Rationality and the appraisal of theories

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A note to the Reader:

This essay is written mid-way in my involvement with a book concerning equality and justice in Western societies. In a revised form, it will eventually constitute an introductory chapter to that book. Such "Introductions" are, of course, usually written at the conclusion of a volume or, less often, prior to undertaking the work that constitutes the remainder of a book.

While I would prefer to have postponed this introductory essay until the bulk of my work was completed, I find it necessary to formulate my introductory remarks now. The reason for this is quite simple: I find that my earlier work concerned with scientific theories and practice leads directly to questions about the status and justification of moral and political theories. Thus I am attempting here to, in a sense, "clear the decks" with this essay so that I can get on with my more substantive concerns.

The main object of this essay is to provide a framework for a later consideration of theories of equality and justice in Western society. Because there is today a widespread awareness of the many difficulties involved in formulating, appraising, and defending not only moral and political theories, but scientific theories as well, I believe it is necessary to confront some of these difficulties before turning to the actual issues which will preoccupy me in subsequent essays. This later work rests on certain assumptions about moral philosophy, about intellectual inquiry more generally, and, in fact, about the world in which one lives and theorizes. Since these assumptions are generally unexplicated in those essays, now is the occasion for formulating the framework within which that work takes place.

I The old Socratic problem of finding an "impartial standpoint" for rational judgment is at the center of many recent discussions in science and philosophy. Perhaps more today than at any earlier time, this problem is referred to in terms of

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"relativism". Relativism itself is, of course, not new. What is new is the extent to which it appears to have direct consequences for our moral beliefs, political institutions, and scientific practices. The awareness of a considerable variety in custom, laws, and social practices has long existed, but until the beginning of the nineteenth century these differences were seen as a manifestation of a single static Human Nature or of a single set of objective, universal, laws of principles (1). With increased travel and communication with people from alien cultures and with greater awareness of differences in the norms and ideas within various societies, the relativist implications of these differing world-views could no longer be ignored.

Until the early twentieth century, however, the relativist implications of human diversity, often documented by sociologists and anthropologists, were usually restricted to questions of social practice and morality. It is only in the present century that the arguments for relativism have been extended to science: first to the social sciences; and then, especially during the last twenty-five years, to the citadel of the natural sciences.

With regard to the social sciences, it was the work of various sociologists of knowledge which pointed most directly to a relativistic conclusion. Karl Mannheim, perhaps the best known of the sociologists of knowledge, will serve as an example here. Influenced by Marx and Weber, he began with a concern with the social determinants of ideology. Whereas Marx claimed that his own ideas were scientific and those of his opponents only "rationalizations" based on class interest, Mannheim extended Marx's conception to include the possibility that our own ideas, as well as those of our opponents, could be ideological. He used the term "ideological" to refer to systems of ideas which positively evaluate either the existing social order and various interests of specific groups, or some past social order. Mannheim also differed from Marx in his rejection of the idea that intellectual attitudes and beliefs could be accounted for *solely* by material interests. "We cannot relate an intellectual standpoint directly to a social class", he says, "although what we can do is to find out the correlation between the 'style of thought' underlying a given standpoint and the 'intellectual motivation' of a certain social group" (2).

For Mannheim, ideology is "distorted" knowledge. This becomes apparent when it "fails to take account of the new realities applying to a situation, and when it attempts to conceal them by thinking of them in categories which are inappropriate" (3). Given that different social groups have different world-views, the sociology of knowledge is defined by Mannheim "as a discipline which explores the fundamentel dependence of each intellectual standpoint on the differentiated social group reality standing behind it, and which sets itself the task of retracing the evolution of the various standpoints" (4). Mannheim extended his analysis beyond ideology, in the usual sense, to include the whole conceptual apparatus with which people operate. He

notes that even perception is ordered and organized into categories, and that the extent "to which we can organize and express our experiences in such a conceptual form is, in turn, dependent upon the frames of reference which happen to be available at a given historical moment" (5). And he adds that "the approach to a problem, the level on which the problem happens to be formulated, the stage of abstraction and the stage of concreteness that one happens to attain, are all and in the same way bound up with social existence" (6). What one finds in Mannheim, then, is an acute sensitivity to the paramount influence of social factors on the various modes of social thought and knowledge. One sees further an emphasis on the impossibility of considering any element of social life - whether language and meaning, perception, knowledge, truth - outside of a communal or social context.

Most sociologists reject (or ignore) the relativist implications of the sociology of knowledge, accepting instead the "absolutistic" standpoint that rational judgment rests on eternal principles of rational criticism. That is, they assume the existence of fixed and enduring principles of rationality, rather than viewing rationality as relative to different groups, times, and places. This absolutistic idea of rationality as independent of socio-historical circumstances is, of course, the polar opposite of the relativistic view. For the most part, however, sociologists have not been at all concerned with the epistemological consequences of the sociology of knowledge (which menas that they never confront the epistemological consequences for sociology itself) (7).

Philosophers of science, in common with sociologists, generally hold to the absolutist view of rationality, truth, and scientific knowledge. But in recent years, some philosophers and historians of science have come to raise serious questions about the nature of the natural sciences. While Mannheim and other sociologists of knowledge exempt the natural sciences from the influence of social factors, Hanson, Polanyi, Toulmin, and, most especially, Thomas Kuhn, have called this assumption into question. Kuhn raises serious objections to the dominant (absolutist) view of science by arguing that scientists within a given "paradigm" share certain assumptions that are not empirically testable, and that furthermore, these assumptions vary with different paradigms and under differing socio-historical conditions (8).

Since each paradigm dicates specific criteria for itself, rational detachment (and the comparison of paradigms) is deemed impossible. The relativist implications of this viewpoint are obvious, and Kuhn's critics have been quick to note them (9).

