its own political grammar, the constitutional convention transcends its contrived origins, and assumes an organic function within democratic political life.

Democratic engagement in constitutional design is possibly even more critical to the development of a meaningful democracy than participation the process of legislation and local government. For while participation allow citizens to forge an identity between policy and practice, the process of consciously reframing the institutional structure of the state establishes a direct relationship between the institutional mechanisms of the state and active political engagement of all members of society. By allowing all citizens to become shared architects of their own constitutional framework, the constitutional convention enables democracy to play a meaningful role in political life.

* * *

§27

Over the course of this chapter, we have gestured towards a loose institutional template for a meaningful democracy. While this template can never be determinative, it helps to

identify institutions that maximise meaningful engagement, and stimulate the healthy development of an organic political community.

Liberal Organic Democracy is defined by the principle of democratic self-realisation. It favours a federal structure, combining practice pluralism at the national level with a greater degree of homogeneity among practices at the local level. It incorporates representative and participatory institutions in order to maximise meaningful engagement. And it places particular emphasis on the importance of local government, the referendum, and the constitutional convention, as it seeks to construct an unbounded institutional model of democratic engagement. It therefore generates a responsive constitutional structure that is attuned to a dynamic political world.

Ultimately, this is an evolving constitutional form, expressed in a plurality of political grammars. It is a very loose template for meaningful democracy, which does not strive for a utopian ideal, yet helps to distinguish how imperfect, idiosyncratic democracies might develop towards a more comprehensive and meaningful structure.

IV. Democracy Online

§28

The internet seems like the perfect forum for the institutional model of democracy that we traced in the first half of this chapter.

At a glance, the online medium seems to fit closely with the three social conditions that we have identified with Liberal Organic Democracy:

i) The internet is a free space of virtual expression (nonviolence).

ii) It has the potential to integrate the entire community within an inclusive and instantaneous virtual forum (inclusion).

iii) It is a limitless space, allowing individuals to access information, join discussions, and engage with concepts in totally unbounded ways (engagement).

However, the ideal of the internet is an oversimplification. The reality is far more complicated. The internet is a gigantic virtual network that has no determinate form. In order to be able to participate online we need to engage with a set of structures, or *platforms*, that provide an institutional framework for virtual interaction.

The most prevalent platforms are social media sites (SMS), web forums for expression, communication, and debate. These SMS cover a wide range of social activities, from social networking (Facebook) to socio-political coordination (change.org, go fund me), and from expression (Twitter, Youtube, Instagram) to information curation and development (Google, Wikipedia). SMS enable online participation, but they remain

problematic: they are often owned by private corporations, offer limited accountability, and are not built by users from the ground up.

The variety of platforms and their fluid, updating model mean that SMS approach the institutional principles of self-determination, practice pluralism, and unbounded institutional structure, at least in part. Yet the use of SMS has produced some unexpected outcomes. Heavy use of social media sites has led to the growth of nationalism and political polarisation. Targeted advertising and fake news have provoked serious questions about the manipulation of public opinion on SMS. The remaining part of this chapter will examine democracy online – drawing on the theory of Liberal Organic Democracy, recent scholarship on SMS, and interviews with key figures in social media.

User-Generated Content

§29

Political theorists have repeatedly revised their understanding of digital democracy over the last two decades. Loader and Mercea note that the advent of the internet in the late 1990s led many theorists to argue that the World Wide Web would act as an ideal deliberative space – allowing all members of the community to break free from social constraints and participate in a Habermasian public sphere.[28] However, this understanding has lost traction as the imperfect fit with the reality of online participation has become more apparent. Bakardjieva echoes this point, arguing that:

[28] Brian D. Loader and Dan Mercea, 'Social media innovations in participatory politics' in *Social Media and Democracy: Innovations in participatory politics*, eds. Loader and Mercea (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 1. See also Zizi A. Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

> the use of the Habermasian public sphere as a benchmark when observing and assessing the deliberative quality of actual online interactions has produced disenchanting results. Already in early computer conferencing systems and mailing lists, researchers found the domination of some participants over others along with new sources of inequality, and most discouragingly, group polarization instead of consensus building.[29]

Factionalism, prejudice, and social differentiation remain, illustrating the distance between the ideal deliberative framework and the reality of social and political interaction online. Moreover, while the ideal deliberative structure can be framed as a normative rather than a descriptive template for meaningful online interaction, it is important to note that this ideal has not proved popular with the majority of internet *users* (the individuals and groups that use the internet and therefore generate demand for specific forms of online interaction).[30]

§30

In response to the failure of the deliberative paradigm of online participation and the rise of a new generation of SMS including Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube in the late 2000s, political theorists have developed a new approach to the problem of digital democracy, labelled 'Web 2.0'. Loader and Mercea characterise this approach as:

> the displacement of the public sphere model with that of a networked citizen-centred perspective providing opportunities to connect the private sphere of autonomous political identity to a multitude of chosen political

[29] Maria Bakardjieva, 'Navigating the Mediapolis: Digital Media and Emerging Practices of Democratic Participation' in Raphael Foshay, *The Digital Nexus: Identity, Agency, and Political Engagement* (Athabacusa, AL: Athabacusa University Press, 2016), p.283.
[30] Nevertheless, this approach continues to be popular with some theorists. See Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 257.

> spaces...It thus represents a significant departure from the earlier restricted and constrained formulations of rational deliberation with its concomitant requirement for dutiful citizens. In its place is a focus upon the role of the citizen-user as the driver of democratic innovation through the self-actualised networking of citizens engaged in lifestyle and identity politics...[31]

Loader and Mercea's definition illustrates how attention has shifted from ideal democratic deliberation to meaningful content creation within a much broader cultural framework. Users generate content themselves, shaping the rules of online engagement through participation in online social and political networks.

Aspects of this approach are mirrored in the attitudes of some of the world's biggest technology corporations. In an interview conducted in July 2014, the team at Google Ideas (the geopolitics branch of Google, subsequently rebranded as Jigsaw after corporate restructuring in 2016) suggested that Google was wedded to a libertarian framework that enabled individual users to engage with information online on their own terms. Dan Keysterling, Chief of Staff at Google Ideas, stated that Google's corporate 'mission-statement' is 'to organise the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful' to the individual user.[32] Moreover Keysterling noted that 'it's not just the presence of participation that makes a meaningful democracy, it's the absence of oppression. And, the absence of a government that views the internet as its property', illustrating Google's commitment to the principle of a free interplay of ideas and norms over structured forms of online interaction.[33]

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[31] Loader and Mercea, 'Social media innovations in participatory politics', p. 2.
[32] Dan Keysterling, Chief of Staff at Google Ideas, interview conducted by Richard Elliott, Wednesday 23 July 2014 (full transcript available upon request).
[33] *Ibid*.

Though Google and other social media companies are less acutely concerned with political organisation than the proponents of Web 2.0, they continue to generate services that facilitate democratic participation. The Constitute Project, a free online tool developed by Google Ideas in partnership with the Comparative Constitutions Project at the University of Texas, allows users to browse and compare constitutions from around the world (in English and Arabic).[34] It was created to promote political education, and to empower all citizens to take an active role in debating (and contesting) the terms of political engagement within their political community. Crucially, the expansion and proliferation of online tools like The Constitute Project has allowed users to share data within social and political networks, and to shape the development of the norms and conventions of online engagement through everyday use. SMS have therefore provided the structural framework for digital democracy.

§31

Web 2.0 and SMS promote an ostensibly democratic approach to online interaction. However, the drawbacks of a system centred on the individual user and driven by social identity have become increasingly apparent since 2016. The creation and propagation of false information, combined with the use of targeted online political advertising through platforms such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter, played a role in shaping public attitudes in the UK referendum on leaving the European Union of June 2016 and the US Presidential Election of November 2016. Though the impact is difficult to quantify, it is clear that widespread use of SMS (and the tendency towards insularity that existed within online social networks) left individual users vulnerable to the manipulation of free debate, the emergence of echo chambers that reinforce false or misleading views,

[34] https://www.constituteproject.org/

and the effects of epistemic confusion.[35] In this respect, the shift towards a model of networked individual driven by social identity has proven to be even more problematic than the Habermasian ideal of online deliberation.

And yet, the concept of user-generated content (UGC) that is intrinsic to Web 2.0 approaches is an invaluable tool for understanding and shaping online engagement. It captures the way that users generate and modify meaningful content (information, applications, norms) through participation and practice. And it echoes the active, dynamic, and inclusive model of social subjectivity that we have explored throughout this thesis. By grounding digital democracy on UGC, we can build our understanding of internet use on the holistic process of co-construction and design, instead of the atomistic process of preference formation and preference aggregation. Rather than retreating from Web 2.0, we should therefore refine this approach in order to show how the internet can act as a framework of democratic self-realisation.