Another recent writer whose work leads directly to relativism is the philosopher Peter Winch, whose standpoint has implications for both science and moral philosophy (10). Winch appears to accord language a totally deterministic influence. For him, "reality" is made totally relative to language. If the world is

portrayed differently by different languages, then there must be different worlds. Winch's view is that "reality", "rationality", "justice", "freedom", and the like, have meaning only within a specific form of life. The term "form of life" comes of course from Wittgenstein, but, as I will indicate later, Winch uses this term in a radically different manner than I believe Wittgenstein intended. For Winch, science, art, history, religion, etc. all constitute particular forms of life. These various forms of life, he holds, operate almost autonomously of one another (11). Each is entirely distinct, and each has its own conception of reality, rationality, or whatever. Thus there are no context-independent standards with reference to which claims made within different forms of life can be rationally appraised.

Obviously there is a great similarity in the views of Kuhn and Winch. While not sharing the general standpoint of their critics, I do agree with the charge that their viewpoints are relativistic. Their positions, in common with Mannheim's, call into question the very *concepts* involved in communication among people from different groups, from different societies, and operating within different scientific paradigms. Contrary to what Kuhn and Winch seem to believe, although recognized by Mannheim, this *is* a problem. If as Kuhn, Winch, and Mannheim argue, the concepts and standards accepted as authoritative in different milieus lead people to define the world in different ways, how can one find a standpoint of rationality from which various claims can be appraised? How can one, for instance, compare scientific, political, or moral theories, and appraise their comparative merits? From what standpoint can this be done? If the members of different societies or within different paradigms indeed live in totally "different worlds", there need not necessarily be any point of contact between the concepts of one group and those of another.

Consideration of Kuhn's work, Winch's ideas, and the views of Mannheim seems to lead inevitably to the necessity of choosing between the *relativist* approach to scientific and intellectual inquiry, where the particular conceptual and theoretical ideas current in one's own scientific or intellectual milieu are treated as locally sovereign; and the *absolutist* approach, where certain abstract, ideal, universal standards are imposed on all milieus alike. If one accepts the basic canons of the sociology of knowledge, the conclusions of Kuhn's research, and Winch's viewpoint, then one must choose the relativist position. Choosing the absolutist position, on the other hand, involves rejection of much that is valuable in the sociology of knowledge, and in the work of Kuhn and Winch.

As between these two extremes, I personally prefer the relativist position. But I believe that there is a middle ground between the relativist and absolutist extremes, a position which accepts neither of these two totally deterministic extremes. Contrary to Winch's interpretation, I believe that Wittgenstein

himself represents this middle ground. In the following pages, I intend to use some of Wittgenstein's ideas in discussing the problem of the appraisal of competing scientific and philosophical theories. Although my major interest is in providing a rational basis for the choice among competing moral theories, I will get to that only at the end of this essay.

II As Winch and Kuhn point out, theories are always held against a background. Among other things, they arise as a possible solution to a problem. One of the criteria involved in judging any theory, then, is its success in problem-solving. Problems occur, as Wittgenstein would say, when we cannot find our way about. The question I want to begin with here is whether there are any problems which do *not* themselves arise against a specific theoretical background. In other words, are all problems theory-generated, or are there some (universal) problems which arise because of the nature of the human animal?

Even Winch, speaking of different societal notions of rationality, points out that the very conception of human life involves certain "limiting notions" which in a sense "determine the 'ethical space' within which the possibilities of good and evil in human life can be exercised" (12). He mentions three such notions which are inescapably involved in all societies: birth, death, and sexual relations. These three notions, "along no doubt with others", Winch writes, "give shape to what we understand by ' human life'" and it is a concern with such questions that is "constitutive of what we understand by the 'morality' of a society" (13). (In fact, what is human *is* the concern.) These notions occupy a central position within every society, although there is considerable variation in the forms which they take in various societies and in the social institutions in which they are expressed. Their central position in all societies gives us a clue where to look, Winch says, "if we are puzzled about the point of an alien system of institutions" (14). While he does not explicitly say so, Winch apparently accepts that there are certain "problems of life" - concerning birth, death and sexual relations - which (while language-dependent) are not theory-dependent but which arise because of the kinds of creatures that we are. At the same time, however, the ways in which these problems are dealt with in different societies and cultures are many and varied. Among other things, this means that different theories of rationality develop to deal with common problems in different places and at different times.

The important point for now is Winch's recognition that the survival and well-being of people in all societies is dependent partially on solving certain common problems of life. These problems arise simply because we are human beings and because the world (the environment) is as it is. These problems of life are common to all members of the species. It seems to me that these problems can be divided into two areas: one, dealing with the relation between human beings and their environment; the second, concerning people's relations to one another (15). With

regard to the relation of human beings to nature, we can reformulate and extend Winch's three notions to include problems of satisfying various physiological needs, shelter, protection, and health. The second problem-area involving people's relations with one another, obviously over-laps and grows out of problems of family-maintenance, the regulation of sex, dealing with death, problems with authority, with violence, and the distribution of life's "necessities" (16).

My claim here is that these problems are generic to all human societies, arising because we are human and because men and women everywhere are faced with many common elements in their relations with one another and with their environment. In a sense, this is simply what we mean by "human beings". Further, I hold that these problems are not theory-generated, i.e., are independent of any particular theoretical framework or position.

Problems of life rest on and emerge from certain facts of nature, including certain common elements in the history of the species. Wittgenstein mentions a number of properties which belong to *our* natural history. Among them are the following.

First of all, *thinking* belongs to this natural history. Wittgenstein writes: "What does a man think for? What use is it? (...) But we are not interested in causes, - we shall say: human beings do in fact think" (17). Man simply thinks; that is a fact of our human history.