Meaningful Engagement Online

§32

The emphasis that Web 2.0 places on UGC makes it a strong starting point for a model of democratic self-realisation. Citizens are able to create new content and establish new patterns of online engagement through their everyday interaction on SMS – to become shared architects within a dynamic and unbounded virtual world. Nevertheless, citizens are vulnerable to manipulation when they interact on SMS. In order to ensure that

[35] In recent months, government have given significant scrutiny to the impact of misinformation campaigns online. See the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport Committee, *Disinformation and 'Fake News: Interim Report*, Fifth Report of the Session 2017-19 (London: House of Commons, July 2018).

internet use maximises meaningful engagement, a model of digital democracy centred on UGC needs to fulfil three criteria.

First, online interaction should not be defined by the issue of identity. Internet users engage with one another through online profiles or avatars – enabling them to participate in accordance with their social identity, to adopt a misleading or strategic online alias, or to participate anonymously. SMS have endeavoured to satisfy public demand for different forms of identity, with the team at Google Ideas acknowledging that the demand for anonymity has driven the redefinition of their platform, and has therefore changed the rules of online participation.[36] However, this culture of deference to social identity subordinates democratic engagement to a competing form of meaning centred on tribal self-determination. If we return to the online example of false information ('fake news') and targeted political advertising, then we can explain this issue in more detail. Users are exposed to information that confirms and amplifies partisan bias, generating a *meaningful* collective experience – in effect, promoting the subjectivity of coexistence over the subjectivity of engagement (Chapter 6) – and effectively moving public debate in a populist and nationalist direction. Allowing social identity to prevail over active and critical engagement is therefore dangerous for digital democracy. SMS should channel users towards the co-creation of content in order to balance the demand for identity. Platforms should integrate discussion forums, group projects, and games that reach across the partisan political divide and promote inclusive political participation (in a manner that directly echoes the model of active citizenship that we outlined in Chapter 6).

Second, a model of digital democracy grounded in UGC should acknowledge the constructive potential of unbounded online engagement. The internet enables virtual

[36] Scott Carpenter, Deputy Director at Google Ideas, interview conducted by Richard Elliott, Wednesday 23 July 2014 (full transcript available upon request).

world-building, making it the perfect laboratory of democracy: a place to develop, critique, and model new institutional configurations for popular self-rule. Perhaps more importantly, the internet enables members of the community to construct programmes (or apps) that assist other members in the process of developing and constructing new ideas. And these programmes can have an additional impact on meaningful political engagement offline. Hélène Landemore has argued that 'cognitive artifacts' – languages, constitutions, and conventions – are a fundamental part of the epistemic process of forming political ideas because they 'contain the wisdom of the past, the idea of a collective intelligence distributed not only through space (over people and artifacts) but over time as well'.[37] Online programmes can act as 'cognitive artifacts', enabling citizens to refer questions and ideas to a virtual model of constructive constitutionalism as they participate in the real world.

Third, digital democracy should integrate online participation into the broader process of constitutional reform. Combining real and virtual interaction will increase participation and illustrate the organic interrelation of different spheres of life. The Constitute Project illustrates how SMS can help to generate the tools required for this activity. By modelling constitutional design as peer-to-peer production (a process in which all participants are free to suggest edits and new material), governments should be able to add another element of democratic feedback into the process of political reform. Landemore's analysis of the Icelandic constitutional convention of 2010-11 has noted that online crowdsourcing has already be incorporated into the process of drafting a new constitution, and has argued that this process provides a promising additional framework for democratic participation in constitutional reform.[38] While it is

[37] Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason: politics, collective intelligence, and the rule of the many* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 21-2.
[38] Hélène Landemore, 'Inclusive Constitution-Making: The Icelandic Experiment', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2015), p. 174.

clear that peer-to-peer production cannot take the place of open and equitable democratic institutions, it can add another element of meaningful engagement to political practice.

Together, these three criteria provide an online institutional framework for democratic self-realisation, and facilitate the civic flourishing of the political community. By channelling users towards co-creation of UGC, integrating this process into the process of constitutional reform, providing a virtual laboratory of democracy, and guarding against the dangers of identity politics, this model of digital democracy helps to maximise meaningful political engagement online.

* * *

§33

To summarise: at the beginning of this section, we noted that the internet appeared to provide the perfect framework for Liberal Organic Democracy. However, we observed that an ideal deliberative framework was unable to illustrate the role of SMS in generating modern patterns of political engagement. We examined the development of a new paradigm of digital democracy, Web 2.0, and noted its strengths (an emphasis on UGC) and its weaknesses (its vulnerability to manipulation and political polarisation). We articulated a set of three conditions for meaningful political engagement online; and in the process, we outlined a model of online participation that is not simply compatible with democratic self-realisation, but enhances and extends it within the real world. Ultimately, we illustrated that digital democracy can provide a valuable institutional

addition to Liberal Organic Democracy, and help us to make sense of in an era of increasing online engagement.

V. Towards Meaningful Democratic Institutions

§34

Throughout this chapter, we emphasised that Liberal Organic Democracy cannot provide a fixed constitutional blueprint for meaningful democracy. Political concepts, conventions, and norms are constantly changing through use. In a meaningful democracy, the community is in command of this process of political redefinition. Members of the community play a crucial role in generating the patterns of engagement and the institutions that enable meaningful democratic interaction.

However, Liberal Organic Democracy can recommend institutional forms that maximise meaningful engagement. A meaningful democracy entails practice pluralism and unbounded forms of political engagement. As a theory of meaningful democracy, Liberal Organic Democracy provides a realistic model of participation grounded in a grammatical understanding of interaction, and an unbounded framework of institutions centred on local government, referenda, and responsive and dynamic procedures for constitutional reform.

In the latter part of this chapter, we projected this theoretical model onto the sphere of digital democracy. By drawing on political theory and the expertise of key figures in social media, we were able to demonstrate that SMS operate like institutions, shaping meaningful engagement online. We noted that SMS are vulnerable to manipulation, and illustrated how this issue has compromised meaningful engagement. By focusing on UGC, and establishing a set of conditions for online engagement, we were able to incorporate internet use into Liberal Organic Democracy, and indicate how it might enhance the civic flourishing of the political community. In the process, we outlined a

model of meaningful democracy that stands apart from atomistic models centred on the formation and aggregation of individual preferences, and that may provide a way forward in a future driven by popular demand for meaningful political engagement.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, we emphasised the need to push beyond the boundaries of contemporary democratic discourse. Over the past seven chapters, we have developed an expansive and dynamic understanding of popular self-rule, inspired by New Liberal ideology, but attuned to contemporary forms of democratic engagement. We reconstructed Hobson's organic theory of democratic self-realisation. And we broke new ground by developing this theory into a new model of meaningful political engagement – Liberal Organic Democracy.

In Chapter 2, we highlighted that Hobson characterises democracy as an ethos – a fundamental political condition, which demands realisation and transcends a specific institutional form or static essential value. His malleable and inclusive theory models democratic engagement (i) as the active process in which all members of a community come to understand and define political concepts, and (ii) as an ideal framework of popular self-rule. It therefore outlines an organic social ontology – an inclusive democratic ideal, and a driving force within the community, compelling citizens towards the realisation of that ideal.

This thesis reclaims Hobson's dynamic conception of democracy, and anchors his organic social ontology to much firmer philosophical foundations. By drawing on the Wittgensteinian theory of following (and modifying) a rule, we were able to elaborate on the conceptual and linguistic processes that define Hobson's deeply unsystematic theory, to bypass the metaphysical assumptions that undermine his vision of politics, and to reconstruct the organic social ontology within a more secure epistemology and

philosophy of meaning. Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance enables us to understand the holistic interrelation of ideas and the indeterminacy of meaning, while his insistence that meaning is defined by practice demonstrates the importance of democratic activity in shaping political meaning. A close reading of Wittgenstein's later work allows us to break free of theoretical models centred on abstract values and institutional designs, and ground the principle of democracy in the everyday practice of following a rule.

Hobson made the active process of understanding and defining concepts central to his dynamic conception of democracy. Using rule-following theory, we were able to elaborate on this idea in Chapters 3 and 4, and identify the rule-following norm that underpins conceptual engagement. The normative principle that 'every agent should have the opportunity to be understood' resolves the contradictions that arise in everyday interaction in an inclusive, democratic way. Building on this insight, we were able to reconstruct the social subjectivity that drives New Liberal democratic thought into a model of rule-following practice that is willed, freely-chosen, and mediated between the individual and the community. Yet we were also able to go beyond the basic framework of the organic social ontology, illustrating the importance of unbounded engagement for meaningful interaction.