Secondly, *language* belongs only to our natural history, not to the natural history of animals. Excepting the most primitive forms of language, animals do not use language at all. But for us, "commanding, recounting, chattering, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (18).

A third aspect of our natural histories concerns what Wittgenstein calls "agreement in judgments". That is, it is simply a fact or our natural history that human beings do generally make the same judgment in certain specific situations. For instance, unless human beings agreed in judging pain to be unpleasant and unless there were similarly characteristic responses to pain, the concept of "pain" would be unintelligible among human beings (19).

For Wittgenstein, various "language-games" (including theories and solutions to the problems of life) are partly dependent on various contingent facts of human nature: that human beings think, use language, agree in judgments and reactions, and so forth. But there also exist, in addition to these facts of human nature, those things which Wittgenstein refers to as "standing fast" or "solid" for us. These things which stand fast, says Wittgenstein, are the foundation of the language-games which we play. They are not, however, arrived at by investigation or inquiry. Wittgenstein notes: "I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish true and false" (20).

This inherited background, these foundations, form the basis for many of our actions. Were we to relinquish our claim that certain things stand fast for us - that the earth existed before our births, that people die when their heads are cut off, that people cannot live without food and nourishment, that everyone has ancestors, that water boils under certain circumstances - it would be impossible for us to maintain a foothold in the world.

Thus, our language (and our life) rests on various contingent facts of nature. In this sense, language is a *product* of human activity in the world; it is a product of the facts of human and physical nature. (This aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy is too-often ignored.) But, at the same time, language is a *producer* of meaning and new forms of human activity. Wittgenstein, then, does not want to endorse a position which holds that facts of nature *completely* determine language; nor, on the other hand (despite what some versions of Wittgenstein's philosophy claim), does he want to say that the facts of nature are *totally* creations of our language. Whereas the relativist refuses to seperate the "facts of nature" from language, so that language completely determines what is real, and the absolutist sees particular concepts as determined by nature, Wittgenstein's position is far more subtle. Of most importance here is his conception of the facts of nature as providing a crucial *prior grounding* for language. His much discussed concept "form of life" can be seen as referring to the fact that the human race is *one biological species*, sharing certain common characteristic interests and responses. There are, then, non-arbitrary aspects of language and language-games; they are rooted in the pre-linguistic world. Wittgenstein remarks that "it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (21). But this acting is not something conditioned by prior-held beliefs; it is the primitive, pre-linguistic behavior of the human species. It is something that is now, and for eons past, encoded and symbolized in language and social relations.

What distinguishes the impact of such problems on people in different societies and in different historical periods is not the presence or absence of these problems of life, but the ways in which people *deal* with them. In some societies, there are (or have been) undoubtedly very few choices as to how to deal with one or another problem of living. In our own modern, Western, societies, however, there are often a wide variety of candidates for solving these problems. I am thinking here of various scientific, technological, religious, legal, economic, political, sociological, and moral solutions (or "theories") to problems of life (including, of course, conceptual problems). While certain problems of life are not (I have argued) themselves context-dependent, the existence of *competing* solutions means that the selection of one or another solution does necessarily presuppose a theoretical framework or theoretical assumptions.

The major difference between what is termed traditional and

scientific thinking, Horton argues, "is that in traditional cultures there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets; whereas in scientifically oriented cultures, such an awareness is highly developed. It is this difference we refer to when we say that traditional cultures are 'closed' and scientifically oriented cultures 'open'" (22). The problem for those of us in scientifically oriented cultures is to find a rational method of choosing the "best" (concerning the removal or alleviation of problems" among many competing solutions. Such choices must usually be made under conditions where there exists no possibility of actually trying out all the various alternatives.

A minimal requirement for the rationality of one or another theory or solution to problems of living, I am suggesting, is that it be able to successfully solve (or alleviate) those problems. A theory which meets this requirement of problem-solving may be termed a pragmatic account of rationality: a solution is rational in so far as it is associated with problem-solving. Pragmatic solutions are seldom sufficient, however, for what we require is some method for deciding among conflicting theories or solutions. As noted above, such decisions must often be made on the basis of something other than trying out all the proposed solutions.

This involves an emphasis on "reflective thinking", something presumably unknown to traditional thought (23). Because the traditional thinker is unable to imagine possible alternatives to his established theories and classifications, he need never face the necessity of choosing among competing solutions - solutions which, of course, claim to provide answers to problems of life. Reflective thinking is the ability to make problematic what would, without alternatives, be experienced as intuitively given; it allows us to transform resources into topics. Reflection means an awareness of choices as to how we lead our lives and select among competing alternatives. Where there is choice, there must be norms governing it. But for us it is necessary to justify our choices in terms that meet public standards.

Before considering these standards, however, it is necessary to say something about the extent to which various theories, solutions, belief-systems, and the like, present *real options* for those weighing the merits of competing viewpoints. First of all, there are those "mere" possibilities which, while conceivable or imaginable (that is, can be formulated), do not constitute viable choices for us. A proposal - emerging from however complex a theoretical framework you can imagine - that we guarantee the health of children by not feeding them, will obtain no foothold with us. Such solutions will not constitute one of the proposed solutions which require our reflection. Nor, secondly, will those solutions which exist in total ignorance of one another; unless we are *aware* of at least two viable options, reflection and choice are not involved. Thirdly, there are belief-systems and solutions of which we are aware but which

we cannot choose. As Bernard Williams points out: "The life of a Greek Bronze Age chief, or a medieval Samurai, and the outlooks that go with these, are not real options for us: there is no way of living hem" (24). In this connection, Williams notes that certain options are asymmetrical: "Some version of modern technological life and its outlooks has become a real option for members of some traditional societies, but their life is not (...) a real option for us" (25). None of these types of options consitute real options or viable choices which require our reflection and consideration.

Real confrontation among conflicting theories or solutions occurs only where there is an awareness of at least two real options (which is not to say that there is always complete agreement as to whether one or another option is a real one). Intellectually serious questions of appraisal - true/false, right/wrong, good/bad - are about real options.

Further, it is necessary that two theories or solutions have conflicting consequences, that there be some "yes/no" question to which one theory answers "yes" and the other "no" (26). The two theories or solutions (options) have to be comparable as regards at least one consequence concerning problem-solving. For comparison and appraisal to exist, there has to be something which is not from every point of view incommensurable. This locus, Williams suggests, will be that of the actions or practices which are the consequence of living with one or another theory (27). This is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's remarks concerning the *practical* consequences of doubt. Speaking of the question as to whether or not the table is still there when no one sees it, he asks: "But if anyone were to doubt it, how would his doubt come out in practice? And couldn't we peacefully leave him to doubt it, since it makes no difference at all?" (28) Nevertheless, real options and competing solutions to various problems of life do frequently exist for us. This is the case with regard to competing world-views, scientific theories (including different accounts of science as with, for example, Popper and Kuhn), and ethical outlooks. To decide among these competing solutions, we require some conception of rationality other than problem-solving.

III It is nowadays widely agreed that the old notion of strict justification is not sufficient to explain the appraisal and choice among competing scientific theories (29). Those in the tradition of justification hold that true knowledge is proven or certain and, further, that it rests on an empirical basis (30). Claims of true knowledge are expected to be "backed either by incorrigible, self-authenticating data, or by arguments as complete and rigorous as those of pure mathematics, and preferably both" (31). By now it is recognized that a solid foundation which can carry the weight of completely certain knowledge does not exist. The notion of justification which assumes the existence of enduring principles of rationality is not human, but divine; it is concerned with knowledge as acquired

by a unique and perfect being (32).

The problem, then, is to find a conception of rationality which allows us to ground our claims that one theory or solution is preferable to another. An absolutist, historically invariant, conception of rationality is, I believe, no longer conceivable.

At the same time, we must also resist being driven to the extreme of total relativism where competing views of rationality are totally the products of particular social and intellectual milieus. This is the path followed by Winch, Kuhn, and Mannheim. What is required, as I emphasized earlier, is some middle way between a commitment to either the absolutist or relativist views of rationality. Perhaps more than anyone else in recent years, Toulmin has searched for such a middle way:

> Questions of "rationality" are concerned (...) not with the particular intellectual doctrines that a man - or professional group - adopts at any given time, but rather with *the conditions on which, and the manner in which, he is prepared to criticize and change those doctrines as time goes on.* (...) The intellectual content of any rational activity forms neither a single logical system, nor a temporal sequence of such systems. Rather, it is an *intellectual enterprise* whose "rationality" lies in the procedures governing its historical development and evolution (33).

Rationality, then, is (partially, at least) an attribute of particular intellectual pursuits and communities. While it may differ among different intellectual milieus, within a particular intellectual enterprise there are common concerns and continuities with earlier investigators and theorists in that community. Across communities, however, there may be competing conceptions of rationality - but even those working within different scientific or intellectual communities will share *some* common concerns and experiences. This assumes, as Toulmin recognizes, "that men's lives do face them, in certain significant respects, with some very general but common problems, regardless of the milieu; and that these shared problems call for the development of corresponding sorts of techniques, concepts, and procedures. It assumes, furthermore, that men's collective rational enterprises can legitimately be regarded as so many attacks - whether in parallel cultures or successive epochs - on these common problems" (34). In rejecting both the view that there exist universal, abstract, definitions of what is rational and the view that what is rational is decided entirely by each separate culture and epoch, Toulmin's position requires us "to accept testimony about human experience in any epoch or culture whatever as relevant to all others" (35).

Learning from human experience means the acceptance of reasons, arguments, and justifications (in a loose sense); these constitute the rational categories which we employ. It is reasons, arguments, and the like, which ultimately sanction our choice of one or another theoretical standpoint. Whatever the content of our scientific, moral and political theories, these achieve-

ments or products must be justified through the presentation of reasons and arguments in their support. The presentation of "acceptable" arguments and reasons for one's particular viewpoint is a crucial facet of the scientist's work. In short, he must justify his claims.

All intellectual enterprises need to be recognized as communal activities. Despite the long historical search for knowledge that is proven or certain, it is now apparent that the communal nature of many intellectual pursuits does not require the assumption that there must exist a solid foundation for justified knowledge. There need not be underlying rules which must be adhered to by all rational thinkers and applied in an all-or-nothing fashion. Questions about the merits of competing theories and solutions are no longer to be seen as formal questions, to be settled by appeal to existing rules, principles, and methods - which can simply be applied in various situations and circumstances - but must be viewed as discussable in discursive terms (36).

Truth and knowledge are inescapably grounded in the consensual validation of one or another scientific or intellectual community. What constitues scientific "truth", then, is decided by those whom a particular scientific community defines as competent members. Since truth is never final, however, this group consensus is perhaps better seen as a continuing dialogue. In any case, as Gouldner points out, "the consensus of the knowledgeable must be a *necessary* condition for some truthclaim to be valid" (37). But, as he also notes, such consensus may not constitute a *sufficient* condition. The reason for this is obvious: a community consensus may be achieved not only by the adherence of free beings but also by political (or other) coercion (38).