In Chapter 5, we argued that the rule-following norm lays the groundwork for a flourishing form of politics. A philosophical analysis of political interaction led us to reject Pitkin's argument that rule-following practice is stratified into different regions of language. The grammar of politics is shaped by meaningful engagement in all spheres of life. We argued that social development is defined by a holistic process of self-realisation that unites politics, morality, language, and culture in a framework of civic flourishing. In the process, we noted that the New Liberal idea of organic development provides an

insightful and intuitive ontological model for politics. We were therefore able to reconstruct Hobson's organic conception of democracy within a comprehensive theory of meaningful democratic engagement.

After establishing the theoretical foundations of Liberal Organic Democracy, we continued to explore the political properties of the rule-following norm. In Chapter 6, we identified three core properties – nonviolence, inclusion, and engagement – that are intrinsic to meaningful self-realisation. By incorporating these three properties into a framework of political interaction, Liberal Organic Democracy promotes the civic flourishing of the political community and development of new forms of meaningful engagement. Competing forms of meaning threaten to undermine this objective. By drawing parallels with the discussion of nationalism in early-twentieth century New Liberal thought, we were able to distinguish between these competing strands of meaning, and to outline the crucial distinction between national self-assertion and democratic self-realisation. A meaningful democracy is grounded in an active model of citizenship. In contrast to republican and radical democratic models of citizenship, Liberal Organic Democracy does not assume that active citizenship is rooted in a dynamic of agonistic conflict; rather, it emphasises that citizens are constantly changing the rules of political engagement through ordinary social and political interaction.

In the final chapter, we considered how a political community might channel the ideas explored in this thesis into a democratic constitutional framework. Liberal Organic Democracy encourages the development of malleable and responsive institutions that help to maximise meaningful engagement. These institutions are defined by the political community, but are ultimately characterised by the principles of practice pluralism and unbounded political engagement. In Chapter 7, we applied these principles to contemporary forms of democratic (re)definition, identifying a series of concrete

institutional forms, including the referendum, local government, and the constitutional convention, that help to maximise meaningful democratic engagement. And we projected this idea into the emerging sphere of online interaction – tracing a democratic ethos of virtual participation centred on the co-creation of user-generated content.

Liberal Organic Democracy emphasises the need to cultivate a self-reflective approach to social and political engagement. The structure of the thesis is broadly consistent with this argument: it employs an internal methodological critique in order to generate a detailed understanding of democratic political practice. The historical approach of earlier chapters gives way to a Wittgensteinian method of philosophical investigation as the process of theoretical reconstruction begins; and Wittgenstein's descriptive approach is refined as the normative implications of rule-following become increasingly clear. The organic approach that we have adopted therefore helps to uncover the holistic processes driving political engagement, and to demonstrate how they can be harnessed to the principle of democratic self-realisation.

Moreover, this methodological approach allows us to distance the arguments presented in the thesis from the metaphysical assumptions that undermined New Liberal political thought. Liberal Organic Democracy outlines an unsystematic grammatical understanding of politics that avoids being drawn into a discussion of objective principles by grounding its arguments in the intersubjective practice of following (and modifying) a rule. This grammatical understanding enables the theorist to shift between descriptive and normative perspectives – to grasp the contingency of political structures, while outlining a model of democratic agency that drives meaningful interaction.

Liberal Organic Democracy advances a new understanding of democracy, derived from New Liberal theory, but grounded in contemporary forms of democratic engagement. It breaks free from the rigid conceptual boundaries of modern democratic thought, and

reclaims a neglected understanding of politics that is grounded in a holistic – rather than an atomistic – vision of the political community. And it proposes an active, dynamic, and inclusive model of democracy centred on the dynamic redefinition of political concepts, rather than on the formation and aggregation of individual preferences. This new model of democracy does not provide a detailed blueprint for meaningful political rule. However, it does enable the theorist to differentiate between imperfect, idiosyncratic democratic states, and to propose holistic evolutionary reforms. This thesis contends that the individual citizen can and should play an increasingly important role in political life. A meaningful democracy is constantly evolving from a representative towards a participatory institutional framework: from a responsive to an active model of popular self-rule. Ultimately, it is this drive to democratise the way that we redefine political concepts and institutions that allows Liberal Organic Democracy to push beyond the boundaries of contemporary theoretical discourse, and to generate a new framework of democratic reform.

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