The various scientific disciplines and academic specialties can be regarded as special language-games which seek an ordered understanding of some particular bounded region of the world. Each discipline has the task, then, of constructing (or borrowing) a language for describing and explaining that particular portion of the world on which it focuses. Each concrete language-game (physics, philosophy, sociology) has a history and an internal dynamic. Each has its own grammar. At the same time, there is not only an over-lap among these extra-ordinary (technical) languages but also an over-lap with the language-game of everyday life. That is, the boundaries between ordinary and extra-ordinary languages and between various extra-ordinary languages must always be drawn for a specific purpose (thus we can speak of the natural and social sciences, for some purposes; and of psychology, sociology, and political science, among the social sciences, for other purposes; or even, within sociology, of structural-functionalism, ethnomethodology, and symbolic-interactionism, as particular language-games).

In this connection, it is important to recognize the *primacy* of ordinary language, and the general language-game of everyday life. This language is not only primary in our everyday lives,

it is also the foundation upon which other (extra-ordinary) languages are based. That is, we can only learn to play the language-game of physics or sociology, for example, through the use of ordinary language. This ordinary language, Wittgenstein stresses, is beyound justification (although what we say *within* ordinary language is not). Wittgenstein warns:

> Here we are in enormous danger of wanting to make fine distinctions. - It is the same when one tries to define the concept of a material object in terms of "what is really seen". - What we have rather to do is to *accept* the everyday language-game, and to note *false* accounts of the matter as *false*. The primitive language-game which children are taught needs no justification; attempts at justification need to be rejected (39).

Our everyday language-game, in short, is not based on grounds. It is there - like our life.

Hence, *the everyday language-game has an epistemological and ontological primacy*. It underlies and provides a foundation for such extra-ordinary language-games as science, art, law, and religion. These constructed, extra-ordinary language-games cannot exist in total isolation from the concrete everyday language employed by human beings. Unless people share at least some conceptions of the world around them, so that there is some agreement about what counts as identification of this or that, it could not even be known to what anyone was referring. Only if our everyday language occupies something like a substratum of scientific, legal, religious, moral, and other derivative languages, is it possible to explain how communication takes place at all.

Whereas Winch, Kuhn, and various sociologists of knowledge are relativistic in that they seem to see various language-games (paradigms, scientific disciplines, etc.) as creations entirely of language, Wittgenstein is at great pains to emphasize the *dialectic* of language-games with nature. The dialectical quality of Wittgenstein's position is captured nicely in his comments on the role of truth and justification:

> Well, if everything speaks for an hypothesis and nothing against it - is it then certainly true? One may designate it as such. - But does it certainly agree with reality, with the facts? With this question you are already going round in a circle.
> To be sure there is justification; but justification comes to an end. (40).

Various sciences, disciplines, and paradigms must be seen for what they are: artificial, constructed, languages which create "possible" worlds. Each of these extra-ordinary languages expresses a possible way of constructing the world or some portion thereof (consider, for example, Marxism and Freudianism), each will speak of certain things and be silent about others. But there are limits to what is possible, as I have tried to point out. Wittgenstein's account of language, therefore, is most certainly not a relativist account. Nor is it a convention-

alist account - if we mean by that an account where any statement at all can be assured truth by meddling at sufficient length with the meanings of other statements in the system. Instead, there are constraints which exist prior to conventions; there is a non-arbitrary element, based on various facts of nature and on our certainties.

So far as rationality is concerned, then, it rests on the assumption that one thinks, acts, and chooses for reasons that can be communicated to and understood by the audience for whom one writes (or to whom one speaks). Rationality requires that we provide arguments, reasons, and justifications for this or that viewpoint. Because men have the ability to harness language to the various problems of human life, they are able not only to operate with accepted concepts and procedures but also to criticize those concepts and procedures. Choices for one or another theory are made for substantive reasons, but are also continually open to revision and correction in the light of experience. Rationality, I am arguing, does not require the assumption of some fixed, unchanging, critical criteria. "A man demonstrates his rationality", Toulmin writes, "not by a commitment to fixed ideas, stereotyped procedures, or immutable concepts, but by the manner in which, and the occasions on which, he changes those ideas, procedures, and concepts" (41).

IV Up to this point, I have been speaking mainly - though not exclusively - about scientific theories and solutions. I have emphasized that the old (strict) notion of justification no longer applies. The same conclusion holds for the language-games of moral and political philosophy. Questions about equality, freedom, justice, rights, and the like, are not to be settled by an appeal to either universally accepted values or to objective methods for discovering them. It is a question of what is intelligible in the language-game of ethical judgments. In deciding whether one or another theory of justice, for example, is superior to its competitors, we require arguments and reasons on behalf of that particular theory. As with other theories, solutions, and belief-systems, the choice among moral and political theories depends partially on their constituting "real" options. As I noted earlier, options are real in so far as they represent viable choices and are comparable as regards at least one consequence concerning problem-solving. In contrast to most scientific theories, moral and political theories are frequently about *ends* or goals. This is not to deny that moral and political questions also arise with respect to the acceptable *means* to one or another valued end. My point is that it is the very nature of political and (especially) moral philosophy to be evaluative. Questions about equality, freedom, and justice, cannot avoid conclusions about what is good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, permitted and forbidden. Much moral and political philosophy is, in fact, *committed* to reaching such conclusions.

Moral and political philosophy differ from science in that the language, technical vocabulary, and grammar which are employed in the former are more likely to be familiar to the layman or nonexpert than is the case with the latter. Although everyday language underlies and provides a foundation for philosophy and science alike, the extra-ordinary language used by political and moral philosophers is closer to the everyday language (and concerns) of the citizen than is the extra-ordinary language used by physicists, biologists, and other natural scientists. The issues and languages of moral and political philosophy involve notions and categories which are often continuous, stable and quite widespread. The political philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, or Machiavelli, and the moral views of the Hebrew prophets or the mediaeval Church, for example, *are* often intelligible and directly relevant to contemporary concerns in political and moral philosophy. To some extent, then, we share a common world with classical and medieval thinkers. As Isaiah Berlin emphasizes: "The subject matter of these disciplines - the most general characteristics of men as such, that is, as beings engaged in moral or social or spiritual activities - seems to present problems which preserve a considerable degree of continuity and similarity from one age and culture to another" (42).

Some persons believe that political and moral discourse differ entirely from scientific discourse in so far as the rational appraisal of competing theories or arguments is concerned. Whatever the disagreements about the best, most correct, or proper standards for evaluating one or another scientific theory or product, there is *general* agreement among scientists and laymen alike that such standards do exist. But many individuals claim that such standards are lacking in moral and political philosophy. Let me consider this now, specifically with regard to moral argumentation.

For some people, moral argument is nothing more than a matter of differing individual tastes or preferences. For them, discussions about "justice", "equality", and the like, are on the same plane as discussions about whether apples are more "delicious" than oranges or pears. We can no more justify, they say, our assertion that this way of doing things is more just than that way than we can support the claim that vanilla ice-cream is more delicious than chocolate. This, I am going to argue, is a profoundly mistaken point of view.

The most important difference between "delicious" or other matters of personal preference and moral discourse is that the latter implies standards of justification. Just as a statement like "The table is square" makes a claim that this assertion is warranted by the evidence or is rationally justifiable, normative statements claim a similar status. To justify a position is, of course, to provide reasons, grounds, and arguments for its acceptance. Anyone who claims that a particular moral principle or theory is justified is assuming that the

reasons in favor of it are persuasive, that a solid argument to this effect has been provided which other persons ought to respect as substantial. We call a position or theory justified when we have a certain confidence, though not certainty, that it will successfully resist future attacks. Of course, there are also intuitions or convictions in which we place confidence - at least until there is reason to believe that our confidence has been misplaced. But these intuitions or convictions cannot in themselves count as evidence or support for the correctness of a particular theory or position. We must assume that there are reasons for our believing what we do in fact believe, without assuming that these reasons are so dazzlingly obvious and self-evident that they stamp themselves as truths on the minds of any rational being who encounters them. These reasons, then, must be explicity formulated and set forth for scrutiny.

What is crucial is that different moral positions can, in principle, be formulated and discussed. If X tells us that a situation is just while Y holds the opposite viewpoint, we expect both to be able to tell us *why* it is just or unjust. We expect them to ground their claims (43). It is not sufficient for them to claim that "It simply is" or that "I just say so". This may suffice for discussions about the comparative merits of flavors of ice-cream, but for moral discourse we require *arguments and reasons*. With regard to reasons, Wittgenstein notes: "Giving a reason for something one did or said means showing a *way* which leads to this action. In some cases it means telling the way which one has gone oneself: in others it means describing a way which leads there and is in accordance with certain accepted rules" (44). Even more than in science, where, at least sometimes, questions can be settled by appeal to existing rules, principles, and methods, the questions of moral and political philosophy must be discussable in discursive terms. The grounds or reasons claimed must, of course, be appropriate to a particular context. Whether a position or assertion is moral as opposed to prudential, for example, depends on the kind of reason given for it. In fact, the same assertion "You ought to go to see your mother" will be moral if the reason supporting it is "because you promised to", prudential if it is "because she may remember you in her will if you do" (45).

If, indeed, as I have argued, political and moral theories can be rationally discussed and defended, there still remains the issue of the status of such theories. Some philosophers hold that these theories rest on the "discovery" of certain self-evident principles from which we can then derive a body of standards and precepts. This is, of course, the Cartesian notion of justification. On this view, moral principles describe an objective moral reality. Such moral principles are held to be discoverable in the same way as the laws of physics.

I choose to reject this way of regarding moral principles and theories. This is not because the principles of physics or

other sciences do have some fixed, objective existence, while moral principles do not. Nor is it because scientific principles can be discovered while moral principles can not. No, I reject this point of view because I believe that the principles of philosophy and science alike are human *constructions* or *inventions*. Scientific and philosophical theories, solutions, and world-views constitute differing ways of conceiving of the world or some portion thereof. In this connection, Wittgenstein states:

> We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena; our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but as one might say, towards the "*possibilities*" of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind* of statement that we make about phenomena (46).

What Wittgenstein intends here is that certain phenomena only "exist", as it were, because our *language* contains their possibility. The language of science more generally and of specific scientific disciplines (physics, sociology, psychology) creates the "possibility" of electrons, neutrons, electromagnetic waves, ids, egos, roles, intentions, and so forth. It depends on the grammar of our everyday language or of a particular extra-ordinary language what will be possible and what not. Wittgenstein writes:

> But surely that is arbitrary! - Is it arbitrary? It is not every sentence-like formation that we know how to do something with, not every technique has an application in our life; and when we are tempted in philosophy to count some quite useless thing as a proposition, that is often because we have not considered its application sufficiently (47).

As I noted earlier, one or another scientific or philosophical construction (possibility) rests on a plurality of beliefs and actions which are interdependent and lend one another mutual support. Not all things are possible, not all competing viewpoints represent real options. But in our everyday language, as well as in the language of moral and political philosophy, there are some facts, assumptions, and theories that are obviously better entrenched than others and are difficult (impossible?) to conceive of as candidates for revision or rejection. Some things, that is, seem so fully anchored to everything around them that their being called into question necessarily calls into question the whole system of which they form a part. They have been accepted (and *used*) for so long that it is virtually impossible to conceive of the contrary. Some scientific and philosophical constructions or world-views are "live" options, then, in that they can be connected to more firmly anchored certainties and beliefs. Others connect up with nothing and, therefore, do not require our consideration or reflection.

The contributions of Galileo, Newton, Einstein, Darwin, Marx, and Freud, created the possibilities of certain phenomena. These individuals provided mankind with radically new alternatives to the established ways of viewing (or constructing) the world.

Similarly with the views of Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Kant, Hegel, Locke, and Hobbes; they have given us new ways of seeing. Scientific and philosophical theories alike can be viewed as human inventions or constructions, and not as constituted by the "discovery" of objective principles in reality.

The difference between this constructive model and the "natural" model, which assumes the existence of an objective moral reality, has recently been given attention by Dworkin (48). Because his discussion is directly relevant to my concerns here, it is useful to consider it in some detail. Dworkin begins by considering John Rawls' technique of "reflective equilibrium", a technique which presupposes that each of us entertains and accepts certain beliefs about justice, equality, and other moral notions. Some of us may believe, for example, that slavery is unjust, or that the present income differentials in the United States are unfair. That is, we all hold certain beliefs simply because they seem "right" to us. These ordinary, unreflective, moral beliefs are what Rawls' terms "intuitions" and Dworkin, "convictions". According to the technique of equilibrium, the task of moral philosophy is to provide a structure of principles (a theory) that supports these immediate intuitions or convictions about which we are more or less secure. The equilibrium notion is a two-way process; we move back and forth between adjustments to our convictions or intuitions and adjustments to our theoretical principles until we find a satisfactory fit between them.

Dworkin goes beyond Rawls in trying to justify the process of equilibrium; he does this by formulating a philosophical position concerning the connection between moral theory and moral convictions. The technique of equilibrium supposes a coherence theory of rationality. But, Dworkin argues, "we have a choice between two general models that define coherence and explain why it is required, and a choice between these is significant for our moral philosophy" (50). Dworkin calls the first model a "natural" model, and it is identical to the view I have described above where it is assumed that moral principles describing an objective moral reality can be discovered. This is true for both the intuitions themselves and for the more theoretical principles. "The main instrument of this discovery", Dworkin notes, "is a moral faculty possessed by at least some men, which produces concrete intuitions of political morality in particular situations, like the intuition that slavery is wrong" (51). The intuitions are clues, then, to the existence of objective moral principles which are yet to be discovered. The second, "constructive" model, is in line with my argument that moral principles are human inventions or constructions. This model treats intuitions or convictions as stipulated features of a general theory to be constructed, and not as clues to the existence of indipendent moral principles. It makes the assumption that men and women have a responsibility to fit the particular judgments which they accept and use into a coherent set of principles or a theory.

Dworkin points to an important consequence of the two models. Suppose that someone believes (has the intuition or conviction) that men and women should be treated equally in the same circumstances. Despite this firmly-held conviction, let us say that he also comes to believe that it is unjust that women are underrepresented in higher status occupations and are, therefore, entitled to *special* treatment or consideration in order to help remedy their unequal status. An individual holding these two opposed views faces the problem of how to reconcile them. Under such circumstances, the natural and constructive models lead to differing conclusions.

With the natural model, the above individual would have to maintain his belief concerning the inherent injustice of distinctions based on sex, and would submerge the apparent contradiction. That is, if he accepts that the intuition about sex-linked distinctions is a clue to some more abstract and fundamental moral principles, then his second (inconsistent) intuition must be submerged - although, as Dworkin observes, he does so "in the faith that a more sophisticated set of principles, which reconciles that intuition, does in fact exist though it has not yet been discovered" (52). The natural model rests on the assumption that moral intuitions are accurate observations of objective moral reality, and therefore it insists on consistency with conviction.

The constructive model, however, does not require that apparent intuitive inconsistencies be submerged, since it does not accept that there exist fixed philosophical principles to be discovered. In Dworkin's words:

> On the contrary, it demands that decisions taken in the name of justice must never outstrip an (...) (individual's) ability to account for these decisions in a theory of justice, even when such a theory must compromise some of his intuitions. It demands that we act on principle rather than on faith. Its engine is a doctrine of responsibility that requires men to integrate their intuitions and subordinate some of these, when necessary, to that responsibility. It presupposes that articulated consistency, decisions in accordance with a program that can be made public and followed until changed, is essential to any conception of justice (53).

The natural and constructive models, therefore, represent alternative standpoints from which moral theories might be developed. With the natural model, intuitions or convictions are looked at entirely from the personal standpoint of the individual who holds them; while the constructive model looks at these intuitions from a more *public* standpoint (54). They also have different consequences so far as Rawls' notion of equilibrium is concerned. The equilibrium technique involves a two-way process, where both our intuitions and our theoretical principles can be adjusted and revised. But the natural model cannot account for this two-way feature. With this model, our moral intuitions are viewed as direct reports from moral reality and the only reason to amend them is if they are superseded by new

moral intuitions, so that we then regard these as so obviously true that the earlier intuitions must then be false. The fact that other persons may disagree about the status of these moral intuitions or certainties is not necessarily a reason for someone to reconsider them, since the individual, under the natural model, is convinced that he has experienced a direct report from reality. If he believes that *his* intuitions are correct, he is more likely to try to "discover" why matters are as they are than to consider revising or altering his intuitions in response to the disagreement of others.

With the constructionist model, however, intuitions or convictions must be open to public appraisal and discussion. It is assumed that different people's intuitions can be compared and considered. Whereas the natural model suggests that an individual's intuitions constitute an epistemological certainty, the constructionist model assumes (recognizes) only that there are indeed intuitions and certainties, that these may differ among different people and at different times, but that, at any given time, there is a large amount of agreement among men and women about some of these intuitions and certainties. Most of us would consider it wrong, for example, that babies should be tortured, widows set on fire, prisoners brutalized, poor people allowed to starve - although we would not always be able to formulate moral principles in opposition to such practices. This is not to say that everyone shares our convictions in these matters. But if we met someone for whom none of these things literally makes any difference, i.e., who either has no intuitions or convictions about such matters, or else has an intuition that, morally speaking, there is nothing to be said for or against such practices, we would probably consider him a madman. It would be very much like the situation described by Wittgenstein, where he says: "If someone said to me that he doubted whether he had a body, I should take him to be a half-wit. But I shouldn't know what it would mean to try to convince him that he had one. And if I had said something, and that had removed his doubt, I should not know how or why" (55).

Both those intuitions which people share and those about which they disagree can be rationally argued for, reasons can be given in their behalf, their "rightness" can be talked about. All of this can occur whether or not the moral principles with which they are expected to cohere have yet been invented or constructed. Similarly, the constructive model allows for public discussion of the constructed moral principles themselves. Again, it is difficult to see how this would work with the natural model, since various individuals will claim to have discovered different, competing, principles describing an objective moral reality.

The constructive model, requiring as it does that decisions about moral intuitions and principles be made publicly, lays a heavy responsibility on individuals to defend their particular standpoints and beliefs. It recognizes that moral philosophy,

like science, is a communal activity. As with science, questions about the merits of competing theories are not to be settled by an appeal to fixed, eternal standards (rules, intuitions, objective principles) that will guarantee the infallability of a particular moral theory. Nevertheless, moral arguments must meet the requirements of rationality or reasonable inquiry held by the intellectual community to whom such arguments are directed. These requirements involve a heavy reliance on reasons, justifications, and argumentation. The rational appraisal of moral and political theories, then, is neither absolutistic, in the sense of resting on abstract, ideal, universal standards, nor is it entirely relativistic, in the sense of accepting the standards of one's own intellectual milieu as sovereign. Instead, it recognizes that the rational appraisal of competing moral and political theories is bound up with meeting various public standards which have emerged during the historical development of moral and political philosophy. It accepts the possibility of (and a commitment to) a rational argumentation which, like Kant's categorical imperative, is valid for the community of reasonable minds. Thus it is not necessary to retreat to either absolutism or to relativism; the task is to make one's own views available and to develop them in light of the past dialogue of humanity. This is not to totally deny the thesis of relativism that our notions and concepts are frequently context-dependent, but is only to claim that there are families of concepts whose territories have sufficient over-lap to make comparison and appraisal possible. As Perelman points out, "There can be no rationality without benefit of continuity" (56).

One of the preconditions for the possibility of any language-game, as I noted earlier, is the existence of a speech community. Our speech and our knowledge-claims are directed, however, not only to those concrete persons who happen to constitute our community at a given time, but also to a tradition of thinkers who have been interested in the problems which concern us. In the case of moral and political philosophy, this community (this tradition) requires reasons, arguments, justification, and dialogue. In a sense, our speech is directed to a universal audience. Thus the techniques available to us are not rational in in the narrow sense of applying rules numerated beforehand but involve arguments, reasons, and justifications which are never conclusive but have the intent of displaying the reasonable character of our viewpoints. "It is this recourse to the rational and reasonable for the realisation of the ideal of universal communication", Perelman writes, "that characterizes the age-long endeavor of all philosophies in their aspiration for a city of man in which violence may progressively give way to wisdom" (57).

NOTEN

1. Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding*. Vol. 1. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
2. Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge

& Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 184.

3. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 86.
4. Mannheim, 1952, *op.cit.*, p. 190.
5. Mannheim, 1972, *op.cit.*, p. 77.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
7. A notable exception was Wright Mills. See C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics, and People*. Irving Louis Horowitz (ed.) (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963).
8. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
9. See a.o. Israel Scheffler, *Science and Subjectivity* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merril, 1967).
10. Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).
11. Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society", In Bryan Wilson (ed.), *Rationality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), p. 82.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
15. A possible third area, which I will not consider here, concerns problems which people have with themselves (which, of course, often involve others), i.e., problems of self-fulfillment, self-satisfaction, and the like.
16. I am assuming that hunger, thirst, fear, anger, and jealousy mean the same for people everywhere. On the other hand, some concepts (and the associated feelings) - for example, guilt - may only be intelligible in certain cultures.
17. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: MacMillan 1953), p. 466.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
19. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 532-534.
20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), p. 94.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
22. Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science". In: Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 153.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
24. Bernard Williams, "The Truth of Relativism", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1975), p. 224.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
28. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty, op. cit.*, p. 120.
29. See, for example, Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes". In Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Karl Popper, "Normal Science and Its Dangers". In: Lakatos and Musgrave, *op. cit.*; Kuhn, *op. cit.*; Toulmin, *op. cit.*; Derek L. Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Scientific Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1977).
30. Gerard Radnitzky, *Contemporary Schools of Metascience* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1973), p. 57.

31. Toulmin, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19
32. Ch. Perelman, *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).
33. Toulmin, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 498.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 500.
36. Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*(Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971).
37. Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 20.
38. This problem has been given considerable attention by Habermas, who himself adopts a consensus theory of truth. See Habermas, *op. cit.*; Jürgen Habermas, "Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence", *Inquiry* 13 (1970).
39. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
40. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-192.
41. Toulmin, *op. cit.*, p. vi. Also, see Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*, p. 481.
42. Isaiah Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" In Peter Laslett and W.G. Runciman (eds.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society*. Second Series. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 30.
43. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*, p. 479.
44. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 14.
45. J. Xenakis, "A Mistaken Distinction in Ethical Theory", *Philosophical Studies*, VIII (1957), pp. 69-71.
46. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 520.
48. Ronald Dworkin, "The Original Position". In Norman Daniels (ed.), *Reading Rawls* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), pp. 16-53.
49. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).
50. Dworkin, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
55. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
56. Perelman, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 87.